

THE TRUCIAL STATES

Palm Trees and Dhow Series of 1961

PURPOSE: A one-frame study of stamps, cancellations and uses of the first and only issue.

BACKGROUND: After 1948, postal matters for the 7 sheikdoms of the Trucial Coast (Abu Dhabi; Ajman; Dubai; Fujeira; Ras al-Khaima; Sharjah; and Umm al-Qiwain) were handled by the General Post Office in London via a Postal Superintendent in Bahrain responsible for all British Postal Agencies in the Persian Gulf. Rising Arab nationalism in the late 1950's made continued use of surcharged UK stamps undesirable and in September 1958, the Political Agency in Dubai suggested a new issue for general use in the Trucial States.

The design brief included:

- UNWATERMARKED paper to avoid an overt British connection (no Royal cyphers or crowns).
- Designs reflective of the Gulf area.

Although the issue was intended to be used by all the sheikdoms in anticipation of new post office openings, the ruler of Abu Dhabi objected—not all seven palm trees were the same height, implying that some sheikdoms were more important than others—and post offices in the other sheikdoms were never opened. Therefore, **Trucial States stamps were used only in Dubai from 7 January 1961 to 14 June 1963** by a population of 55,000 people.

IMPORTANCE:

- Dubai the center for the carrying and entrepôt trade on the Trucial Coast.
- Mostly commercial use, yet few surviving covers. *Key items outlined/matted in deep red.*
- Forerunner to the pejorative "sand dune" (or just "dunes") issues of some of the 7 independent sheikdoms.

What Trucial States stamps were to eliminate: Use of QEII definitives in the Gulf region.



Trucial Coast in 1961

Exhibit Plan

1. Designs & Printing
2. Cancellations
3. Postal Rates & Usage
4. Epilogue

—○ Denotes original research in blue.
Non-philatelic information in brown italics.



Posted 4 September 1958 by D.F. Hawley, the British Political Agent in Dubai, to family in England. Correct rate (40np) for a half ounce airmail letter to Europe.



SYNOPSIS

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Treatment: In today's collecting circles, the term "sand dune countries" (or just "dunes") pertains to the thousands of controversial issues emanating between 1963 and 1972 from some of the seven independent sheikdoms (Abu Dhabi; Ajman; Dubai; Fujeira, Ras al-Khaima; Sharjah; and Umm al-Qiwain) which now comprise the United Arab Emirates. Yet this flood all started innocently enough with the issue of just 11 stamps—The Trucial States Palm Trees and Dhow Series of 1961. **This exhibit will show stamps, cancellations and covers of the first and only Trucial States issue.** Although extensively used, surviving examples of used Trucial States stamps and commercial, private and philatelic covers are scarce. The single air letter sheet issued by the Trucial States is beyond the scope of this exhibit.

Importance: Postal service in the Trucial States, originally known as the Pirate Coast but later the Trucial Coast, began on 19 August 1909 with the opening of an Indian Branch Post Office in Dubai. From its original opening in 1909 until 1961, Indian, Pakistani and British stamps were used in the Dubai Post Office without any indication of the name of the state. In anticipation of the probable establishment of postal services in the other six emirates as well as an attempt to quell rising Arab nationalism, officials for the British Postal Agencies in the Persian Gulf prepared a new issue intended for general use throughout all the Trucial States—the Palm Trees and Dhow Series of 1961. Because of local politics—the ruler of Abu Dhabi objected to the different heights of the palm trees, implying that some sheikdoms were more important than others—and because Dubai still remained the **only** post office in all of the Trucial States, **this issue was used only in Dubai from 7 January 1961 to 14 June 1963**, although Trucial States stamps remained valid in independent Dubai until 30 September 1963.

Philatelic/Subject Knowledge: I contacted Thomas De La Rue, London (who had also acquired Harrison and Sons in 1997) for additional information regarding essays, proofs, color trials, etc, only to find that their archives had been sold off years ago. Some of this material ended up at the University of Reading in the UK; however, none of it pertains to the Trucial States issue. Elements of the De La Rue archive digitized and reprinted in book form by The Royal Philatelic Society London yielded only a picture of the recessed high-values in corner blocks of four along with perforation size and first day of use but without plate numbers or marginal inscriptions.

Next, I contacted the British Postal Museum (BPM) in London. **The BPM houses most all of the recorded pre-production material pertaining to this issue (color essays; imperforate registration sheets; and original intaglio printing plates).** They did, however, provide information on dates and quantities of stamps printed and location of printer's guidelines.

Commercial covers can provide social, cultural and economic context so companies sending and receiving mail franked with Trucial States stamps were checked on-line to see what was actually being bought and sold in Dubai. In most cases, trading companies dispatching mail from Dubai in the 1960's still exist. A history of the British Bank of the Middle East (BBME), the bank for Dubai, and the web site for the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (who purchased the BBME) were reviewed for the role of trade in the Dubai economy and an understanding of export bills, the primary means of payment between the exporter and the purchaser in Dubai. **A thorough understanding of Dubai trading patterns allows one to readily identify philatelic or contrived covers.**

Personal Study and [Original] Philatelic Research: Postal rates for the Gulf Agencies in annas are readily available from the BPM. However, on 1 April 1957, the Indian Overseas Rupee was decimalized to where 100 naya paisa (np) equaled 1 Rupee. Available postal rate information for Dubai does not begin until 1966, three years after postal independence, leaving a postal rate "hole" for the period 1957 to 1966, which includes the

entire period of use for the Trucial States issue. Since 1 anna = 6.25 np and 100np = Re1, the entire rate chart provided by the BPM was converted by the exhibitor to naya paisa and rupees. In many cases, rounding up or down had to occur in order to match the value of the existing stamps. As an example, the former ½ oz airmail letter rate to Europe of 6 annas became 37.5 np, rounded up to 40 np, the rate shown on all covers to European destinations. The accuracy of rounding up or down was validated by the study of all covers in the exhibitor's possession, covers shown in *The Arabian Gulf States Postal History Quarterly*, Editions 20 (Autumn 2006) and 23 (Summer 2007), and covers sold on eBay. **Postal rates for this area still remain largely unexplored but the rate table developed by the exhibitor and shown on page 8 is believed to be the most current and accurate available.** Even so, rates cannot always be reconciled with the franking on covers as genuine errors by the sender or postal staff frequently occurred. Moreover, some surface rates on the table were seldom, if ever, used and examples on cover have never been reported. Parcel cards bearing the high-value rupee stamps are known to exist but are seldom seen.

Rarity: This one-frame exhibit contains twice the number of Trucial States covers (17) of any prior FIP exhibit on this topic; there is no equivalent US exhibit on this Trucial States issue. Like the postal rate "hole" for this issue and time period, there is also a correspondence "hole" and Trucial States covers are hard to find. Dubai originally had a marginal subsistence economy based on pearls, date palms, camels and fishing and literacy rates were low; oil was not exported until 1969. **Tourism was not allowed**, hence the general absence of post card "tourist" mail. Yet Dubai was also the center for the carrying and entrepôt trade on the Trucial Coast and **most mail from Dubai was commercial in origin** from individual trading companies or banks, much of it to the UK (the sheikdoms were classified by the Foreign Office as "independent emirates under British protection") or elsewhere in Europe. **Mail to the Subcontinent exists but most covers have not survived**; ones that do surface are in generally poor condition. With some exceptions, **many covers to the US are philatelic. Commercial or personal letter mail within Dubai is practically non-existent** as there was no home-delivery.

Key Items: (1) Two covers from the Resident Political Agent in Dubai to family in the UK; (2) SPECIMEN overprints on the entire set; (3) used block of eight Rs2 stamps; (4) private correspondence post card to Aden; (5) Ras al-Khaima government cover; and (6) an independent Dubai mixed franking cover.

References: [In order of importance]

Toops, Emory Earl. "The Trucial States Palm Trees and Dhow Issue of 1961." *The American Philatelist*. December 2018: Volume 132, Number 12, Whole Number 1,415, pages 1140-1153. [Historical, cultural, social and philatelic "deep background" of this Trucial States issue].

Toops, Emory Earl. "A Tale of Two Exhibits and Three Countries." *The Philatelic Exhibitor*. October 2018: Volume 32, Number 3, Whole Number 127, pages 36-43. ["Creation" narrative of this Trucial States study—acquisition, research, false starts and turning a collection into an exhibit].

Donaldson, Neil. *The Postal Agencies in Eastern Arabia and the Gulf*. Batley, West Yorkshire: Harry Hayes, 1975. (Reprint Edition). [Considered the definitive work on British Postal Agencies in the Middle East. Part II, Dubai section, pages 206-13, pertain to the Trucial States issue].

Muir, Douglas N. "The Philatelic History of the Trucial States, 1948-1966." *Crosspost*. Spring 2011: Volume 13, Number 4, pages 8-24. [Lavishly illustrated article that builds on Donaldson's work].

Hawley, Donald. *The Trucial States*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1970. [The author served as Resident Political Agent in Dubai from 1958-61 and played an advisory role in the creation of the Trucial States issue. Chapter 10 on the Dubai economy and the table "Dubai Trade Statistics" were quite helpful in verifying trade patterns and partners].