

# THE VERNEUKPAN SKELETON CANCELLERS OF 1929

**Malcolm Campbell's Attempt on the  
World Land Speed Records in South Africa**



1935. Reduced autographed menu from the banquet held at the Dorchester Hotel, London, September 24th 1935, in honour of Sir Malcolm Campbell following his setting of a new World Land Speed Record of 301.129 mph in Bluebird at the Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah, USA. He broke two World Records at Verneukpan, SA, in 1929 but not the one he wanted most.

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## PREFACE



### VRYPEX 1967

**“Vrypex 67” was a major philatelic exhibition held in Bloemfonten in the Orange Free State, South Africa, in October 1967 .**

**The ‘South African Philatelist’ magazine reported on Vrypex 67 in its December 1967 issue. Its article contained the extract below.**

***“Mrs A. E. Wannerton and Mr K. F. W. Lydall showed postal markings: both exhibits contained the 1929 Verneuk Pan cancellations but the wording on the canceller was set out differently in each case - there seems to be room for investigation by the postal historians”.***

**Both Mrs Wannerton and Mr Lydall were well-known and respected collectors of South African Postal History. These two luminaries often displayed at the “Royal Philatelic Society of Cape Town”.**

**This display investigates the Verneuk Pan Datestamps of 1929 and attempts to provide some answers to the question raised about the differences between them, as well as tell the wonderful story behind them.**

# **Captain Malcolm Campbell at Verneuk Pan 1929**

**In January 1929 Captain Malcolm Campbell set sail from Southampton for South Africa on the Union Castle Mail Ship "Carnarvon Castle" in an attempt to break the world speed record held by his rival Major Henry Seagrave.**

**See Sheet 4, 5 6 & 7**

**Campbell had decided upon a dry salt lake in South Africa called Verneuk Pan to make his attempt as he felt that previous sites he had used were now not suitable, despite the fact that the performance of his car would be affected by the rarefied air conditions at Verneuk Pan.**

**See Sheet 5 and 6**

**The Union postal authorities intended to publicize Campbell's attempt and in order to assist the press in reporting his efforts a temporary Field Post and Telegraph Office was arranged.**

**The Union Post Office Circular No. 554 of 4<sup>th</sup> February 1929 stated: "Verneuk Pan: A temporary Post and Telegraph Office will be opened at the Speedway to be known as Verneukpan on or about 4<sup>th</sup> February. Postal and Postal order business will be transacted. Wireless communications will be available for telegraph traffic. The inland telegraph rates will apply".**

**The office was opened on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1929 and remained open until 26<sup>th</sup> April 1929.**

**The Postmaster in charge of this post office was a Mr G. N. Grey who was a senior official of the South African Telegraph Department, based in Cape Town. He was also head of Division One, which was the Western District of the South African Radio Relay League which covered the Cape Province. Mr Grey had been given authority to use any means at his disposal for the dispatch of mail matters.**

**SIR MALCOLM CAMPBELL IN 1929**  
**“A MAN OF COURAGE IN A CONTINUOUS QUEST FOR SPEED”**



**A short illustrated history showing the four “Bluebirds” used by Sir Malcolm in his record attempts starting with number “1” which was used at Verneuk Pan.**

## VERNEUK PAN, GREAT BUSHMAN LAND - IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE



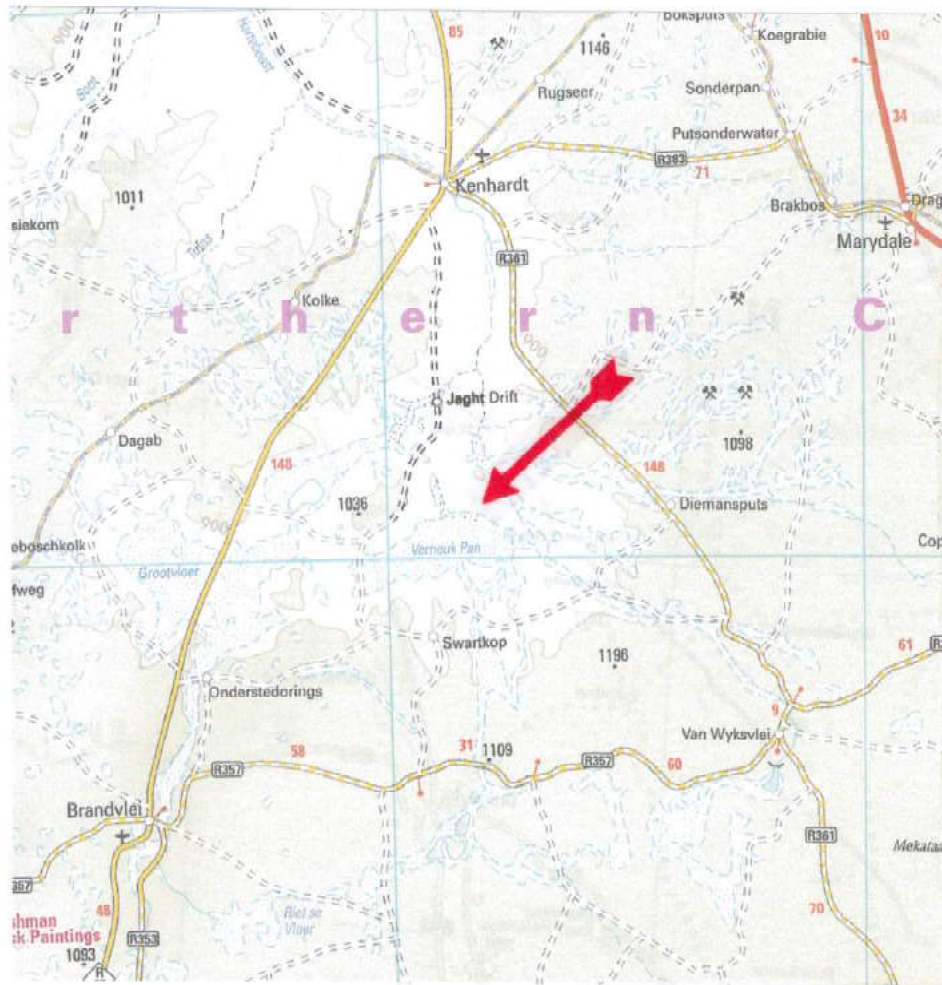
In 1929, Captain Campbell came to SA to attempt to break World Land Speed Record. His attempt to set a new World Record in SA attracted international attention. The site he chose was a remote dry lake in Great Bushmanland called Verneuk Pan. He under-estimated the remoteness of Verneuk Pan and its lack of support infrastructure. The SA Post Office opened a Temporary Verneuk Pan PO to support him and the media.



## VERNEUK PAN

This is a dry lake or “pan” in the district of Kenhardt, about 80 km south of that town. Formed by wind erosion, it contains water only after good rains. It is called “Verneukpan” (cheat pan) because of the deceptive mirages, or because the shallow expanse after the rains gives the false impression of an extensive lake, but the water evaporates in the dry climate within a few weeks. It covers an area of 27,335 ha. Its length is 56km (35 miles) and its minimum width 10km and is exceptionally flat and level.

The flats were used by Sir Malcolm Campbell in an unsuccessful attempt to break Major H. O. D. Seagrave’s speed record of 372km/hr with his Bluebird on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1929. He attained a speed of 351km/hr.



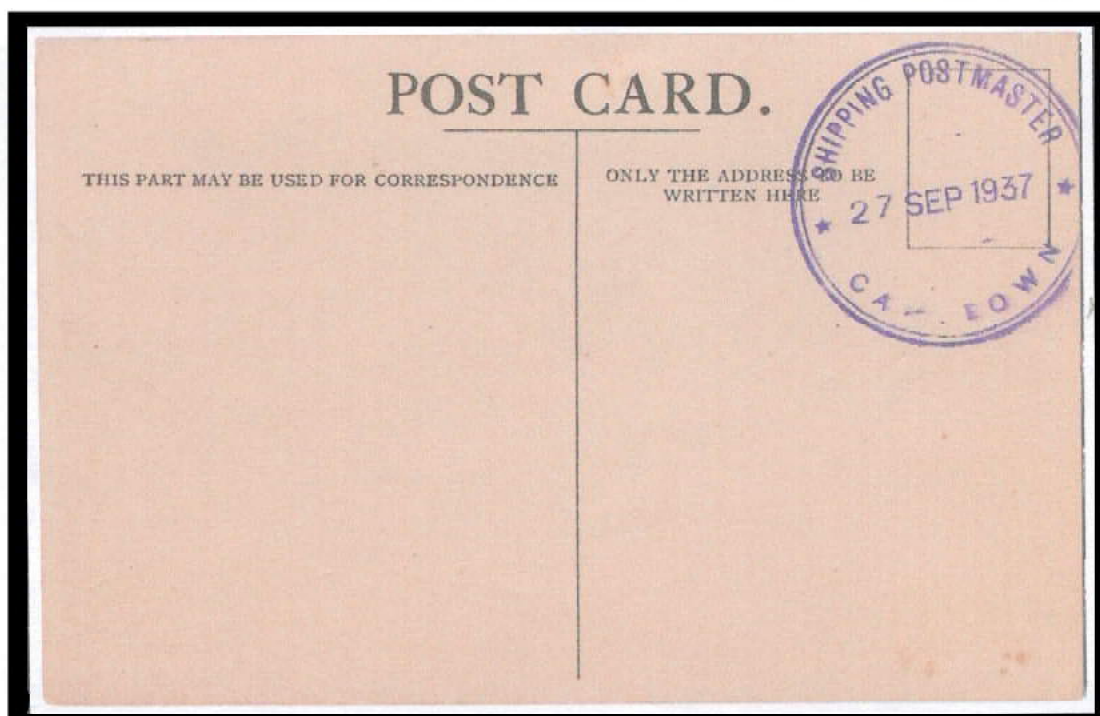
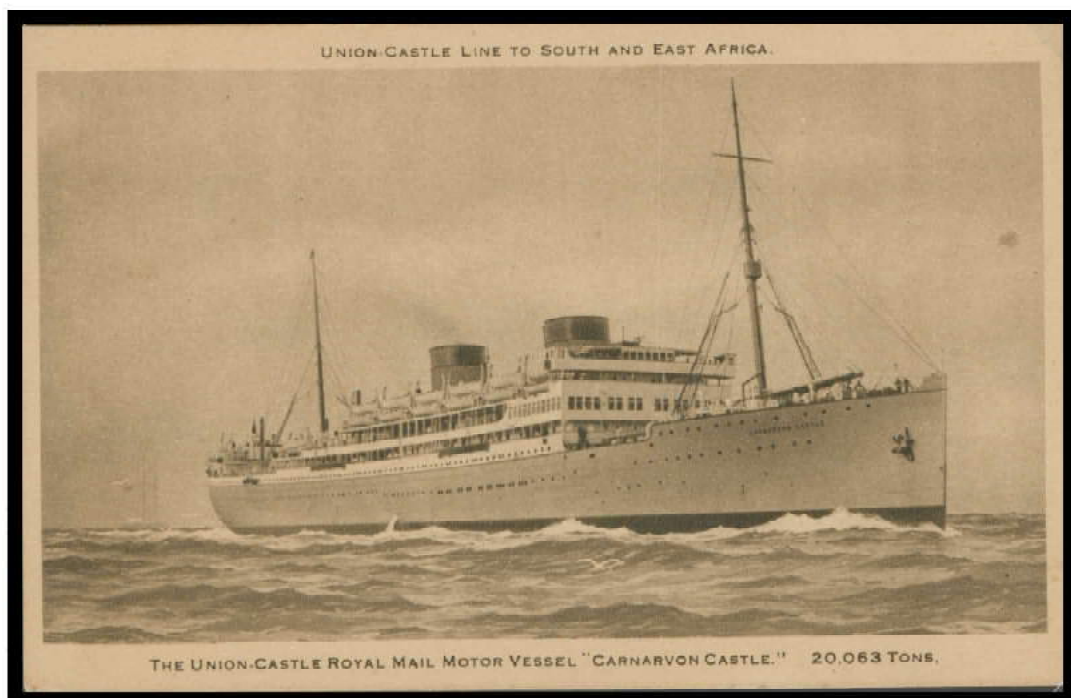
The Union Post Office Circular No. 554 of 4<sup>th</sup> February 1929 stated :  
“Verneukpan: A temporary Post and Telegraph Office will be opened at the Speedway to be known as Verneukpan on or about 4<sup>th</sup> February. Postal and Postal Order business will be transacted. Wireless communications will be available for telegraph traffic. The inland telegraph rates will apply”. The office was in fact opened on 8<sup>th</sup> February and remained open until 26<sup>th</sup> April 1929. Putzell lists mail from this period as very rare.

**THE UNION - CASTLE LINE ROYAL MAIL MOTOR VESSEL  
"CARNARVON CASTLE"**

**When Sir Malcolm Campbell left Southampton in January 1929 and set off to South Africa on his world record attempt at Verneuk Pan, he sailed on the "Carnarvon Castle"**

**The ship was built in 1926 and was the first Union-Castle mail ship to exceed 20,000 tons. It was requisitioned as an auxiliary cruiser by the Royal Navy during the Second World War and was scrapped in 1963.**

**The reverse of the postcard (not addressed) bears a scarce 40mm double circle violet rubber "Shipping Postmaster" date stamp (Dovey type 16) which was in use at Cape Town from 1933-39.**



**Campbell arrived at Cape Town on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1929. There was a short delay of 2 hours due to an outbreak of influenza before passengers were allowed to leave the ship. Campbell was meet by his South African representative and after customs clearance drove Campbell to his headquarters the Queen's Hotel at Sea Point.**

**See Sheet 9 (Next)**

**Campbell's arrival at Cape Town was well reported in "The Natal Mercury and Commercial Advertiser"**

**See Sheet 10**

**Campbell was accompanied by his wife and two children.**

**See Sheet 12**

**It would appear that the Postmaster Mr Grey and his staff, including his deputy a Mr Swan arrived at Verneuk Pan on the 7<sup>th</sup> February, this is supported by a postcard that Grey sent to his son the following day (8<sup>th</sup> February) on which he writes:..."Got here safely yesterday. O.K. Not as bad as painted. This goes down by first mail from this office"**

**See Sheet 14**

**Mr Grey had been given a skeleton date canceller kit and he produced the first of the three cancellations that were used at Verneuk Pan. This first one was used on the postcard to his son dated the 8<sup>th</sup> of February and is the only known recorded example.**

**See Sheet 14**

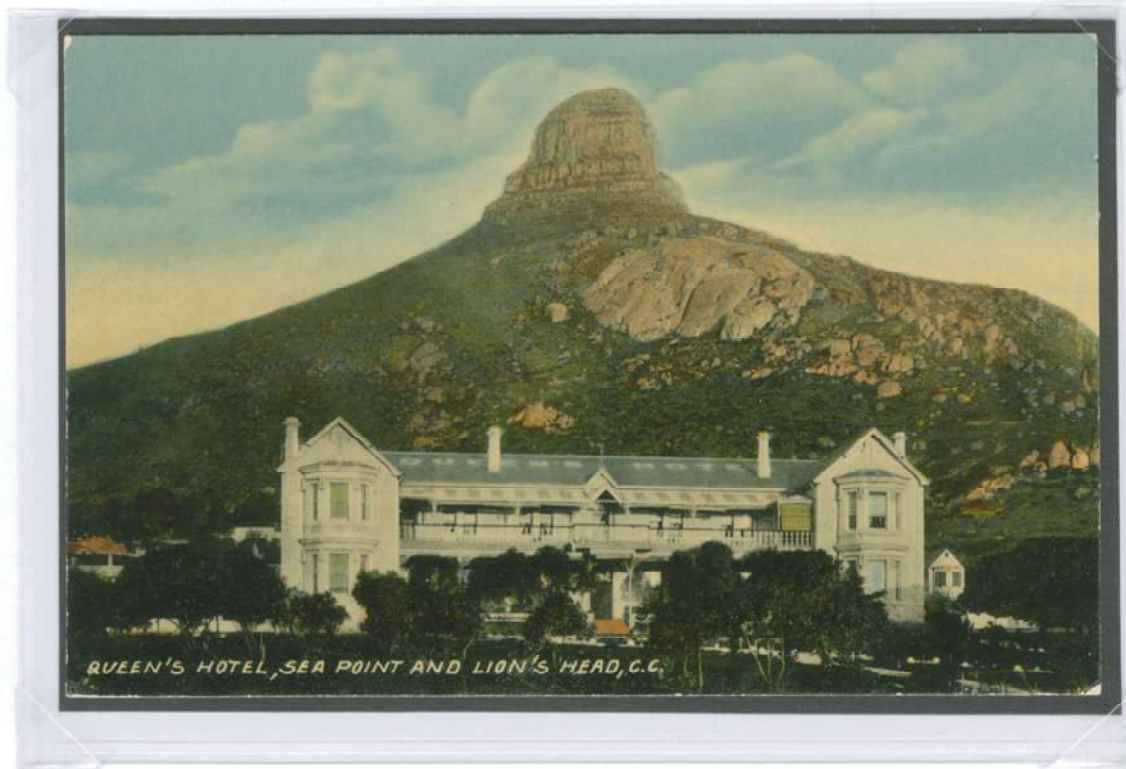
**The reverse of the postcard shows Grey's house in Cape Town ,Table Bay and Mountain and the logo of the South African Radio RelayLeague.**

**See Sheet 15**



## THE CAMPBELL'S RESIDENCE IN CAPE TOWN

On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1929 after arriving at Cape Town on the Carnarvon Castle and having completed the necessary Customs formalities, Campbell accompanied by his South African representative Mr Waters drove to the Queen's Hotel at Sea Point which was their headquarters during their stay in Cape Town.



Queen's Hotel Sea Point and Lion's Head.



Courtyard of the Queen's Hotel where dancing took place.

# The Natal Mercury

AND

COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1929.

## THE "BLUE BIRD" ARRIVES

CAPTAIN CAMPBELL  
IN CAPE TOWN

WORLD'S SPEED  
ATTEMPT

FAMOUS MOTORIST'S  
OPTIMISM

READY IN TEN DAYS'  
TIME

Capetown, Feb. 4.—The passenger in whom chief interest was centred when the Carnarvon Castle arrived at Capetown this morning was Captain Malcolm Campbell, who is to make his attempt on the world's motor speed record at Verneuk Pan. He was greeted by a number of friends and wellwishers, among whom were Mr. Waters, his representative in South Africa, and the secretary of the Royal Automobile Club, Mr. Macintyre.

In consequence of an outbreak of influenza aboard the mailboat there was a delay of more than two hours before the Capetown passengers were permitted to leave the ship, while the passengers for other ports were compelled to remain on board.

It was not until shortly before 10 o'clock, therefore, that Captain Malcolm Campbell, who looked remarkably fit, descended the gangway with his small daughter in his arms. The famous motorist at once became the target of a battery of cameras—an ordeal to which he smilingly submitted.

### The Blue Bird and an Airplane

Having completed the necessary Customs formalities, Captain Campbell, accompanied by Mr. Waters, drove to the Queen's Hotel, Sea Point, where he and Mrs. Campbell will probably make their headquarters during their stay in Capetown.

Captain Campbell brought with him, besides the Blue Bird, two Rudge-Whitworth motor-cycles, an airplane, a quantity of petrol and oil, and a number of spare parts for the car.

The Blue Bird is to be transferred direct from the ship's hold to a Thornycroft lorry, and conveyed to Verneuk Pan in its case. The airplane will be assembled at the Wynberg aerodrome.

In spite of the fact that he expects the Blue Bird will lose 11½ per cent. in efficiency owing to the altitude of Verneuk Pan, Captain Campbell is optimistic regarding his chances of breaking the world's speed record. He explained to an interviewer today that this loss of efficiency would probably be compensated for by a decreased wind resistance at the Pan.

"All reports of the track at Verneuk Pan are favourable, and I hope to make my attempt on the world's motor speed record in 10 days' time," said Captain Campbell. "But it is easier in this world, I find, to fail than to succeed. I am not going to try and guess what speed I may attain. One thing, however, seems certain. If I can do 160 miles an hour on the Verneuk Pan track in safety, then I can break the record. I shall study local conditions before adjusting my engine to its maximum efficiency for the altitude of the Pan."

### His Most Interesting Experiment.

Captain Campbell mentioned that the most vital point of all is the effect of the surface of the Pan on his tyres. He remarked that he was the pioneer of beach racing, but he realised that even Daytona Beach—which in his opinion is the hardest in the world—left much to be desired.

"Verneuk Pan is the most interesting experiment I have ever made," he said. "At present it can only be regarded as an experiment, and nothing but a run over the course can determine whether success is possible. If I do break the record there, no one will wish to race on treacherous beach sands again—Verneuk Pan will be the centre of high-speed motor racing in the world."

"When I am on the job I like to finish it as soon as possible," proceeded Captain Campbell. "The work of clearing the track at the Pan will be hurried on, and, as I have said, I am confident that it will be ready in two days' time. After that I shall be a free agent, but I hope to do something for British trade in South Africa before I return to England."

Captain Campbell, who was received by the Governor-General at Government House this morning, is not quite certain when he will proceed to the Pan, but he may motor there to-morrow or the next day.—(Reuter.)

### How the World Will be Told

Synchronising with Captain Campbell's arrival in Capetown, another lorry left for Verneuk Pan this morning, this time laden with wireless apparatus for the field post office which is to be established there. Mr. Grey, who is in charge of the station, in an interview with Reuter, stated that owing to the kind co-operation of the South African Radio Relay League the Post Office had decided to establish a post office at the Pan, which would be linked by means of two wireless transmitting stations with two amateur receiving stations at Capetown, which have been kindly placed at the disposal of the Post Office. By means of this "wireless" post office, telegrams will be dispatched and received at Verneuk Pan from Capetown, and Press matter will also be handled.

The power of the main transmitting set to be used will be 50 watts, and Mr. Grey said he hoped, if possible, to keep up constant communication with receiving communication with the receiving stations

(Continued from Column Six.)

throughout the day and night. Three sets in all are being taken. One will be operated by dry batteries, while a generator is also being taken to supply power to the second set, the third set being kept as a stand-by.

"Our path will be beset with difficulties," said Mr. Grey, "principally as regards actual operating conditions, as we are using small power and the 'fade out' period, which generally sets in about sunset every evening, will no doubt trouble us a great deal, but we are fairly optimistic, and will do all in our power to cope with as many messages as we can."

A special post office staff will be in charge of the actual sending and reception of messages. Thus by this means the whole of South Africa, and even the world, ought to know the result of Captain Campbell's great attempt on the speed record within a few minutes of its completion.—(Reuter.)

## NO OTHER RECORD TO BE ATTEMPTED

ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB'S  
DECISION

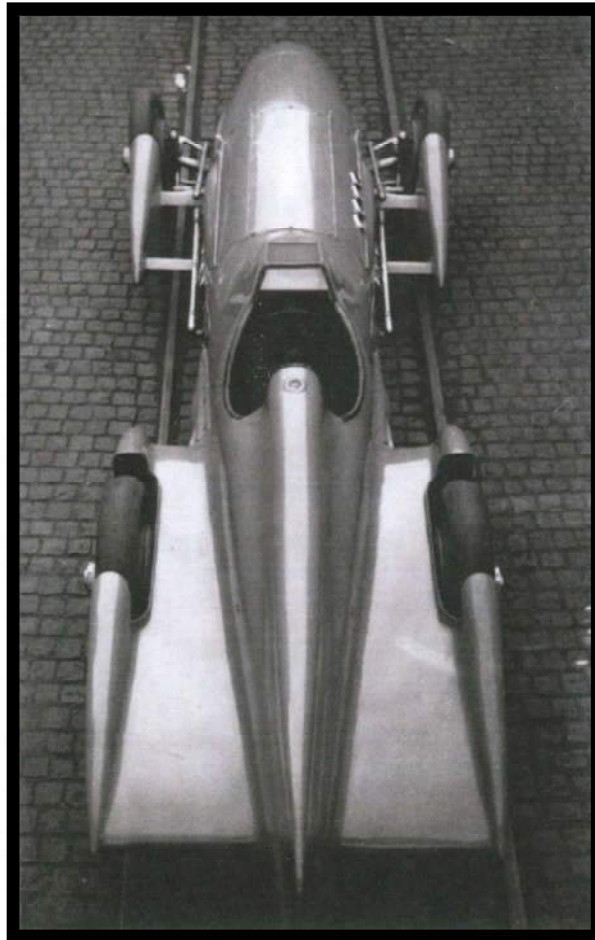
Capetown, Feb. 4.—Reuter is officially authorised to state that as the Royal Automobile Club of South Africa has not yet completed arrangements for the conduct of speed events on Verneuk Pan, all those interested are hereby notified that the only event which can be authorised is that of Captain Malcolm Campbell. No other event of any character will be permitted.—(Reuter.)

With

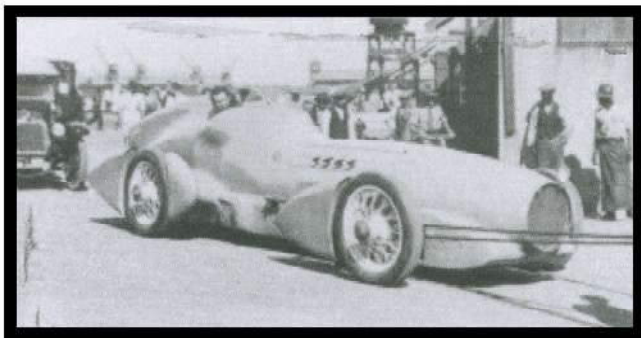
J. Chamberlain  
Compt

"Scafolk" Albion Place Stamford Hill  
BURGAN-NATAL

## BLUEBIRD

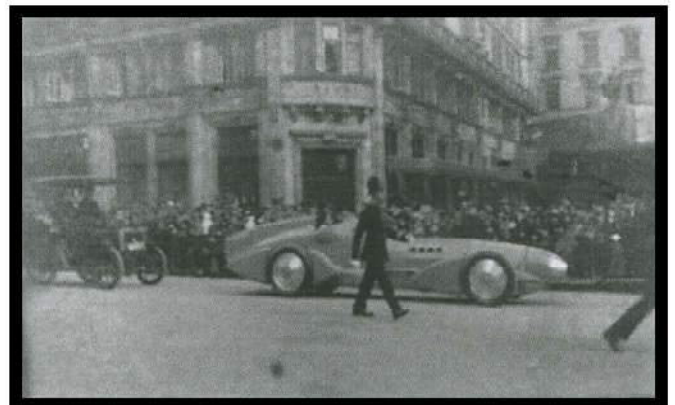


## BLUEBIRD



Arriving in Cape Town from the  
"Carnarvon Castle" with 56 crates  
of spares, 800 gallons of aviation  
fuel and a light aeroplane.

The Lord Mayor's Parade in London



CAPTAIN MALCOLM CAMPBELL PREPARES TO LEAVE  
WYNBERG AIRFIELD FOR VERNEUKPAN

4

1929.

CAMPBELL TO TRY TO-DAY



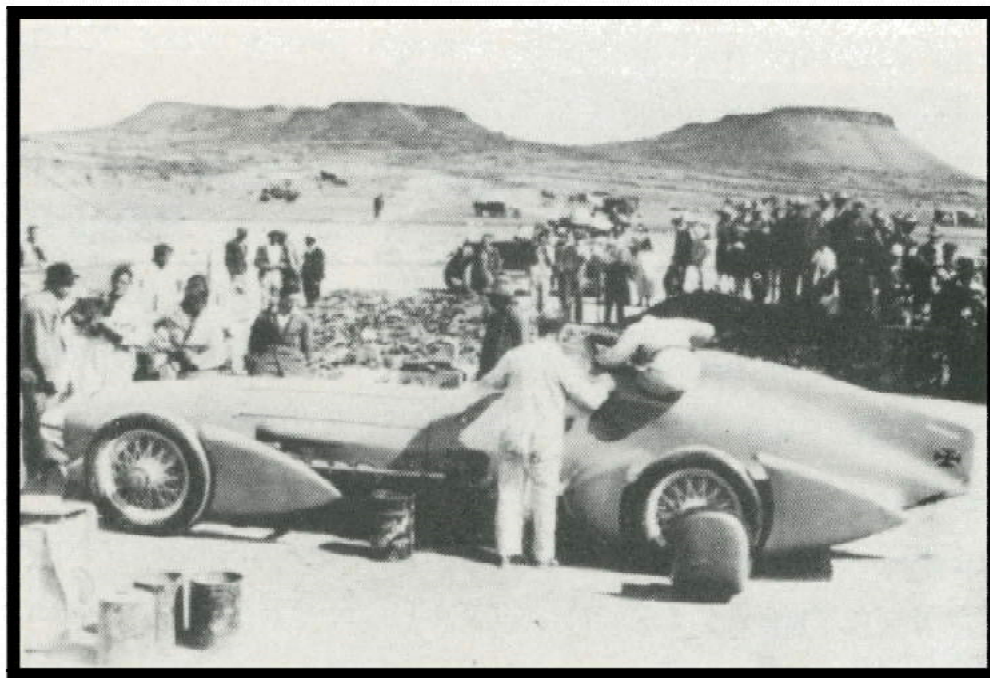
Captain Malcolm Campbell, who will to-day attempt at Verneuk Pan, South Africa, to beat the motor-car speed record of 231 m.p.h. made by Major Segrave, with his wife and children.

SEE BACK OF PAGE

## THE CAMP AT VERNEUKPAN



**Two photos showing the primitive conditions of the camp at Verneukpan. Light aircraft provided the quickest way in and out. On arrival, Campbell learned that it would take a further nine weeks to clear and level a speedway track**

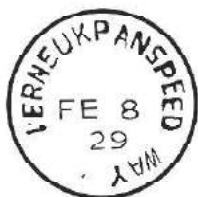


**Preparations for the attempt on the World Land Speed Records drew spectators from far and wide. Bluebird was a vision of the future.**

**The aircraft top is possibly Eric Penny's Avro Avian. It is also possible that this photo shows Penny and Campbell about to depart Verneuk Pan for Cape Town on 24th February. They would overnight in Clanwilliam.**

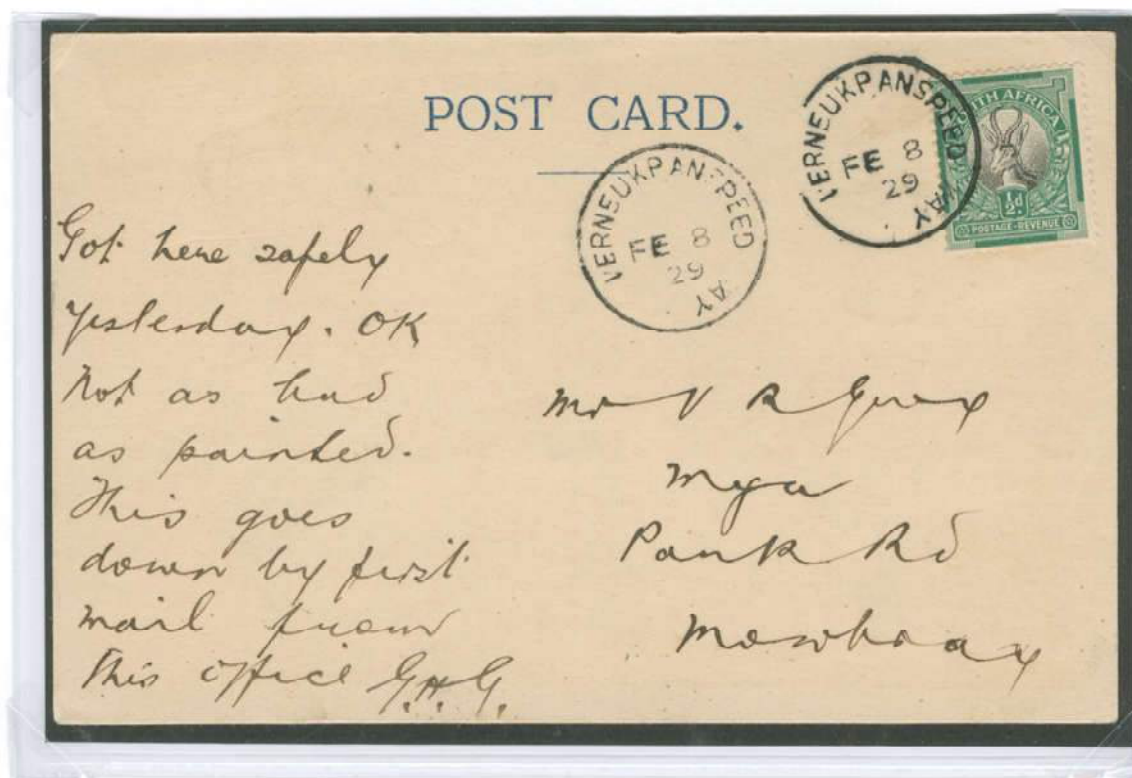
## SPECIAL SKELETON DATE CANCELLER

“World speed attempt by Captain Malcolm Campbell”



1<sup>st</sup> Skeleton Date Cancellor 8<sup>th</sup> February 1929

A special field post office was set up on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1929 at Verneuk Pan by Mr G. N. Grey a senior post office official who was authorised to use any means at his disposal for the dispatch of mail matters. Upon his arrival on the 7<sup>th</sup> February he produced the first of three skeleton date cancellers, which he put into effect the following day (8<sup>th</sup>).



The above radio card sent by Mr G. N. Grey to his son in Cape Town tells of his arrival at Verneuk Pan and states that the card “...goes down by first mail from this office”.

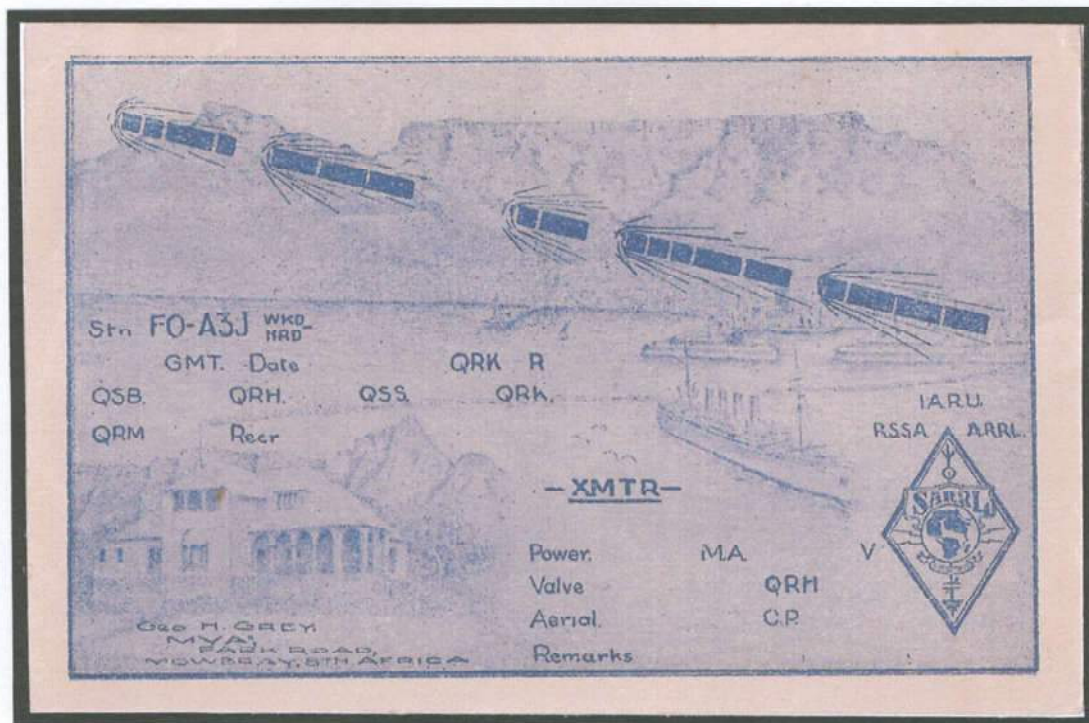
This date stamp was only used for one day (8<sup>th</sup>) and is the only recorded example of it which Reisener records as unique.

This interesting and truly unique card was, according to Hasso Reisener, ‘*The Special Commemorative Postmarks, Cachets & Covers of SA*’, previously in the possession of Ken Lydall of Johannesburg. (See Preface).

## REVERSE OF 8<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 1929 RADIO CARD

The radio card sent by Mr Grey to his son was issued by the South African Radio Relay League.

The card shows views of Table Mountain, Table Bay, Cape Town Docks and "Mya" which was the home address of Mr Grey (shown at bottom left) who was the postmaster in charge of the field and telegraph post office at Verneuk Pan.



Mr Grey was a senior official of the South African Telegraph Department which was based in Cape Town. He was also head of Division One, which was the Western District of the South African Radio Relay League which covered the Cape Province.

Mr Grey's call sign was "A3J" which is shown on the radio card (middle left). Members of the league used to hold regular committee meetings in their homes and in one instance in the Fire Station in Cape Town.

## SPECIAL SKELETON DATE CANCELLER

**“World speed attempt by Captain Malcolm Campbell”**



### 2nd Skeleton Date Cancellor 9<sup>th</sup> February 1929

The first skeleton date canceller was only used for one day, the 8<sup>th</sup> February and for some unknown reason Mr Grey changed the layout of the words and on the following day (9<sup>th</sup> February) the 2<sup>nd</sup> skeleton canceller was used.

It is not known how long this canceller was in use, as the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final canceller has been recorded in use on 13<sup>th</sup> February, four days later.

Although the maximum period of its use would have been 4 days only two recorded copies of this canceller have been noted, both dated the 9<sup>th</sup>.



Only two copies of this date stamp are known, both having been in the collection of Mrs Alicia Wannerton of Cape Town. Reisener in his book on Special Postmarks and Covers of South Africa records them as unique.

Mrs Alicia Wannerton exhibited at Vrypex 67 alongside Ken Lydall where they both showed Verneukpan skeleton cancellers. (See Preface).



## SPECIAL SKELETON DATE CANCELLER

“World speed attempt by Captain Malcolm Campbell



### 3<sup>rd</sup> Skeleton Cancellation – Earliest recorded use

It is not known for certain when the Verneuk Pan postmaster Mr Grey first used his 3<sup>rd</sup> and final skeleton canceller, but the earliest recorded usage of it to date is 13<sup>th</sup> February 1929 (see cover below).

This cancellation was used until the closure of the field post office on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1929. One suggestion for the change of format was that by having “V.P.N.” at the base it complied with the requirement that date stamps should be bilingual.



**Earliest record use of this date stamp – 13<sup>th</sup> February 1929** Although this is the more common date stamp seen, it is still rated by Putzel as very rare.

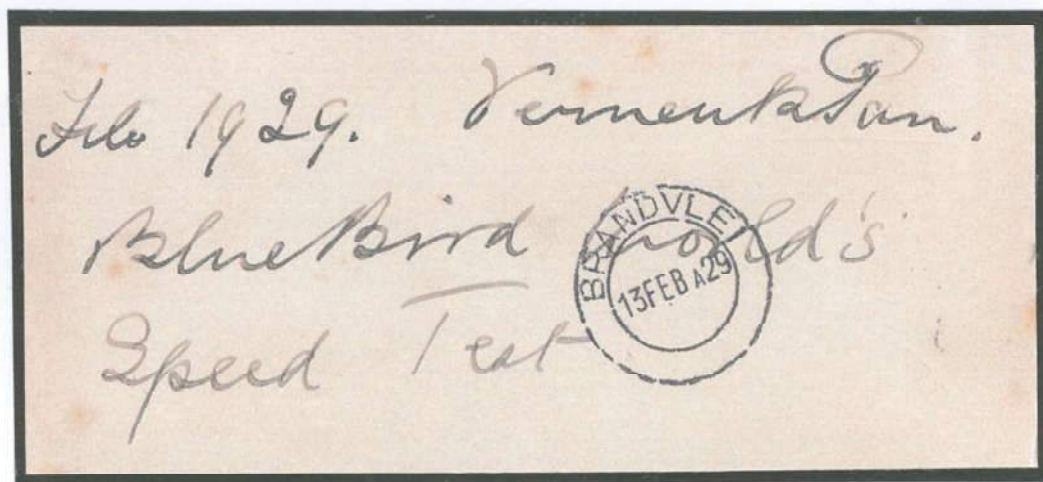
## SPECIAL SKELETON DATE CANCELLER

“World Speed Attempt by Captain Malcolm Campbell”



3<sup>rd</sup> Skeleton Canceller – Earliest recorded use

It is not known for certain when Mr Grey, the Verneuk Pan Postmaster first used his 3<sup>rd</sup> and final skeleton canceller. The earliest recorded usage to date is 13<sup>th</sup> February 1929 (see postcard below). It has also been recorded on a cover to England.



Reverse shows transit 25mm double circle date stamp from Brandvlei the head office of Verneuk Pan.

**Mr Grey sent another item of mail on the 24<sup>th</sup>, this was a registered letter to a Mr. V.S. Peers of Cape Town in which Grey replied to a note that Peer's had sent him. What is unusual is that Grey's reply is written on a Post Office Telegraph Form.**

**On it he writes ".....Your letter is going back by airplane if I can get Penny (Campbell's pilot) to take it back with him tonight...."  
This is could be the only recorded example of a Telegraph Form being used at Verneuk Pan.**

**Sheet 22, 24 and 25**

**Penny and Campbell took off during the evening of the 24<sup>th</sup> and flew to Clanwilliam for an overnight stop. Whilst taking off in the morning Penny's Avian plane struck the top of a 30foot tree and crashed. Penny sustained serious injuries whilst Campbell was badly cut on the nose and lips.**

**Sheet 23**

**Major A.M.Miller who was speaking in the Houses of Parliament upon hearing the news of the crash flew to Clanwilliam in Campbell's own aeroplane "Blue Bird", which had just finished an overhaul. He returned at 4pm with Campbell and arrived at 6.45pm at Maitland aerodrome. Whilst wheeling "Blue Bird" into the hanger a sudden gust of wind overturned the plane onto them both re-opening Campbell's cuts. Campbell had been in two incidents during the past 24 hours.**

**The twelve items of mail that had been on Penny's plane were forwarded by rail to Cape Town.**

**This flight of Campbell's on 24<sup>th</sup> February in which Grey authorised the mail to be carried on, would appear to be the only example of him exercising his discretion of how to dispose of the mail.**



**VERNEUK PAN SPECIAL AUTHORISED AIR MAIL FLIGHT  
23RD FEBRUARY 1929**

According to the Postmaster, Mr Gray there was a small amount of mail to be sent to Brandvlei (local head office) but as Campbell and Penny were flying back the next day to Cape Town he incorporated that mail with the mail of the 24<sup>th</sup>.



One of the items of mail of the 23<sup>rd</sup> was signed by Penny (see above). The plane left Verneuk Pan on the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> and after an overnight stop at Clanwilliam took off the following morning. However it crashed into a tree and Penny was seriously hurt with Campbell receiving minor cuts. The mail was recovered, sent to Brandvlei and then forwarded to Cape Town by train. No more than 12 items of mail were carried on the plane.



**Reverse of cover with Brandvlei transit date stamp.**

Crash mail from Clanwilliam believed to have been returned to Brandvlei (Verneukpan HO) dated 25th February 1929 for forwarding to Cape Town by road and train.

VERNEUK PAN SPECIAL AUTHORISED AIR MAIL FLIGHT  
24<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 1929



As stated, after inspecting Verneuk Pan on 23rd and 24th, Captain Campbell and his pilot, Eric Penny, decided to return to Cape Town late in the afternoon of 24th.

The postmaster, George Grey, authorised the two men to carry the mail for that day, and possibly also for the preceding day, to Cape Town. As it was late, the two men decided to overnight in Clanwilliam. Twelve items of mail are known to have been carried on the flight, two being Registered Mail items, No.s 605 and 606.

After the plane crash the next morning, the mail was recovered. It would have made sense not to send the mail to remote Brandvlei but to forward it directly by road and rail, the shortest and quickest route, direct to Cape Town. Interestingly, there is no Brandvlei transit stamp on the Registered Mail item No. 606.



Reverse of above cover showing the 3<sup>rd</sup> skeleton datestamp used by Mr Grey.

VERNEUK PAN SPECIAL AUTHORISED AIR MAIL FLIGHT  
24<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 1929



Photograph of the crashed Avian plane at Clanwilliam which was flown by Mr Penny with Captain Campbell as his passenger. When the noted aviator Major Miller who was speaking in the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town heard of Campbell's accident, he immediately left the House and flew in Campbell's "Bluebird" plane which was at Maitland Aerodrome to pick him up.

Upon returning to Maitland with Campbell, as they were wheeling the aircraft into the hanger, a sudden gust of wind overturned the plane injuring both persons. Campbell therefore had been involved in two plane accidents within 24 hours.

Sunday 24. 2 - 29 ✓  
 Aerial & counterpoise altered  
 3:30 ZSW here OK. no press to stand yet  
 4:20 mail per plane to Ctn ← →  
 4:30 Press for Oversea  
 ZSW complains abt note  
 5:30 adjusted OK.  
 7:10 PM sent 950 via post. 9/11 (NS)  
 UK PAN

Extract from the postmaster's log book showing details of the Cape Town flight.

POST OFFICE TELEGRAPH FORM DATED  
24TH FEBRUARY 1929

Post Office Telegraph Form dated 24<sup>th</sup> February 1929 hand written by the Postmaster Mr George Gray to Mr V. S. Peers of Cape Town, thanking him for his note and informing him that no special stamps were used at Verneuk Pan.


He also informed him that he would ask Campbell's pilot Mr Penny to carry his reply by plane. Mr Grey had been authorised to any means available to him for the forwarding of mail. He also stated he was in a terrific hurry. The form is stamped (top right) by the 3<sup>rd</sup> skeleton date stamp used by Mr Grey.

5411—22/6/28—40,000-100. 8 T. 6.

**POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.**

**SERVICE MESSAGE.**

Prefix.....Received at.....	Sent at.....To.....
From.....	By.....
By.....	By.....

DATE STAMP.  


To.....

.....*via*.....

Thanks for your note  
by plane no spe stamps but your  
letter is going back by  
airplane. if I can get  
penny to take it back  
with him tonight.  
In a terrific hurry  
as I've only a minute to  
spare,  
Yrs sincerely  
*Geo W Gray*

Signature of Sender.....

This is probably the only known recorded example of a Telegraph Form used at Verneuk Pan.



**GREY'S LETTER & COVER TO PEERS RE-UNITED**



5411-22/6/28-40,000-100. ■ T. S.

**POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.**

**SERVICE MESSAGE.**

Prefix..... Received at..... Sent at..... To.....

From..... By.....

To.....

DATE STAMP.

Thanks for your note  
 by plane no real stamps but your  
 letter is going back by  
 airplane if I can get  
 penny to take it back  
 with him tonight  
 In a terrific hurry  
 as I've only a minute to  
 spare  
 Yrs Sincerely  
 J. W. Grey

Signature of Sender.....

LOG OF EVENTS

Temporary Post Office Skeleton Datestamp 'VPN' : Feb - April 1929

Small print to Beunderling



3:30 on  
about 10:00 press

Sunday 24. 2-29

Aerial & counterpoise altered  
3:30 Zsw here OK. no press to hand yet  
4:20 mail per plane to CTW  
4:30 Press for Overseas  
Zsw complains abt note  
5:30 adjusted OK.  
7:10 PM sent 950 wds press GPN (MS)



58 x 1 90 x 1 10 x 1  
215 x 4 320 x 16 160 x 1

9am Open  
9:15 Zsw OK slight changes in  
have at 7:05  
9:22 clear both way next call 9:45  
1:15 all clear Dsw

**I have a contemporary photograph taken at Verneuk Pan by the Cape Times Service showing Campbell and his mechanics (signed by Campbell) alongside “Bluebird”.**

**Sheet 28 and 29**

**I have two registered covers both dated March 13<sup>th</sup> 1929 sent by the same person to a Mr. R. Oxenham, 136 Long Street, Cape Town. The manuscript numbers on the front indicate that other similar covers were sent as well.**

**Sheet 30 and 31**

**A lettercard (written in German) posted April 22<sup>nd</sup> states that “.....A terrible wind chased us away. We saw a good attempt to break the world record yesterday.....”**

**Sheet 32 and 33**

**The last known recorded date stamps are from April 26<sup>th</sup> (I have seen one other written by the same sender) stating that Campbell had set up a new five mile and five kilometres world record that day.**

**Sheet 35**

**Campbell regained the world speed record in 1935 at Daytona Beach in 1935.**

**Sheet 41 and 42**

**SIGNED PHOTOGRAPH**  
See Next for Rotated View



Contemporary photograph of Sir Malcolm Campbell taken at Verneuk Pan in 1929 on his attempt to break the world speed record. The photograph was taken by "The Cape Times Service" from Cape Town and shows Campbell, mechanics and possibly his wife standing around "Bluebird". The photograph is signed by Campbell.

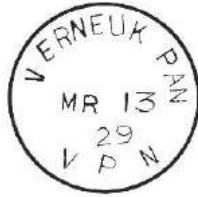


Contemporary photograph of Sir Malcolm Campbell taken at Verneuk Pan in 1929 on his attempt to break the world speed record. The photograph was taken by "The Cape Times Service" from Cape Town and shows Campbell, mechanics and possibly his wife standing around "Bluebird". The photograph is signed by Campbell.

**Rotated and Reduced  
See Previous**

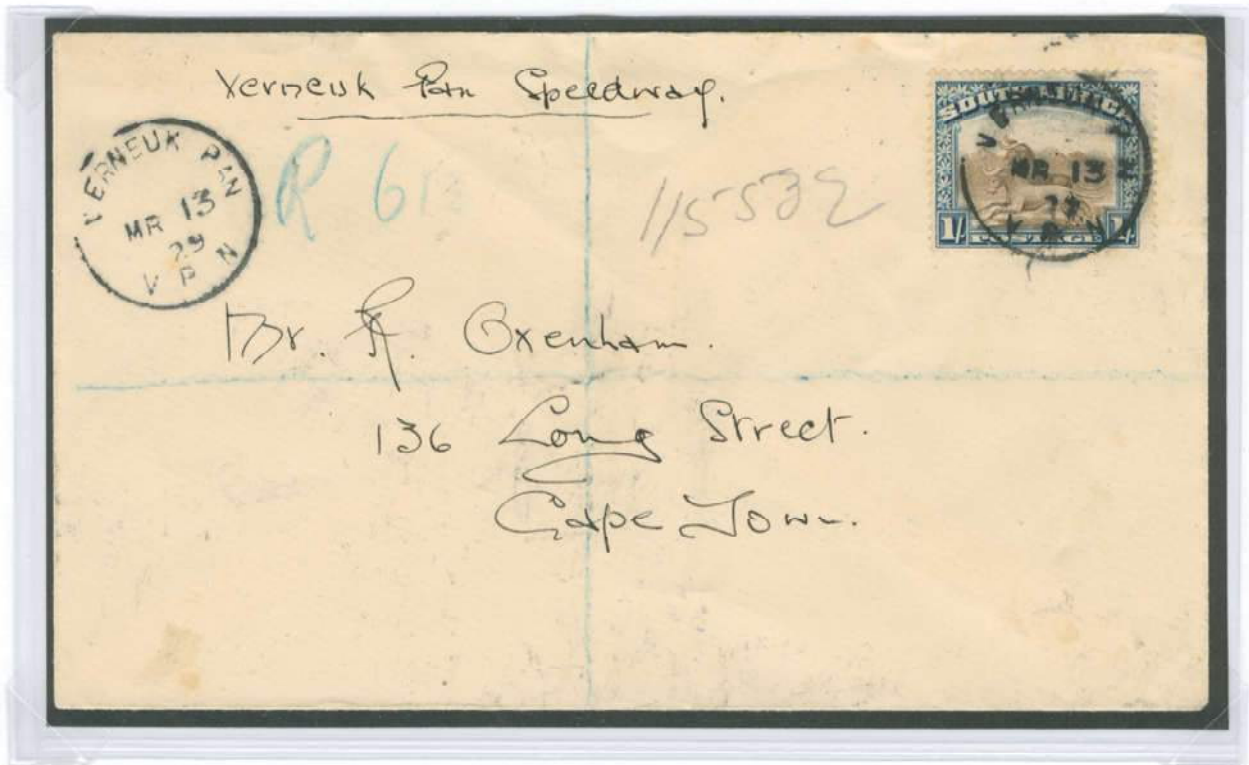
## SPECIAL SKELETON DATE CANCELLER

**“World speed attempt by Captain Malcolm Campbell”**

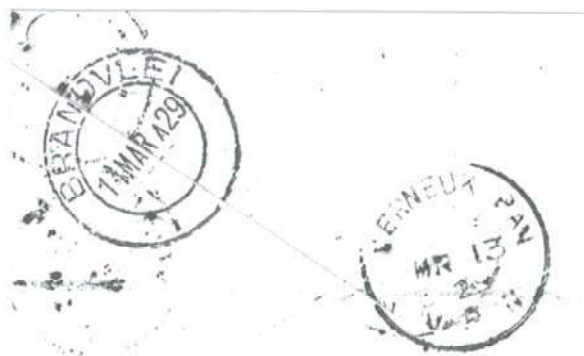


### 3rd Skeleton Date Cancellor

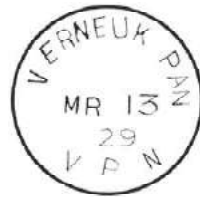
The above was the third and final skeleton date canceller prepared by Mr Grey. It is not known for certain when he introduced this canceller but the earliest recorded date of its use is the 13<sup>th</sup> February and it remained in use until the field post office was closed on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1929.



Registered letter from Vernuek Pan to Cape Town dated the 13<sup>th</sup> March, backstamped with “Brandvlei” which was the Head Office for this temporary postal agency.



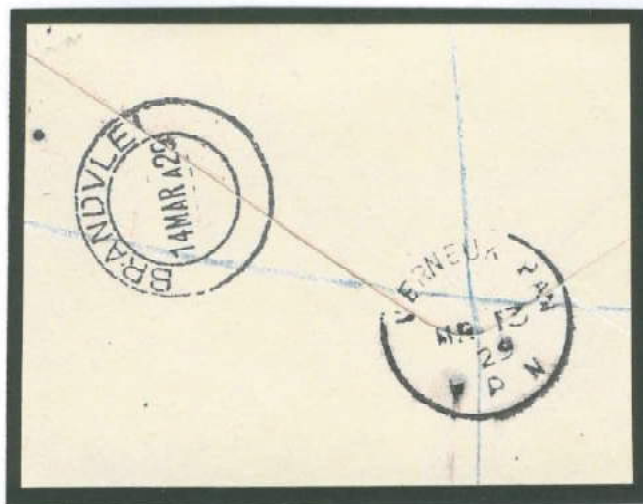
## VERNEUK PAN -THIRD AND FINAL DATESTAMP



The postmaster Mr Grey produced his third and final skeleton date stamp probably on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1929. It has “VPN” at the base which was an abbreviation for Verneuk Pan which Grey believed made it into a bilingual date stamp. It continued in use until 26<sup>th</sup> April 1929.



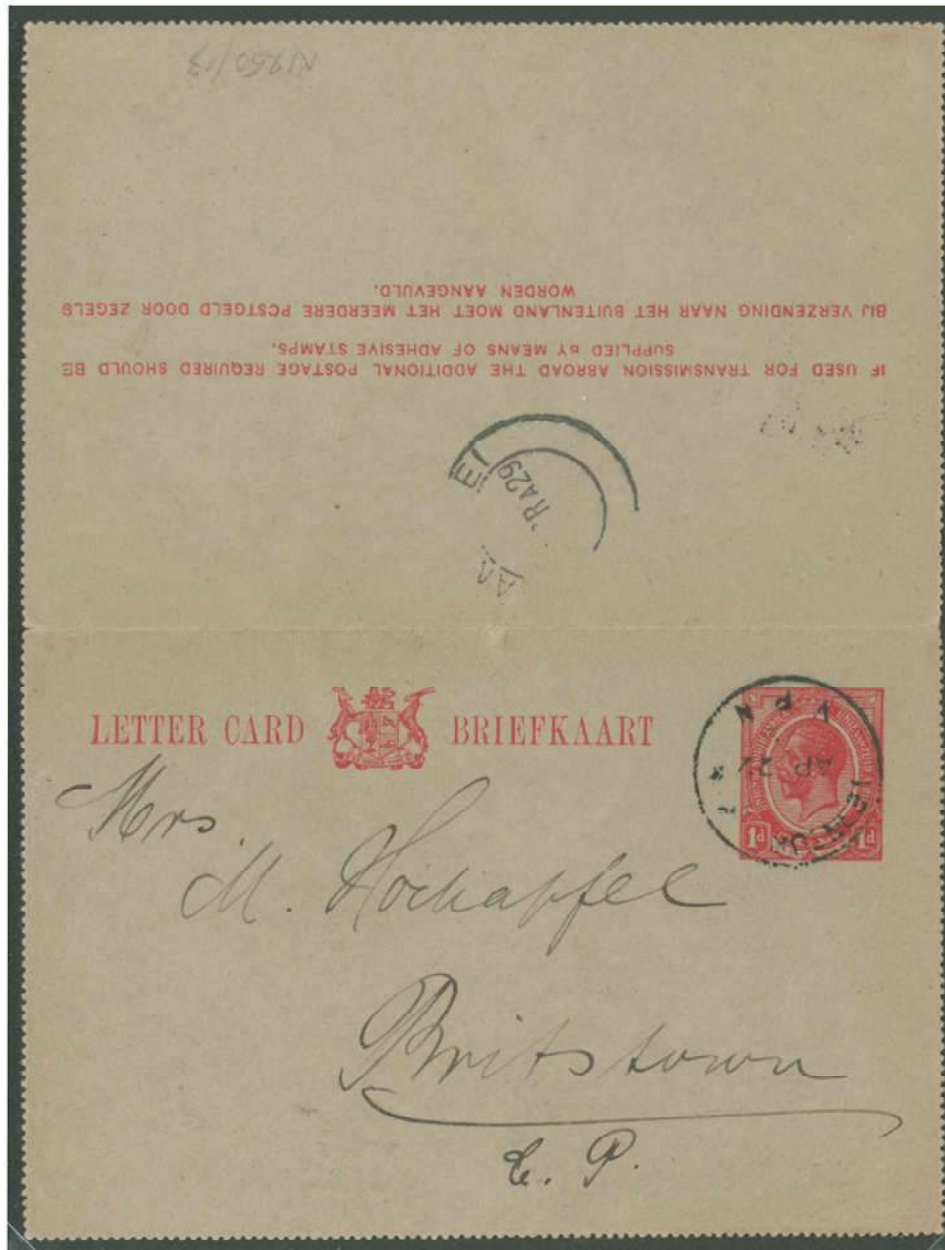
Registered letter with a block of four 11/2d KGV “Tete-Beche” stamps, franked by four strikes of this date stamp with other at top left all dated Mar 13 29. The blue manuscript numbers at bottom left are a record of the postman’s round.



Backstamped with another “VPN” datestamp and 25mm double circle date stamp from Brandvlei (local head office) dated 14 Mar 29.

## CAPTAIN CAMPBELL ATTEMPTS TO BREAK THE RECORD

After nine weeks of delay due to rain and an unsuitable stoney track that required levelling, Captain Campbell was finally ready to make trial runs by the 19th April 1929. The excitement surrounding this event drew onlookers from far and wide.



This letter card from Verneukpan to Britstown in the Cape Province was accepted at the temporary post office and cancelled on the 22nd April. See the reverse overleaf dated "Blue Bird's - Verneuk - Pan 22/IV/29. 11am" It says that "a terrible wind chased us away. We saw a good attempt to break the World Record yesterday..." This is likely the 21st April.



Blue Bird's - Verneuk Pan 22/IV/29

Blue Bird's - Verneuk - Pan  
22/IV/29 . 11. am.  
Gedränglicher Wind jagt  
heut uns alle mit fort  
Nachdem wir gestern einen  
pressantigen "Versuch"  
zum Brechen des Welt-  
Records gesehen haben.  
Leben habe ich auch  
"traudlos" telegraphiert  
dass ich hoffe morgen  
Vormittag dabeiin zu  
sein.  
Herzlichste Grüsse  
Dein treuer Reinhardt

"Blue Bird's - Verneuk - Pan 22/IV/29. 11am"

"A terrible wind chased us away. We saw a good attempt to break the World Record yesterday...."

## 215 Miles Per Hour

Capt. Campbell Has a Fine  
Trial Run.

### BUMP THRILL.

16 Miles Short of Major  
Segrave's Record.

VERNEUK PAN (S. Africa),  
19.4.1929. Friday.

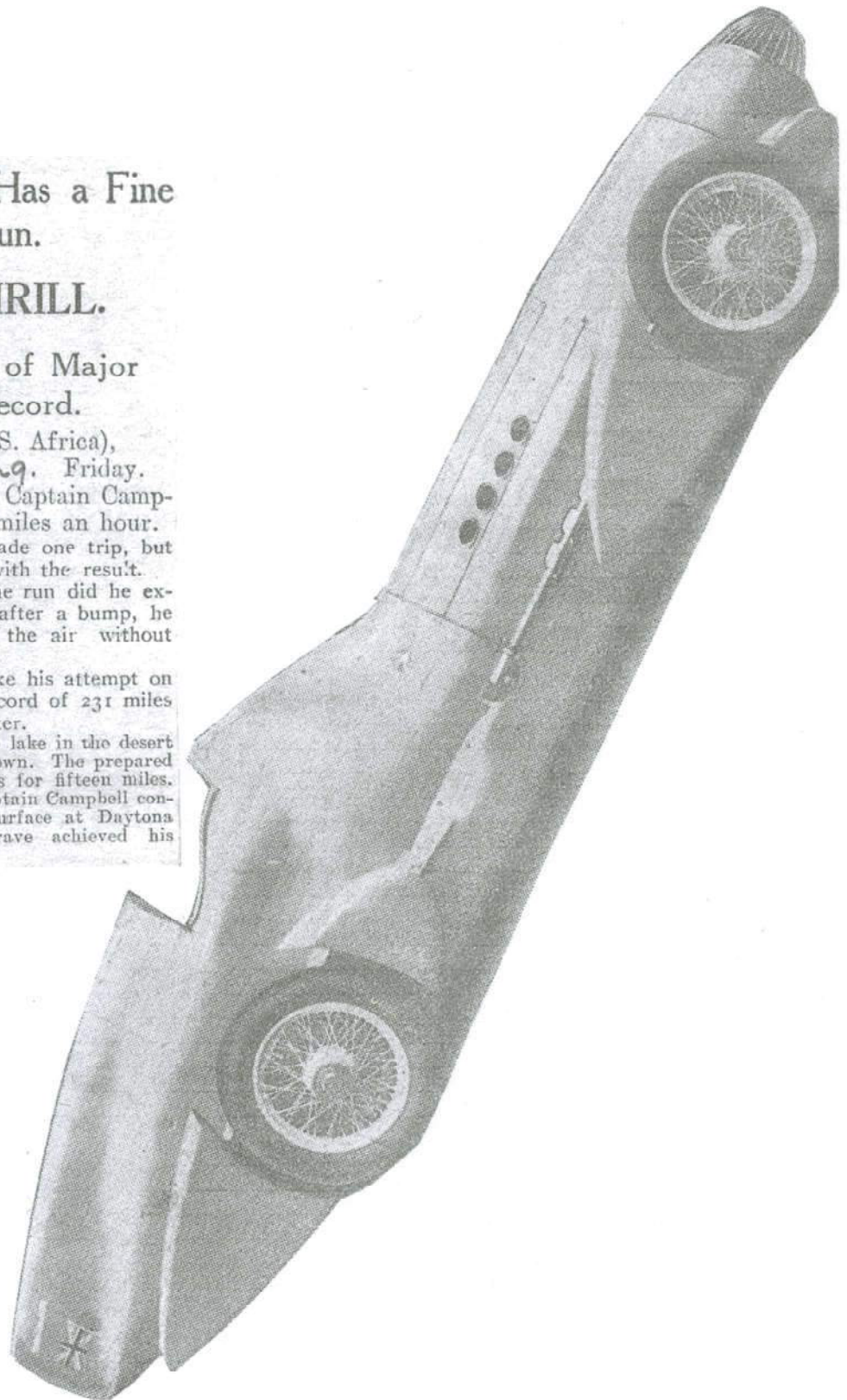
**I**N a trial here to-day Captain Campbell touched 215 miles an hour.

Capt. Campbell only made one trip, but he was highly satisfied with the result.

Only at one stage of the run did he experience difficulty, when, after a bump, he travelled 30 feet through the air without touching the track.

Capt. Campbell will make his attempt on the world's land speed record of 231 miles an hour to-morrow.—Reuter.

Verneuk Pan is a dried-up lake in the desert about 475 miles from Capetown. The prepared surface of the track extends for fifteen miles. It is of sun-baked clay. Captain Campbell considers it superior to the surface at Daytona Sands, where Major Segrave achieved his record.



**It is difficult to imagine today just how modern and revolutionary Bluebird's design was in 1929, a time when motor vehicles were still an uncommon sight in the remote rural areas of South Africa. The sight of any vehicle other than a donkey cart or ox-wagon at Verneuk Pan in 1929 was unusual; the sight of Bluebird would have been truly extraordinary, even when paraded through Cape Town. It was a breath-taking glimpse of a space-age future five years before Flash Gordon appeared as an American cartoon strip character in 1934!**

## SPECIAL SKELETON DATE CANCELLER

“World speed attempt by Captain Malcolm Campbell

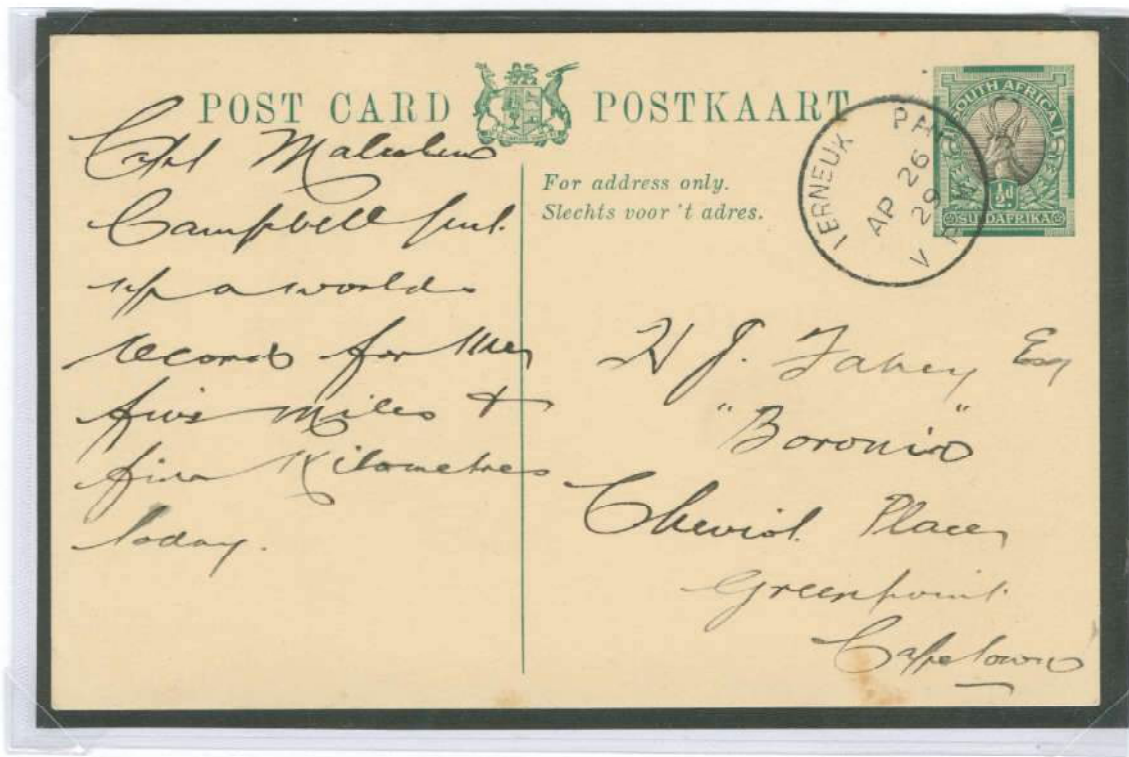


3<sup>rd</sup> Skeleton Cancellor – latest recorded use

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and final skeleton canceller used by the Verneuk Pan postmaster Mr Grey was known to be in use from 13<sup>th</sup> February until 26<sup>th</sup> April 1929 when the field post office was closed.

Despite the 9 week period the post office was open mail is not often seen as the main purpose of the office was to provide both mail and telegraph facilities to the press who were present.

The postcard below dated the 26<sup>th</sup> April records that the day before (25<sup>th</sup> April) Captain Campbell had broken both the 5 mile and 5 kilometre world speed records.



Last record use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> skeleton canceller dated 26<sup>th</sup> April 1929.

## CAPTAIN CAMPBELL BREAKS TWO RECORDS AT VERNEUK PAN



**CAPT. CAMPBELL'S  
WORLD'S RECORDS**

FIVE MILES AT **212** MILES PER HOUR

was accomplished by Captain Malcolm Campbell at Verneuk Pan. This further British success follows Sir Henry Segrave's 231 m.p.h. for one mile at Daytona—the World's Land Speed Record.

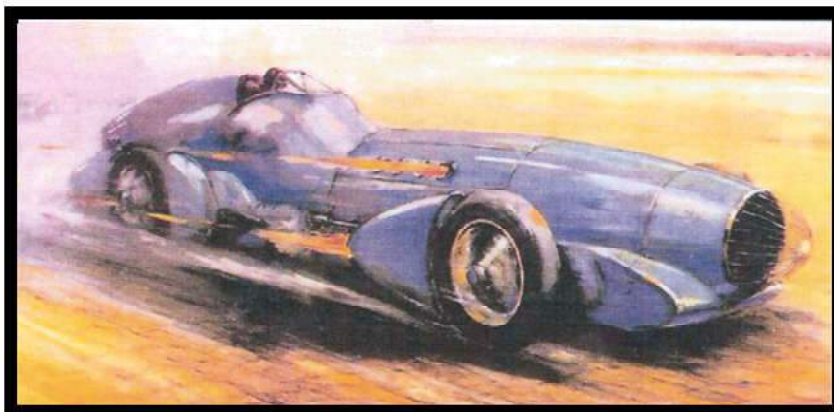
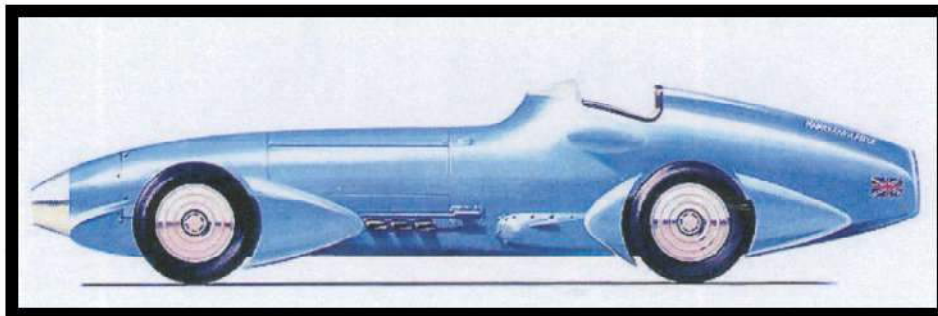
It is significant that in each instance the lubricant chosen to ensure success was—

**WAKEFIELD  
CASTROL  
MOTOR OIL**

—the product of an All-British Firm

C. C. WAKEFIELD & CO. LTD., Wakefield House, Chesepole, London, E.C.2.

On 25<sup>th</sup> April 1929 whilst failing to break the one mile world record, he did break the five mile and five kilometre world records. It should be noted that on his last run the front nearside tyre shed its rubber tread and ran for the five miles on canvas, without bursting.



## The Skeleton Datestamps of VERNEUK PAN: 1929 as Shown in this Display

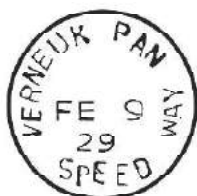
Temporary Post Office Opened: 8th February, Closed 26th April 1929.



### VERNEUKPANSPEED WAY - FE 8 29

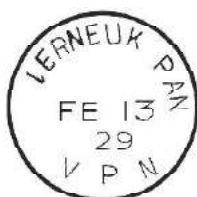
This is the only known date for the first datestamp. The cover shown on sheet 14 is the only recorded example cancelled with it. Until another is found, this item is philatelically unique. Such statements have a habit of being proved wrong. If you have an example, please share it with us.

Differences in Text and Date setting exist in all datestamps shown below.



### VERNEUK PAN SPEED WAY - FE 9 29

The first datestamp of the 8th February was changed and used as the second datestamp the next day, the 9th. It is believed that this datestamp was used for four days until the 13th of February when the third and last datestamp was introduced. Only two examples of this second datestamp are recorded.



### VERNEUK PAN VPN - FE 13 29

This is the first recorded day of use of the 'VPV' datestamp, the third and last known one used at the temporary PO at Verneukpan while Captain Campbell was attempting to break the WLSR (World Land Speed Record). This was to be the longest-serving and most common of the three Verneukpan cancellers.



### VERNEUK PAN VPN - 'CRASH MAIL': FE 23 29 and FE 24 29

On the 23rd February Captain Campbell was flown by Eric Penny from Cape Town to Verneukpan for the purposes of inspecting the speedway which was being levelled in preparation for his attempt on the WLSR. These two datestamps were used on mail which accompanied Captain Campbell on his return to Cape Town when Penny's aircraft crashed at Clanwilliam, injuring both pilot and passenger, on 25th February 1929. No more than 12 items of mail prepared on the 23rd and 24th were on board the plane when it crashed. The mail that was on the plane was transferred to a train which took it to Cape Town. See the *'The Airposts of South Africa'* (overleaf).



### VERNEUK PAN VPN - AP 26 29

This is the last recorded day of use of the temporary PO at Verneukpan. On 19th April, Captain Campbell made a trial run reaching 215 mph. He made further attempts over the next week, the last being on the 25th. Covers with datestamps of 19 - 25th February are from his attempt on WLSRs.



## **TIMELINE: 1929**

### **4th February**

Campbell party arrives in Cape Town

### **5th February**

The Natal Mercury reports Campbells hoping to break World Land Speed Record "in 10 days' time".

### **7th February**

Grey and Swan arrive at Verneukpan to set up a Special Temporary Post Office.

### **8th February**

Grey issues the first Verneukpan datestamp, VERNEUKPANSPEED WAY No. 1

### **9th February**

Grey Issues the second Verneukpan datestamp, VERNEUK PAN SPEED WAY No. 2

### **13th February**

Grey issues the third Verneukpan datestamp, VERNEUK PAN V P N No. 3

### **15th February**

The anticipated attempt on the record is delayed because the track was not level enough.  
This will result in a two month delay before the attempt can be made.

### **23rd February**

Campbell and Penny fly up from Cape Town to inspect the work on the track.

### **24th February**

Campbell and Penny return to Cape Town, staying overnight in Clanwilliam.

### **25th February**

The plane piloted by Penny crashes on take-off in Clanwilliam, injuring both men.

### **13th March**

Covers to Oxenham from Verneukpan using the VERNEUK PAN V P N No. 3 datestamp.

### **19th April**

The track is ready. Campbell makes a trial run of 215 mph. (Unknown Newspaper clipping)

### **20th April**

Unknown Newspaper clipping states Campbell will make his attempt "tomorrow".

### **21st April**

Campbell attempts to break the WLSR.

### **22nd April**

Lettercard in German states "we saw a good attempt to break the world record yesterday".

### **25th April**

Campbell attempts to break the WLSR again.

### **26th April**

This is the last recorded date of use on the VERNEUK PAN V P N No. 3 datestamp.  
"Captain Campbell put up a world record ... today", presumably the 25th.

## VI. THE VERNEUK PAN AIR MAIL, 1929.

Verneuk Pan, situated in the North-Western Cape, one of the most deserted tracts of South Africa, will always be associated in history with the name of the famous British racing motorist, Capt. (now Major Sir) Malcolm Campbell, and it may at first seem paradoxical that this ordinarily uninhabited spot should also find a place in the record of the official aerial postal communications of South Africa, and that the famous racing motorist was himself the aerial postman on this occasion.

Synchronising with the arrival in South Africa early in February, 1929, of Capt. Malcolm Campbell with his famous "Blue Bird" motor car, the Union postal authorities decided to establish a special field post office at Verneuk Pan, where Capt. Campbell's attempt to lower the speed record of 207 m.p.h., then held by Ray Keech, was to be made. With the co-operation of the South African Radio League, the field office was linked up by means of two wireless transmitting stations with two amateur receiving stations at Cape Town placed at the disposal of the Post Office, and thus telegrams could be despatched and received between the Pan and Cape Town, and press matter handled. The special field post office was in charge of Mr. G. N. Grey, one of the senior postal officials, assisted by a small staff. Owing to the isolated nature of Verneuk Pan, Mr. Grey was authorised to use any means at his disposal for the despatch of mail matter. A rather crude post office date-stamp was prepared by Mr. Grey.

On Saturday, 23rd February, Capt. Campbell and Mr. Eric Penny, of the Cape Town Light Plane Club, left Cape Town in the latter's Avian aeroplane to inspect the progress being made in preparing the track at Verneuk Pan, and the following afternoon the postmaster announced to the dozen inhabitants of the Pan camp that advantage would be taken of the opportunity offered by the return flight to Cape Town to send a mail with Capt. Campbell which would close in half an hour's time.

Late on the afternoon of Sunday, 24th February, Verneuk Pan was left and a night stop made at Clanwilliam on the railway line. Upon leaving Clanwilliam early the following morning the "Avian" rose with great difficulty, the right wing struck the top of a 30-foot tree and the machine crashed to earth. Mr. Penny was seriously injured, while Capt. Campbell was badly cut on the nose and lips. The mail was handed over to the Clanwilliam Post Office, from where it was sent to Cape Town by rail.

Upon the news of the crash reaching Cape Town Major A. M. Miller, D.S.O., M.P., immediately decided to absent himself from his parliamentary duties and fly up to Clanwilliam in Capt. Campbell's own aeroplane "Blue Bird," which had just completed its overhaul. Clanwilliam was reached in the afternoon, and at 4 o'clock the return flight was commenced, Cape Town (Maitland aerodrome) being reached at 6.45 the same evening. When wheeling the "Blue Bird" into its hangar a violent gust of wind caught the wings and turned the machine over on top of Major Miller and Capt. Campbell, re-opening the cuts on the latter's face. Capt. Campbell had survived two aeroplane misadventures in one day!

Although Capt. Campbell's Verneuk Pan attempt on the record was not successful, it is gratifying to be able to record that in September, 1935, at Daytona, he achieved his ambition of attaining a speed of over 300 m.p.h. in his famous "Blue Bird" motor car.

Mr. Grey, the Verneuk Pan postmaster, has stated that the total mail despatched from Verneuk Pan comprised approximately 12 letters, the majority of which was ordinary private correspondence. Three covers were addressed to a certain Cape Town chemist and philatelist. Amongst the mail there was also a post-card (now in the author's collection) despatched by Mr. Grey to his son in Cape Town after it had been autographed by Capt. Campbell, Mr. Penny and the other visitors to the Pan, including newspaper representatives and Capt. R. R. Bentley, the airman.

## A SHEET FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN 'SPORTS' DISPLAY

### SOUTH AFRICAN SPORTS STAMPS AND COMMEMORATIVE SPORT CANCELLATIONS.

#### SIR MALCOLM CAMPBELL.

The first philatelic sports item posted through the South African post office was in 1929, when Malcolm Campbell came to South Africa to try to break the World land speed record at the Verneuk Pan.



An example of the cancellation used at the Campbell's camp. Only 9 or so examples of this cancellation exist.

Sir Malcolm Campbell was born in Kent on the 11 March 1885. He learned to drive at an early age. In 1927 he set up a World land speed record of 174,88 mph at Pendine. Then in 1929 he came to South Africa to the Verneuk Pan. When he arrived he found that the Pan was very uneven so it took 500 workmen a month to make the eleven mile course approximately even.



Malcolm Campbell with the young Donald at the wheel of the Napier - Campbell Bluebird.

He attempted the record, but was unsuccessful, though he set up new 5 Kilometer and 5 Mile records. In 1931 he was knighted and in 1935 he became the first man to travel on land at more than 300 mph, namely 301,1292 mph at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah. In 1949 he died in his sleep at his home in Surrey.



**SIR DONALD CAMPBELL**

**THE SEARCH FOR SPEED CONTINUES -**

**ATTEMPTING TO BREAK  
THE WORLD LAND  
SPEED RECORD AT  
DAYTONA BEACH, 1933.**

**HE WOULD NOT BE  
SUCCESSFUL UNTIL 1935.**



DOWN South they say "Once you get Florida sand in your shoes you will never get it out again", which, translated, means there is a subtle appeal about the state which draws those who have once been within its borders—a yearning to return, that nothing satisfies until you do return—the grip of the sub-tropics lays its hold on you and you never shake it off.

Whether it is the sunshine and blue skies, the clear pure air, graceful palms rustling in the sea breeze, the splash of fish in a salt lagoon, the outdoor

recreations, the hospitality of the people, the colorful tropical beaches, the sweet scented groves of oranges—there is an exotic lure once felt which will always draw you back.

Florida is the ideal place to winter and is so accessible now—less than 24 hours by rail from New York and 32 from Chicago. There is daily air passenger service too, operating on regular schedule for those who, from choice or business necessity, wish to cut this time in half.

The state has long been the winter



playground of the nation and every conceivable form of entertainment, both indoor and outdoor, is provided. Winter golf of course is a major attraction and salt water fishing has its appeal for many.

Florida has such an excellent system of paved highways, wide, smooth and fast, that many prefer to bring their cars and there are now all-paved routes into Florida from the north and west.

About half way down the east coast lies Daytona Beach, one of the favored



resorts of the state. It is an attractive, pleasant, little city of some seventeen thousand, nestling amid palms and sweet scented bay and great glossy leaved magnolias, and in this neighborhood Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Sr., owns his winter home.

One of the major attractions here is the marvelous beach, unique in its hardness, smoothed twice each day by



the rolling surf, and long famous as the scene of international attempts to lower automobile speed records. The present world record was set here last winter at 245.377 m. p. h. by Sir Malcolm Campbell, of London, in his English-built Bluebird II.

Daytona Beach is essentially a tourist resort city and has many inducements to offer the winter visitor.

An attractive booklet has been prepared and is yours for the asking.

Daytona Beach Chamber of Commerce  
Box 917  
Daytona Beach, Florida.

Gentlemen:

I would very much appreciate your sending me a copy of your larger illustrated booklet descriptive of Florida and Daytona Beach.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

P. S. I would also be interested in

- a list of hotels
- a cottage
- an apartment



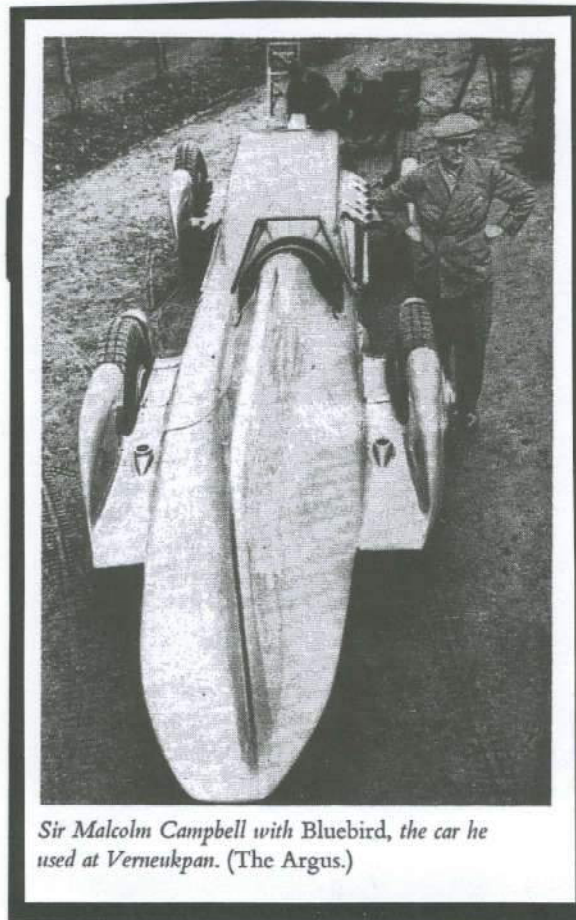
1933. Daytona Beach Chamber of Commerce Tourist Publicity Brochure. See next.

## DAYTONA BEACH BLUEBIRD HAND CACHET



An American cover cancelled 'Feb 10 1933'. The cover bears a 72mm violet double oval hand cachet with "International Speed Trials 1933" at the top and "Daytona Beach Florida" at the bottom. In the centre is an illustration of Captain Campbell's improved "Bluebird 11". (Published by the Daytona Beach Chamber of Commerce and the "Daytona Beach Stamp Club".)

Captain Campbell regained the world speed record at Daytona Beach in 1935.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Ralph Putzel:** Encyclopedia of South African Post Offices and Postal Agencies. Volume One.
- Hasso Reisener:** The Special and Commemorative Postmarks, Cachets and Covers of South Africa 1892 - 1975.
- Captain M.F. Stern:** South African Airmails (circa 1969).
- Mr L.A. Wyndham:** The Airposts of South Africa (1936).
- Lyn and Rob Lester.**

**YOUR ASSISTANCE REQUIRED, PLEASE!**

*Dear Reader,*

*If you have examples of mail from Verneukpan, could you please provide a copy of your material to me via the offices of the South African Philately Club. I am particularly interested in seeing all covers and postcards that you have that include dates and Registered Mail Numbers so that we can together build up a better understanding of the activities of the special temporary post office at Verneukpan and the route and time that the mail took to reach Brandvlei and beyond.*

*Please send your replies to the Editor via:*

*"Postmaster" <postmaster@southafricanphilatelyclub.com>*

*Your help and understanding will be greatly appreciated. Thank you.*

*Robert Hill.*



# The End

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**A grateful South African Philately Club thanks**

**Robert Hill**

**for sharing his collection with us.**

**13/11/2020**

**If you have questions and want to contact Robert Hill, please contact:**

**"Postmaster" <postmaster@southafricanphilatelyclub.com>**

**[www.southafricanphilatelyclub.com](http://www.southafricanphilatelyclub.com)**