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# What is Meteorological Philately?

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**Résumé:** La philatélie se pratique sous diverses formes. Certaines personnes s'intéressent aux timbres-poste d'un seul pays, pendant que d'autres préfèrent étudier un thème particulier à travers des items philatéliques émis n'importe où dans le monde. Il n'est pas difficile de trouver des timbres-poste, des plis premier jour et des feuillets souvenir qui traitent de la météorologie. Ces items peuvent ensuite se regrouper dans une collection spécialisée qui présente de divers aspects du temps et du climat

## 1. Introduction to Philately

We all know about stamps. Some of us accumulated them as children. Philately is the collection and study of postage stamps and related postal items (e.g. cancellations and postal envelopes and cards with pre-printed stamps). It is a pastime for some and an area of serious research for others. Ever since the first postage stamp was issued by Great Britain on May 6, 1840 (the Penny Black), there have been people who collect and study stamps.

Why do people collect stamps? The reasons are many. As in any type of collection, there is a challenge in putting order into a large mass of material. Postage stamps can be miniature works of art, and so appeal to the esthetic sense of some people. Others are interested in the history of postal services as illustrated by postage stamps and related postal items. Still others are interested in the mini geography lesson implicit in stamps, while a few have the urge to compete and win recognition in philatelic expositions. And, of course, there is a social aspect to the local "stamp club" meetings. It all boils down to people doing something they enjoy.

Philatelists keep track of stamps through the use of stamp catalogues that identify and number stamps, by date and country of issue. In North America, the *American Scott Standard Stamp Catalogue* is most commonly used. Others include the *Stanley Gibbons* from Great Britain, the *Yvert et Tellier* from France and the *Michel* from Germany.

Stamps are often issued in a special pane known as a souvenir sheet: a sheet including one or more stamps and a wide margin with artwork and/or an inscription describing the event being commemorated. Stamps are also found on special envelopes known as first day covers (FDCs): envelopes issued by the official postal authority of a country with a cancellation dated on the first day of issue of the stamps. Destined for collectors, most FDCs include illustrative artwork known as a cachet.

Different people collect stamps in different ways. The traditional collection concentrates on all the different stamps issued by a single country. Another philatelic style involves a particular topic. In such a collection, stamps from any country that relate to the topic are included. Topics are as varied as people's imagination and interests. Some are interested in historical, others in the arts, others in the sciences, and so on.

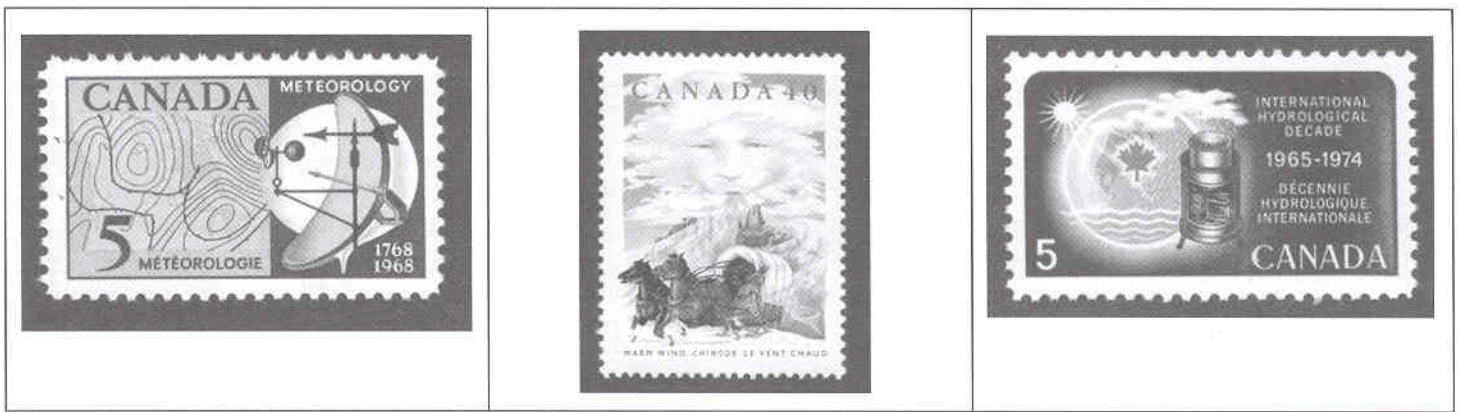


**Figure 1:** A Canadian souvenir sheet featuring SARSAT search and rescue activities. A NOAA polar orbiting weather satellite is found to the left of the sheet margin and also on two of the stamps.

Topical stamp collectors often like to collect stamps related to a topic they know well: doctors may collect medicine on stamps, while military people might gravitate toward topics related to the armed forces. People with a scientific background find it natural to work with a scientific topic. For a meteorologist who has some interest in philately, what more natural area of specialization could there be than meteorology and climate on stamps? It turns out that many such stamps that have been issued by countries around the world.

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**Figure 2:** Three Canadian stamps: a) celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canada's first long-term weather observations from a single location; b) featuring the Chinook wind; and c) commemorating the International Hydrological Decade with tipping bucket rain gauge.

## 2. Meteorology and Philately

There are stamps that illustrate various meteorological instruments and radiosondes. Other stamps feature national meteorological centres, or weather maps with fronts and isobars, or tropical storms, or meteorological satellites, or meteorologists. Climate is the theme of many meteorological stamps, and climate change and the greenhouse effect are referred to on a few. Since the late 1980s, many stamps relating to ozone have been produced. There are also a large number of stamps that relate to the World Meteorological Organization. For example, the World Meteorological Day, which takes place each March 23, has been celebrated by the WMO since 1961. Through the years since then, over 200 stamps that commemorate the World Meteorological Day have been issued by countries around the world. Similarly, 1973 marked the centenary of international meteorological cooperation (the precursor to the WMO, known as the International Meteorological Organization, was founded in September, 1873 at the International Meteorological Conference in Vienna). Many stamps were issued to commemorate that anniversary. The WMO itself was proclaimed a United Nations Agency in 1949, and came into formal existence in 1951. In 2000 and 2001, 35 stamps were issued around the world to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the WMO. Of course some of these stamps can have multiple meteorological themes: many stamps issued in relation to the WMO also show, for example, Stevenson screens, radiosondes and other meteorological instruments.

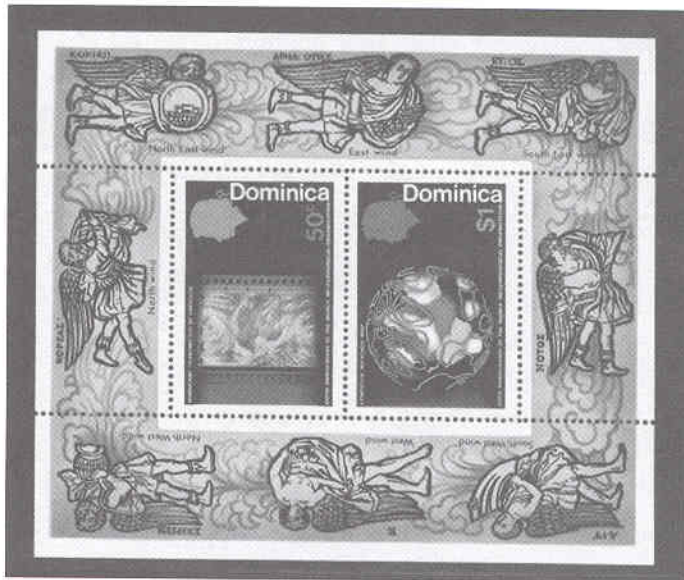
International science programs have also been recognized. Research activities associated with efforts such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Polar Year (1932-33), the International Geophysical Year (1957-58), the International Years of the Quiet Sun (1964-65) and the International Hydrological Decade (1965-1974) have appeared on many stamps. Some of these stamps contain meteorological elements.

## 3. Canadian Meteorology-Related Stamps

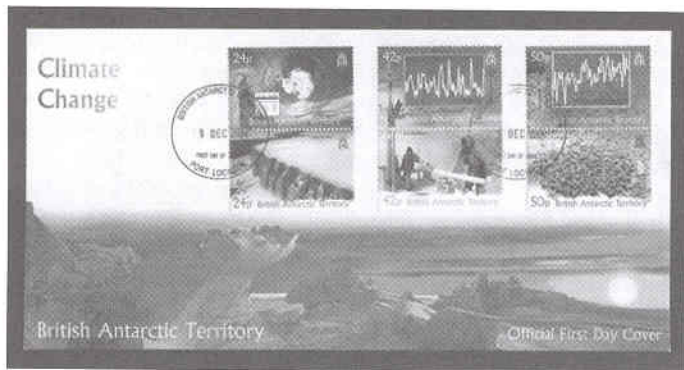
Has Canada issued any stamps related to meteorology? Yes, there are a few. The most recent, issued in 2005, is found in is a souvenir sheet of four different stamps featuring SARSAT search and rescue activities (*Scott* 1831 – Figure 1). A recent NOAA polar orbiting weather satellite (some of those satellites carry the transponders used in the SARSAT program) is illustrated on one of those stamps and also on the border of the souvenir sheet. A stamp from 1968 (*Scott* 479 – Figure 2a), was issued for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first regular weather observations in Canada: William Wales conducted weather observations near present-day Churchill for approximately one year, in 1768. This stamp also shows a weather balloon and a weather radar antenna. The interested reader can consult <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/cocoon/peel/39/3.html> for a fascinating summary of the observations taken by Wales. The chinook wind (*Scott* 1336 – Figure 2b) is included in a set of stamps issued to celebrate Canadian folklore in 1991. Another stamp from 1968 (*Scott* 481 – Figure 2c), issued to commemorate the International Hydrological Decade, also shows a tipping bucket rain gauge. Lastly, a stamp from 1990 (*Scott* 1287 – Figure 3) commemorates the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of continuous weather observations in Canada (they started in 1840 in Toronto). This stamp features a summertime weather observation presented in the standard plotting model one would find on a surface weather analysis. It is the only known stamp featuring all the standard weather elements plotted together in this way. The background illustrates what the weather situation for this case might be like.



**Figure 3:** Stamp honouring the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of continuous weather observations in Canada and including a weather observation in the standard surface plotting model.



**Figure 4:** Souvenir sheet from Dominica of two stamps illustrates a satellite image and computer-generated weather map. Surrounding the stamps are the eight Greek gods of wind: Boreas (north wind), Notus (south wind), Apeliotes (east wind), Zephyrus (west wind), Lips (southwest wind), Skiron (northwest wind), Eurus (southeast wind) and Kaikias (northeast wind).



**Figure 5:** A recent first day cover issued by the British Antarctic Territory illustrating the topic of climate change and related research activities.

#### 4. Meteorological Stamps from Around the World

Canada, of course, has no monopoly on stamps related to meteorology. They have been issued by almost every country in the world. In this section we present just a few examples of the wide variety of international meteorological philately stamps. In Figure 4 is a nice souvenir sheet from Dominica (*Scott 360a*). Issued for the centenary of international meteorological cooperation in 1973, this sheet includes two stamps showing a satellite photo and a computer-generated weather map, possibly of mean sea level pressure. In the border are found representations of eight Greek wind gods. Figure 5 shows a recent first day cover including a set of stamps issued by the British Antarctic Territory (*Scott 342-344*) with the theme of climate change. In this case the theme of climate change is specified on the envelope, and an Antarctic scene is illustrated. In Figure 6a is a German stamp (*Scott 1102*) with a weather map including fronts and isobars. This one was also issued in 1973 for the centenary of international meteorological cooperation. Hurricanes are found on quite a few stamps. Figure 6b depicts hurricane Gilbert on a stamp from Belize (*Scott 974*). Clouds are also nicely illustrated on some stamps. For example, Figure 6c shows a cumulonimbus cloud on a stamp issued by Zimbabwe (new issue, catalogue number not yet known). Finally, another new issue from the French Southern and Antarctic Territory (Figure 6d), includes a graphic of the increasing concentration of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> at the Port Amsterdam observing station during the last 25 years.

#### 5. Virtual Meteorology Philately

There are many on-line sources for stamp information, including some with information on meteorology philately. The most comprehensive Internet site for viewing meteorological stamps and associated philatelic materials is:

<http://www.cira.colostate.edu/ramm/hillger/weather.htm>

This website contains detailed lists and many images of stamps and postal items in various meteorological categories. A detailed philatelic listing of scientific satellites in general, and meteorological satellites in particular, is found at:

<http://www.cira.colostate.edu/ramm/hillger/satellites.htm>

These sites are a good starting point for someone who wants to get into meteorological philately, or a reference for someone already working in the field of weather and climate.

#### 6. Conclusion

We hope that the reader has enjoyed this brief tour through the wonderful world of meteorological philately. For those working in the field of weather and climate, a thematic meteorology philately collection is a fine way to combine professional interest with personal pleasure. The authors would be pleased to correspond with people who wish to learn more about weather and climate on stamps.

(Continued on next page)



Figure 6a



Figure 6b



Figure 6c



Figure 6d

Figure 6: Some examples of different stamps highlighting a) a weather map; b) hurricane Gilbert; c) CB cloud; and d) atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> increase.

### Appel de mises en candidature pour la médaille Timothy R. Parsons (sciences de la mer)

Nous sollicitons des mises en candidature pour la médaille Timothy R. Parsons, remise à des scientifiques qui se sont distingués dans un domaine de recherche multidisciplinaire lié aux sciences de la mer. Veuillez nous les faire parvenir d'ici le 28 février 2007. En 2006, Ken Denman et Trevor Platt ont tous deux reçu une médaille. Les chercheurs qui œuvrent au sein d'une institution canadienne et dont les travaux profitent au Canada sont admissibles. Une médaille sera décernée pour souligner une carrière extraordinaire ou une réalisation récente extraordinaire. Pêches et Océans Canada remettra la médaille Timothy R. Parsons 2007

durant le congrès de la Société canadienne de météorologie et d'océanographie, qui se tiendra en mai 2007, à St. John's, Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador.

Vous pouvez remplir le formulaire en ligne disponible à l'adresse suivante :

[http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/Awards/Parsons\\_f.htm](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/Awards/Parsons_f.htm),

et nous le faire parvenir par télécopieur, au 613-990-0313, ou par la poste au :

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