

## Your Postal Podcast 52nd Edition Transcript – September 2012

Source: [yourpostalpodcast.com](http://yourpostalpodcast.com)

**Richard Watkins:** Welcome to *Your Postal Podcast*. This is Richard Watkins of U.S. Postal Service Corporate Communications. In this September twenty-twelve edition, we'll journey to one of the seven wonders of the world to learn how its residents receive mail – and sustenance – via a unique mode of mail delivery. And we'll check in on two Post Offices that show just how high and low the Postal Service goes to serve its customers.

The bottom of the Grand Canyon is home to a few hundred members of the Havasupai Tribe and tourists. The mail, along with much of the food they need to survive, is brought to them in a way unlike anyplace else in the country. Peter Hass reports on the providers of this reliable and sure-footed means of mail delivery.

### Grand Canyon Mail Mule Train Segment

**(Background: Beeping sound of a semi-truck in reverse gear.)**

**Peter Hass:** As another weekday morning begins at the Peach Springs Post Office, a semi truck backs up, angling carefully toward the back door. Located on the Hualapai Indian Reservation in northern Arizona, this small outpost has a huge responsibility when it comes not only to the mail, but to the daily needs of members of the Havasupai Tribe, who live at the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

The food distributor's truck driver offloads various foodstuffs and sundry items: Fresh tomatoes. Jars of pickles. Eggs. Bacon. Dish soap. Gravy Train dog food.

All the items are stacked along the walls and corners of the back of the tiny Post Office, as Postmaster Terry Misenheimer and clerk Connie Olson work quickly to weigh and affix postage on the various boxes. The postage is paid by the Havasupai tribe.

Misenheimer says just about everything Supai residents need to live will be carried down an eight-mile trail – by mule.

**Terry Misenheimer:** About a month ago, FedEx Freight stops by and dropped off some heaters for the tribe down there for their housing. So, we were able to get them on mules. They were just kind of long; they weren't real large. But, like I say, FedEx and UPS depend on the Post Office to get the mail down to Supai.

**Hass:** Milk, meat and other perishables get rolled into the Peach Springs Post Office's most unique feature – a walk-in freezer. These items will be stored here a day or two before being delivered. Misenheimer says the milk is to be frozen solid so that by the time it reaches the Supai Post Office at the bottom of the Canyon, it will still be cold and ready for sale at the general store or for use by the community's school or senior programs.

Highway Contract Driver Andy Bufano arrives next. He has driven an hour from Kingman along old Route 66, bringing mail for Peach Springs and Supai. His next task – eyeballing the boxes of Pringles Chips, Campbell's Soup and the other items to

determine how many parcels he will load into the back of his small truck to drive north to the rim of the Canyon.

In his head, Bufano calculates the weights of each box with the knowledge that each of the 10 to 16 pack mules that will deliver the mail to the bottom of the Canyon can carry 150 pounds on their backs, evenly distributed on their left and right sides, with lighter items on top.

**Andy Bufano:** You try to keep it around, between, you know, 60 to 70 pounds on each side, with the light stuff on top.

**Hass:** After an hour-long drive, Bufano unloads the mail at the trailhead, where packers hired by contractor Charlie Chamberlain load the silent mules up with the various items. They swiftly loop ropes around the mules to secure the packs. The 10-mule train, connected by another rope, will be led down the canyon by Chamberlain and his packers on horseback and arrive at Supai Post Office after descending about 3,000 feet, taking two to three hours to negotiate switchbacks and steep descents on a trail that has been used to deliver the mail since the 1950s. The trail is about six miles shorter than the previous route, which started from the Grand Canyon National Park's well-known South Rim.

Chamberlain is a long-time veteran of the trail and explained some of the history.

**Charlie Chamberlain:** The Post Office was established in 1896 in Supai, and they brought the mail in from the Topakopa trail from the South Rim, then via train from Williams. And they did it once a week, back in those days. They'd bring in just the basic staples, flour, sugar, coffee, beans – that was it – and mail of course." When I started in 1974, I was only packing three days a week – Monday, Wednesday and Friday. And then it just blossomed and exploded from there, it went up; finally they changed it to five days a week and it's been that way ever since then.

### **Extreme Postal Elevations Segment**

**Watkins:** The Postal Service prides itself on having the world's largest retail and delivery network. But just how far does that network extend? Brian Sperry reports on two Post Offices at extreme elevations.

**Brian Sperry:** There are more than 31,000 retail postal locations in America, and none stand taller than a small Post Office perched in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. If the beautiful scenery doesn't take your breath away, the lack of oxygen surely will. At an elevation of 10,152 feet above sea level, the Leadville Post Office and its employees serve more than 5,000 customers.

Leadville carriers, like Leonard Ortega, deliver the mail in the shadow of two fourteeners, which is mountaineering terminology for a mountain that exceeds 14,000 feet. Living at altitude means short summers and long winters, says Ortega, who remembers one particularly tough winter day.

**Leonard Ortega:** I guess we had a late truck, and that was like in January, one of the coldest days there was, and we were out there until well past dark. That was (laughing) pretty rough.

**Sperry:** While poor weather can slow things down, the town nor the Post Office has ever taken a day off, says Leadville Officer-in-Charge Greg Sandoval.

**Greg Sandoval:** I don't believe that they've ever had a snow day up here. The Post Office has always been open and even on the days that the truck hasn't made it up, we've still sent the carriers out to deliver local mail that has come through. They'll still be out there delivering mail while they're waiting for the truck and seeing if it comes in.

**Sperry:** Leadville has a four-wheel drive Long-Life Vehicle for each of its four city routes, making delivering the mail on those snowy days a lot easier, says Sandoval.

**Sandoval:** They keep the roads pretty well maintained. We're so used to the snow. As soon as the first flake starts falling, the snow plows are out and all over the place. But the four-wheel drives do help the carriers to get up to some of the steeper areas in Leadville, especially when it is snowy and icy.

**Sperry:** Leonard and Sandoval enjoy all the Leadville area has to offer, including close encounters with wildlife.

**Sandoval:** Yesterday, a carrier came back and said there's a bear asleep two blocks away from the Post Office up in the tree. We have some moose wandering by us occasionally, lots of deer and elk, even antelope; foxes all over the place. It's nice to be out and not be congested with so many people.

**Sperry:** Nearly a thousand miles southwest of Leadville is Mecca, California – elevation 180 feet below sea level. Of all USPS locations, none stand lower than the Mecca Post Office. Located south of Palm Springs, the Mecca Post Office and its employees serve nearly 9,000 customers in a growing agricultural community.

Rosa Villarreal, a clerk in the Mecca Post Office for 20 years, says folks in town don't talk much about being below sea level, more so the 120-plus degree summers. Despite the heat, Villarreal says she enjoys working in Mecca.

**Rosa Villarreal:** I just like the town, like the people – they're mostly Spanish speaking.

**Sperry:** A variety of fruits and vegetables are grown in the area, which Villarreal suggests customers mail to friends and family.

**Villarreal:** The grapes, the dates, lemons, oranges, chiles, bell peppers, a lot of vegetables. When I started working, people really didn't come to the Post Office. As I started, you know, helping them, like, "Hey, you know you can send this there," and they started coming in. They started sending grapes to their families in Arkansas, Florida, stuff like that, and they said, "Oh, you can do that?" Yeah!

**Sperry:** During Mecca's scorching summers, the cool mountain climate of Leadville sounds enticing to Villarreal.

**Villarreal:** I wish I was there. (Laughing.) It's so hot here!

**Sperry:** Conversely, Villarreal invites Leadville employees, like Ortega, to the warmth of Mecca during the harsh Colorado winters. Ortega says he's willing to concede the weather to Mecca, but treasures where he lives.

**Ortega:** (Those) guys are probably luckier than us weather-wise, but on the view, probably, they ain't got the view we got.

### **News Roundup Segment**

**Watkins:** And now, here's a look at recent postal headlines.

Using "Everyday Cards for Everyday Heroes," Americans can now express gratitude to their own everyday heroes by sending personal messages in keepsake greeting cards. Patriotic imagery featured on the cards is suitable for heroes from all walks of life — firefighters, police officers, teachers, volunteers and emergency medical technicians. U.S. Postal Service employees may also be described as everyday heroes, with nearly 350 employees recognized last year for life-saving works in the line of duty. Ideal for expressing gratitude, the card collection offers six different designs, crafted with patriotic symbols and heartfelt expressions sure to make both the sender and recipient proud. Available at select Post Offices nationwide, "Everyday Cards for Everyday Heroes" at just \$2.95 each, provide an affordable way to send a salute through the mail.

Thanks for listening to *Your Postal Podcast*. Now we'd like to hear from you. One lucky listener who posts a comment about this month's podcast on the *Your Postal Podcast* webpage will be selected to receive a free Bonsai Notecard Set, including 10 notecards, envelopes and stamps. The winner will be selected at random from all qualifying comments posted by October 1st.

Our congratulations go out to Michelle Jones of Manchester, Washington, who posted a comment about the August podcast and has won an 1862 Civil War Commemorative Folio.

This has been a production of USPS Western Area Corporate Communications.  
Copyright 2012, All Rights Reserved.

# # #