

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

Introduction

Tierra del Fuego is an archipelago that lies at the tip of the South American continent. It was discovered in 1520 by the Portuguese navigator, Ferdinand Magellan, and the straits to the north of the main island are named after him. He named the region "Land of Fire" supposedly on account of the many fires lit by natives along the shorelines

The ownership of the area was disputed between Argentina and Chile for a long period of time but a treaty in June 1881 effectively settled the dispute and divided the main island vertically giving the eastern part to Argentina and the western part, along with numerous small islands to Chile

Argentina slowly undertook political and administrative control of their eastern portion of Tierra del Fuego from the 1881 to 1886 period and it was around this latter date that Julio Popper first came into prominence



Crests of Tierra del Fuego devised by Julio Popper

With the news of a fabulous discovery of gold in Cape Virgins at the southern tip of Patagonia in 1885, many gold mining ventures came into being in Buenos Aires which is where Julio Popper, who was born in Roumania and who had studied in Paris as a mining engineer, happened to be. He was well travelled and ideally qualified for such a venture. He obtained authorisation from the Argentine Government and organised an expedition to Tierra del Fuego which left Buenos Aires in September 1886. He returned to Buenos Aires the following year and gave a lecture to the Argentinian Geographical Institute. As a result of this lecture a company was formed, "Compania Lavaderos de Oro del Sud", with Popper as technical director. Popper immediately went back to Tierra del Fuego and established the company's first gold mining plant at El Paramo

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The Essay



The first trial design
by Rudolfo Soucup, an Austrian lithographer

In 1890 the Argentine post office opened up an agency at San Sebastian but failed to follow this up with an organised mail boat service. As a result of this Julio Popper arranged a ferryboat service to carry mail and supplies to and from San Sebastian to the Chilean port of Punta Arenas (or Sandy Point as it was also occasionally known) where regular shipping lines ran frequent services

Popper had organised a local monetary system for which he had "medals" minted and he also had his own postage stamps printed in 10 centavos (of gold dust) denominations for his postal service. This fee covered the cost of mail between any internal camps or to Punta Arenas where, with the addition of Chilean stamps, it could enter the regular mails. If an Argentine ship did happen to arrive at San Sebastian then the route to or through Buenos Aires could also be used with the addition of Argentine stamps

This first trial design is similar to that of the issued stamps (apart from size) but there are several differences mainly in the shading. For example, the ribbon with the 'TIERRA DEL FUEGO' inscription has horizontal shading running with the wording on the essay but vertical shading on the issued stamp

The stamps first appeared in April 1891 and were in use for approximately four months before being withdrawn sometime in August 1891. A total of just nine genuine usages on cover or part cover have been recorded. Eight of these are shown here

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The Proof Sheetlets



Kidd & Co. proof sheetlets in orange and in brown

Proof sheetlets of four stamps were produced by the printers, Kidd & Co. of Buenos Aires, in six different colours: orange, brown, green and blue plus, similar to the issued colours, a dull carmine shade and a rose-red shade. These all have a printer's imprint in the top margin area which is clear of perforations

The two stamps on the left side of the sheet are slightly different unissued designs which shows shading behind the 'DIEZ', 'CENTAVOS', 'ORO' and 'LOCAL' inscriptions around the edge of the stamps and inside the central 'P'. The upper stamp also has shading behind the '10' numerals in the four corners. The two stamps on the right side are exactly the same as the issued designs

Less than ten intact proof sheetlets of this type are known

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

The Proof Sheetlets



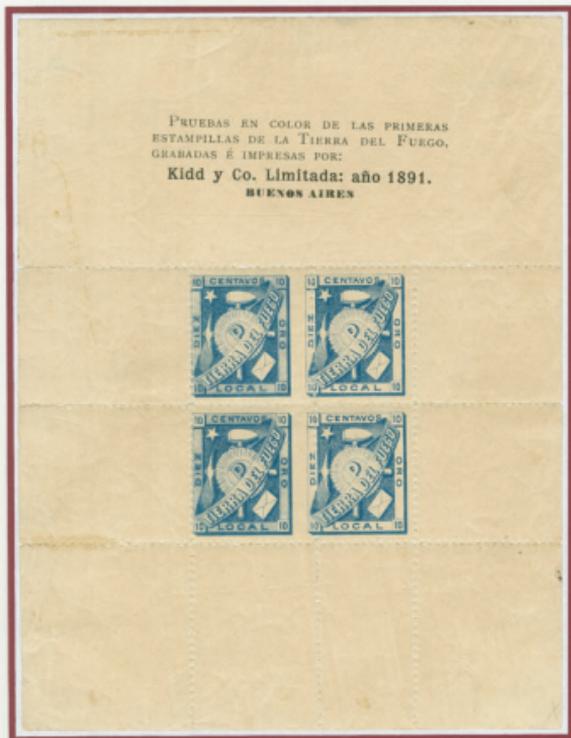
Kidd & Co. proof sheetlet in green

The background design of the stamp supposedly represents a pebbled beach and in the centre is a miner's gold panning dish (often described as a sun) inscribed with the letter 'P' behind which is a miner's pick and hammer. At the upper left corner is the five-pointed star of Chile and at the lower left corner is the reverse side of an envelope. The 'P' is commonly thought to stand for 'Popper' though it is possible that this whole central design was a type of symbol or coat-of-arms for Paramo

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The Proof Sheetlets



Kidd & Co. proof sheetlet in blue

Poor alignment of vertical perforations at the left side and, especially, through the centre

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

The Proof Sheetlets



Kidd & Co. proof sheetlet in rose-red

This colour is fairly similar to the shade that is attributed to second printing of the Tierra del Fuego stamps

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

The Proof Sheetlets



Kidd & Co. proof sheetlet in dull carmine

This colour is fairly similar to the shade that is attributed to the actual first printing of the Tierra del Fuego stamps

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The 1891 'Popper' Issue

The Proof Sheetlets



Proof sheetlets in black, deep blue, dull carmine and rose-red with the latter being numbered '00022' at the upper right. This is the only recorded example of a numbered proof sheetlet.

All the above proof sheetlets have the vertical perforations running through the top margin

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The 1891 'Popper' Issue

The Proof Sheetlets



Imperforate proof pair in deep brown



Imperforate proof pair in deep green

The above pairs have, at some time, undoubtedly been cut from imperforate proof sheetlets. One other pair of each of the above could therefore theoretically exist but, at the present time, the above are the only recorded copies of these imperforate proofs



Imperforate proof sheetlet in dull carmine shade

This is the only recorded intact imperforate proof sheetlet

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The Black Proofs



Transfer Type D



Transfer Type D
(Pos. 4 on the sheet)



Transfer Type E



Transfer Type E



Transfer Type H

An intermediate stone of 12 stamps (4 x 3) (Transfer Types A - L) was created and transfers were taken from this stone to build up the complete sheet (10 x 10). These black proofs are originally thought to have been taken from this intermediate stone but it has now been shown that they are actual plate proofs from a sheet of 100 stamps

All known copies of this proof have a partial circular cancel in red which is a marking supposedly bearing the name of the printers, Kidd & Co. of Buenos Aires

These black proofs are rare and there are no multiples currently known though Phillips (1912), Kraus & Philippi (1923) and Johnson (1943) all refer to a centrally cancelled block of four. Phillips actually noted typographical differences in the four types of this block (relating to transfer types A-B and E-F) which led him at the time to, erroneously, conclude that the sheet had been made up from intermediate transfer blocks of four

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

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The Issued Stamps



Dull carmine



Carmine-rose



Rose-red



Bright rose-red



Bright rose-red
Imperf at bottom



Dull Carmine
Double perforations through the centre

A rare multiple in this shade



Bright rose-red
Imperf at bottom

The stamps were printed in sheets of 100 (10 x 10), perf. 11½ on unwatermarked paper by Kidd & Co. of Buenos Aires and they were issued sometime in the first half of April 1891. The overall print order is not known but it would appear that there were two printings

The dull carmine and rose-carmine shades are from the very small first printing that was actually used in Tierra del Fuego whereas the rose-red and bright rose-red shades are attributed to the much larger second printing that did not see any genuine usage and which were, undoubtedly, never sent to Tierra del Fuego

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The 12 Transfer Types

A



Dot before 'D'

B



Dot in 'C' and dot in 'O'

C

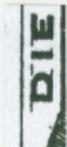


Frame break at lower left of '10'

D



Dot before 'O'



E



Dot 6mm below '10' and dot in 'R'

F



Dot and scratch in hammer head

G



Dot in 'R' and two dots after 'L'

H



Dot in star and dot above 'D'



TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

The 12 Transfer Types



Dot outside value box
and dash between '1' & '0'



Scratch at left of
hammer head



Scratch 4mm below 'D'
and on pick head



Scratch on 'A'



| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | B | C | D | A | B | C | D | D | C |
| E | F | G | H | E | F | G | H | H | G |
| I | J | K | L | I | J | K | L | L | K |
| A | B | C | D | A | B | C | D | A | B |
| E | F | G | H | E | F | G | H | E | F |
| I | J | K | L | I | J | K | L | I | J |
| A | B | C | D | A | B | C | D | B | C |
| E | F | G | H | E | F | G | H | F | G |
| I | J | K | L | I | J | K | L | J | K |
| E | F | G | H | A | B | C | D | E | H |

The arrangement of the 12 transfer types on the printing stone

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The Major Plate Flaws



Pos. 4
Transfer type D



Pos. 68
Transfer type D



Pos. 4 on the sheet (Transfer type D) has no frame line above the figure of value box at the upper right corner



Pos. 68 on the sheet (Transfer type D) shows a retouch to the area around the 'E' of 'FUEGO'

These are the only two major plate flaws on the sheet

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Auricosta



Incoming cover from Buenos Aires (22 Jan 1891) with two Argentine 1889 3c and single 1890 2c addressed to Senor Don J. Aeby, Comisario San Sebastian via Punta Arenas, Tierra del Fuego, Chile with a single 10c in a dull rose shade added on arrival tied by AURICOSTA cds (14 Apr) with SAN SEBASTIAN final arrival cds (17 Apr) alongside. The cover has undergone some restoration work

This cover is documented by Ramon L. Cortes, the Postmaster at San Sebastian, in a report regarding Julio Popper's activities made to Senor Tomas de Veyga Zeballos, the Director of Posts and Telegraphs on 10 August 1891

The earliest known usage of a Tierra del Fuego stamp, the first of two known ingoing covers and the only known cover cancelled in Auricosta

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

Colonia Popper



Cover addressed to Julio Popper in Buenos Aires with a single 10c in a carmine-rose shade tied by COLONIA POPPER cds (19 Jul 1891) and sent to Punta Arenas in Chile where 1883 5c blue and pair 1886 20c grey were added (10 Aug) to pay a triple registered AR rate to Buenos Aires. The final arrival cds (22 Aug) on the reverse also cancels the stamp. The wax seal reads 'TIERRA DEL FUEGO / POPPER / 1889'. The oval 'Wehrhahn y Ca.' cachet is that of Popper's agent in Punta Arenas

The first of two known registered frankings



TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

Colonia Popper



Cover addressed to Julio Popper in Buenos Aires with a single 10c in a dull carmine-rose shade tied by COLONIA POPPER cds (19 Jul 1891) and sent to Punta Arenas in Chile where 1883 5c blue and 1886 20c grey were added (10 Aug) to pay a single registered AR rate to Buenos Aires. Arrival cds (22 Aug). The oval 'Wehrhahn y Ca.' cachet is that of Popper's agent in Punta Arenas

The second of two known registered frankings



TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

San Sebastian



Incoming cover from La Boca (Buenos Aires) (31 Jan 1891) with two Argentine 1873 4c ABN Co. issues addressed to Senor Dn. Matias Trebotich at Punta Arenas with a single 10c in a dull carmine-rose shade added on arrival and tied by SAN SEBASTIAN cds (17 Apr). Buenos Aires transit backstamp (31 Jan)

This cover is documented by Ramon L. Cortes, the Postmaster at San Sebastian, in a report regarding Julio Popper's activities made to Senor Tomas de Veyga Zeballos, the Director of Posts and Telegraphs on 10 August 1891. A sworn statement by the addressee attached to the report stated that the letter was delivered by Maximo Popper and a fee of 10 centavos local gold was demanded in respect of the postal service rendered

The second of two known ingoing covers

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

Paramo



Top part of a cover addressed to Kidd & Co. (the printers) in Buenos Aires with a single 10c in a deep carmine-rose shade tied by PARAMO cds (Aug). Carried privately to Buenos Aires and placed in the mails on arrival with added pair Argentine 1891 1c brown, to pay local delivery, tied by ONCE DE SET sub-office cds (7 Aug). Buenos Aires main office backstamps (7 Aug)

A very rare shade of the stamp



6 August 1891

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

San Sebastian



Cover addressed to Whitfield King & Co. in Ipswich with a single 10c in a carmine-rose shade tied by SAN SEBASTIAN cds (19 Jul 1891) and sent to Punta Arenas in Chile where pair 1883 5c bright ultramarine was added (10 Aug) to pay ongoing postage to England

On the reverse, the oval 'Wehrhahn y Ca.' cachet is that of Popper's agent in Punta Arenas

The second of two known covers to Europe



TIERRA DEL FUEGO

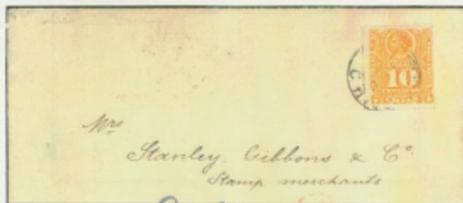
The 1891 'Popper' Issue

San Sebastian



Cover addressed to Stanley Gibbons & Co. in London with a single 10c in a rose-carmine shade tied by SAN SEBASTIAN cds (25 Apr 1891) and sent to Punta Arenas in Chile where 1885 10c yellow was added to pay ongoing postage to London. The cover was routed via Lisbon (15 Jun) and has two London arrival datestamps (18 Jun)

The first of two known covers to Europe



TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

San Sebastian, Tierra del Fuego
April 25th 1891

M^{rs}. Stanley, Gibbons & Co.
London

I will be obliged to you
if you send me your last
Catalogue with prices for postage
stamps.

Enclosed you will find
sample of the new Tierra del
Fuego stamp w^{ch} is used
for letters between the newly
established Colonies North and
South of Tierra del Fuego and
also between them and Sandy
Point.

I can send you more if you like.

Yours truly
Maximo Popper
San Sebastian, Tierra del Fuego
per Sandy Point
Magellan Straits

The letter that was enclosed in the cover addressed to Stanley Gibbons & Co. in London.

Dated April 25th 1891, it was written and signed by Maximo Popper, who was the brother of Julio Popper. He writes: "Enclosed you will find sample of the new Tierra del Fuego stamp w^{ch} is used for letters between the newly established Colonies North and South of Tierra del Fuego and also between them and Sandy Point." (sic)

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

San Sebastian



Cover addressed to Julio Popper in Buenos Aires with single 10c in rose-carminé shade tied by SAN SEBASTIAN cds (1 Jun 1891). Possibly carried privately to Buenos Aires outside the regular mails



Sept or Oct 1891



14 Aug 1891



14 Aug (1891)

Type II cancels with Roman date - status unknown

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Early Maps of the Island



Circa 1890-1900 period map printed by Williams Engraving Co. in New York showing an accurate geographic layout of Tierra del Fuego and the Magellan Straits. The borders between Argentina and Chile that were agreed and settled a few years earlier in 1881 are marked by "dots and dashes". The map clearly shows Cape Virgenes, S. Sebastian Bay and, on the Chilean side, Punta Arenas

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

Paramo, Tierra del Fuego
July 18 - 1891

Mr. Whitfield King & Co
Ipswich

Dear Sirs

Please send me
your last wholesale & retail
price lists for stamps etc. and
tell me if you will take the
new issued Tierra del Fuego
stamps in payment for your
articles.

Yours very truly
Franz Eigl

Paramo, Tierra del Fuego
pr Sandy Point
Straits of Magellan

The letter that was enclosed in the cover addressed to Whitfield King & Co. in Ipswich.

It was dated July 18th 1891 and was written by Franz Eigl quoting his address as "Paramo, Tierra del Fuego, pr. Sandy Point, Straits of Magellan." He writes: "...tell me if you will take the new issued Tierra del Fuego stamps in payment for your articles."

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Aftermath



Julio Popper inadvertently left us one other philatelic souvenir. A photograph from an album of his showing a small group of people and horses outside a cave in San Sebastian Bay was utilised in 1900 for one of the illustrations inside the series of 1901 5c New Year lettersheets issued by the Argentine post office. The title of the illustration was 'Cueva en la Bahía San Sebastian (Tierra del Fuego)' and it is known in green, blue and red-brown

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

Julio Popper



Popper was notorious for his dictatorial attitude and, towards the end of 1890, a French Scientific mission visited Tierra del Fuego and crossed swords with him. Upon its return to Buenos Aires, two members of the mission made various accusations against Popper including "coining money and selling stamps with his effigy". These accusations about the stamps resulted in an official enquiry and Ramon Cortes, the head of the Argentine post office in San Sebastian, wrote, in July 1891, to Dr. Estanislao Zeballos, the General Administration of Posts and Telegraphs, as follows: "I have the honour to inform you that Sr. Julio Popper, owner of a gold mining establishment in the Dept. of San Sebastian, has been using for sometime past an issue of stamps which does not appear to me to be legal...."

Dr. Zeballos considered that Popper had infringed postal law and wrote to the Attorney General for an opinion. The decision was that as the alleged offense had taken place in Tierra del Fuego then the matter should be passed to judges there for investigation

Popper heard of these problems through newspaper reports and asked that he be allowed to submit his side of the story. This request was granted. He wrote at length to the authorities covering, amongst many other things, the subject of his stamps and coins and on his submitted document he affixed examples of both. This document, with the coin removed, still remains on file today

The case against Julio Popper for his issuing his own stamps and the subsequent possible infringement of the Postal Laws never actually came to court. While on a visit to Buenos Aires on 6 June 1893 he suffered an unexpected and fatal heart attack at the age of 55 years

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 1891 'Popper' Issue

Julio Popper



Photograph taken from an original negative in the collection of the Royal Geographical Society in London showing Julio Popper (on the right hand side of the picture) while surveying out on the east coast of Tierra del Fuego circa 1886-87 period. Note the presence of the armed guard which was a very necessary precaution at the time

