

THE MOST INLAND PAQUEBOT POSTING

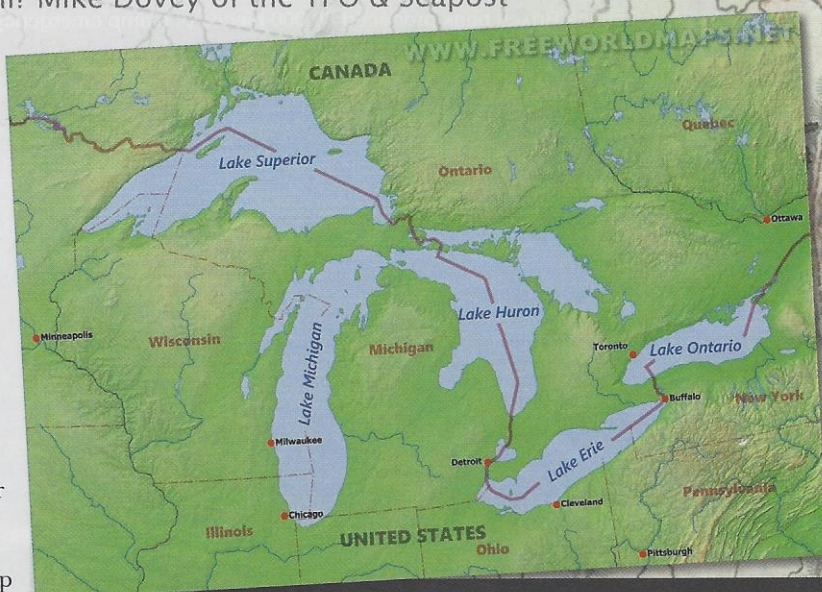
By Mike Dovey

Paquebot cancels were introduced 130 years ago to allow sea-going ships to post mail bearing the stamps of its country of registry at any port in the world. In most instances these ports would be located on coastlines, but there are cases where the routes of sea-going ships would take them to ports along inland waterways. So just how far inland can a ship travel and still receive a port's paquebot postmark on its mail? Mike Dovey of the TPO & Seapost Society investigates.

Paquebot cancels were first introduced to the world on 1 January 1894 following a UPU Convention in 1892 which ratified a decision that a vessel, whilst on the high seas, was in fact its own sovereign territory. This allowed passengers while on a voyage at sea to post a letter using stamps from the vessel's country of registry. This would then be deposited at the next port of call, where a paquebot cancellation would be applied to show that the letter or postcard had been posted at sea, and then forwarded onwards to the addressee. This meant that a British ship using British stamps could, for example, post mail at Capetown from where it would receive the port's paquebot postmark before being forwarded on. Thus, you would have a Capetown postmark on a British stamp.

This was a revolution in the posting of letters at sea. Prior to 1894, when a ship docked in a port someone would have to run to the nearest post office to buy local stamps and then return to the ship. If he bought too many the surplus would end up in the Captain's safe for use on the next voyage, while if he bought too few there would be a number of very angry passengers. From 1 January 1894, this all changed and the vessel could keep a stock of stamps aligned to the registry of the vessel which could be used anywhere in the world – a problem truly solved. The ship would leave its country well stocked for the voyage knowing that a surplus could always be used in the very next port of call.

All this is fine for ships sailing on the high seas but then what would happen if a ship actually sailed up a river? There are instances all over the world of ships docking at ports that could be deemed as inland. For instance, Gloucester is a little way up the River Severn and could be said to be inland. Saigon is 48 miles



The Great Lakes of North America: Lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan and Superior

Fig 1 The 10,400-ton Blue Funnel Line vessel MV *Anchises* (photo courtesy of Malcolm Cranfield)



up the Mekong Delta, whilst New Orleans is 75 miles up the Mississippi and so could also be described as inland, especially if you carry on to Baton Rouge.

All of the ports mentioned above have paquebot marks. So how far inland can we head along a river and still find a port with a paquebot cancel? This article researches just that.

The only justification for a posting to be included is that a vessel must have crossed an ocean, been on the high seas, and is classified as an ocean-going vessel. This rules out all flat-bottomed barges, etc. that constantly run up and down rivers, like the Rhine and the Danube.

The Great Lakes

Our first area to research in our quest to find out how far up a river we can get to obtain a paquebot posting is very easy. In fact, it is cheating a little bit. It's the five Great Lakes of North America: Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan and Superior. We have to trace their ports to see how far inland from the sea at Montreal we need to travel in order to reach them.

The five lakes were only truly linked when canals, like the Welland Canal, were built and rivers were expanded so that sea-going vessels could sail from one lake to another. When the last part of the lock and canal system was finished in 1959, all five lakes

were passable by a ship of up to a gross tonnage of up to around 10,000 tonnes.

It is a great surprise when studying a map of the Great Lakes to see just how few actual ports there are for ships from the ocean to call at. For this article I have based the sailing on one ship which entered the lake system in September 1975. The Blue Funnel Line vessel MV *Anchises* (Fig 1) had been launched in 1973 and later sold by the company in 1984 for further trading. The ship itself had a net tonnage of 10,400 tonnes, so this was not an ordinary little vessel which could easily ply its trade through the lakes. Indeed, it was serious business to navigate the ship through the rivers and locks. *Anchises* was 75-foot wide, while some parts of the Welland Canal and locks were 80-foot wide, allowing the ship only two feet six inches on either side to manoeuvre itself through the system. The biggest problem for all of the five Great Lakes is that they are only navigable in the summer from April to October.

A vessel would sail down the St Lawrence Seaway to Montreal (Fig 2) and then onwards to Quebec (Fig 3). After that, a ship would eventually enter Lake Ontario and then onwards again to its first port of call, which could be Toronto (Fig 4). From there a ship would sail south to the Welland Canal which links Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. On entering the next lake the next port of call would be Port Colborne (Fig 5). There are very few ports in this lake and so calls could be made at Erie, Ashtabula, Cleveland and onwards to Detroit (Fig 6).



Fig 2 A cover from the MV *Anchises* posted at Montreal with a circular paquebot postmark (type 2242B)

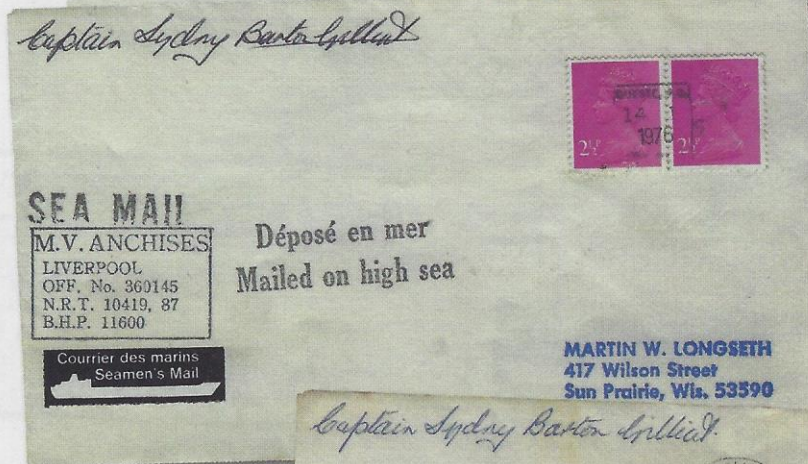


Fig 3 A cover that was carried through the Great Lakes and posted at Quebec with a type 2281B 'Déposé en mer/Mailed on high sea' paquebot mark



Fig 4 Once into Lake Ontario ships would most likely make a call at Toronto. This cover posted at Toronto was given a manuscript paquebot annotation



Fig 5 This cover was carried by the *Anchises* through the Welland Canal into Lake Erie where it received a manuscript annotation at Port Colborne

All covers shown reduced

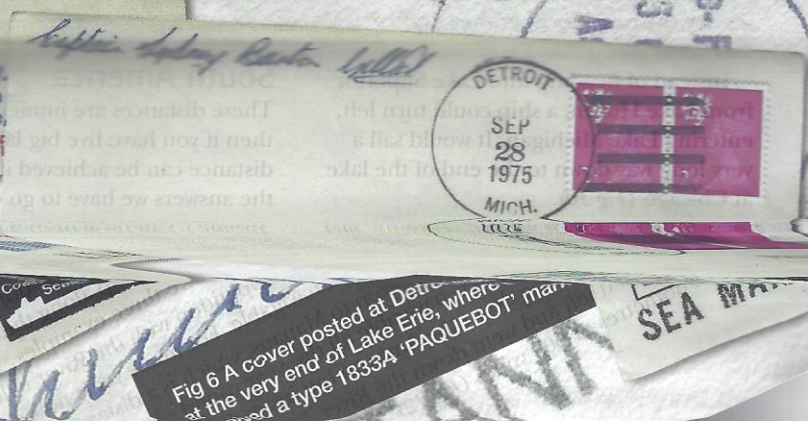


Fig 6 A cover posted at Detroit at the very end of Lake Erie, where it received a type 1833A 'PAQUEBOT' mark

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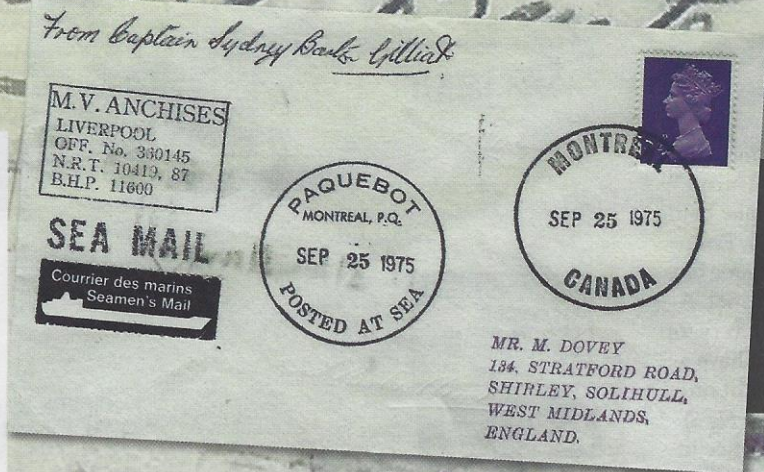


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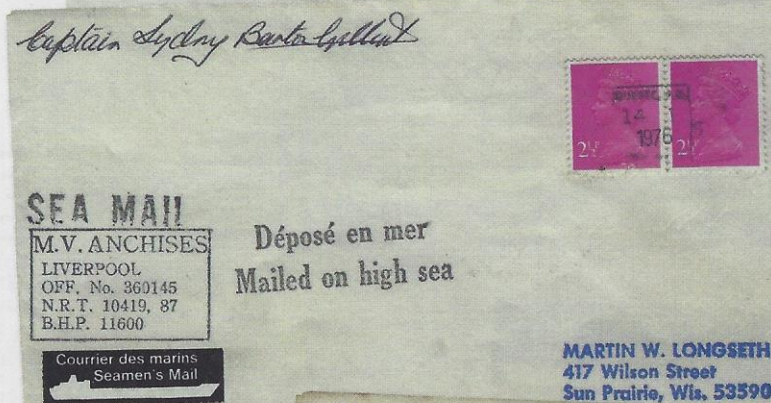


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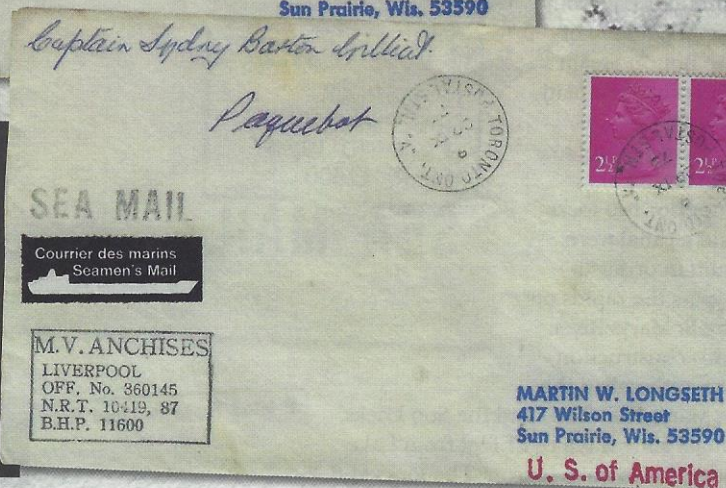


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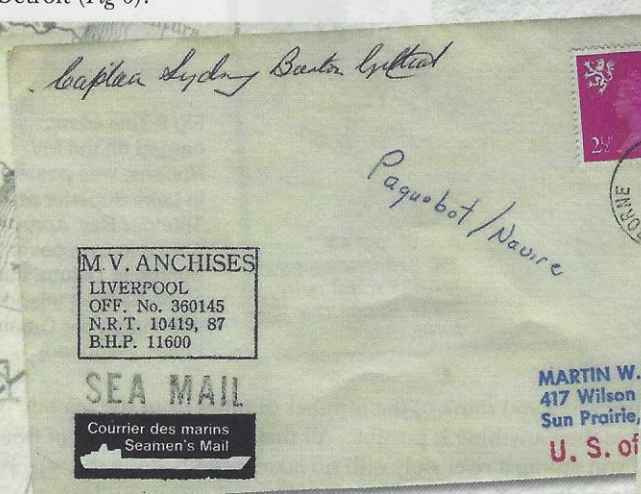
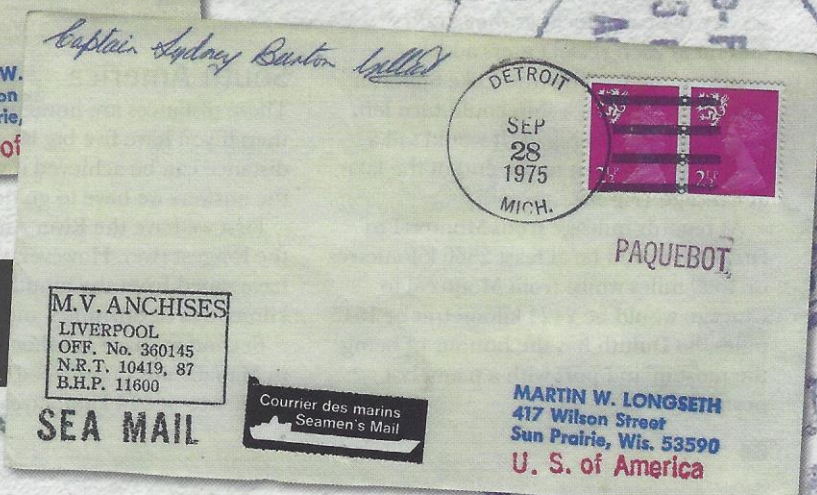


Fig 6 A cover posted at Detroit, located at the very end of Lake Erie, where it received a type 1833A 'PAQUEBOT' mark



Ships would then move from Lake Erie into Lake Huron, the entrance to the lake being at Port Huron (Fig 7). From here the lakes get bigger but the ports of call get fewer. A ship would sail to the very top of this third lake and have a choice of going straight on via Sault Saint Marie (Fig 8) into Lake Superior. Once in the lake the only major port of call is at the very far end, at Duluth. There is a known posting of a cover at Duluth from the MV *Baltic Skou* belonging to Laurensen Line but, alas, I haven't got a copy. I do have a cover posted in Lake Superior at the smaller port of Thunder Bay from the MV *Rubens* of the Bolton Steam Shipping Company (Fig 9).

To get from Lake Huron to Lake Superior two locks and a canal were built in order to bypass the rapids on the St Marys River. This construction was aptly called the St Marys Fall Canal and the Soo Locks, which show a fall of 21 feet from Lake Superior to Lake Huron. The locks and canal itself was constructed by the US Army Corps of Engineers who were the prime builders of the Panama Canal.

There is a 600 feet drop in elevation from Duluth to the Atlantic Ocean and a total of 16 locks throughout the five lakes, all built to bypass the parts of rivers St Marys, the Niagara and the St Lawrence that were not navigable for a variety of reasons. There is more than enough water in each lake to service the canal locks as they drain and fill as each vessel enters a lock.

Instead of heading into Lake Superior from Lake Huron, a ship could turn left, entering Lake Michigan. It would sail a very long way down to the end of the lake at Chicago (Fig 10).

As regards mileage from Montreal to Duluth it would be at least 2560 kilometres or 1600 miles whilst from Montreal to Chicago would be 2424 kilometres or 1515 miles. So Duluth has the honour of being the most inland port with a paquebot postmark.

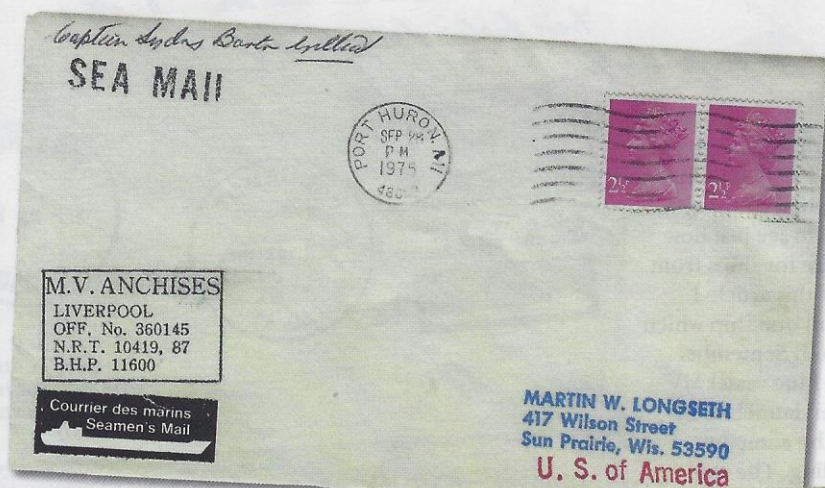


Fig 7 A cover carried on the *Anchises* and posted at Port Huron in Lake Huron. Unfortunately it received no written annotation or a paquebot cancel (Reduced)

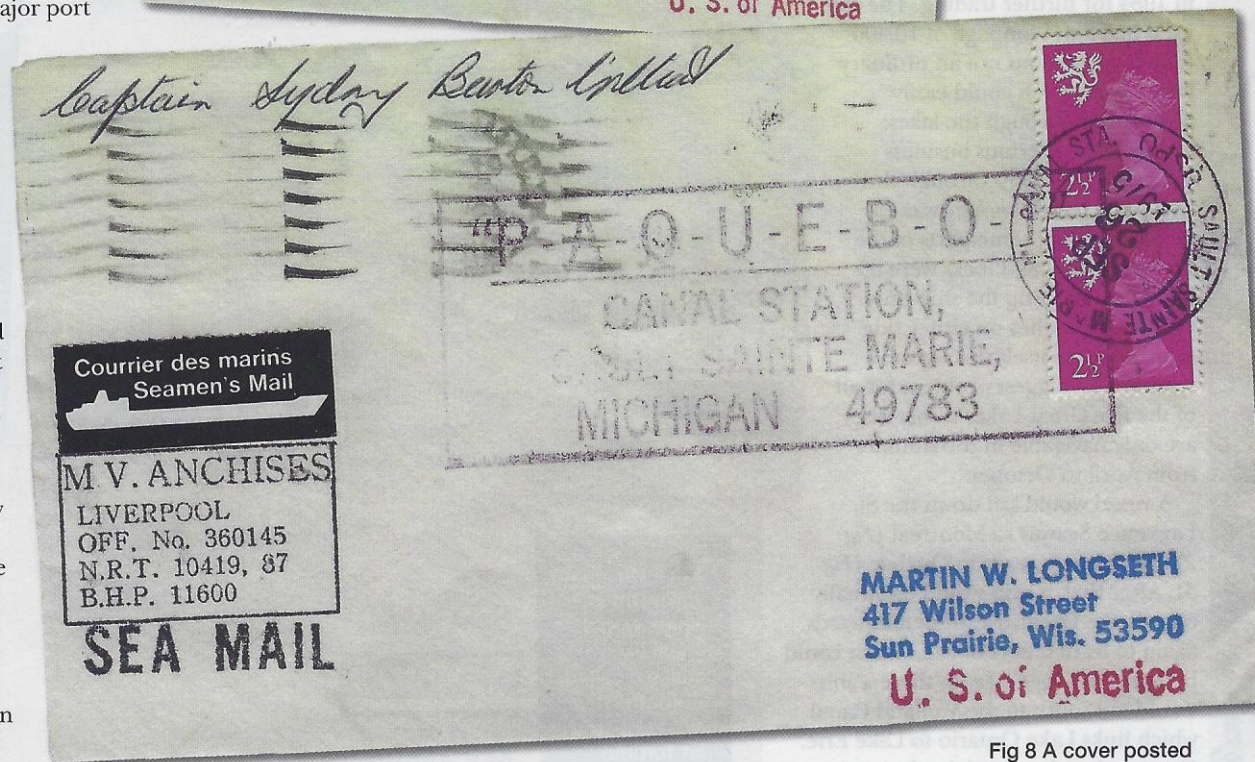


Fig 8 A cover posted at Sault Saint Marie at the top of Lake Huron, nearly into Lake Superior, with a boxed paquebot mark (type 2156B)

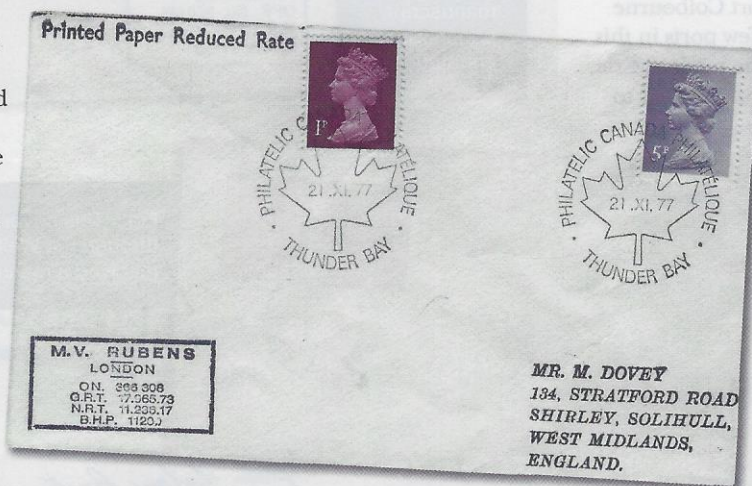


Fig 9 This cover, carried on the MV *Rubens*, was posted in Lake Superior at Thunder Bay. Apart from a known cover posted at Duluth, this is the furthest inland posting on the Great Lakes (Reduced)

South America

These distances are immense when you think of the number of miles from the sea but then if you have five big lakes then anything is possible. All this begs the question of what distance can be achieved if you sail up a river only with no lakes to help along the way. For the answers we have to go down to South America where we have three examples.

First we have the River Amazon which would be in competition with the River Nile for the longest river. However, the Amazon is the most navigable. For many years now ships have sailed from the mouth of the River Amazon to Manaus, which is a distance of 1386 kilometres or 867 miles and of course is navigable all the year round (Fig 11).

Second we have another sailing down the Amazon but instead of going all the way to Manaus the ship turned left and went down the River Tapajos to Itaituba, which is a distance of 974 kilometres or 609 miles (Fig 12). Sailing to this port really is in the