



The Afghan Bulletin

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The Northern Route – Inbound mail

The 'Northern Route' is the name given to the mail route which was opened on the outbreak of World War II to enable mail to be sent between Afghanistan and Axis countries which could no longer be sent via the normal route through (British) India. The route could also be used to send mail to neutral countries such as Switzerland. It seems to have been operational from late November 1939 and continued until Germany invaded Russia on the 22nd June 1941.

In an article on the Northern Route in the *British Journal of Russian Philately* in 2015 (BJRP 105, pp70-77, at p.72; available at http://www.afghanphilately.co.uk/page_35.html) I stated that I had not yet seen an inbound cover using the route but noted that "there is no reason to think that they should not exist". And indeed they do! Illustrated are three covers from (German occupied) Norway to Afghanistan. Two travelled via the Russian Northern Route whilst one, the first, did not. As with all the outbound covers, there are no Russian markings on the Northern Route covers. All three covers are from the same correspondence.

Cover 1. This cover was sent from Oslo on 1st July 1940 by registered airmail. It is franked with 2 x 1Kr Haakon stamps, with a third stamp missing. It is endorsed in manuscript "via Tyskland-Russland" (i.e., via Germany-Russia), but did not travel by that route. On the reverse there is a reddish purple censor marking in Norwegian reading–

VIDEREBEFORDRING
TILLATT
TYSK CENSUR

i.e.,

Forwarding
Allowed
German Censorship

So the cover was cleared to travel to a neutral country and then to Allied territory for onward transmission to Afghanistan via India. The route it actually followed to get from Norway to India is not clear as the next marking is the British Indian censorship **H** label tied by the **HI** Triangular censor mark of Peshawar, then the Kabul arrival mark of the 17th September 1940. A transit time of 78 days.

Why the manuscript route marking was not followed is not clear. The route was evidently known about, and up and running, but not utilised in this instance. The only

obvious difference between this cover and the two following is that this one was sent airmail - mail on the Northern Route would not have flown so maybe it was thought that that 'airmail' should take precedence over the route marking.

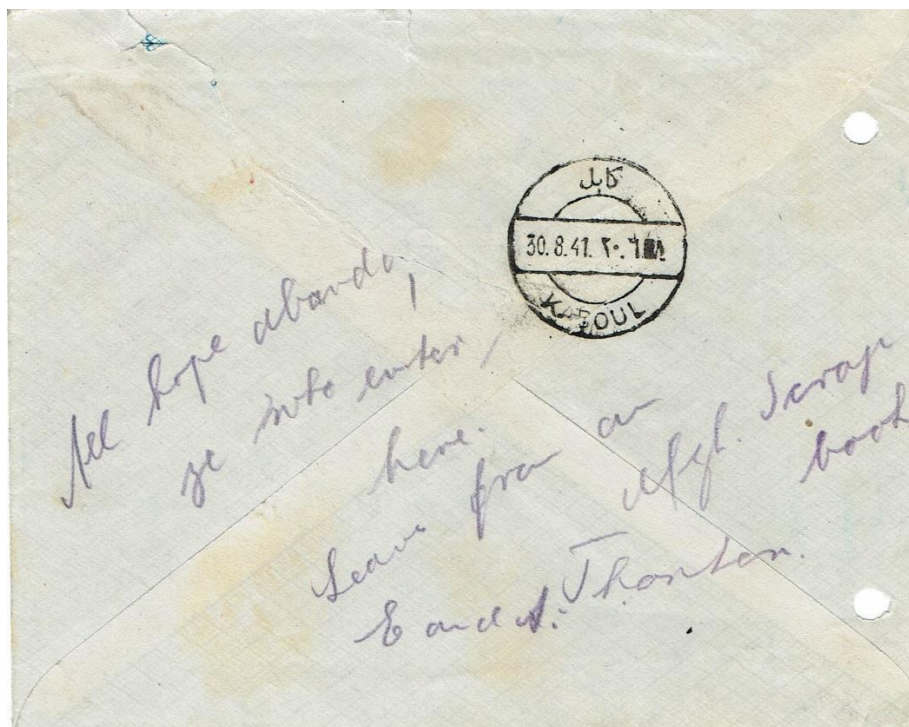


Cover 2 was sent from Oslo on the 15th August 1940 at the registered rate of 60 øre. It too is endorsed in manuscript "via Tyskland-Russland". With no Indian censorship it is evident that it actually did follow the Northern Route. It passed through German censorship and arrived in Kabul on the 21st September, giving a transit time of 37 days – less than half the time of Cover 1.



The sealing tape on the reverse is inscribed 'Oberkommando der Wehrmacht' – i.e., High Command of the Armed Forces, and 'Geöffnet' – i.e., opened. The Code Letter 'b' indicates that the censorship took place in Berlin. The red cancel has 'Oberkommando der Wehrmacht' at top and 'Briefstempel – geöffnet' at bottom.

Cover 3 was sent on the 18th June 1941, again from Oslo at the registered rate of 60 øre. Like the others it too is endorsed in manuscript “via Tyskland-Russland” and with no Indian censorship it followed the Northern Route. Somewhere along the way it was marked ZURÜCK (i.e., Back or Return), but that was then crossed out and the letter travelled on its way. The cover has a German reddish purple circular censor handstamp ‘Ab’ of Berlin and a Kabul receiver of the 30th August 1941. The transit time is 73 days – almost as long as Cover 1.



On the back has been written “All hope abandon ye who enter here” Leaves from an Afghan Scrapbook E and A Thornton, a quote from a book written in 1910.

The Northern Route – Postcards

Illustrated are two postcards sent using the Northern Route. Both have been sent from Baghlan in northern Afghanistan which did not have a postmark at this date and so have been cancelled in manuscript.

The first card has a manuscript date of ١٩/٣/٢ i.e., (13)19/ 3/ 2, which equates to 23rd May 1940. The card is actually of a view in Reht in Iran, through which the sender presumably travelled on his way to Afghanistan. The second card is an old Amanullah-era Afghan card of the showground in Kabul. Its manuscript date is ١٩/٥/١ i.e., (13)19/ 5/ 1, equating to 23rd July, 1940. It was sent registered and so more attention seems to have been paid to it with it receiving a Kabul transit for 3rd August, and a Prague receiver for 30th August, 1940. The card therefore travelled from the north of the country, down to Kabul, and then back north again on the Northern Route.

Clements and Adamec relate that factories for the production of sugar from sugar beets were initiated in Baghlan by Czech experts in the 1940s (*Conflict in Afghanistan: A Historical Encyclopedia*, Frank Clements, Ludwig W. Adamec, 2003, p.38) and it is likely that the sender was involved in that project as both cards are sent to Czechoslovakia, or more accurately at this date, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, or as written here: Protektorát Čechy Morava.



Card 1

Sent unregistered at the 55 poul
foreign postcard rate.

The card shows the Chahdari, or Town Hall, in Recht, Iran.

Card 2

Sent at the registered foreign postcard rate of 85 poul.



Both cards have red German 'Oberkommando der Wehrmacht' censor marks.

The transit time for the second card is 27 days from Kabul, including censorship. This is fairly normal as three to four weeks is the usual transit time for a Europe-bound Northern Route cover, although six or seven weeks are not unknown.

Northern Alliance – Misplaced overprints

No. 1031, the stamp commemorating the 3rd Anniversary of the Sawr Revolution, exists imperf and surcharged 1, 2 or 4 AFS. Their status is uncertain but they are said to have been prepared by the Northern Alliance. They are not known used.

Illustrated alongside are examples of the 1 and 4 Afg stamps with the overprint misplaced so that it reads vertically.



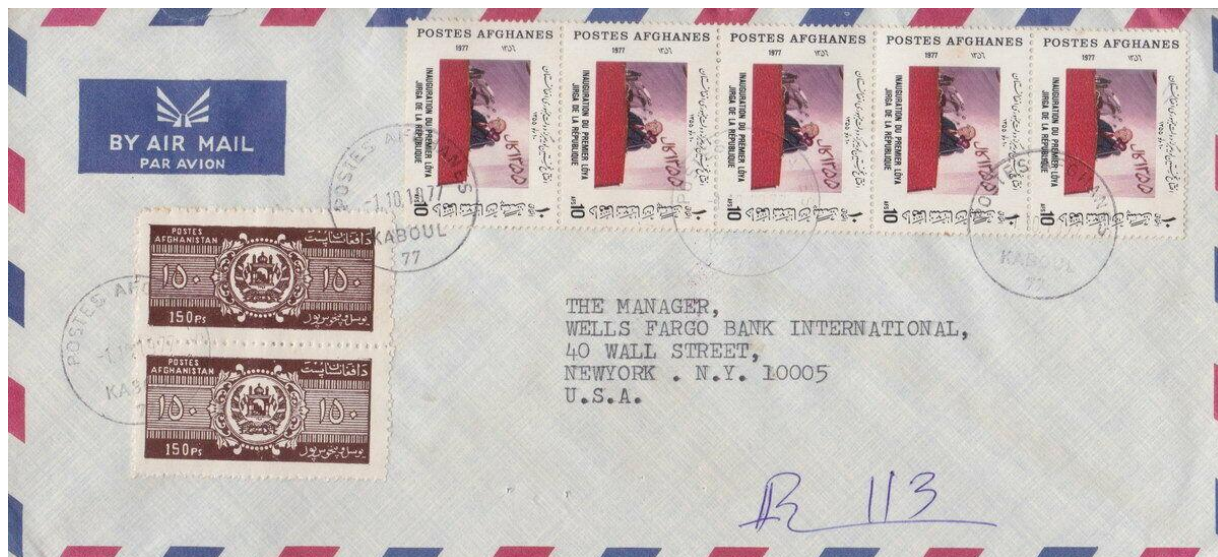
1310 Tax on Property revenue stamp

The 1310 Revenue stamp #92 has been found in a new colour, black on white rather than black on green, and with a crude (sewing machine?) perforation.



Late Use of Royalist Stamps

Usages of Royalist stamps, or at least those bearing Royalist emblems such as the National Arms, after the introduction of the Republic in 1973 are not common. The pair of 150 poul stamps below are on a cover from 1977.



After the end of the Russian occupation and during the high inflation period in the 1990s however, when there were no new stamp issues, any stamps available were used, provided of course that, during the Taliban period, they didn't portray living things. The cover below shows the 2 poul newspaper stamp with the same National Arms design, together with a 1932 15 poul, used in 1998 on a registered letter to PO Box 1, Kabul (i.e., the BBC). They were obviously not used at their face values, but the values they were used at has not yet been determined and is subject to ongoing research.

