

The Seychelles Travelling Post Office

By Keith Morris

What follows comes mostly from the TPO Journal – Magazine of the TPO & Seapost Society

Officially the **Republic of Seychelles** (French: *République des Seychelles*; Creole: *Repiblik Sesel*), is an archipelago nation of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, some 1,500 kilometres (930 mi) east of mainland Africa, northeast of the island of Madagascar. Other nearby island countries and territories include Zanzibar to the west, Mauritius and Réunion to the south, Comoros and Mayotte to the southwest, and the Suvadives of the Maldives to the northeast. Seychelles has the smallest population of any state in Africa.

Known to the Arabs in the 9th Century AD, the Seychelles were visited by the Portuguese in 1502. In 1756 France claimed the uninhabited islands, however, in 1794 Great Britain annexed the Seychelles. The islands were administered from Mauritius during most of the 1800s and in 1903 they were made a separate British dependency. Independence was granted on 29th June 1976.

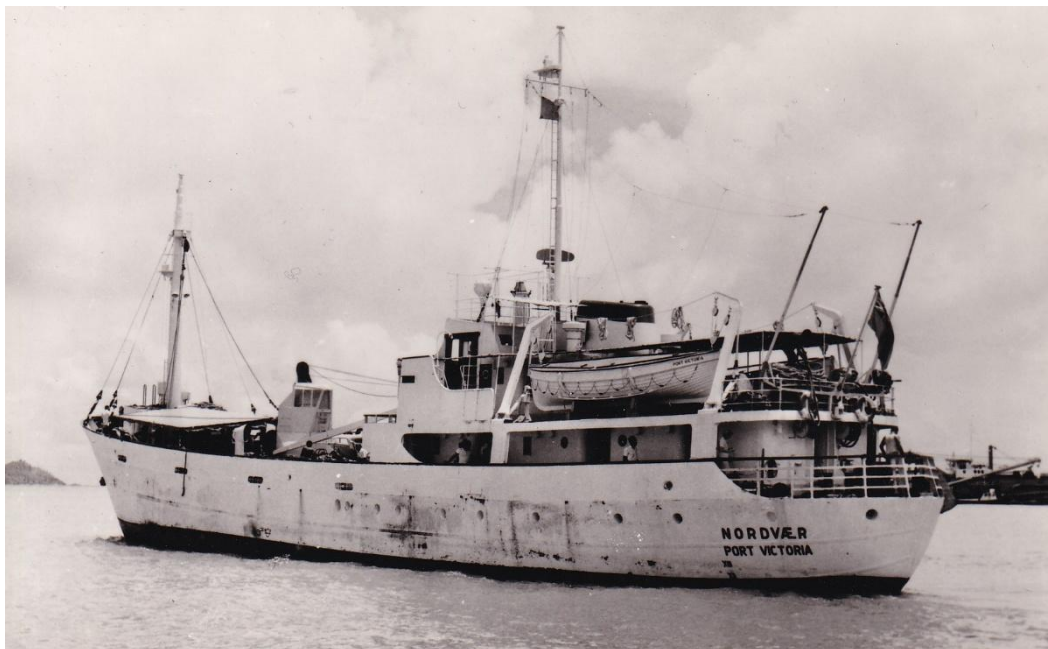
British Indian Ocean Territory

The British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) was created on the 8th November 1965 from its archipelago of small coral isles and Diego Garcia, Peros Banhos and Salomon (from Mauritius), and Aldabra, Desroches and Farquhar (from Seychelles) and is some 1000 miles south of India and 1200 miles east of the Seychelles.

Not until 1968, however, did regular inter-island mail services begin. Prior to this the islanders had to depend on the goodwill of company vessels needed for their exports of copra, salt, fish and tortoise-shell.

The islands named previously had their own Postal Agencies, but on 14th July 1969 the **mv Nordvaer** came into service to improve the communications of the total population, in June 1968, of 1019 (380 in Diego Garcia, 42 in Aldabra).

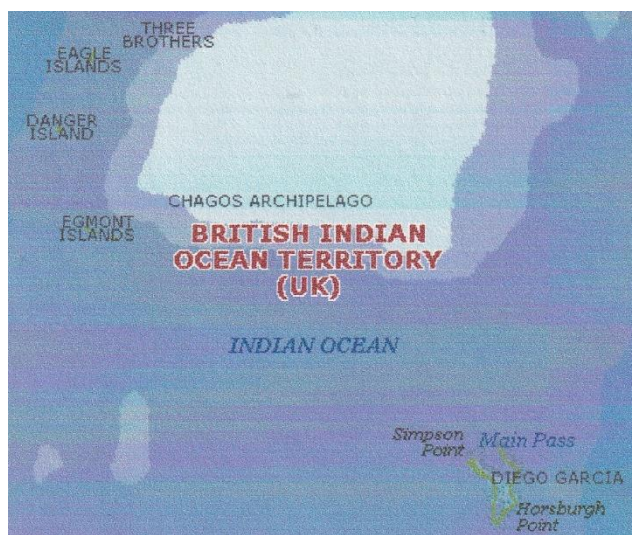
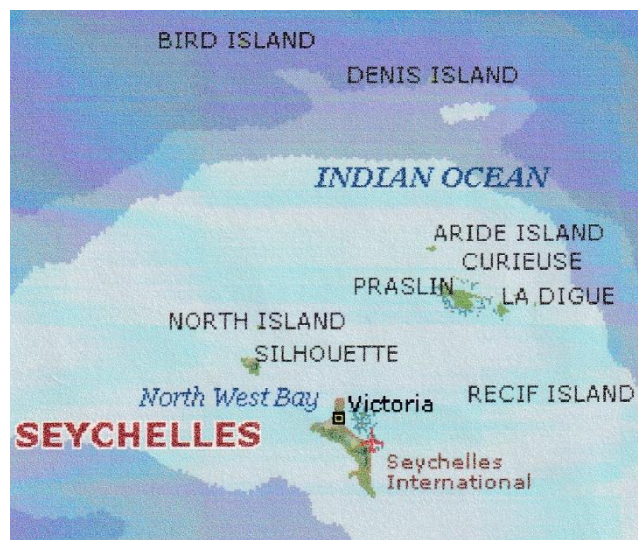




The **mv Nordvaer** was built in 1958 by Kremer & Sohn of Elmshorn, Hamburg, Germany for the Norwegian owners and operated mainly in Norwegian waters, the Nordvaer was bought by the BIOT in 1968.

After her delivery she came into service in July 1968. Her overall length was 161 ft and her beam was 28 ft, she drew 11 ft and her tonnage was 500. Powered by a Detuz diesel engine giving 635 hp at 325 rpm, she could cruise at 10 knots. Her capacity was 500 tons deadweight (23,000 cu ft), with passenger capacity of 12 (in 5 double and 2 single cabins). She had a crew of fifteen.

The inter-island service by Nordvaer ran approximately once every 3 weeks from the Seychelles to Mombasa, calling at islands en route and visiting the Chagos Archipelago approximately every two months.



In addition, charter trips were undertaken to other islands. Mail consisting largely of despatches containing plantation and fishery accounts between the islands and head offices in Mahe and Victoria, Seychelles, was carried, and postal services were provided on the islands (the majority!) where these do not exist. One crew member acts as Postmaster and had his own datestamp as illustrated here. This postmark was first used on the 14th July 1969, on mail landed at Victoria, Seychelles, on the 4th August 1969.



In 1974 a pair of stamps were issued to commemorate the 5th anniversary of the service. These stamps are probably unique in featuring both the Travelling Post Office vessel and the original datestamp.

The service continued to operate until the early 1980s when it ceased.

Zil Eloigne Sesel (Outer Islands) Seychelles

The postal ship Cinq Juin, an ex-French landing craft, faithfully served the Seychelles and Zil Eloigne Sesel islands chain in a multitude of ways.

The inner islands of the Seychelles consist of forty mostly granite (with two exceptions) mountainous islands. The outer islands, however, comprise sixty islands divided into three groups. These groups, the Amirantes Farquhar and Aldabra Groups, are spread over one million square kilometres of ocean.

Considering the vast area that the Cinq Juin was responsible for, the postal ship was entrusted with the not always easy responsibility of maintain postal services to the inhabited islands. The vessel was often the only communications link to the vast outlying islands.

The Cinq Juin also made important deliveries of vital resources such as timber and other natural products. This was especially important considering the fact that the outer islands are all flat coral and devoid of many needed resources.

The Cinq Juin was originally scheduled to start her official duties as TPO for ZES on the 29th August 1980, however, on the 6th August at three hours' notice she sailed on her first voyage as the TPO vessel.

The Philatelic Bureau only had time to prepare 14 covers for servicing, two were in UK collections during the 1980s and the whereabouts of the other 12 are currently unknown.

It is not known when the service was terminated, however covers have been seen from 1993. Do you know differently?



Complete sheets of the stamps seen here and following



Two more examples of covers from the service.



R.M. Stubbs,
30. Grosvenor Bridge Road,
Bath.
BA1 6BQ.
ENGLAND.