

Finland and Morocco Combine to Pioneer 100 per cent Recycled Stamps

Exclusive report from Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS



The two 100 per cent recycled Moroccan stamps issued on 22 April 2010



The world's first 100 per cent recycled adhesive postage stamps have been issued by Finland Post and Morocco Post following a successful but technically challenging, joint project masterminded in Europe, Africa and Asia.

The 100 per cent recycled and FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) stamps were printed by Thai British Security Printers in Bangkok, Thailand, by offset litho on gummed paper specially developed and manufactured by Gascogne Laminates, a French owned company based in Martigny in Switzerland.

According to Gascogne Laminates, one of the world's leading stamp paper manufacturers: 'Tropimatic Green 100 is an uncoated, 100 per cent high white recycled paper, made from non-printed post-consumer waste (Nordic Swan certified)'. The Nordic Swan Label, which originated in the Nordic Council of Ministers, is the best known eco-label in Scandinavia.

Ground-breaking

Morocco Post launched its two ground-breaking green stamps on Thursday 22 April at a ceremony held in Rabat, the capital, to mark the 40th Anniversary of World Earth Day (*Journée de la Terre*). The 3d.25 (dirhams), approximately 25p, 'Tree' stamp is the postal rate for sending internal mail weighing 20g. The 10d. 'Seed' stamp is the rate for sending mail weighing 20g. to countries in Africa. This commemorative issue will be on sale at 500 post offices throughout Morocco. Two million of the 3d.25 value and 200,000 of the 10d. value have been printed.

Environmentally conscious

Finland Post (Itella Corporation) issued a single 80c.+5c. (approximately 75p) surcharge adhesive commemorative stamp, printed in sheets of ten, on Tuesday 4 May. The stamp is available from all post offices and sales outlets throughout this environmentally conscious country. 1,000,000 stamps have been printed. The 5c. surcharge is being used to support the construction of the first solar power plant in Finland.

Morocco Post first day cover with handstamp cancellation



100 per cent recycled paper

In a short exclusive interview by email, Marc Butaud, Sales Manager, Stamps & Security at Gascogne Laminates told GSM: 'The greatest challenge facing us was to have a paper white enough to match the artwork of the stamps. Previous 100 per cent recycled papers were too grey-looking.'

Mr Butaud added: 'The other point for which our co-operation with Thai British was very important is that the paper had to be able to carry print well, as the surface is rougher than a usual coated paper.'

Asked about the 100 per cent recycled FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) paper Marc Butaud explained: 'This ecological paper is manufactured from blank wastes which means it has not been printed with potential polluting inks needing chemical treatment for recycling. This is why the aspect is outstandingly white compared with usual recycled papers.'

Forest Stewardship

The FSC is an international non-profit organisation founded in 1993 to support the world's forests. FSC members comprise a diverse group of representatives from environmental groups, the timber trade, paper industry, and forestry. Certification involves inspection and auditing of the land from which the timber and pulpwood originate and tracking it through all the steps of the production process until it reaches the end user. Only when this tracking has been independently verified is the product eligible to carry the FSC logo.

World premiere

During Antverpia 2010 International Stamp Exhibition, held in Antwerp, Belgium's second city, 9 to 12 April, Markku Penttinen, the Business Director of Finland Post Philatelic Centre explained the background to this world premiere stamp issue in a wide-ranging exclusive interview with this correspondent.

Not a philatelic gimmick

Mr Penttinen emphasised that: 'The idea for releasing 100 per cent recycled postage stamps was initiated by Finland Post and willingly shared with Morocco Post.' He said: 'In Finland releasing a 100 per cent recycled postage stamp is not a philatelic gimmick. This stamp is a good alternative for those people who want an easy and inexpensive way to participate in the green programme.'

He stressed: 'Finland Post will promote this particular stamp as a part of Finland Post's green programme. 800,000 stamps have been printed and I hope this special commemorative stamp sells out quickly. We have also produced a special first day cover and handstamp cancellation.'

He added: 'Finland Post (Itella Corporation, a perhaps transitory name, as Consignia was for Royal Mail) has always been very open to innovative technology and our 100 per cent recycled postage stamp is a good example.'

Sheet of ten recycled Finnish stamps issued on 4 May 2010 and the first day postmark



Solar power

A Finland Post press release, 'A green stamp in support of Finnish solar power', dated 12 April 2010, states: 'Carbon neutral deliveries with a green stamp. As part of the Itella Green programme, the Posti Vihreä - Grön Post stamp will be introduced. Deliveries with the stamp are carbon-neutral. The environment has been observed in all manufacturing phases of the stamp.'



'The stamp will be manufactured for Itella (Finland Post) using 100 per cent recyclable OBA-free paper material. No bleach or brightening substances will be used in it. No wax or shine substances have been added on the surface. The fresh green tone comes from a water-solvent print colour which does not strain the environment.'

The press release concludes: 'Itella (Finland Post) is committed to reducing its carbon-dioxide emissions by 10 per cent by the year 2012 and by 30 per cent by 2020 (per unit of net sales compared to 2007 levels). The reductions will be carried out through long-term projects as part of the Group's environment programme; the projects are particularly related to vehicles and the energy used by properties.'

'Itella (Finland Post) decided to adopt green electricity gradually from August 2009. From 2011, all electricity used by Itella in Finland will be green. The share of low-emission vehicles and alternative fuels will be increased: the objective is to increase the share of alternative vehicles to 40 per cent by 2020.'

Posthorn

The press releases concludes: 'The designers, Timo Berry and Teemu Ollikainen, have designed a posthorn on the first class stamp. The end of the horn puts out green seed leaves. The stamp carries an extra fee of five cents. The assets accrued from the fees will be allocated to support the construction of the first solar power plant in Finland.'

A further press release explained that Itella Green products are part of Itella's environmental programme. Among the objectives listed are: 'to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 30 per cent by 2020 (compared to 2007, relative to turnover). Increase the share of alternative vehicles to 40 per cent by 2020. Energy efficiency in buildings—adopt green electricity, in Finland, by 2011. Providing customers with climate-neutral products.'



Picture by Peter Jennings FPPSL, FROG

Markku Penttinen (left), Director of Finland Post Philatelic Centre, pictured with Gilles Le Baud, International Consultant to Thai British, during Antwerpia 2010

Thai British

Gilles Le Baud, International Consultant to Thai British, who arranged and was present during my interview in Antwerp with Mr Penttinen of Finland Post, gave further insights into these ground-breaking stamp issues. He explained that earlier trials had taken place but there were problems with the paper manufactured by Gascogne Laminates.

He said: 'At first the paper was not of a satisfactory quality or white enough for printing postage stamps. During further trials in 2009 a 60 per cent recycled and 40 per cent FSC (Forest Tracking) paper was produced and tested in comparison to the 100 per cent recycled paper but the impact of the 60 per cent recycled proportion meant the paper was not of sufficient quality.'

Mr Le Baud revealed that recycled waste used by Gascogne Laminates consisted of white blank paper from the trimmings of the edges of chequebooks manufactured for banks. He said: 'The white part of the paper had never been printed on and it is this paper that is 100 per cent recycled into stamp paper. As the original paper was 100 FSC, this 100 per cent recycled paper is also 100 per cent Forest Stewardship Council, FSC.'

Gilles Le Baud stressed: 'This 100 per cent Tropimatic stamp paper is the most environmentally friendly paper at present available anywhere in the world. It also benefits from having the Nordic Swan label which is the highest label in terms of the environment in the Nordic countries—Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland (current volcanic events set on one side)—that are leading the way in the protection of the environment. It also has the German *Blauer Engelen* (Blue Angel) label as well. This is the reason that Finland Post decided to proceed with a special stamp issue on 100 per cent recycled paper.'

The first

Mr Le Baud emphasised that Finland Post was the first postal administration to make the decision to use the 100 per cent recycled paper. 'The decision was made following a meeting between myself and Markku Penttinen, Director of Finland Post Philatelic Centre at the International Stamp Exhibition held in Rome during October 2009. Finland Post was not able to place a sufficiently large order to justify the manufacturing of the first batch of this special paper. So we had to find a solution.'

World Earth Day

Mr Le Baud continued: 'I knew that Morocco Post had made the decision to issue a green stamp for World Earth Day during April 2010. I approached Ikram Taibi, Director of Philately of Morocco Post, who, backed by her Postmaster, jumped at the opportunity to share this world premiere with Finland Post and include a seed stamp using Lucerne seeds. Both are 100 per cent recycled stamps.'

He made clear: 'It is a joint project but a not a joint stamp issue between Finland Post and Morocco Post.'

Mr Le Baud approached Thai British Security Printing and during discussions between the technical teams from Gascogne Laminates and Thai British it was agreed that because of Global Warming and environmental concerns it was appropriate to develop a special 100 per cent recycled paper.

More expensive

Asked if the 100 per cent recycled paper is cheaper or more expensive than ordinary stamp paper, Gilles Le Baud paused for a moment before he admitted: 'This 100 per cent recycled paper is 30 per cent to 40 per cent more expensive to produce.'

Pressed about its viability he added: 'Thai British hope that higher volumes generated in the future will help to reduce the cost of manufacture of this 100 per cent recycled paper. In the longer term it may be possible to produce this special paper at the same price as normal stamp paper.'

Mr Le Baud emphasised: 'Thai British has exclusive use of this 100 per cent recycled stamp paper because it invested in the initial trials and helped to develop the production technique.'

Morocco Post

The Stanley Gibbons stamp catalogue describes Morocco as: 'An independent kingdom established in 1956, comprising the former French and Spanish International Zones.' The Kingdom of Morocco regained its postal autonomy and the definitive stamps depicted the King of Morocco. Morocco Post split from Morocco Telecom in 1998 to become an independent entity with financial autonomy but under State control.

Ikram Taibi, Director of Philately of Morocco Post, said: 'Today Morocco Post employs about 8400 people working in 1750 post offices throughout the country.'

'Philately is not organised as a business unit as such, but during the past two years we have actively developed and used new innovative technologies in the production of our postage stamps. These include lenticular, embossing, hot foiling, special shapes and perforations. They have helped to keep philately alive and together with special promotions we have increased the number of customers on our database.'

She added: 'The 10d. stamp—we decided on this value (approximately 75p) because of the high production cost involved—incorporates some lucerne seeds included in a debossed area and protected by a biodegradable transparent sticker. I hope it catches the imagination of stamp collectors. If the stamp is watered, planted in the ground and the earth kept moist, the seed will germinate through the paper and the seedling should appear within two weeks.'

Green City

World Earth Day started in the United States of America on 22 April 1970. She said: 'For the 40th anniversary, Rabat, the Moroccan capital, has been chosen by the World Earth Day Network as the Premiere City because of the declaration of Rabat as a 'Green City,' with large areas of parks and green belt.'

She stressed: 'Issuing these two green stamps, Morocco Post wanted to be associated with the National Chart of Environment initiated and strongly supported by His Majesty the King.'

'The choice of lucerne for the seeds has been taken with the help of the National Institute for Agriculture Research as a leading long-term, drought-resistant and high-yielding legume. Lucerne is an interesting source of protein for cattle.'

First Finnish stamp

Meanwhile, my interview with Markku Penttinen, Director of Finland Post Philatelic Centre, moved from paper manufacture to Finland and stamp collecting. The Stanley Gibbons catalogue states: 'Finland was a Russian Grand-Duchy until 1917 when it became an independent Republic.' Finland issued its first postage stamp in 1856 and joined the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in February 1918. Finland entered the European Union (EU) in 1995 and the population today is about 5.3 million people.'

Profitable

Mr Penttinen explained that Finland Post is a profitable public corporation owned by the Government of Finland, with its headquarters in Helsinki, the capital. He said: 'We employ about 30,000 people, 6000 of whom work in the Russian Federation, because we own the largest Russian logistics, warehousing and transportation company.'

Finland Post has about 150 post offices and a total of some 1200 postal outlets. In the future, shares in Finland Post, a dynamic and well-managed company, may be made available to the public through the stock market.

One postage rate

Mr Penttinen said that the most used postage rate in Finland was 80 cents. 'We only have one customer-friendly rate of 80 cents for both first class internal and overseas mail—the volume of overseas mail sent from Finland is low compared to internal use. Our 80c. postage rate is easy to use and easy to remember. Our customers like it and it's also less time-consuming for staff in post offices and sales outlets. Self-adhesive stamps are the most popular in Finland.'

This correspondent then put the question frequently asked by stamp collectors throughout the world: 'How many new stamp issues does your postal authority release each year and what is the total face value?' The Director of Finland Post Philatelic Centre said: 'Finland Post officially releases 20 stamp issues per year consisting of about 50 different stamps with a total face value of approximately €50.'

Stamp collectors

Asked if there were many stamp collectors in Finland, Mr Penttinen replied: 'There is a Philatelic Union in Finland of about 80 stamp clubs and 2500 members. 'Finland Post Philatelic Centre is a profitable unit with a customer base of about 60,000 customers, 10,000 of whom are overseas.' He added: 'About 70 per cent of our customers are women, many of whom are over the age of 45. They are casual collectors who subscribe to all our new issues and first day covers.'

Asked if young people in Finland collected stamps, Mr Penttinen said: 'In Finland we face the same challenge as in Great Britain. It is the grandparents or parents who subscribe to the new stamp issues on behalf of the children and young people.'

Joint issue with Japan

Asked about future special stamp issues, Markku Penttinen paused for a moment and smiled. 'We are working on a joint Father Christmas stamp issue with Japan Post. The stamps will be issued in November 2010, both in Finland and Japan.'

Asked if he had a final point he would like to make, Mr Penttinen said that Finland Post took part in Antverpia 2010 because it had a good reputation as a well organised show. 'Finland Post will not have a stand at the 2010 International Stamp Exhibition in London and is represented by Harry Allen as part of a common Scandinavian booth.' Further information on Finland's Green stamp is available on www.posti.fi/goshopping.



Markku Penttinen pictured with Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS at Antverpia 2010

Vital message

The world's first 100 per cent recycled stamps will undoubtedly be a talking point among postal administrations, stamp collectors and dealers during London International at the Business Centre in Islington. These environmentally friendly green stamps are a remarkable technological achievement.

Following the dramatic and devastating second eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland during April, causing extensive air travel disruption across large parts of Europe and stranding millions of passengers, these green stamps will help to dispel the widely-held perception that stamps are just dull little pieces of paper. Green stamps carry a vital message that is helping to protect and look after natural resources and the environment.

Finland exhibition card with special Antverpia 2010 handstamp

