

UN-MANNED SATELLITES ON POSTAGE STAMPS 15: THE EXPLORER-1 SATELLITE

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This is the fifteenth in a series of articles about un-manned satellites on postage stamps. After focusing mainly on weather and environmental-observing satellites, this series of articles now turns its attention to scientific/research satellites. This article features **Explorer-1**, the first satellite successfully launched by the U.S., on 31 January 1958.



Ajman Mi257

The Explorer satellite series continues to this day, with over 80 satellites in all. Because of the large number of satellites in the Explorer series, and because of the large number of postal items for Explorer-1 in particular, Explorer-1 will be dealt with separately from the rest of the Explorer satellites. The remainder of the series, beginning with Explorer-2, will be covered in the next article in this series.

In the 1950s, research with sounding rockets and upper-air balloons led to an interest in launching a scientific research satellite. It was thought that the International Geophysical Year (IGY), planned for 1957-1958 to coincide with an expected peak sunspot activity, would be a good opportunity for a first satellite launch. In fact, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union announced their intentions to orbit a satellite at some time during the IGY.

Even within the U.S. there was competition among various agencies that were considered to work on the launch vehicle for the proposed satellite. The major contenders were a Navy program, and an Army program led by Wernher von Braun at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville AL. The Navy ended up with the initial authorization to proceed with work known as Project Vanguard. (The Vanguard series will be covered shortly in this series of articles.) However the Army was later given permission, even before the first Vanguard launch failure, to proceed with an alternative to Vanguard, which ended up being the first Explorer satellite.

After the embarrassing failure of the first Vanguard attempt in December of 1957, Explorer-1 was launched on 31 January 1958. It was the first successful U.S. satellite. The



Explorer 1 appears on both these issues from St. Vincent/Grenadines. 2080f (top) shows Dr. James Van Allen, while 2081f shows Ernst Stuhlinger

Soviet Union had already launched both Sputnik-1 and Sputnik-2 in late 1957, before the first Vanguard failure. Explorer-1 carried instruments that made possible the discovery of one of the earth's natural radiation belts, now known as the Van Allen radiation belt (named after Dr. James Van Allen, who was responsible for the experiment that discovered these belts). The Explorer-1 satellite looked like a rocket, probably owing to its heritage as a sounding rocket with extra launch stages added to achieve earth orbit.

Sputnik-1, the Earth's first artificial satellite, is shown on a very large number of postal items, almost too many to list. Whereas Explorer-1 is depicted on only 25 postal items, as listed in the table that accompanies this article. It is interesting that the U.S. only recently (in 1999) decided to feature the Explorer-1 launch as part of its Celebrate the Century series covering the 1950s. Considering that the 50th anniversary of the Explorer-1 launch will occur in 2008, that would be a good time for the U.S. to feature another stamp to specifically commemorate Explorer-1, the earliest American satellite that helped pave the way for U.S. space exploration.

Readers are referred to the authors' Website for reference images of the Explorer-1 satellite, as well as images of launch covers and postal items that feature this satellite. As a complement to this article, a checklist of all known Explorer-1 items is presented both here and on the Website: <http://www.cira.colostate.edu/ramm/hillger/satellites.htm>. E-mail correspondence with the authors is welcome. Don Hillger can be reached at hillger@cira.colostate.edu and Garry Toth at garry.toth@ec.gc.ca. ♦



Front and back side of US 3187d

Checklist of Postal Items Showing the Explorer-1 Satellite

Country	Catalog #*	Type of Item**	Year	Notes on Content
Ajman	Mi257		1968	
Antigua & Barbuda	2360b	One of MS6 (2360a-f)	2000	
Batum	Local	One of MS6	19??	
Bolivia	BL130	In margin of imperforate SS1	1982	
Burkina Faso	1168f	One of MS6 (1168a-f)	2000	
Cuba	2136	Stamp-on-stamp: Yugoslavia 870	1977	
Djibouti	C189		1983	
Djibouti	C189a	SS1 (C189)	1983	
Grenada Carriacou	2126b	One of MS6 (2126a-f)	1999	
Hungary	CB30b	In margin of MS4 (CB27-CB30)	1967	Poorly-depicted Explorer-1
Manama	Mi87		1968	
Marshall Islands	345c	One of MS25 (345a-y)	1989	Explorer-1 Launch
Micronesia	81b	One of MS9 (81a-i)	1989	Explorer-1 launch
Micronesia	344a	One of MS20 (344a-t)	1999	



Burkina Faso
1168f

Paraguay	C405	SSI	1975
Poland	1180		1963
Poland	2248a label	One label of MS6 (2248a (6x2248 + 2 labels))	1977
Poland	2248 cancel	Cancel on FDC	1977
Poland	None	Cancel	1977
St. Vincent	2080f	One of MS9 (2080a-i)	1994
St. Vincent	2081f	One of MS9 (2081a-i)	1994
St. Vincent	2702a	One of MS9 (2702a-i)	1999
United States	3187d	One of pane of 15 (3187a-o)	1999
United States	None	Cancel	1983
Yugoslavia	870		1967

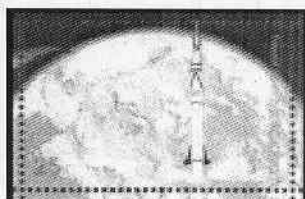
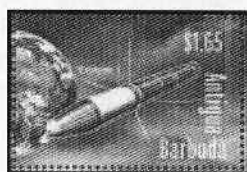


Poland 1180

Explorer-1 Launch

* Scott catalog number, unless indicated with Mi or BL for Michel.

** FDC = first day cover; SS# = souvenir sheet, MS# = miniature sheet, where # = number of stamps in sheet, and the numbers in parentheses are the catalog numbers of the stamps in the sheet.



Other stamps issued for Explorer-1 include (from left to right):

Top: Antigua-Barbuda 2360b, Batum (local post), Grenada-Carriacou 2126b

Middle: Micronesia 344a, Djibouti C189, Marshall Islands 345c

Bottom: St. Vincent 2702a, Manama Mi87, Micronesia 81b