The U.S. first-day cover that was postmarked on the moon

By Cheryl Ganz

Only one piece of mail was postmarked on the moon at the first lunar post office. It will be an exhibit highlight in the Gems of American Philately hall, part of the National Postal Museum's new William H. Gross Stamp Gallery.

United States astronaut Dave Scott postmarked this first-day cover — an act as nationally symbolic as planting a flag.

During the 1971 Apollo 15 mission, astronauts Jim Irwin and Scott spent three days exploring the moon from the lunar rover. The wheeled lunar rover, first used on this mission, greatly expanded the range of lunar exploration.

At the end of the third day, Aug. 2, before re-entering the lunar module, Scott took out a pouch of Beta cloth that could withstand 2,400-degree temperatures.

The pouch contained a miniature post office: an envelope franked with two die proofs of the 8c 1971 stamps honoring the 10th anniversary of the space program, an ink pad and a rubber stamp.

One die proof shows the landing craft; the other shows the rover. The die proofs had been hand-perforated to look like the stamps that were being issued that same day on Earth (Scott 1434-35).

The postmark applied by Scott reads, UNITED STATES / ON THE MOON / AUG. 2 1971 / FIRST DAY OF ISSUE.

Since it was faint, Scott made another impression below it. On the left side of the envelope are “thumbprints” made by his space suit glove.

While postmarking the cover, Dave Scott made a speech that millions of viewers watched on television:

“To show that our good Postal Service has deliveries any place in the universe, I have the pleasant task of canceling, here on the moon, the first stamp of a new issue dedicated to commemorate United States achievements in space. And I’m sure a lot of people have seen pictures of the stamp. I have the first one here on an envelope. At the bottom it says, ‘United States in Space, a decade of achievement,’ and I’m very proud to have the opportunity here to play postman.

“I pull out a cancellation device. Cancel this stamp. It says, ‘August the second, 1971, first day of issue.’ What could be a better place to cancel this stamp than right here at Hadley Rille? ‘By golly, it even works in a vacuum.’

To be safe, a second miniature post office was aboard the command module piloted by astronaut Alfrad Worden. If Scott and Irwin had been unable to postmark on
the moon because of their need to complete other chores, a different postmark would have been applied on the home flight, reading, MOON LANDING / USA / [DATE] / FIRST DAY OF ISSUE.

To see a video of this momentous postmarking event, search “moon mail” on the museum website at www.postalmuseum.si.edu. When the new gallery opens, you will be able to view other space mail.

Cheryl Ganz is the Smithsonian chief curator of philately. The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation’s mail service and showcasing one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington, D.C., across from Union Station. For more information visit the museum website at www.postalmuseum.si.edu. ■

Arizona stamp show April 19-21

The Arizona Federation of Stamp Clubs will present the 55th annual Aripex 2013 stamp show April 19-21 at Mesa Convention Center, 263 N. Center St., Mesa, Ariz., a suburb of Phoenix.

The show hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday.

Admission is free.

The show’s theme is the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Arizona Territory.

The exhibitor winning the Aripex grand award will qualify for the American Philatelic Society’s Champion of Champions competition at Stampshow 2013, Aug. 8-11, at the Delta Center in Milwaukee, Wis.

The Aripex bourse will include more than 350 stamp and cover dealers, as well as a Stamps in the Attic feature that provides informal appraisals of philatelic items and collections brought into the show.

The show’s awards banquet will take place April 20 at 7 p.m., with a reception beginning at 6:15 p.m., at the show hotel: the Phoenix Marriott Mesa, 200 North Centennial Way, in Mesa, near the convention center.

The Buffalo Balloon Post will be the main feature of the Court of Honor exhibits. The 1877 Buffalo Balloon Post is considered by many as the first airmail stamp. On display will be a cover, one of two known, and a black die proof.

Auction houses holding meetings at the show include the American Air Mail Society, the American Revenue Association, the American Society of Check Collectors, the State Revenue Society and the United States Possessions Philatelic Society.

For more information about Aripex 2013, including additional hotel information, visit online at www.aripex.org. ■

Aland Post to launch auction house website

Aland Post announced March 12 that it will create a website auction house, Aland Auctions. The first auction is planned for November, according to information on the Aland Post website, www.posten.ax. The philatelic items to be offered are from consignors. ■