

The Houston-Mt. Everest Expedition Flights 1933

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Although Mount Everest was first climbed in May 1953, its summit (29,030 feet/8,848 metres) was actually conquered by air two decades earlier.

The Great Trigonometrical Survey under George Everest did considerable work collecting the geographical data of the Indian region. Radhanath Sikdar a Bengali mathematician, joined the Survey in December 1831. In 1851, on the orders of Everest's successor, Colonel Waugh, Sikdar started measuring the mountain ranges near Darjeeling. After compiling data from various observations, in 1856, Sikdar, by now the Survey's chief computer, apparently rushed into Waugh's office exclaiming "Sir, I have it discovered the highest mountain in the world!" (Douglas-Hamilton.) When this finding was officially announced, Waugh declared that the unnamed (i.e. by British authorities) 'Peak XV' would be known as 'Mount Everest,' as a tribute to his predecessor.

After Captain John Noel's presentation in 1919 to the Royal Geographical Society in London (Noel 1919) about his clandestine journey six years before, through Tibet to the foothills of Everest, the mountain became a focus for British exploration. After WW1, three British-led expeditions to Everest were organised - a reconnaissance of the approaches to the mountain, through Tibet, in 1921, followed in 1922 and 1924 by climbing expeditions under the leadership of Gen. the Hon. C. G. Bruce. The latter expedition ended in tragedy when George Mallory and Sandy Irvine lost their lives while 'going strong' for the summit. This disaster, and the negative reaction of the Dalai Lama to certain scenes of Tibetans depicted in John Noel's film of the expedition, put a brake on any further attempts for the next nine years. The closure of Nepal to foreign expeditions precluded exploration via the only alternative land route to Everest.

The concept of flying over the summit of Mount Everest was suggested shortly before the end of WW1, by Dr. Alexander Kellas, the Scottish chemist, pioneer high-altitude physiologist and experienced Himalayan mountaineer in his paper 'The Possibility of Aerial Reconnaissance in the Himalayas,' read before the Royal Geographical Society in London (Kellas 1918). Kellas passed away while taking part in the 1921 reconnaissance of Everest.

In January 1921, the then holder of the altitude record, American aviator Roland Rohlfs, declared his intention to fly over Everest (*Gloucestershire Echo*, 19 January 1921). Ultimately, his plan came to nothing and it would be another four years until the challenge would be considered again. On 27 January 1925, Alan Cobham took off from Jalpaiguri in west Bengal, and flew over Darjeeling towards the world's third-highest mountain, Kangchenjunga. It was reported by the Calcutta correspondent of the *Western Morning News* on 28 January 1925, that Cobham 'proposes to get as near the summit [of Everest] as his aeroplane will take him.' In the event, strong downwinds prevented any near approach to his objective. Undeterred, Cobham declared 'With the right type of machine.. we could fly over the summit with ease.' Despite Cobham's confidence, other than a declaration of intent in 1926 by the French pilot Monsieur Colleno (*The Times*, 3 February 1926), and a suggestion by Captain John Noel (Noel 1927), that a man could be dropped on the summit from a plane, no attempt at the overflight was considered until January 1932.

In that month, during their round-the-world flying expedition, the American pilots Richard Halliburton and Moye W Stephens, flew their Stearland C3B aircraft (NR-882N), nicknamed 'The Flying Carpet,' to within 20 miles of Everest, having obtained permission from the Maharajah of Nepal. Stephen H. Smith, then Secretary of the Indian Air Mail Society, persuaded the aviators to carry 50 suitably labelled and cacheted covers on the flight. Cancelled at Park Street, Calcutta, on 18 January, most of the flown covers are addressed to him.

Following these isolated, individual attempts, it became obvious that no real challenge could be



Figure 1. The main protagonists of the expedition:

From left to right: Fellowes, Blacker, Etherton, Clydesdale, Lucy, Lady Houston and McIntyre.

mounted without a combination of proper organisation, experienced pilots, technologically-advanced aeroplanes and significant financial support. The impetus for just such an expedition came in March 1932 from Colonel P. T. Etherton, who was an experienced traveller in the Himalayan regions, and Colonel L. V. Stewart Blacker, who was similarly familiar with the region, an experienced pilot and a descendant of the first Surveyor-General of India. The organising committee was also bolstered by the addition of two highly-experienced aviators: Squadron Leader Douglas Douglas-Hamilton, Marquess of Douglas and Clydesdale MP, son of the 13th Duke of Hamilton, joined in June 1932, while Air Commodore Peregrine Fellowes was appointed chief executive in November of the same year.

A diplomatic obstacle also needed to be surmounted. The expedition's flight would necessarily take them over the territory of the Maharajah of Nepal. Permission for mountaineering expeditions through his country had always been denied by the Nepalese monarch, but Richard Halliburton had been allowed to fly over Nepal's border in January 1932, and this was an encouraging precedent. The first approaches to the Maharajah were made in May 1932, by Col. Clendon Daukes, British Envoy in Kathmandu. In August 1932, permission, with certain conditions attached, was granted.

Following receipt of Nepal's conditional permission, plus assurances of assistance from the India Office and confirmation of full technical and logistical support from the Air Ministry, on 20 September 1932 Etherton announced the expedition's plans rationale to the British press:

The ambition of the expedition is to secure to Great Britain the honour of being the first nation to conquer Mount Everest and at the same time to secure air survey photographs and data of supreme scientific and geographical interest...

The fact that both the North and South Poles have already been reached by aircraft of foreign manufacture makes it all the more important that the greatest geographical objective still remaining — Mount Everest — be attained by British endeavour. (Yorkshire Post 20 September 1932)

Etherton also publicised the appointment of Lord Clydesdale's appointment as its Chief Pilot, a move which greatly annoyed Clydesdale as he had not been consulted about the statement in advance. As a sitting Member of Parliament he was duty bound to obtain permission from his constituency committee to undertake such a potentially dangerous adventure.

That same month, 'the boxing Marquess,' as Clydesdale was popularly known, visited Lady Lucy Houston (pronounced 'how-ston,' unlike the American city) at her Scottish shooting estate, Kinrara, to ask her to fund the expedition. An earlier visit to her London home had ended without any commitment on her part. Lady Houston, who actively supported the development of British air power (she had already bankrolled the successful British team who won the 1931 Schneider Air Race trophy) and the strengthening of Imperial rule in India, was delighted with Clydesdale's proposal. He also impressed her by dressing in his kilt for dinner (Crompton), to the extent that he reported that 'Thereafter she took a maternal interest in my physical well-being' (Clydesdale). On 6 October, Clydesdale was able to announce that she had agreed to fund the expedition in its entirety and wanted to be closely involved at all stages, from England. Lady Houston sponsored the enterprise to the tune of £15,000 and in recognition of her support the undertaking was named the 'Houston-Mt. Everest Expedition.'

The scientific focus of the flight, a photographic survey of the Himalayas, was endorsed by the

Royal Geographical Society. The photographic equipment to be used on the flight comprised horizontal plate cameras and automatic vertical cameras, and these would take images of the surface at predetermined intervals as the planes crossed over identified survey points. The aim was to obtain a 'photographic mosaic' of the ground covered and an accurate map. The planned flight would spend a maximum of 15 minutes at high altitude over the mountains.

A suitable location for an aerodrome for the expedition base was found at Lalbalu, 10 miles north of Purnea in Bihar state, the site of a landing ground which belonged to the Army Department. Purnea was situated on a railway line and among its administrative facilities was a post and telegraph office, plus a permanent meteorological observatory. Lalbalu's location meant that to reach their objective the team would only require to fly 150 miles north.

Chief Pilot of the expedition Clydesdale, had commanded 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron, based in his constituency of Renfrew. Flight Lieutenant D. F. McIntyre, the expedition's second pilot, was a Flight Commander in the same unit (Douglas-Hamilton). The aircraft chosen for the expedition were an original Westland PV-6, (a prototype of the Westland Wallace bomber and also known as the Houston-Wallace), registration G-ACBR, along with a modified Westland PV-3, registration G-ACAZ. Both aircraft were fitted with highly supercharged Bristol Pegasus IS 3 engines and equipped with enclosed observer positions, but retained open pilot cockpits. In addition, oxygen systems, telephone equipment and facilities for heating special flying clothing and boots were installed. Specially formulated aviation fuel was developed by Shell.

Following extensive trials, on 16 February 1933 the team left Heston Aerodrome in west London for Karachi, flying in three de Havilland 'Moth' type light aeroplanes - a Puss, Fox and Gypsy. The two Westland aircraft for the expedition were shipped in crates on the P & O vessel SS *Dalgoma*. Lady Houston telegraphed the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, asking him to receive the team and give them her blessings. Coincidentally, this year would see another expedition on the mountain, the first mountaineering attempt since the disaster of 1924.

The air route to India stretched across France and down through Italy and Sicily, before crossing into Africa. After stops in Tunis, Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad, the team crossed over the Persian Gulf before finally reaching India. Blacker, chief observer of the expedition, was the first to reach Karachi, as he had chosen to travel on the Imperial Airways service to India. He then travelled on to the expedition base at Purnea. After satisfying himself with the ongoing arrangements, he returned to Delhi just as the Moths arrived. The Westland machines arrived at Karachi on 7 March. Fellowes, Clydesdale and McIntyre took the Fox Moth and the Gypsy Moth and flew them to Purnea, becoming acquainted with the aerial journey across India. During this trip they achieved their long-awaited first sight of the Himalayan peaks. The fliers then decided to bring the Westlands to Purnea, so flew back to Karachi. At this juncture, one of the Moths was wrecked in a storm at Allahabad, and the pilots had to proceed by train to Delhi. At Delhi, Ram Nath Chawla, the first Indian to pilot a plane out of India, lent his own Puss Moth to the expedition. This generosity very much impressed the British aviators. They departed Karachi on 20 March, and after refuelling at Hyderabad, spent the night at their next stop, Jodhpur. On 21 March the team arrived in Delhi, where they were inspected by the Viceroy. Purnea was finally reached on the following day. While the Viceroy inspected the team and aircraft in Delhi, Etherton visited Nepal, having received an invitation to the new ruler's coronation. While in Kathmandu, Etherton received permission for a second flight, should it be deemed necessary.

The Maharaja of Darbhanga owned a bungalow at Purnea, which he provided for the use of the expedition team and had it refurnished to meet their requirements. It is his stationery, with 'Raj Dharbanga' printed on the flap, that was used for many of the flown covers. The Raja of Banaili also offered his private racecourse, located a mile away from the Maharaja's house, together with three cars and a lorry, for the use of the expedition. The Indian meteorological officer at Purnea, S. N. Gupta, provided a daily weather report and forecast based on observations and the use of weather balloons, which were of huge value to the expedition.

The First Survey Flight over Mount Everest, 3 April 1933

On 3 April, Gupta reported that according to weather balloon observations, the wind velocity at 25,000 feet (7620 metres) had finally decreased to 58 miles per hour, and the clouds were light. Knowing that this might be a very small window of opportunity, and with Gupta's advice, the team decided to immediately proceed with the first full survey flight.



Figure 2. McIntyre piloting the Westland-Wallace over the Himalayas. (*Illustrated London News*, 29 April 1933.)

The two machines took off at 8.25 am from Lalbalu Aerodrome. Blacker and Clydesdale flew the Houston-Westland, while the Westland-Wallace was piloted by McIntyre with Sydney Bonnett, a Gaumont British News cinematographer with great experience of flying expeditions, as cameraman and observer.

Thirty minutes into the flight, the aircraft passed over Forbesganj, the advanced landing ground situated 46 miles to the north of Purnea. Everest first became visible above the dust haze at 19,000 feet (5,790 metres). As the planes neared the peak, the deflection of winds off the mountain created a downward current, which caused them to drop 1,500 feet (457 metres) as the pilots struggled to climb. Despite the high winds, at 10.05 am both planes soared 100 feet (30 metres) over the summit. They spent another 15 minutes circling the roof of the world before beginning their journey back. The fliers landed at Lalbalu airport at 11.25 am and paid tribute to the splendid performance of the aircraft.

It was soon realised, however, that although the cine film and some of the images were excellent, the photographic strips produced by the automatic vertical cameras had been unsuccessful. Clear images had not been obtained, because of the dust haze of dust obscuring the lower mountains. As had already been considered during the planning stages of the expedition, a second flight now became necessary.

The Kangchenjunga Flight, 4 April 1933.

Because of the problems encountered with the cameras and the telephone apparatus, it was decided to check these instruments at the maximum anticipated flight altitude and over snow. The meteorological department warned that the fine weather was not going to last much beyond 4 April, so a flight to and, if possible, over the Kangchenjunga massif was hastily planned for that day, to check the equipment under conditions similar to those experienced over Everest.

Fellowes and Gaumont cameraman A. L. Fisher flew in the Houston Westland, while R. A. F. Flying Officer Dick Ellison piloted the Westland Wallace, with Bonnett as cinematographer. The cameras were operated and tested thoroughly, and responded satisfactorily. Once again downdrafts from the mountain impacted on the flight and any attempt to fly over the summit had to be abandoned. On the return leg of the flight, Fellowes lost his way in the clouds and was forced, by a shortage of petrol, to land at Dinajpur. He sent a telegram to Clydesdale, who arrived with the second aircraft about three hours later. However, the local availability of petrol was inadequate so a fresh supply was brought in by a third aeroplane. All three aircraft then returned safely to Purnea.

The Second Survey Flight, 19 April 1933.

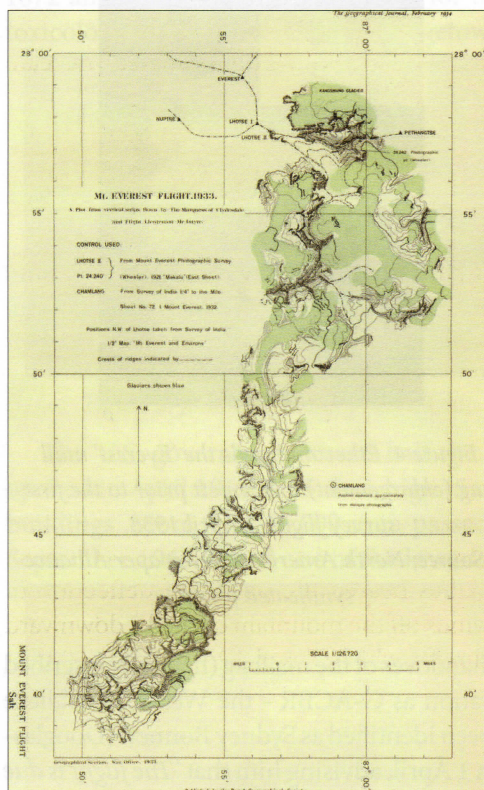


Figure 3. A plot from vertical strips flown by Clydesdale and McIntyre (Salt).

Strict prohibition against a second flight had been received from the expedition's organisers back in London, primarily because of concerns that this would not be covered by the expedition's insurance policy: the Kangchenjunga flight had prompted a demand for an additional premium.

Fellowes' response was to accelerate plans to close down the expedition's operations. Along with the demands from London to abandon any thoughts of a repeat attempt, came a telegram of foreboding from Lady Houston:

The good spirit of the mountain has been kind to you and brought you success. Be content. Do not tempt the evil spirit of the mountain to bring disaster. Intuition tells me to warn you that there is danger if you linger. (The Scotsman, 10 April 1933.)

However, after waiting for a spell of cloudy weather to clear and taking full advantage of Fellowes' indisposition through ill-health, the second survey flight took off at 8.15 am on 19 April. The two Westland aircraft were piloted by Clydesdale and Ellison, accompanied respectively by co-pilot McIntyre and Blacker as observer. This time, everything worked to plan and the quality of the photographs were excellent, having secured an unbroken survey strip. Photographing such an extent of a major mountain range, with its high peaks and glaciers, had never before been achieved from the air.

By a curious coincidence, on the day after the second survey flight, a Gypsy Moth named 'Ever-Wrest' took off from Stag Lane aerodrome in Edgware, north of London (*Leeds Mercury*, 20 April 1933). The inexperienced pilot, Capt. Maurice Wilson, was determined to fly solo to Purnea, and from there drop a Union Jack on the summit of Everest. Failing this, he planned to land at the highest point possible on the mountain and then reach the summit by foot. Ultimately, however, his body was discovered in his tent at 21,000 feet (6,400 metres) by the 1935 British Mount Everest expedition. An excellent in-depth study of Wilson's expedition has just been published for the first time (Caesar).

The photographs of the Houston-Mt. Everest Expedition were rediscovered in the archives of the Royal Geographical Society in 1951, by Dr. Michael Ward, who took part in the 1951 and 1952 British Everest reconnaissances and the successful 1953 expedition. They ultimately led to the discovery of a new route up the Nepalese side of the mountain and ultimately to Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay achieving the first summit ascent of Everest on 29 May 1953.

Mail carried on the First Survey Flight, 3 April.

Prior to take-off on 3 April, Etherton was photographed handing over a small mailbag containing letters, addressed by Fellowes and other members of the expedition, to dignitaries including HM King George V, the Prince of Wales and Lady Houston, which would be posted after the successful conclusion of the flight. In *Wings over Everest* (p80), it is noted that the bag was handed over 'to one of the pilots.' Fellowes' letter to the Editor, reproduced in *The Times* for 4 April, stated that it was 'about to be placed in the Houston-Westland aeroplane, of which Squadron Leader Lord Clydesdale is the pilot.' Elsewhere in the same edition of the newspaper it is noted that 'a number of letters were carried over the top in Flight Lieutenant McIntyre's machine.'



Figure 4. Etherton hands the 'Everest' mail bag (enlargement) to Bonnett prior to the first survey flight, 3 April 1933.

(Source: North American Newspaper Alliance syndicated photo.)

One of the photographs of Etherton which captured the handover of the mailbag (helpfully inscribed 'Everest') (Figure 4), clearly shows the aeroplane's registration as G-ACBR - the Westland-Wallace PV-6, piloted by McIntyre. The recipient has subsequently been identified as Sydney Bonnett (Douglas-Hamilton). Fellowes also wrote to Colonel John Buchan on 1 April, advising him that *'The flight is due to start tomorrow & this letter will be carried by Clydesdale.'*

Based on Fellowes' letters to Buchan and *The Times* and from Frank Rosher (Jennings gives the full text), plus his certification of flown covers, it seems entirely plausible that some covers may have been carried over Everest by Clydesdale.

According to Waterfall and others (Waterfall, p42 and 'Osprey', p10, Singer & Gould) each member of the expedition team was allowed to put one letter into the mail bag, and that a total of 25 covers were flown. Jeffrey Brown assessed the number as more than 25 (having identified 28 members of the expedition) but less than 60, 'this being the number quoted in catalogues.' (*India Post*, 177.) Certainly, the list of covers included in the Census indicates that letters contributed by team members were in addition to those for dignitaries, as the number recorded now exceeds the total of 25 flown that Waterfall and other give.

Flight magazine of 30 March 1933 announced that 'It is proposed, after the flight, to drop photographs at Kalimpong, from where they will be conveyed by runner to the expedition attempting to climb Mount Everest.' This proposal was never realised. One 'delivery' was apparently effected, however. In a letter to *The Times* printed on 5 April, a correspondent advised that he had handed a postcard to the team, prior to their departure from London, asking them to drop it over Everest. He wrote to acknowledge receipt of a cable from Etherton on 3 April, reading *'Your postcard dropped on Everest. Marvellous shot.'*

The recorded First Survey flown covers (and those from the Kangchenjunga and Second Survey flights) all bear the expedition's 'HOUSTON MOUNT EVEREST FLIGHT * PURNEA' special cancel (see Figure 5), applied in varying shades of purple, blue or black, dated 3, 4, 5, 7 or 8 April. Fellowes, writing to Sir Clive Wigram (Cover 1.23 in the Census) in reference to this 'cancelling stamp' (as Fellowes described it) recorded that *'the number stamped with this stamp will be about one hundred and the stamp will then be destroyed.'*

Some covers also bear a 3-wavy lines cachet inscribed 'HOUSTON-MT. EVEREST / FLIGHT / 1933' on the front or reverse. This is known struck in purple and blue. In the course of the research

undertaken for this article in the archives of Raj Darbhanga, Pradip Jain discovered that Thacker & Co., Calcutta (now Kolkata) prepared the design for this cachet.

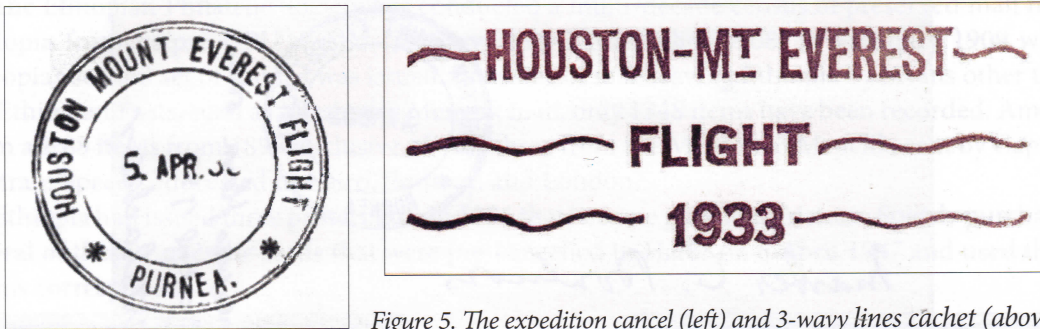


Figure 5. The expedition cancel (left) and 3-wavy lines cachet (above)

One cover (Cover 1.22 in the Census) shows a strike of a single line 'Houston Everest Flight' cachet. The status of this marking, official or otherwise, is unknown.



Figure 6. Single-line 'Houston Everest Flight' cachet

The letter referred to above, from Frank Rosher, written on 1 April with Cover 1.15, noted:

A very limited number of letters including this will be carried by the first pilot Lord Clydesdale in his machine - & if he is successful the Director-General of Posts & Telegraphs has consented to the stamps on the letter being overprinted with the words 'Houston - Mt. Everest Flight.' So should this letter reach you, be careful to preserve the envelope.

The postmaster at Purnea had assured Etherton that he would apply the office datestamp to the covers after the conclusion of the flight, in addition to the special expedition datestamp. Although many of the April 3-8 dated covers have the Purnea datestamp, a number do not.

The application of the expedition cancellation was obviously conducted separately from the actual receipt and despatch at Purnea post office. A good example of this is the cover addressed to Master C[harles] Boulnois (Census number 1.3). This was enclosed (apparently together with one addressed to his sister, Elizabeth) in the larger cover (Census number 1.4) addressed to his mother. The large cover has a strike of the Purnea cds on the reverse, while the smaller one does not. The covers were sent by Blacker on 12 April (the Purnea cds date on the reverse of the larger cover to Violet Boulnois). His letter, of the same date, states

My darling Violet,

Here are two of the envelopes flown over Everest & Kanchenjunga (sic). I am sorry the latter is rather stained but it is the only one left. I expect Charles & Elizabeth will want to have them.

This would seem to suggest that a quantity of presumably empty envelopes were cancelled with the expedition cds on 3 April other dates. These were then available for members of the expedition to address and mail later. In this case both the covers to Violet and to her son Charles were cancelled nine days before they were put into the mail at Purnea. Two other covers (Census numbers 1.6 and 1.7) cancelled on 3 April also show the Purnea cds for 12 April. Even more interesting is Blacker's reference to the cover which would have been addressed to Elizabeth, as being 'the only one left' from the flight over Kangchenjunga on 4 April.

The variation in the recorded dates of the expedition cancellation is possibly due to when the letters were actually handed over to the post office, although this assertion is complicated by the fact that a number of the covers do not show strikes of the Purnea cds, despite the postmaster's declaration to Etherton. Mail from expedition team members and the film crew that had not been flown is recorded cancelled with the standard Purnea office cds, but also with the 3-wavy line cachet.

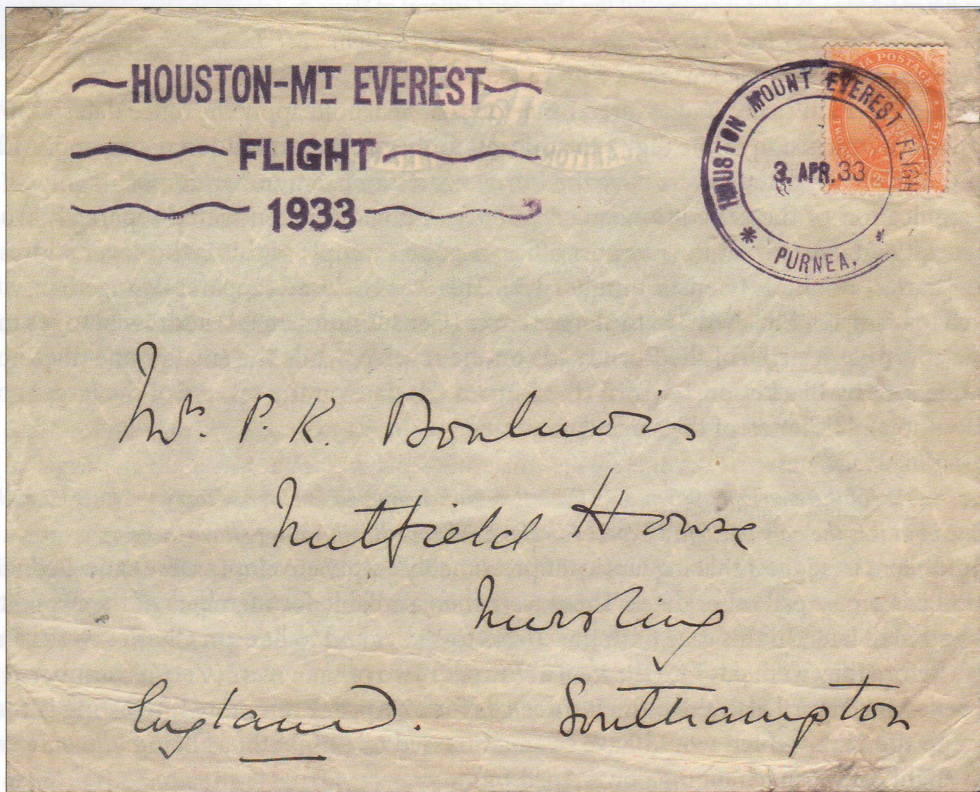
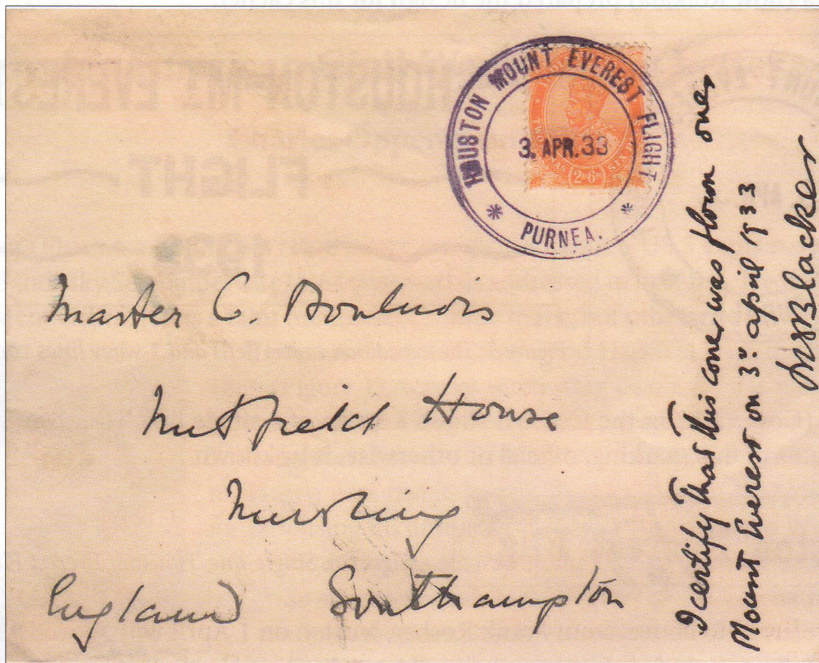


Figure 7. Cover sent by Blacker to Violet Boulnois (bottom), enclosing an Everest First Survey envelope for her son (top), dated 3 April 1933 and certified by him. Another cover, for her daughter, from the Kangchenjunga flight was also enclosed according to the accompanying letter, dated 12 April.

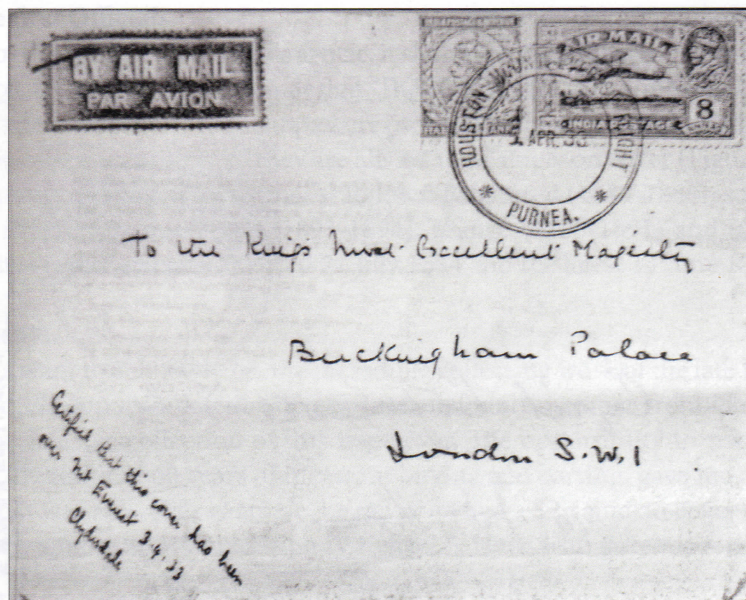


Figure 8. Scanned photocopy of the cover sent by Fellowes to HM King George V, certified by Clydesdale. (Courtesy of the National Library of Scotland and Lord Selkirk.)

The postal rates, reflected by all but one of the recorded covers, were as follows: 1a 3p for domestic mail, 2as 6p for international surface mail and 8as 6p for international airmail. The latter rate is made up of 2as 6p surface for the first half ounce, plus 6as per half ounce for airmail to the UK. The one registered cover recorded (Cover 1.15) has been paid at 8as 9p. This payment comprised 2as 6p for the first half ounce surface to the UK, plus 2as for each additional half ounce or part thereof and 3as registration. The sender overpaid an additional 1a 3p (probably assuming that the domestic surface rate was also required).

In the accompanying Census, the authors have been able to add a further 12 covers, cancelled between 3 and 8 April, to the list of 22 compiled by Jeffrey Brown (these are indicated by 'JB' and his numbering). Additionally, covers to King George V, the Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister etc have been accurately recorded through inspection of papers in the National Library of Scotland.

Mail carried on the Kangchenjunga Flight, 4 April.

Two covers, cancelled with the expedition cds dated 5 April and certified by Fellowes as having been flown over Kangchenjunga, were recorded by Jeffrey Brown (*India Post*, 178, p200).

Blacker's letter to Violet Boulnois, dated 12 April, refers to the existence of other Kangchenjunga flight covers. The letter specifically refers to his enclosing 'the only one left' from this flight, that was apparently addressed to Violet's daughter, Elizabeth. Elizabeth's brother received an Everest First Survey flight cover, but her stained cover has not been recorded before now, and takes the total known to three. Unfortunately Blacker gives no indication of how many covers were flown over Kangchenjunga.

Indian Air Mail Society covers, 8 April.

Stephen Smith, the Society's Secretary arranged with Blacker and Fellowes for covers to be flown, at a cost of one guinea (£1 1s) each, in aid of various R. A. F. charities. He travelled to Purnea and gave 87 covers to Fellowes on 7 April, returning to collect them the following day. All are postmarked Purnea 8 April and bear strikes of the special cachet and label prepared by Smith for the event. No flights took place on 7 April, but Fellowes probably carried them on a reconnaissance flight early on the 8 April. They were never carried on the first Everest overflight, as one author has stated (Jennings).

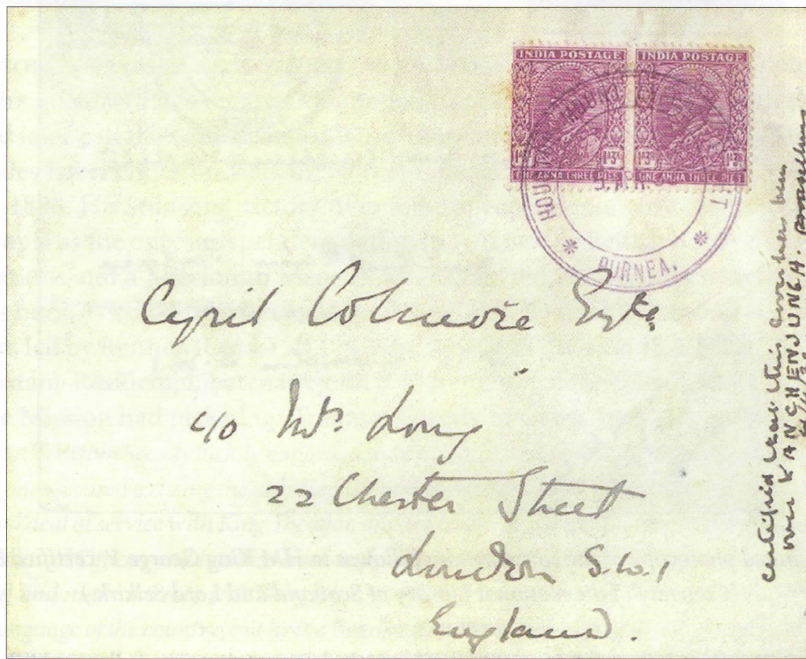


Figure 9. One of two covers, recorded as certified by Fellowes, having been carried on the Kangchenjunga flight of 4 April. The expedition cancel is dated 5 April 1933.



Figure 10. One of the 87 covers produced by the Air Mail Society of India, but in this case signed by Etherton, McIntyre, Clydesdale, Fellowes and Blackler. (Image courtesy of J.-C. Feiry.)

Mail carried on the Second Survey Flight, 19 April.

Like the Kangchenjunga flight, there is very little information as to how many covers were carried on the second survey. Jeffrey Brown noted that he had recorded seven covers (*India Post*, 179) with cancellations dated 20 or 21 April, which he did not list in detail. The authors can now record 11 covers - seven dated 20 April and four (plus two pieces) dated 21 April. None of the recorded covers dated 20 or 21 April bear certification by a team member that they had been flown. The fact that some covers bear the expedition cds of 21 April, gave rise to the assertion that some were flown from Purnea by Lord Clydesdale to Karachi ('Osprey') on that date. In fact, the flight to Karachi did not take place until 24 April. On arriving at Jodphur, Clydesdale was informed that the plane flying the air mail from Delhi to Karachi had crashed after a collision, and he offered to carry the now-delayed post bags to their destination on 25 April (Douglas-Hamilton). Although this final flight therefore had no connection with the covers flown by the expedition, Armand Singer recorded one example where he infers that the actual date on the expedition cancel is 24 April. Unfortunately, the cover is not illustrated, and should therefore be considered as unconfirmed.



Figure 11. One of the covers carried on the second survey flight over Everest with cancellation dated 20 April.

Non-flight mail from the expedition.

Outgoing items posted on dates other than those recorded for the expedition cancel confirm that only flown covers received special handling. Non-flight mail is actually far rarer than flown covers. To date only two postcards and one cover have been recorded. All bear strikes of the way line cachet, the stamps on the cover having been actually cancelled with it. The postcards are cancelled with the regular Purnea datestamp. All are dated 14 April 1933. (Figures 12 and 13.)

Additionally, one incoming cover is known (Figure 14). This was sent to Leading Aircraftman G. Hensley, who was originally based at RAF Drigh Road, Karachi. After various attempts to redirect the cover to 'Peneah' (*sic*) it arrived at the expedition's base on 10 April. (Singer & Gould). Census cover number 2.11 was presumably Hensley's reply to his parents' letter on 21 April.

Lord Clydesdale was awarded the Air Force Cross for his leadership of the expedition. Bonnett's footage of the flights was later incorporated into the film *Wings Over Everest* (1934). Directed by Geoffrey Barkas and Ivor Montagu, it won the 1936 Academy Award for 'Best Short Subject, Novelty.' The film can be viewed online in full at <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-wings-over-everest-1934-online>

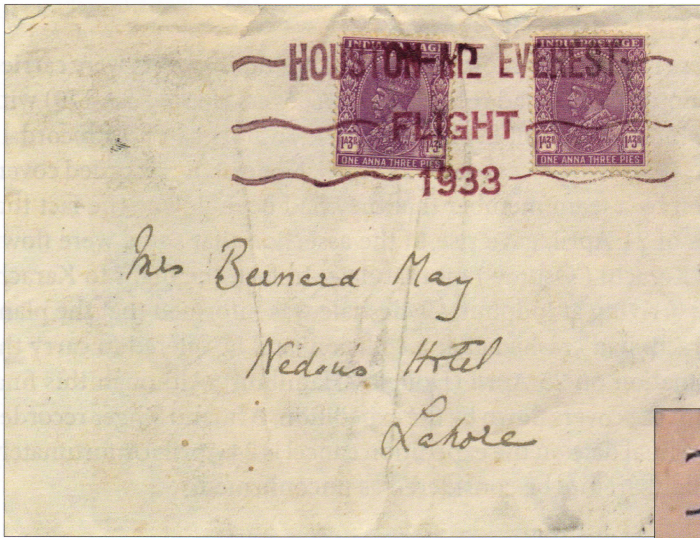


Figure 12 (above): Cover to Lahore cancelled with the expedition's wavy-line cachet and back-stamped Purneah on 14 April 1933.



Figure 13. 4 annas air mail postcard sent by Sidney Bonnett, cancelled at Purneah post office on 14 April 1933.

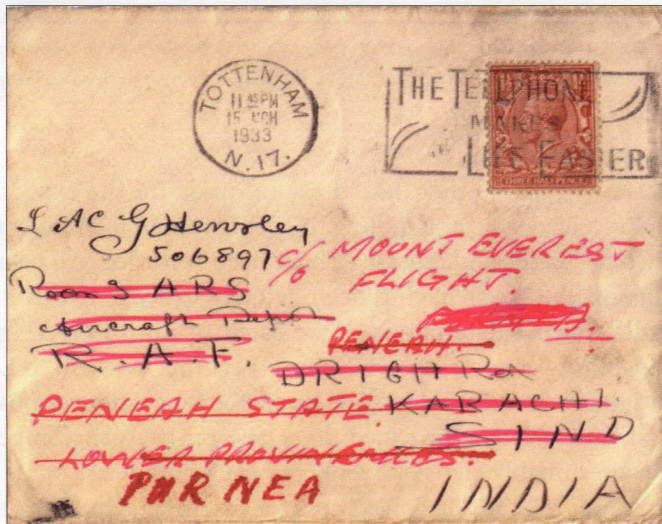
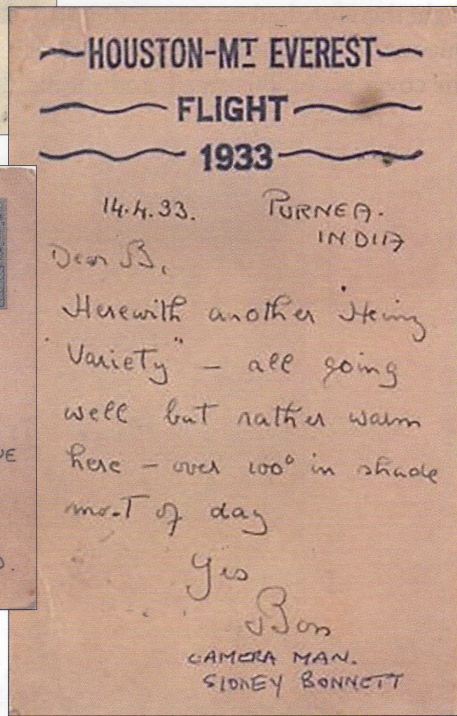


Figure 14. The only recorded example of incoming mail to the expedition, sent to Leading Aircraftman Hensley.

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James Douglas-Hamilton, Baron Selkirk of Douglas PC QC for permission to access his papers at the National Library of Scotland. Lord Selkirk's late father was Chief Pilot of the expedition.

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