

## India – Commemoration of First Air Mail

By Tom Reyman

In 2011, India issued a set of stamps to commemorate the first air mail flight on the Indian sub-continent which had occurred 100 years earlier on February 16, 1911. What makes this early flight so remarkable worldwide is that this was the first official carriage of mail by air. Some mail had been carried by air before this, usually placed in the pilot's pocket and flown to a destination. These flights with mail were not condoned by the local authorities or by any local Post Office.

In 1911, two Sommer biplane aircraft were brought to India for demonstration purposes. As part of the demonstration, it was proposed that some mail could be carried by air across the Ganges River from Allahabad to the town of Naini. The local Postmaster approved the idea and over 6,000 pieces of mail were prepared. All mail was cancelled with a unique hand stamp stating, "First Aerial Post, UP Exhibition, Allahabad, 1911".

One of the pilots travelling with the planes was French aviator, Henri Pequet. It was he who was given the opportunity to carry the mail. He completed the flight in 13 minutes and made history as the first official air mail pilot. The subject 2011 cover shows a picture of the aircraft used by Pequet.



**Tom Reyman** is a Nevada Stamp Study Society member whose collecting interests are U.S. FAM covers, general Air Mail covers, Canadian Semi-Official Air Mail stamps and covers, and Cape Breton (Nova Scotia) covers.