

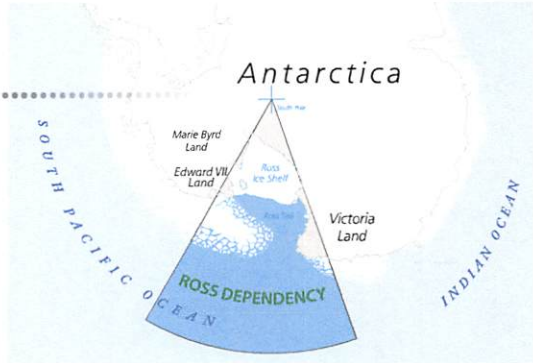
Ross Dependency

Status: Claimed by New Zealand

Population: 300 (winter), 1,300 (summer)

Area: 170,000 sq miles

Currency: 100 cents = 1 New Zealand Dollar (NZ\$1 = US\$.69)



The Ross Dependency – home to most of the massive Ross Ice Shelf (188,000 square miles) – is a pie-slice of Antarctica consisting of all the islands and territories between the 160th degree of east Longitude and the 150th degree of east Longitude that are situated south of the 60th degree of south Latitude. Since the bulk of this area is taken up by the Ross Sea, it is one of the smallest territorial claims in Antarctica

The area was discovered by Sir James Ross, a British explorer who led an 1839 expedition to conduct magnetic observations in Antarctica. In 1841, he claimed the Ross Sea and an area called Victoria Land for the British Crown. British activity in Antarctica grew and after World War I, officials in the Colonial Office sought to have all the continent except “some barren islands belonging to France” incorporated into the British Empire.

As a step toward this goal, a British Order in Council of July 30, 1923 created the Ross Dependency, defined its borders, and assigned responsibility for its administration to the governor general of New Zealand. By World War II, the British had substantially achieved their goal. But as its reach over the continent expanded, diplomatic challenges intensified from Latin American entities, who believed they had legitimate claims; Nazi Germany; and, after World War II, Russia and others. This friction was addressed by the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, which established Antarctica as a scientific preserve.

Philatelic activity in Antarctica was not driven by postal need; the whaling ships that worked the Antarctic waters did not require postal facilities. Initially, stamps were issued to help defray the costs for specific expeditions. In 1907, Ernest Shackleton, leader of the British National Antarctic Expedition, was sworn in as postmaster of King Edward VII Land and supplied with about 24,000 copies of the current New Zealand 1-cent stamp overprinted “King Edward VII Land” (Scott 121a). His post office closed March 4, 1909. The Royal Philatelic Society strongly protested this stamp issue.

In 1910, Capt. Robert F. Scott was made a postmaster for his last Antarctic expedition and given about 24,000 1-cent stamps (Commerce stamps of 1909-12, Scott 131) overprinted “Victoria Land” (Scott 131d). A later determination that the international rate of 2½ cents would apply, required that 2,400 ½-cent stamps also were overprinted (Scott 130d).

The modern era of New Zealand’s Antarctic postal history began with the 1955-58 Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition to cross the Antarctic continent overland. Scott Base was established in 1957 as headquarters for the New Zealand party.

The first stamps inscribed “Ross Dependency” were issued January 11, 1957 for use at Scott Base. The primary motivation for the issue was probably to reinforce New Zealand’s claim to sovereignty in the face of increasing diplomatic challenges, rather than to raise revenue.

Scott Base has been in continuous operation since 1957, but the post office was closed in 1987 as an economy measure. The issuance of Ross Dependency stamps ceased at that time. New Zealand resumed the Ross Dependency stamps on November 2, 1994, “due to local and international demand.” Since that time, the stamps have been available from the “Ross Dependency Agency,” located at a post office in Christchurch. The agency has its own cancels. The stamps are not valid in New Zealand.

The first stamps issued specifically for Ross Dependency in 1957 included one showing a map and another showing explorers Shackleton and Ross, Scott L2 and L3.



A first-day cover for the HMS Erebus and Mount Erebus stamp, one of Ross Dependency’s first stamps, issued January 11, 1957.



The first four stamps issued specifically for Ross Dependency in 1957 included one showing a map and another showing explorers Shackleton and Ross, Scott L2 and L3.

The 25th anniversary of Scott Base was noted with a set of six stamps in 1982, Scott L17.



Ross Dependency 20¢

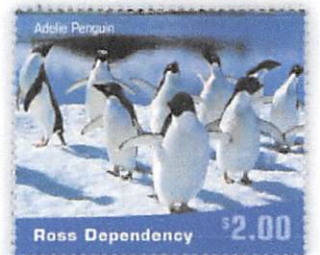
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James Clark Ross and his ships appear on a 1995 stamp, Scott L32.



A 2001 set of New Zealand Penguins stamps were reprinted the same year as a Ross Dependency set, Scott L72.