

## Proposed 1975 Skiing Issue

1973-74

In January 1925 the world's first international downhill skiing and slalom races were held at Mürren in Switzerland, at the initiative of the Kandahar Ski Club of Great Britain and the Schweizerische Akademische Ski Club, both newly formed bodies. Previously the sport had been heavily dominated by Scandinavian influences, so that only events such as long distance racing and ski jumping were recognised in international competition. Downhill ski racing, however, was a comparative newcomer, developed largely by the British in close co-operation with the Swiss. Slalom is a variant of downhill racing conducted over artificial courses marked out by flags or posts.

In early 1973 the Kandahar Ski Club made representations to James Riddell, President of the Ski Club of Great Britain, for a stamp in 1975 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Anglo-Swiss ski racing; Riddell passed the suggestion to the Post Office in March. Over the months the proposal received much support from various quarters: the former Conservative MP and Minister Lord Orr-Ewing, President of the National Ski Club; Dr Roger Bannister, Chairman of the Sports Council; the MP and publisher Brian Batsford, a member of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC); Sir Arnold Lunn, a veteran skier, mountaineer and prolific author, whose works included many on aspects of Anglo-Swiss relations. In addition the Deputy Chairman of the Post Office, Whitney Straight, belonged to the Corviglia Ski Club of St Moritz. Pressures were also being applied by the Swiss, via the British Ambassador in Berne, J R Wraight, and the Swiss Ambassador in London; as a result Julian Amery, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Sir John Eden, Minister of Posts & Telecommunications and Sir Frank Wood, Sir John's senior civil servant, also became involved. Similar requests for a stamp were being made to the Swiss postal administration: the chairman of its general directorate wrote to the Post Office that while the anniversary did not justify a stamp there might be a general set on Alpine Ski Sports. It was probably at this stage that the possibility of a joint issue by both countries was raised.

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### SUGGESTION PUT TO SAC

The 50th anniversary of Anglo-Swiss skiing was first put to the SAC on 4 July 1973, and discussed again on 27 September, as a contender for the 1975 programme. It was not, however, listed as one of the subjects under consideration when regional directors were circularised by E G White, the Director of Marketing, on 12 September for ideas on the programme. The sole reference to sports of any kind was the suggestion sent on 16 October for a series on hobbies or sports from the North West Postal Board. Nevertheless White, in

his capacity as its Chairman, put the proposal to the meeting of the SAC on 25 October that a sports issue 'centred on' the Anglo-Swiss anniversary should provisionally be included in the 1975 programme.

The proposal was not agreed at that meeting, but was subsequently adopted by the SAC; Brian Batsford was a particularly keen supporter. Stuart Rose, the Post Office Design Adviser, seems to have been captivated by the design potential, while D M Elliott representing the Ministry of Post & Telecommunications (MPT) was present to ensure the SAC was aware of external political pressures such as those for the Anglo-Swiss proposal. White, on the other hand, began to have reservations about the proposal. Enquiries to the Sports Council on 31 October concerning other sporting occasions and anniversaries in 1975 brought information on events as various as yachting, chess, Channel swimming and women's hockey, but none relevant to the theme of winter sports. After White had sought advice from officials of his own Department, his views given to the SAC meeting of 6 December were that 'skiing could only be included if it was part of a set on sports. It would be inappropriate to combine both winter and summer sports in one set, while an issue based on winter sports would be too restrictive.'

A decision on the 1975 programme was deferred until the meeting of 16 January 1974, at which broad support for the winter sports proposal prevailed. An important factor was the advice of Elliott that the Post Office was under strong political pressure not only from the Foreign Office in connection with the Anglo-Swiss anniversary and International Women's Year, but from the Prime Minister Edward Heath regarding the quincentenary of Michaelangelo's birth; agreement on a winter sports issue, which was widely desired, would relieve pressure for the two other proposals, neither of which were attractive to the Post Office, the MPT or the SAC.

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## POPULARITY OF SKIING

Other arguments favouring the issue included figures showing that skiing was the fastest growing recreational activity in the United Kingdom - about 100,000 active skiers pursued the sport in Scotland while no fewer than 400,000 visited the Alps. It was thought that the set could include such sports as ice skating and curling, and that there would be no problem in producing an attractive set of designs; it would be the first British set of its kind, and attractive to 'sports' thematic collectors. It was also noted that 'the Swiss are keen to recognise the British contribution to the development' of skiing, while the MPT felt that the issue would be a valuable gesture to the Swiss for hosting the 1974 UPU Centenary Conference. Dr Markus Redli, the Director General of the Swiss PTT, had confirmed that it was contemplating stamps on the theme; if the Post Office decided to proceed, it would be pleased to produce its own series for issue on the same date.

White seems to have inclined towards a joint issue, leaving both countries free to choose its own styles, which was certainly a more acceptable proposition than stamps largely or wholly identical in design, which had caused difficulties in the past or fallen through altogether. He wrote to A Currall, the Managing Director (Posts) [MDP], the day following the meeting with the provisionally agreed programme; on the matter of extending the range of the winter sports issue, he suggested that including curling would 'please the Scots'. Regarding the popularity of sports sets, most recently evidenced with the County Cricket stamps of May 1973, he noted there was none scheduled for 1974 and no British sports subject in 1975 'which competes with the one recommended' (he excluded mention of the numerous sailing and yachting anniversaries falling due in 1975, on which information was now available).

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## RESERVATIONS BY BOARD

The various points were substantially reiterated in White's recommendations to the Post Office Management Board, submitted for its meeting of 18 February; he concluded that of the three subjects urged upon the Post Office by Government pressure, Winter Sports including skiing ... would give us the most varied and balanced programme in the context of the other subjects proposed, it would give far greater scope for stamp design, and reflects best the British contribution to world affairs.

The Board nevertheless commented, 'in the view of most Members, winter sports did not have a large enough following in the United Kingdom to justify a complete issue, and there was a strong case for widening the subject to cover sport more generally'. The following day Stuart Rose wrote to David Burn of Postal Marketing, arguing against the Board's recommendation:

To break up a set devoted to such closely related activities as winter sports by introducing another sport would destroy the homogeneity of the issue and pose design problems which any amount of ingenuity could not solve satisfactorily.

Rose was aware there was justification for a series on 'aquatic sports ... rowing, sailing, small-boating and canoeing, for example', treated as a set in the interests of 'consistent design idiom'. Another memorandum of the same date by Miss F Ladbury argued that 'winter sports are not typical of the British Sporting Life and stamps on such a theme would seem incongruous in a set featuring other British sports'. Miss Ladbury acknowledged British interest and participation in skiing and the strong pressures for the issue, but made it clear there was an equally valid case for a series on yachting, although did not suggest it should replace winter sports.

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## FEW SUITABLE 'WINTER' EVENTS

It was also apparent that the available material for a winter sports series was rather thin; curling was of likely interest to the Scots, while bobsledding had been pioneered in Switzerland, at St Moritz in 1892, but seemed to have no especial British connotation. The international representative body for ice skating was based in Switzerland, this being a sport in which British competitors traditionally did well. The 1975 World Ice Skating Championships had been suggested for a stamp in August 1972; the initial attraction, however, had been that these would hopefully take place in Britain, which was no longer the case.

At its meeting on 27 February the SAC received White's report of the Board's objections to the winter sports proposal and reviewed its former recommendation. Despite sailing having a wider following, and as far as Britain was concerned a longer pedigree, than winter sports, it preferred its original decision. The members thought the set as recommended would make an attractive series enjoying design harmony, whereas a mixture of winter sport with water or 'green field' events would be less successful. The MPT representative on this occasion, P Neale, reiterated Elliott's advice that a winter sports set including the Anglo-Swiss anniversary was the best way to confront the pressures to which the Post Office was subjected; there was also the 'prospect of a stamp issue link with Switzerland in a manner not previously attempted' if skiing was included as a subject. It was conceded that sailing would make 'a most attractive and popular issue ... in a future programme', and that sailing anniversaries would have been 'especially appropriate' in 1975; nevertheless it was still felt the original recommendation was right. The chief concern 'was to avoid an unsatisfactory mixed set which would not do the best for either topic, but which (bearing in mind the many claims on stamp programme space) would close both subjects at least for many years'.

White wrote to the MDP on 1 March describing the SAC's feelings:

They are strongly opposed to a 'mixed' sports set, but - whilst still preferring winter sport - would accept a sailing set as a total alternative ... The background to the 'mixed set' antipathy includes the annual struggle which the Committee used to have with designs for the 'miscellaneous anniversaries' set included each year up to 1972 inclusive ... Since 1972 we have avoided having 'miscellaneous anniversaries', whilst being alert for 'dual purpose' set opportunities that broaden the scope of a year's programme.

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## WINTER SPORTS REJECTED

'Winter' and 'water' sports seemed too diverse to White and the SAC to constitute a 'dual purpose' opportunity. White hoped Currall would be able to support the SAC's objective of 'design unity', whichever of the two he recommended to the Management Board, in view of the financial importance of producing attractive sets for collectors (there was a philatelic target of around 600,000 sets per issue). The MDP's advice to the Board, submitted the same day, was 'that we substitute Yachting for Winter Sports'; on 3 March the Board opted for a sailing issue as the SAC's preferred alternative to a 'mixed' set, although it was noted that any thought of a joint issue with Switzerland was thereby lost. The SAC accepted this without recorded dissent on 21 March.

On 29 March Currall submitted the programme as finally agreed by the Board and SAC to Sir Frank Wood at the MPT. He explained:

You will recall that the Minister of Posts received several letters in the earlier part of 1973 advocating the issue of a stamp for the Jubilee of Alpine Skiing. We aim to produce a balanced programme and would normally contemplate no more than a single sport or recreation issue in any one year. After much thought we decided on sailing. Skiing appeals to a more limited group. The skiing celebration was a fiftieth anniversary only whereas we usually try to keep to centenaries as in the case of the Royal Yachting Association. Skiing could warrant no more than a single stamp in a set devoted to winter sports generally.

He added that the SAC found the choice between winter sport and sailing 'fairly evenly balanced' and was content to give the draft programme full support.

After March the minister responsible for postal affairs in the new Labour government was Anthony Wedgwood Benn, as Secretary of State for Industry. On 26 June the Post Office Chairman Sir William Ryland was obliged to provide Benn with yet another explanation of why 'water' had supplanted 'winter' sports:

We considered skiing very carefully both as a separate subject and as the pivot for a set on winter sports. The breadth of public interest did not appear to justify either. The idea of a set to include skiing but with a wider range including sailing was also considered but discarded - first because sailing is for most participants a summer activity, and second because such an omnibus issue would have lacked design cohesion. We have moved away from 'miscellaneous' issues, which look incongruous together in collectors' albums, on first day covers or in presentation packs; they are disliked by philatelists, and we must take their views into account as they are the customers who buy the stamps.

Sailing was also preferred to skiing because the June issue date was more appropriate and convenient to the programme as a whole, whereas the earlier months into which an issue including skiing would have appropriately fallen were now taken up by the Charity issue (January), the Turner bicentenary (February) and European Architectural Heritage Year (April). Following Sir William's reply the 1975 programme was finally approved by Benn at the beginning of August 1974.

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## SWISS COMMENTS ON PROPOSAL

Shortly prior to Sir William's correspondence with Benn, the MDP visited Basle in Switzerland on the occasion of an international philatelic exhibition held in conjunction with the country hosting the 1974 UPU Conference. There he had an encounter with Erwin Bosshard of the Swiss PTT, which he described in a letter to E G White dated 18 June; he was taken aside during an evening party by Bosshard, who asked 'Was the baby dead?' regarding the Anglo-Swiss skiing anniversary stamp. Currall explained that due to the change of government the British Post Office had not been able to finalise its 1975 programme, 'but I thought that the chances were against its inclusion'. Bosshard's reply shows that the PTT had itself been subjected to considerable lobbying:

While the political pressure groups that have been asking for the Stamp still felt that the Swiss Post Office ought to be able to produce it at short notice, the time had now effectively gone past when it would be feasible to have a Stamp in issue by next February when the event at Mürren takes place ... The Swiss Post Office would be just as pleased if we now decided against the proposed Stamp, but there remained a difference of view between them and the political administration.

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## PROPOSED DESIGNS FOR ISSUE

No designs for the proposed issue were commissioned for obvious reasons; however, six unsolicited designs were produced by the stamp printers, Bradbury Wilkinson, together with a set of four for the planned railways issue. The six were described in a letter to Don Beaumont of Postal Marketing on 8 February 1974:

[The] set depicts both Downhill and Slalom Racing. They consist of three alternative sets of two stamps, A and B, C and D, and E and F, to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Kandahar Club of Great Britain and the Swiss Ski Association. These could of course be part of a set of stamps depicting winter sports.

It was explained that the designs had been prepared 'free of charge and without any commitment' in the hope they might be considered by the SAC. All six skiing designs are in

colour, have a 10p value, and are held in the British Postal Museum & Archive: B, C and E show slalom racing, and A, D and F downhill.

It appears that the designer Andrew Restall also discussed the possibility of a set on winter sports with Stuart Rose, prior to the end of March 1974; a formal letter of commission from J R Berry of Postal Marketing dated 26 March referred to a verbal briefing by Mr Rose to submit designs for 'a sports issue': in his reply Restall indicated he would produce 'four designs for Winter Sports' and a similar number for 'Yachting & Sailing'. It seems possible that Rose still considered that there was some chance of 'winter sports' finally being adopted for the 1975 programme, in view of the pressures for its inclusion and the impending change of administration. However, the files have no other record of designs on winter sports themes by the artist and only Restall's designs depicting sailing are held in the British Postal Museum & Archive.

Giles Allen  
5 November 1996

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## REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:

- MKD/BS/576 (Sailing stamps - correspondence)
- MKD/BS/577 (Sailing stamps - instructions to artists)
- MKD/BS/1027 (1975 stamp programme - submission to MDP and PO Board)
- MKD/BS/1028 (1975 stamp programme - regional correspondence)
- MKD/BS/1029 (1975 stamp programme - background research)
- Post 54 SAC minutes 1973-75