

Imperial Airways First Flight, London to Cape Town Christmas Flight, December 9 - 21, 1931

Imperial Airways had extended air service from England to East Africa in March 1931. In late 1931, the British Post Office announced that airmail service from London to Cape Town was scheduled to be extended on January 20, 1932 and the return flight was scheduled to begin on January 27, 1932. Since Imperial Airways had to deliver aircraft to South Africa for the return flight, it was decided to allow for a special Christmas flight leaving Croydon (London's airport) at noon on Dec. 9, 1931. The notice for the Christmas flight was very short and collectors had only ten days to prepare any mail for the flight.

The British Post Office set the airmail rate from the UK at 9d to Northern and Southern Rhodesia and one shilling to South Africa and South-West Africa. The South African Postal Administration decided to co-operate in the trial service and agreed to this experimental flight. The Post Office indicated that the airmail rate within the Union of South Africa was to be at the all inclusive rate of 4d per half ounce from all points of call from Pietersburg, Johannesburg, Kimberly and Victoria West. Special arrangements were made for the back stamping of all mail received at these points.

The inaugural ceremony of the first air mail to South Africa was performed at the Croydon Aerodrome on December 9 when the airliner "Heracles", piloted by Captain W. Rogers left for Paris. The main mail had been dispatched to Paris by an earlier aircraft. Only 127 letters posted at the Croydon Aerodrome Post Office were carried by "Heracles". For the purpose of the opening ceremony and for press photographs, the aircraft was loaded with dummy mail bags. There were no passengers.



A special cachet cover posted December 9, 1931 from Hudson Place, Wilton Road in London to Cape Town

The following is the flight log of Imperial Airways first flight from London to Cape Town in December 1931

December 9	Croydon, London - Paris	Handley Page H.P. 42	"Heracles"
December 9 - 11	By train Paris - Brindisi		
December 11	Brindisi - Athens, via Mirabella, Crete	Kent Flying Boat	"Scipio"
December 12	Athens - Alexandria	Kent Flying Boat	"Scipio"
December 12	Alexandria - Cairo by train		
December 13	Cairo - Aswan (via Assiut)	Argosy	"City of Arundel"
December 14	Bad weather delay		
December 15	Aswan - Khartoum (via Wadi Halfa, Atbara)	Argosy	"City of Arundel"
December 16	Khartoum - Butiaba (via Kosti, Malakal, Juba)	Calcutta Flying Boat	"City of Swanage"
December 17	Butiaba - Kisumu	Calcutta Flying Boat	"City of Swanage"
December 17	Kisumu - Nairobi	Handley Page H.P. 42	"City of Basra"
December 18	Nairobi - Mbeya (via Dodoma, Moshi)	Handley Page H.P. 42	"City of Basra"
December 19	Mbeya - Salisbury (via Mpika, Broken Hill)	Handley Page H.P. 42	"City of Basra"
December 20	Salisbury - Germiston (via Bulawayo, Pietersburg)	Handley Page H.P. 42	"City of Basra"
December 21	Germiston - Cape Town (via Kimberly, Victoria West)	Handley Page H.P. 42	"City of Karachi"