

Brief review

ESSENCE OF POLAR PHILATELY: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF POLAR PHILATELY. Hal Vogel (editor Alan Warren). 2008. Exton, PA: American Society of Polar Philatelists. ix + 206 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 978-0-9776449-0-2. Available from Alan Warren, Secretary ASPP, PO Box 39, Exton PA 19341-0039. USA (alanwar@att.net).
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Philately and polar history have many points of intersection and these are very evident in this lavishly produced and illustrated volume. The book starts with a definition of polar philately that appears excessively overarching at first sight but which must have been the product of much thought. It is 'the appreciation, collection, study and exhibition of transmitted (or prepared for transmission) tangible communications (eg mail, telegrams, lofted leaflets, courier-delivered messages) and other specifically philatelic articles (eg stamps, postal stationery, vignettes, commemorative, first day and event covers, postal history, marcophily) from, to or pertaining to the polar regions or its events, environment or entities.' The book then proceeds to consider questions such as the basis and nature of polar philately, the different types of material that are available for study, for rest assured this is not mere stamp collecting, including air mail, ship mail and conflict mail.

As well as comprehensive lists of expeditions, territories covered, etc the book has a complete glossary of technical terms a comprehensive bibliography and index. But the chief glory of the book is the illustrations and these are what make it a 'must have' for those philatelists with polar interests. These are all in excellent colour and are scattered throughout the book. However the most mouth watering ones are presented in the section entitled 'Gems showcase' and here we have some wonderful and seriously valuable pieces. Just to take one page at random we have probably the only postal item from the Orcadas del Sur between the closure of its (and Antarctica's) first post office in 1905 and its reopening in 1942. This is a receipt for telegraph usage at the station in 1928. Opposite is the only known postal item from the Russian segment of the Russo-Swedish Arc of the Meridian expedition to Svalbard at the start of the twentieth century and this is displayed together with an early piece from the 1929 Zeppelin world flight, dropped over Irkutsk, and the only known mail to document Frederick Cook's 1894 *Miranda* expedition, which had a party in Labrador.

The illustrations have been selected with a refreshing catholicity of approach and valuable items from all the territories of relevance are presented along with items from the earliest times to the latest. One of the first is an entire from a Captain Lovel of the ship *John and James* to his owners as he was leaving Deal on a cruise to Hammerfest and the North Cape in 1716 while some of the latest relate to the Argentine occupation of the Falkland Islands in 1982. A veritable feast for the eyes. All polar philatelists should purchase this book.