

THE GREAT BRITAIN PHILATELIC SOCIETY

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Mr & Mrs Joe Gozzett,
Rosies Cottage,
Dalmore, ROGART,
Sutherland, Scotland.

29th August 1983

Dear Joe and Judy,

Whilst enjoying our stay with you I promised to let you have some details of the Mail Coach and early postal routes above Inverness.

The first Mail Coach in England was introduced in 1784 running from Bath to London. Edinburgh was the last of the five great roads from London to have a Mail Coach and this was started in 1786. This Mail reduced the time for letters from London to Edinburgh from 85 to 60 hours.

On the first August 1794 the first Mail Coach ran from Edinburgh to Aberdeen and by 1813 the route was extended to Inverness.

During the summer of 1819 a Mail Coach commenced from Inverness to Thurso. It left Inverness at 6AM and was due in Thurso at 7.30AM the next day.

The above covers the dates on which the London/Edinburgh Mail was extended northwards. It was extended with all reasonable despatch but due to the poor quality of the roads generally lagged behind other parts of the country. Naturally you will appreciate the work of Telford did much to lay level roads and build bridges.

A map of 1813 shows the Mail Coach route above Edinburgh as running via Perth, Arbroath, Montrose to Aberdeen and then on alternate days via Old Meldrum to Banff and Fochabers or via Keith to Fochabers and thence to Inverness. At that time (1813) a daily horse ride went on to Beauley, Dingwall, Parkhill, Tain, (over Mickle (sic) ferry) to Dornoch thence Little Ferry to Cline (Brora ?), Berrydale, Dunbeath, Wick and Hana (for the Orkneys).

Also from the 1813 map there were Foot Runners from Dingwall to Lichinver (for the Minsh); from Dingwall to Ullapool and from Tain to Invercharrm. Also quite unconnected and at private expense a foot runner ran from Tongue via Thurso to Halkirk.

Enclosed please find a photocopy of an Edinburgh to London Time Bill. It is fairly ealy to follow bearing in mind the times are not included but the Mail was timed to finally reach the GPO London at 4.35AM ready for morning delivery and the list of names on the left of the Bill are the Innkeepers or Horse stations that horsed the mails. The mail ran daily except Sundays and the average speed on the Edinburgh route started at 7 and rose to 9 mph.

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The second enclosure is a completed Time Bill. The coaches always left the GPO at 8PM. They usually left their London Inn half an hour earlier and all formed up together at the GPO to take on their mail. This with the exception of the West Country Mails which started from the Gloucester Coffee House in Knightsbridge.

The Edinburgh Mail was horsed from the Bull and Mouth right by the GPO at Lombard Street and later St. Martins le Grand. The proprietor was Willan and his name is therefore shows as horsing the Mail up to Waltham Cross.

A full list of the Mail Coach Routes Direct from London of 1838 is enclosed (all for your retention). Here you can pick up the times right up to Thurso. Times will have changed from the Time Bills of 1790s to 1838 of course. I do not have a copy Bill above Edinburgh which would naturally give the Innkeepers on route. If you really wanted same the Post Office Records at GPO London should have a copy.

There was really only one Mail Coach above Inverness. A map of 1836 shows the following information.

A Daily Mail Coach ran from Inverness through Dingwall, Tain, Muckle Ferry, Dornoch, Golspie, Helmsdale, Dunbeath, Wick to Thurso.

From Dingwall a Ride or Gig ran three times a week to Lock Carron and Lochalsh with spur Walks running up from Garve to Ullapool and from Auchnasheen to Poolewe for Lewis/Stornaway.

Daily a Ride or Gig left Tain for Bonar Bridge.

Daily a Ride or Gig left Golspie to Lairg and three times a week there was a Walk from Lairg to Assynt and Lochinver, + three times a week a Walk from Assynt to Durness.

Three times a week a Ride or Gig left Lairg for Tongue and Thurso.

From Wick a Walk to Huna went on to Thurso and from Thurso a Walk went to Halkirk.

Certainly trust the above information is of interest. It really shows the only viable road above Inverness was your eastern route with spurs off for the western coast. The two decades after the 1830's saw the railways.

Very kindest regards,

Charles & Richard.