SZOSTEK/WSMR NUMBERED COVERS

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Some cover manufacturers nicely identify their covers with names or logos, and some even number their covers, increasing the chances that collectors know when they have a complete series of similar items. Such is the case with Szostek-designed covers, all of which are for events either at White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) or nearby. The authors of this article have compiled a list of Szostek/WSMR (numbered) Covers, all of which appear to be identified both by the artist "Szostek" and as "WSMR Cover" with a cover sequence number.

James Szostek (El Paso TX) created WSMR Covers to mark rocket launches and other events from or near WSMR. The list of covers provided here is incomplete, consisting of only those that the authors have found, dating from early 1973 to late 1974. One goal of this article is to try to fill in the missing details for Szostek/WSMR (numbered) Covers, with help from other collectors. Any details or scans of missing covers would be greatly appreciated.

This article also presents a few examples of Szostek/WSMR Covers. They are nicely done, documenting in detail some of USA's aerospace history from the desert southwest. All known covers were canceled at WSMR or nearby locations, such as Holloman AFB (near Alamogordo NM), El Paso TX, and Las Cruces NM.

Szostek/WSMR Covers known to the authors

The table below lists the Szostek/WSMR Covers that are currently known to the authors. All of them have "Szostek" in text, and all appear to be numbered as WSMR Covers. We believe that those without WSMR numbers on the front have that number on the back. This is not certain, however. We do have images of five such backs, but in other cases we have scans only of the fronts.

In compiling this list, significant contributions were made by Tom Steiner and Wolf Magnus. Despite their help, details on the earliest covers (numbers 1 through 6) and a couple of the intermediate covers (numbers 18 and 30) are missing. In addition, it is not known if covers exist past number 36, which is where the table ends at this time.

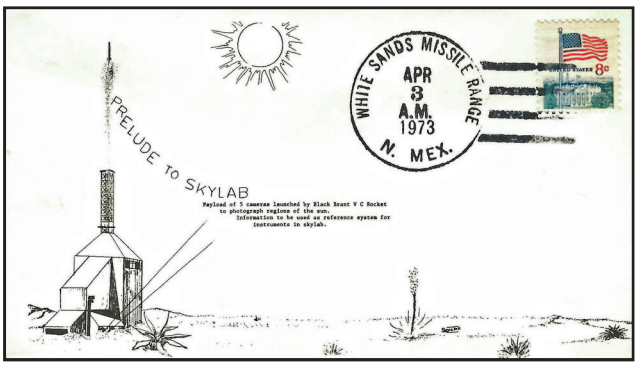
A few examples of Szostek/WSMR Covers

The first item in the list of Szostek/WSMR Covers is the following one for a Black Brant-5C launch from WSMR, (hand) canceled there on 3 April 1973. It was a joint WSMR-Skylab solar observations inter-comparison mission. Text on the cover reads "payload of 5 cameras launched…to photograph regions of the Sun. Information to be used as reference system for instruments in Skylab." This cover has "Szostek" in text but no indication of it being a WSMR Cover on the front. Instead,

TABLE: SZOSTEK/WSMR COVERS

WSMR Cover number	Cancel Date (yyyy-mm-dd)	Cancel Location	Rocket or balloon launch or other event
1 – 6			(unknown)
7 (on back)	1973-04-03	WSMR, NM	Black-Brant-5C sub-orbital rocket launch
8 (on back)	1973-04-25	WSMR, NM	Hound Dog missile B52 launch
9 (on back)	1973-05-14 / 1973-05-25	WSMR, NM / WSMR, NM	Black-Brant-5C sub-orbital rocket launch / Aerobee-170 sub-orbital rocket launch
10 (on back)	1973-05-18	WSMR, NM	Black-Brant-5C sub-orbital rocket launch
11 (on back)	1973-06-02	WSMR, NM	Aerobee-170A sub-orbital rocket launch
12 (on back)	1973-06-04	WSMR, NM	Black-Brant-5C sub-orbital rocket launch
13 (on back)	1973-06-11	WSMR, NM	Aerobee-200A sub-orbital rocket launch
14 (on back)	1973-06-13	WSMR, NM	Black-Brant-5C sub-orbital rocket launch
15 (on back)	1973-06-14	Holloman AFB, NM	B1 (bomber) module escape system test
16 (on back)	1973-06-19	El Paso TX	Pershing missile first launches
17 (on back)	1973-06-27	El Paso TX	Pershing missile first launches
18			(unknown)
19 (on back)	1973-07-26	El Paso TX	Pershing missile first launches
20	1973-08-03	Holloman AFB, NM	T38/F15 (jet) escape module dual-seat version test
21	1973-08-09	WSMR, NM	Black-Brant-5C sub-orbital rocket launch
22 (on back)	1973-08-14	Holloman AFB, NM	B1 (bomber) module escape system test
23	1973-08-30	WSMR, NM	Black-Brant-5C sub-orbital rocket launch

24	1973-11-07	Holloman AFB, NM	B1 (bomber) module escape system test
25	1973-12-10	WSMR, NM	Black-Brant-5C sub-orbital rocket launch
26	1973-12-19	WSMR, NM	Aerobee-200A sub-orbital rocket launch
27	1974-01-04	WSMR, NM	Aerobee-200A sub-orbital rocket launch
28	1974-01-07	WSMR, NM	Aerobee-200A sub-orbital rocket launch
29	1974-01-12	WSMR, NM	Aerobee-200A sub-orbital rocket launch
30			(unknown)
31	1974-02-26	WSMR, NM	Black-Brant-5C sub-orbital rocket launch
32	1974-05-25	WSMR, NM	SMS-1 first ground picture received
33	1974-06-18	WSMR, NM	Aries-1 first sub-orbital rocket launch
34	1974-06-26	Holloman AFB, NM	B1 (bomber) module escape system test
35	1974-06-28	Holloman AFB, NM	B1 (bomber) module escape system test
36	1974-11-01	Las Cruces NM	DaVinci-1 balloon launch
37			(unknown, if any)



Another Szostek/ WSMR Cover is the following one for an Aerobee-170A launch from WSMR, (machine) canceled on 2 June 1973. The rocket launch coincided with a Skylab overflight, so that comparisons could be made between Skylab remote-sensing measurements, rocket payload

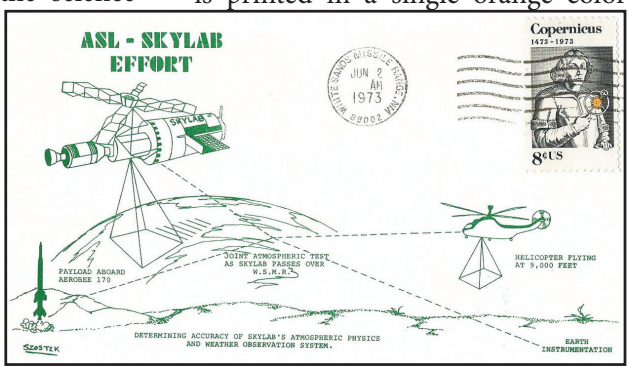
the WSMR number (#7) is found on the back (not shown), as it is on most early Szostek covers.

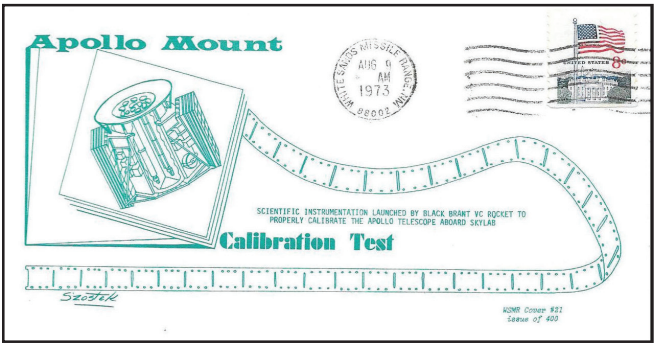
measurements and what appear to be remote sensing or measurements from a helicopter, as well as "Earth instrumentation". The sited comparisons were part of the WSMR Atmospheric Sciences Laboratory "ASL - Skylab effort". Skylab is shown imaging the Earth using the Earth Resources Experiments Package (EREP), a comprehensive and systematic image survey of the Earth from space. Like the first cover, this cover has "Szostek" in text but no indication of it being a WSMR Cover on the front. Instead, the WSMR number (#11) is found on the back (not shown). The single-color printing, green in this case, is typical of Szostek covers, though some WSMR Covers are printed in two colors.

The next example is one of the first Szostek covers to have the WSMR Cover number (#21) on the front. This nicely-documented cover is a Black Brant 5C rocket launch test flight from WSMR, (machine) canceled on 9 August 1973. The mission was to "properly calibrate the Apollo telescope aboard Skylab." The "Apollo" name came out of the Apollo Applications Program, the science-based arm of the NASA Apollo Program. The "mount" was a platform for eight solar studies instruments, observing at a variety of wavelengths, including X-rays, ultraviolet, and visible light. The data from those instruments was mainly exposed photographic film, which was returned to Earth with the Skylab crew. The Apollo Mount and film are prominent parts of the Szostek/WSMR cachet on this cover. The launch of rocket-borne instrumentation and use of ground-based measurements for calibration seem to be an ongoing theme at WSMR during the Skylab period from mid-1973 to early 1974.

The next example is a Synchronous Meteorological Satellite (SMS-1) event cover, (machine) canceled on 25 May 1974, for the "first ground pictures received" at the "direct readout ground station at WSMR", the "sole location in the US properly equipped to receive SMS pictures". SMS-1 had been launched a few days earlier (17 May 1974) from Kennedy Space Center. SMS was the designation for the first two experimental satellites of what turned into the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES) series that continues today in a much-improved generation that still has that name.

The cover, which is noted as both "Szostek" and "WSMR Cover #32", is printed in a single orange color

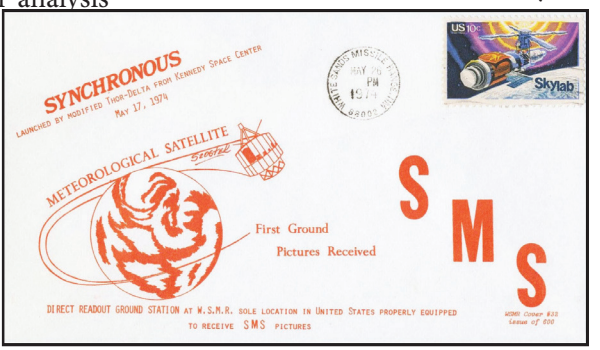




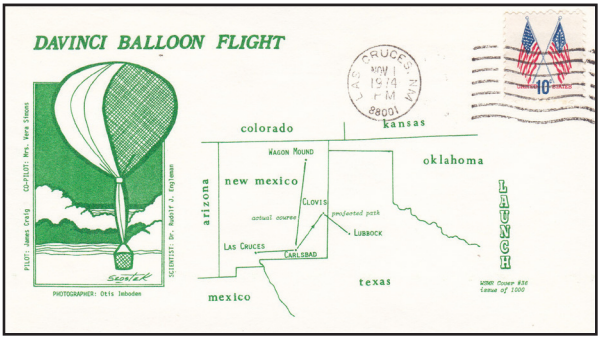
and is of special interest to the first author, who as a graduate student at the time was among the first users of the digital satellite imagery from SMS/GOES. He was one of several researchers from Colorado State University Department of Atmospheric Science to spend many days collecting SMS/GOES imagery for analysis of thunderstorms on the Great Plains. No real-time analysis was done; the data collected during the summer months (hot days on the desert at WSMR) was analyzed many months later, as there was not yet a way to look at the imagery as it was being collected. Now there are many ground stations for GOES satellite imagery, not just the "sole" location that is documented by this cover. There is also real-time display of that imagery for meteorological analysis and forecasting.

As a last Szostek example, a manned balloon launch cover for a "DaVinci balloon flight" from 1 November 1974 is presented. This is the last WSMR numbered cover in the authors' list, as "WSMR Cover #36". The DaVinci balloon flight was the first of four special balloon flights with this name. The first took place in 1974 in New Mexico and collected data on atmospheric temperature and winds (some additional details of the DaVinci missions are provided in a footnote). From the diagram on the cover, it appears that the balloon was launched from near Las Cruces NM where the cover was canceled, but it did not follow the projected path east to Lubbock TX. Rather, the actual path took the balloon to Wagon Mound in northeast New Mexico.

In addition to rocket launches, some Szostek/WSMR Covers were produced for airplane escape module/system tests, in particular for the B1 bomber and T38/F15 jet. Those covers were canceled at Holloman AFB where the tests took place. See the table for a few details on those tests. The authors' interest in the Szostek covers is mostly in



the rocket launches and associated Skylab remote sensing comparisons along with any references to unmanned satellites.



Summary

As mentioned above, there appear to have been more numbered WSMR Covers, especially before the first one presented (#7). Also missing from the authors' list, with no known details, are two numbered covers (#18 and #30). Finally, there may be additional numbered covers after the last one (#36) in the provided list. Not much is known about Szostek and his cachets. The authors are looking for help in identifying other Szostek/WSMR Covers, in order to fill in the details that are missing from what is presented here. Please contact us using the email addresses which follow.

Biographical notes

The authors have researched and written extensively on the subjects of weather, climate, and un-manned satellites on stamps and covers, as well as other topics. The authors' Unmanned Satellite Philately site can be found at http://rammb.cira.colostate.edu/dev/hillger/satellites.htm. For a complete list and electronic reproductions of their publications, see http://rammb.cira.colostate.edu/dev/hillger/stamp-articles.htm. Email correspondence with the authors is welcomed, using the addresses below.

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References

[1]The Earth Resources Experiments Package (EREP) on Skylab made a comprehensive and systematic image survey of the Earth from space, taking some 36,000 photos from 1973 to 1974. Imaging was done by several cameras, the main one with six spectral bands.

[2]The four Skylab missions are identified as follows:
Skylab-1 (SL-1): 14 May 1973 launch of the un-manned Skylab
Skylab-2 (SL-2): 25 May - 22 June 1973 (with first crew Conrad, Kerwin, and Weitz)
Skylab-3 (SL-3): 28 Jul - 25 Sep 1973 (with second crew Bean, Garriot, and Lousma)
Skylab-4 (SL-4): 16 Nov 1973 - 8 Feb 1974 (with third crew Carr, Gibson, and Pogue)

[3]See SLIDER: Satellite Loop Interactive Data Explorer in Real-time (http://rammb-slider.cira.colostate.edu)

[4]In the 1970s, four special balloon flights, Da Vinci-1 to -4, were organized by the aeronaut and artist Vera Simons. She designed them to combine science and art. Simons worked with Dr. Rudolf J. Englemann, a NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) scientist and former Air Force meteorologist who was a specialist on the transport of low-level atmospheric pollutants. Simons planned to use the unique perspective from a balloon to gather landscape and cloud images that would be used in producing works of art. Englemann assembled a package of scientific experiments from 25 universities. Funding for the Da Vinci project came from the National Geographic Society, the Atomic Energy Commission, some private companies, and NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration). The first flight took place in 1974 in New Mexico and collected data on atmospheric temperature and winds.