

MY WAY

by Ross Burden

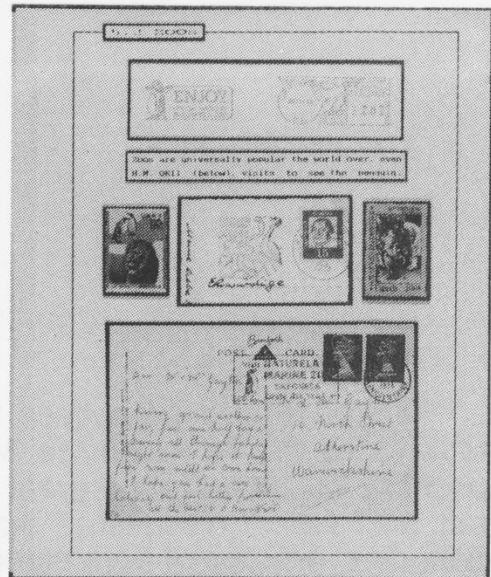
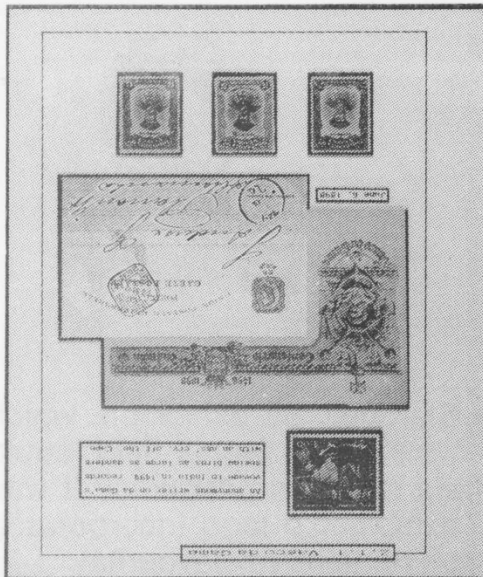
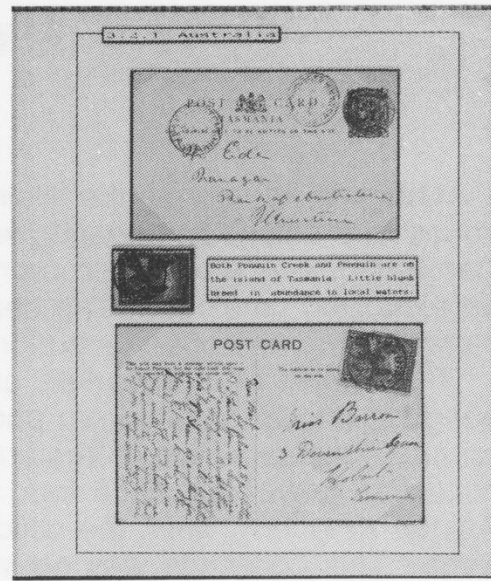
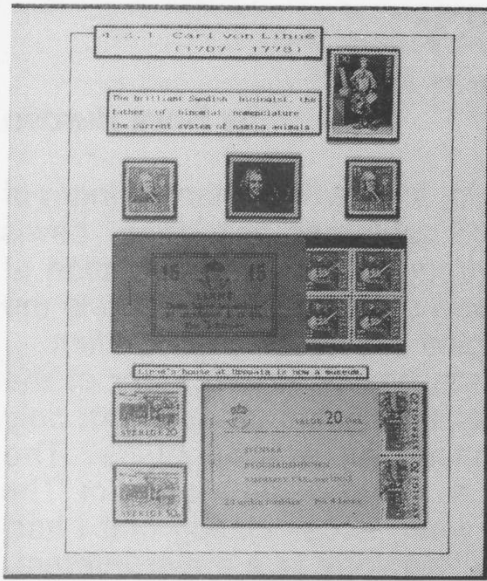
'The time has come, the Walrus said, to speak of many things; of shoes and ships; and sealing wax and cabbages and kings.' Lewis Carroll may well have been running through the thematic section of an exhibition catalogue. The beauty of the thematic discipline is the variety of themes open to exploration and individual interpretation.

The theme I have worked on of late has been the story of the penguin, known to Southern people for thousands of years but only recently discovered by Western science. But why penguins? The collection grew by chance from an already large compilation of 'The Animal Kingdom', itself the child of a world accumulation that I had formed. This collection was no surprise, zoology is a major interest, indeed currently my 'major' at University.



'Penguins' was a response to the Stampex '85 exhibition, which took as its theme Antarctica. What, more in the faunal field, could possibly be linked to the great Southern mass as penguins? It was not until later I discovered that the exhibition's logo incorporated penguins. (My medal from that exhibition remains my favourite).

I built two frames from eight stamps in twelve months. The first phase, ten months or so was merely accumulating likely material, penguins, their food sources and predators, scientists and explorers were all gleaned from local dealers. After the initial indiscriminate period I concentrated my attack and was helped in this by a leading American philatelist who has a Gold medal collection of the same topic. He enlightened me as to the existence of booklets, postal stationery, fancy cancels, meters and the like. Once their existence was known the chase became much easier. The more difficult items were tracked down in England, Wales, Russia, Germany, Argentina, USA and Australia from collectors and dealers. Advertisements in overseas stamp magazines also proved helpful.



Once a large pool of material had been accumulated I read a number of simple books on the subject and used their organisation with my knowledge to construct a plan. Children's books are very useful to help formulate a simple, coherent plan. The plan is then tailored to match the material, ensuring each chapter is balanced with the rest. When 'written up' each sheet has material grouped to illustrate a SINGLE point. EVERY FACT OR POINT MUST BE SUPPORTED BY MATERIAL. In this way the story develops logically, smoothly, point by point to the conclusion.

The plan is of utmost importance. The way it is constructed and followed makes or breaks a collection. A good theme is one that allows a good variety of material and a plan with depth. The plan should be both complex and simple, that is, a plan with depth that is treated simply. It should flow smoothly and not get caught in eddies and backwaters or flounder in the shallows. The plan should be ORIGINAL, BALANCED, COMPLETE and LOGICAL.

When well written the collection should tell its story simply with annotation at a premium, the stamps and other material not illustrating a story but telling it with a little writing to clarify. To make the most of material, attention must be drawn to the strong and away from the weak. The arrangement of material, balance of pages and mounting each affect this. An item to be highlighted should be placed where the eye looks first, to grab attention. The 'focal point' of a page is one third down, slightly to the left of centre. Try it yourself. (This also applies to placement of sheets within the frame). If too much writing is present, attention will be drawn to the black mass and away from the material.

The final step is to 'fiddle' the plan slightly to accommodate the most pleasing arrangement of sheets in the frame, once this is achieved the plan can be inked in.

After this process was completed, the exhibition finished and the critique received it was possible to see a hundred weaknesses and the next write up reflected the points I had learnt. Number eight is on the go. I still change layout, add and improve material, refine and rewrite the annotation towards a better collection. My main effort is to improve my material; used stamps have been dropped in favour of mint as they illustrate the point in a cleaner, clearer way; silk and first day covers have been replaced by genuine postal covers and major purchases have been made. There are, however currently no points awarded at exhibitions for scarcity or importance of material in the youth class.

I enjoy my collection for the challenge of competing AGAINST MYSELF and aiming for higher medals by refining my material and technique all the time. I have found philatelic and thematic reading as useful as contact with other collectors and attendance of exhibitions to see how other collectors tackle the problems I have faced. As thematic collecting embraces all the other forms of philately a wide knowledge is useful. The three most important aspects of thematic collecting are Individuality, Material, Enjoyment, Bon philatélie.

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