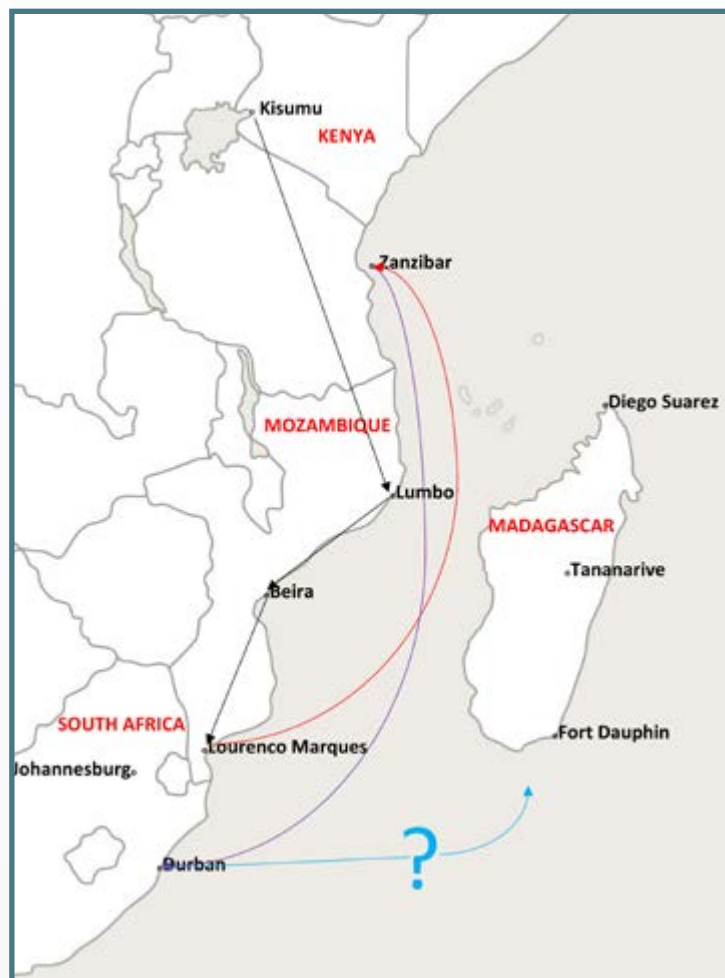


'A Few of My Favourite Things', Number Two: Australia to Madagascar via the Scenic Route

Gary Watson FRPSV, FRPSL, FACCCofNSW, FBSAP



World War I, or the Great War, was, despite its titles, largely a European and Mediterranean conflict. World War II, on the other hand, was far more global in scope. Apart from developing political and national entanglements, faster transport - in particular, the advent of long-range aircraft - effectively brought the continents closer together, and resulted in many of even the most far-flung territories being impacted by the hostilities.

The island of Madagascar is a case in point. Located off the south-east coast of Africa, and despite its enormous size exceeding 500,000 square kilometres (about the same size as Texas), it was one of France's most remote colonies.

When the French capitulated to Germany in June 1940, Madagascar was one of many Colonies that pledged allegiance to Marshal Petain's puppet government at Vichy, a declaration that caused little more than a disgruntled yawn from Whitehall. However, 18 months later, the benign British attitude changed dramatically after Japan entered the war, on 7 December 1941. Churchill's brains trust was concerned that the Japanese might seek to establish naval bases in Madagascar, an action that would directly threaten Allied shipping traversing the Indian Ocean.

The British therefore decided to invade Madagascar, with the Free French forces specifically excluded from the affair! This was apparently because of de Gaulle's half-hearted involvement in the Battle of Dakar in September 1940 and his infamous cop-out that he "did not want to shed the blood of Frenchmen for Frenchmen". Operation Ironclad, with the specific task of capturing the deep-water port of Diego Suarez, at the northern tip of Madagascar, was launched on 5 May 1942.

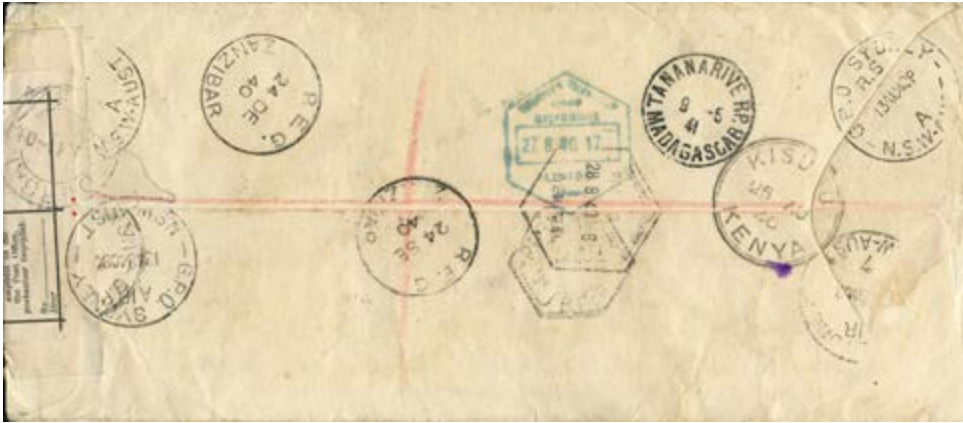
This was Britain's first amphibious assault since the Dardanelles Disaster in 1915. Apparently, the British had learned little from the Gallipoli Campaign, including how to read topographical maps. This time, instead of landing the troops on a narrow beach with towering cliffs, many of the invading troops were confronted with impenetrable mangrove swamps and thick bush. However, the French colonial troops were not the Turks of 27 years earlier, and Diego Suarez fell within two days.

By then, Japanese long-range submarines were operating freely in the Indian Ocean. Three of these craft arrived off Diego Suarez at the end of May 1942 and caused some mischief but had little impact. However, this action did hasten the Allied invasion of the rest of Madagascar.

The three-pronged Operation Stream Line Jane was launched on 10 September 1942. The Vichy forces put up a spirited resistance but the entire island was effectively in British hands by the end of October, with an Armistice signed at Ambalavao on 6 November 1942. To put this action into perspective, de Gaulle's biographer, Julian Jackson, noted that the Colonial troops in Madagascar held out longer than had the French themselves in 1940!

This fun fact, finally, brings us to the subject of this article.

On 13 August 1940, Masschelein & Co, a Sydney firm of general agents, brokers and merchants sent an airmail letter to the French



firm of Bonnet et Fils in Tananarive, the inland capital of Madagascar.

Considering that France had fallen to Germany two months earlier and the Madagascan authorities had declared allegiance to the pro-German Vichy regime, it might be expected that this item of mail would have been immediately marked 'NO SERVICE AVAILABLE' and been returned to the sender. This would have represented the loss of the 8/4d postage paid: 2/9d for the first half-ounce + 2/8d for each successive half-ounce x2 + 3d registration.



Instead, the cover was routinely examined and passed by the censor at Sydney and sent unimpeded on its merry way by the Horseshoe Route to Egypt, then south into continental Africa. Unusually, it was carried all the way by BOAC flying boat *Cambria*, which departed Sydney 13.8.1940, and arrived at Kisumu in Kenya where it was offloaded and backstamped 26AU/40. Then, presumably because Portugal and its Colonies were neutral, the letter was sent to Mozambique, where it arrived and was backstamped at 'LUMBO' the next day. That is an as-the-crow-flies distance of some 1,400km, which could have been

achieved in a single day only by air. Which creates a problem.

In his monumental *Intercontinental Airmails: Vol III Africa*, the late Ted Proud RDP wrote about the Portuguese operations of *Divisao de Exploracao dos Transportes Aereos dos Mocambique (DETA)* which did run a trans-continental service between Lourenco Marques and Luanda in Angola. But that route did not go anywhere near Kenya. In fact, the only direct connection between the BOAC route and DETA was at Johannesburg, where the letter could have been offloaded, but was not. Proud notes that the Johannesburg-Lourenco Marques service was suspended in September 1940 but this cover may be evidence that the route was cut by late August. Proud gives no other indication as to how our letter got from Kisumu to Lumbo, or why it was sent there and not directly to Lourenco Marques.

It is likely that at Lumbo the cover could have been put on a ship for Madagascar. However, instead it was now flown south some 1,500km to the Mozambique capital, where it received a 'CENTRAL' backstamp of 28.8.40. (Note, there is also a smaller and indistinct 'BEIRA' backstamp, probably applied at what was roughly the half-way point between Lumbo and Lourenco Marques.)

Surely our cover must now have been taken by sea to Madagascar. But, no! Instead, after almost a month, it was returned to British territory, the island of Zanzibar, where the cover arrived 24SE/40. This must have been a mistake. With Mozambique being neutral, there must have been Portuguese and/or French ships providing a mail service between the mainland and Madagascar. It seems highly unlikely that such a service would have been available from Zanzibar which, in any event, was 2,300km north, and even more distant from there to Madagascar!

At some point, the English language handstamps 'NO OUTLET TO MADAGASCAR' and 'RETURN TO SENDER' were beautifully struck on the face. I had concluded this was done at Zanzibar, on 24DE/40, when the cover was again backstamped there, having languished for a further three months. However, that is probably incorrect.

Both of these markings must be exceedingly rare. The only other examples I have located are on a surface cover from Iowa to Fort Dauphin, on Madagascar's south-east coast, that was illustrated by the eminent postal historian Robert Johnson in *France & Colonies Philatelist* of April 2006 at page 32. Importantly, that item shows quite clearly that the markings were applied by separate implements. The American cover was opened for censorship in South Africa, which provides compelling evidence that the instructional markings were applied there. This just adds to the intrigue with the cover from Australia.

For some reason that frankly defies logic, the cover was sent from Zanzibar to South Africa, probably by sea, with a further 3,000km being added to its journey. Here it either arrived open at the left - unlikely, given that at Sydney it had been sealed with an Australian censorship label - or it was now opened for further examination. In either event, it was resealed with an English/Afrikaans 'Found open and/.../officially closed...' label which was 'tied' front and back by light strikes of a Durban cds of 6.1.41. As noted, it was probably here that the 'NO OUTLET TO MADAGASCAR' and 'RETURN TO SENDER' markings were applied. (Interestingly, there is no record of these handstamps in Nicholas Arrow's *South African Airmails*, self-published in 2008.)

How the letter then reached its originally intended destination is a real conundrum, but reach there it did. The superb 'TANANARIVE RP/MADAGASCAR' arrival backstamp boldly announces that almost four months after being processed through Natal, the cover finally reached Bonnet et Fils. The entire magical mystery tour took just under nine months, most of it devoted to an apparently aimless journey throughout East Africa. It would be marvellous to know if a reply was ever received in Sydney. That seems a long-shot, but then so was the delivery of the outgoing letter.

From my perspective, postal history items such as this are an absolute delight. It probably should have never left Sydney. It was probably mis-sent at least once. It travelled at least 50% further than should have been necessary. Even after it was clearly marked 'RETURN TO SENDER', the indomitable postal authorities continued to seek a positive outcome, that they somehow conjured up.

Clearly, there are gaps in the timeline. Presumption and assumption only partly address the puzzling questions asked by the cover. What we know for certain is that a letter sent from Sydney, NSW on 13 August 1940 was eventually delivered to a hostile, soon to be invaded, island Colony some nine months later. That of itself is enough to make this cover one of My Favourite Things. The journey itself, the wartime context, and the events in Madagascar in 1942 are all a colourful bonus.

And, the connection with James Hardie Ltd? Our senders, Masschelein & Co were headquartered at 69 York Street, Sydney, in the beautiful art deco building ominously named Asbestos House. When it was erected in the early-1930s, James Hardie was not even playing with dangerous grey fibres.

In 1951, James Hardie Ltd was incorporated and occupied the same premises, which was renamed James Hardie House. Despite having been unable to locate the necessary evidence, I expect that Masschelein, which circumstantial evidence suggests had been involved in trading asbestos from Madagascar, had been acquired by James Hardie Ltd or one of its predecessor companies.

A Note on New South Wales Charity Stamps and Related Matters

Bill Lloyd-Smith FRPSV

This article raises the matter of possible fiscal use of charity stamps in New South Wales in a manner similar to that for the Victorian charity stamps discussed in the last issue of this journal. After all, Kellow raised a query in his book on Victorian stamps about possible fiscal use of Victorian charity stamps. The answer is almost certainly, not at all in practice, in that case. We will argue similarly for New South Wales but a few differences between the two colonies must be noted, especially the rules for using stamps for fiscal or postal purposes.

It would be well to review the laws on interchangeable usage of stamps in New South Wales as this matter is not well treated in Basset Hull's monumental treatise on New South Wales. Hutson's book also lacks a discussion of these laws. Thus, we refer to *The Federal Australian Philatelist* for an article on the relevant legislation for New South Wales, but even that article has significant gaps. In brief, a *Stamp Duties Act* of 1865 (29 Vic 6) came into force on 1 July 1865 and was due to expire by the end of 1868 when a new Act (32 Vic 1) was passed just in time to continue this legislation (the principal Act) until 31 December 1869. Thence:

- 32 Vic 4 continued the *Stamp Duties Act* until 31 December 1870.
- 33 Vic 8 continued the *Stamp Duties Act* until 31 March 1871 and amended the principal Act.
- 34 Vic 13 continued the *Stamp Duties Act* until 31 May 1871.
- 34 Vic 20 continued the *Stamp Duties Act* until 31 December 1874 with further amendments and replaced the old schedule of stamp duties with a new schedule of duties.

- After 31 December 1874, the stamp duties legislation finally lapsed.

There was an Act to authorise the use of *postage stamps* for fiscal purposes (*Postage Stamps Extension Act* of 1873 (36 Vic 15)). This came into force on 1 May 1873 (Section 1 of this Act). Section 4 stated: "Nothing in this Act contained shall affect otherwise than as herein expressly enacted any enactment in the Stamp Acts or in any Act relating to Postage rates." This somewhat obscure wording does not encourage the view that fiscal stamps were ever allowed for postage. Nevertheless, some fiscal stamps were used postally in the 1880s and perhaps later still.

A new Act to impose Stamp Duties came into force on 1 July 1880 after a lapse of 5½ years. At once, postage stamps could again be used fiscally since the *Postage Stamps Extension Act* of 1873 was still on the statutes, but fiscal stamps could not be used postally. This point is clearly made in an article in the second issue of *The Federal Australian Philatelist* for 1890 about interchangeable stamps for all Australasian colonies, including New Zealand. After a few more amendments to the legislation, the *Stamp Duties Act*, 1898 (1898 No. 27) was assented to on 27 July 1898 to consolidate the law on stamp duty and included the provisions of 1873 on using postage stamps for fiscal purposes. Fiscal use of postage stamps was terminated for good on 1 January 1901 by Act No. 53 of 1900 (to amend the *Stamp Duties Act*, 1898).

For New South Wales, various fiscal stamps are known postally used between 1880 and the end of 1900, as recorded in Hutson's book on New South Wales and in Robson Lowe's Encyclopaedia. Peck and Smith (1999) also mention postal use of fiscal stamps,