

# Tin Can Mail

## By Emmanuel GPS

What is Tin Can Mail?

What can you do when you live on an island with no deep-water port in the early 1900s?

This is Niuafou'ou, a volcanic Tongan island: postal deliveries were received via the so called "Tin Can Mail" system of having mail thrown overboard in biscuit tins and retrieved by local swimmers. After a shark killed a Tongan swimmer in 1931, swimming was banned and canoes had to be used.

This is an island unlike any you're likely to have seen before, and it's seriously remote. The protective caldera almost makes it look like a huge walled fortress. Part of the kingdom of Tonga, the island is inhabited, and has been for most likely thousands of years. The population of around 600 individuals are, however, in constant threat of the active volcano that they're living on. In fact, the island ceased to be inhabited for some 12 years from 1946 until 1958 after a devastating eruption.



**Niuafou'ou (volcano)**

Niuafou'ou from the International Space Station, 2005-03-19

<b>Highest point</b>	
<b>Elevation</b>	260 m (850 ft)
<b>Coordinates</b>	15.60°S 175.63°W
<b>Geography</b>	
<b>Location</b>	Tonga, Oceania
<b>Geology</b>	
<b>Mountain type</b>	Shield volcano
<b>Last eruption</b>	March 1985

The specially marked Tin Can covers of the 1930s and 1940s became collectors' items after an Englishman, Charles Ramsey, became the first and only white man to swim out with the mail. A German trader, Walter Quensell, cashed in on what had become a major tourist attraction with visiting cruise ships, by stamping all the mail and sending it on.

[EmmanuelGPS@gmail.com](mailto:EmmanuelGPS@gmail.com), a native Frenchman, is a past Director and life member of <https://www.rotaryonstamps.org/> and the lead person of the Inverness (California) stamp club where he resides. He owns this highlighted 1937 cover.