ITCS News

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ITCS, Telecom Australia Payphone Services, PO Box 3964, Parramatta, NSW 2124

New Countries issuing Telephone Cards

Dr Steve Hiscocks

There are over 110 countries issuing telephone cards around the world. Since April 1990, there are some twenty 'new' countries issuing or about to issue telephone cards. I will outline those countries and telephone companies (Telcos is the jargon in the business) so you can update your records.

Andorra:
Andorra was due to issue smart cards a month or so ago but no cards have been seen at the time of writing. It is expected to be soon.

Argentina:
Argentina is reported to have issued a card similar to the Japanese cards. These cards are likely to be made by Tamura rather than Anritsu, who make cards for Australia, since Tamura tend to be active in Latin America.

Colombia:
Colombia has had both cards and telephones for the cards for some time, but has only now deployed them. A few of the Colombian cards have appeared on the Paris market. These cards are made by a Japanese manufacturer.

Czechoslovakia:
Czechoslavakia is reported to have cardphones at the airport. The type of card is not known although they could be Autelca like those of Hong Kong and Korea. It is expected that smart cards will be introduced experimentally in Prague in the very near future.

Gambia:
Gambia has issued smart cards although there are doubts about how many types are available. Only one is available at present but there is said to have been another initially.

Guinea-Bissau:
Guinea-Bissau is reported to have issued cards but the type of card is not known.

Hungary:
Hungary is expected to introduce Gemplus smart cards soon.

Iceland:
Smart cards are reportedly about to appear.

Iran:
Iran is said to have had Solaic smart cards in use for almost a year without collectors having been aware of them.

Israel:
Israel introduced two successive Landis and Gyr (Swiss manufactured optical cards) for the use of immigrants arriving in the country last year and have now introduced a new set for public use.

Micronesia:
Micronesia has issued a set of four Japanese cards - thought to be Tamura. There is one for each state of the Federation and they fit together to form a design.

New Caledonia:
New Caledonia has recently issued smart cards.

Poland:
Poland has provisional Landis and Gyr cards in use in hotels. It is reported that the GPT system as used in New Zealand and Singapore will also be in use in Poland before long.

Russia:
Russia has had the Konstar cards on sale in hotels, etc., to foreigners for hard currencies for some time but Landis and Gyr public cardphones have now been deployed in railway stations and other such sites in Moscow.

St Martin:
St Martin is the major island of Curacao, the old Netherlands Antilles, which did have a 'matching set' for the various islands. St Martin now has Landis and Gyr cards of its own but these are reported to be in the process of replacement by French smart cards.

Togo:
Togo has introduced Autelca cards, very similar in design to those of Gabon.

Vanuatu:
Vanuatu has now issued Autelca cards reported to be of the general type used by other Cable and Wireless companies such as the Falkland Islands.

USA:
The one big hole in the telephone card collecting world is of course, the USA.

There have been trials and closed user group applications. Hotel cards have been issued for tourists in Hawaii. Cards for the University of Hawaii campus have also been issued and they are similar to the hotel cards. They are said to be of Japanese manufacture - probably Tamura.

Nynex, the Baby Bell Telco covering the New York area, is about to begin trials of public cardphones at railway and subway stations in the city.

Wallis and Futuna:
Wallis and Futuna have just begun to issue smart cards.

If you have counted the above and found it a little short of twenty, you are quite right. There are a couple more I am not allowed to mention yet - but watch this space! If I have got it wrong - tell me!

Editorial

Thank you to all those people who wrote to me about the first newsletter. I greatly appreciated your letters with suggestions and ideas for future issues. I hope to put some of these suggestions into the next issue.

Most people want to receive a list of collectors from other countries. There are a few difficulties associated with this. At the moment, I am not certain that everyone who is on our mailing list wishes to have their address published in an international list. So I'm asking you to nominate the list you would like to be on - the 'public list' which is available to other collectors, or to stay on the 'private list', i.e. details of your name and address will not be supplied to other collectors.

The 'public list' of collectors will only be distributed once a year. It is quite a large task to put this list together and ensure that our mailing information is correct. I would be grateful if you could take the time to fill out the enclosed card and return it to me. This will ensure that you appear on the list you prefer. If I do not hear from you, I will assume you want to remain on the private list.

This newsletter includes another article by Dr Steve Hiscocks - this one on the different types of telephone cards. Alan Kilpatrick from New Zealand writes about the very interesting variations in the Satellite cards there. Of course, there's also news about telephone cards around the world and new issues from Australia. Happy reading!

The Editor July 1991

Australian News

New Issues

The issues of Telecom Phonecard on a state basis continues. These cards are generally only available in the state or territory of issue so no distributor can carry every card design. Telecom hopes to distribute designs more widely in the future.

Collector sets of the implementation state and territory issues are available from the national Payphone Services office or selected dealers.

The Western Australia series of three cards were released in June, and in July the Canberra (ACT) cards - a series of five - are to be released. August/September will see the conclusion of the state issues when the Tasmanian and Northern Territory cards are issued. As before, all these cards feature scenes from around the states and will be available in presentation folders. The Northern Territory cards are particularly of interest - featuring Uluru (Ayers Rock) and the (in)famous salt water crocodile.

ID codes on reprints

Some reprints of Australian cards have new ID control codes. Cards identified to date as having different ID codes on 1991 reprints are listed below.

Description of card	Original ID code	New ID code
$ 2 South Australia Vineyard	T2C2-1	T2C2-1-2
$20 South Australia Adelaide	T2C2-6	T2C2-6-2
$ 5 Generic	TC1	TC11-2-2
$10 Victoria Grampians	T4C3-3	T4C3-2

The last card is of particular interest, as the code is an error: the '-2' indicates it should be a $5 card, when in fact the card is a $10 card. It is also possible that the $5 Melbourne card has a new ID code, but this has not been confirmed.

Used Australian cards

Telecom Australia is a card issuer and does not sell used Australian Phonecards. Used cards obtained by Telecom are used for promotional purposes to ITCS members,or for research purposes.

New Zealand News

Alan Kilpatrick

Alan Kilpatrick is a well-known New Zealand dealer in telephone cards. His postal address is: PO Box 588, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Standard Satellite Reprints

New Zealand phonecards, as with all GPT cards, have a control number which is individually imprinted on the reverse of each card. The control number consists:

(a) a card information code and
(b) a serial number - the serial number is different for each card.

The information code for New Zealand cards cosists of a single digit followed by four letters. For example, '3NZLB' is the information code for the $5 Standard Satellite card.

1. The first digit represents the issue number, i.e.:-
   '1' = Trial issue
   '2' = First satellites
   '3' = Standard satellites
   '4' = Commonwealth Games
   '6' = 1990 Christmas issue
   '7' = 1991 Landscape issue
   The reason for the jump in the numbering sequence will be explained later in the article.
2. The letters 'NZL' are the code for New Zealand.
3. The final letter represents the face value of the card, i.e.
   'A'=$2; 'B'=$5; 'C'=$10; 'D'=$20; 'E'=$50

Reprint Control Codes

As is often the case with long term definitive issue telephone cards, reprints are required from time to time.

In August 1990 the first of a series of reprints began to appear. To the surprise of collectors, GPT had made an error with the issue and value codes. The $5 and $10 cards were assigned issue code '5', instead of the correct code '3'. The error was compounded with the wrong value codes being used as well. The $5 card was assigned the value code 'A', the $10 code 'B' and the $20 code 'C' instead of the correct codes 'B', 'C' and 'D' respectively.

This error is interesting because of the fact that it is possible to obtain, say, a $2 Games card and a $5 Satellite reprint with exactly the same control and serial numbers. The chances of this occurring, however, are quite remote.

Standard Satellite Checklist

Since the initial group of three, there have been several more reprints all providing variety to what has become a very interesting group of cards, some of which are very scarce. The following is a list of all the printings of the Standard Satellite cards which have been discovered to date (listed in order of appearance for each card): -

$ 2 3NZLA
$ 5 3NZLB, 4NZLA, 3NZLB (note 1), 3NZLB silver strip (note 2)
$10 3NZLC, 4NZLB, 2NZLC, 3NZLC silver strip, 4NZLB silver strip
$20 3NZLD, 5NZLC (note 4), 2NZLD, 3NZLD (note 3), 4NZLC
$50 3NZLE

Note 1: This reprint is only slightly different from the original printing in that the edges of the card are slightly bevelled. When the card is held against a dark background a very thin blue line is often visible along one or two edges.

Note 2. The code and serial number is printed on top of an oblong silver panel.

Note 3. This reprint is distinguishable from the original by its deeper chocolate brown shade and the absence of a small white dot below the 'l' in Telecom. This small flaw is present in all other printings of the $20 card.

Note 4. Because issue code '5' had been used on this card, the Christmas set was reassigned with issue code '6'. Hence the jump in the numbering sequence.

New Zealand's New Issues

The new Landscape issue has been well received by both the general public and collectors alike. It is likely that these stunning cards will draw even more people into this increasingly popular hobby of telephone card collecting.

As announced in a recent newsletter to Telecom Phonecard retailers, the next issue of cards will depict New Zealand lighthouses. These too are bound to be popular and will be eagerly awaited by collectors.

News from around the world

Bahrain:
Two new cards have appeared recently in Bahrain. A special complimentary 10 unit card was issued for a promotion of Batelco services on 12 May. One thousand cards were produced of which 700 were still available after the event. This will be a key card in due course. There was also an attractive 100 unit card for Worlds Telecoms Day on 17 May. This was on sale through normal channels and with an issue of only 5000, may well have sold out by now. Batelco now have plans to issue private cards.

For enquiries contact: Collectors' Phonecards, BATELCO, PO Box 14, Manama, Bahrain. The cards cost 1 and 3.5 Bahrain Dinars respectively (1 Dinar equals about £1.50 or US$2.65) payable by bank draft or any major credit card. There is a discount of 10% on cards sent outside Bahrain.

Readers may also be interested in the new definitive Bahrain cards featuring watercolours by the artist Koheji - the values are 1, 2, 3.5 and 6.5 Dinars.

Belgium:
Belgium RTT has made a small step in the right direction regarding card issues. They have stopped the issue of two unit private cards, which made no pretence of being useful in a payphone, and they have put the minimum issue of such cards up to 2000.

Caribbean:
A number of new cards are in preparation for the islands of the Caribbean and will be issued at the beginning of the tourist season around October and November. These include: a card for Barbados celebrating the 25th anniversary of independence: three GPT cards for the Cayman Islands to be followed by a Christmas card; three for Grenada plus a further card to raise funds for the rebuilding of the Treasury Building which was destroyed by fire; a new card for Montserrat; three new GPT cards for St Lucia and two for St Vincent; three new GPT cards for Turks and Caicos plus a further $(US)0.50 special complimentary card; and three new cards for St Kitts.

Denmark:
There are four Telcos in Denmark, three of which have been issuing cards over recent years. These Telcos have now adopted a common set of cards and there is no way of telling which company sold any particular card, although the companies can tell from the allocated control numbers.

France:
From the beginning of this year, France Telecom split from the Post Office and reorganised as a publicly owned company. With this change has come a change of policy with regard to the issue of private cards.

Sponsors can still order 1000 cards of their own but France Telecom will now print a further 10 000 copies of each card which they will sell to collectors six months after the release of the sponsor's original 1000. Only one such card has appeared so far and the sponsor has printed on them numbers up to 1000 to make the cards different from those that will be sold later. France Telecom is charging 250FF (about $A65) for these cards.

Gibraltar:
The single definitive card of Gibraltar has recently been joined by no less than twelve special cards - six of 40 units showing local scenes and six of 100 units showing the same scenes.

Ireland:
The first Irish advertising card - for Kellogg's cornflakes - is scheduled to appear later this year, perhaps in October or November.

Netherlands:
It is expected that a decision to change to smart cards will be made any day now. New cards are unlikely to appear before next year.

South Africa:
A new locally made magnetic system is under trial at the Police College in Pretoria. There are 36 000 cards of 5R and 10R values. No other details are available at present.

UK - British Telecom:
BT has announced that it will now be issuing private cards for sponsors in quantities as low as 500. There seems to be no plan at present to print further copies to satisfy the collectors market as Mercury does in the UK.

British Telecom will be issuing a new advertising card - the second for Castrol Oil in June and there will be several new special cards in June and July: Wimbledon (tennis), Sheffield World Student Games (two), Celtica '91 (two) for a festival in Wales, and two for the Belfast Festival '91.

UK - Paytelco:
The cards issued by Paytelco for university campuses in the UK are beginning to appear with two cards for York University, one for Manchester and one for Exeter. Other universities have the system but without special cards - they tend to use the Paytelco pop star series instead! With special cards recently introduced for the University of Hawaii and the now completed trials on the University of Michigan in the USA, we seem to have the beginnings of a new thematic field.

Paris Fair

The 'Foire aux Collectionneurs' (the Collectors Fair) was held in Paris from 27 April to 9 May 1991. Some believe the event was too long but that was beyond the organisers' control since the event formed part of the 'Foire de Paris' - an enormous annual event covering nearly every imaginable subject.

There were 68 booths of which 33 were selling telephone cards as a main line while a further four sold cards as a sideline. The rest of the stands were dealing with stamps, 'pins' (which are very popular in France at present), miniature perfumes, books and so on. The only telephone company with a stand was Uniphone, the private Malaysian company. There were no dealers from outside France.

The accent was heavily on French cards and especially on the private cards with prices mostly in the $A75 - $A200 bracket. The public French cards were selling at more reasonable prices, $A5 - $A20. Most dealers had one or two books of non-French cards, including Australian cards. UK Mercury seemed particularly well represented and there were some bargains to be had.

There was also a very well attended auction of telephone cards and the lots on sale were again almost entirely French. The highest price realised was $A3385 for a card signed by a Minister of the French government, Gerard Longuet. Most private cards went for prices similar to those being asked by dealers.

The 'Foire aux Collectionneurs' was by far the largest telephone card fair to date and it is a pity that international interests were so weakly represented and the selection of cards on offer was not wider.

Telephone Cards — How do they work?

Dr Steve Hiscocks

The use of prepayment telephone cards began, it is thought, in Italy in 1976. Anyone foresighted enough to have started collecting cards at that time will by now have a valuable collection.

Most of us, unfortunately, started to collect well after that but, with the number of countries issuing cards growing every month and the number of collectors even faster, the rewards are still there for those who enter the field now. The card you buy today can often be worth several times the amount you paid a few months later when the card is longer on sale.

Telephone cards, usually of plastic and always of credit card size, contain a number of stored units of telephone use. They are slotted into an appropriate payphone which reads the card and displays the number of units (or the money value) remaining on the card. One dials one's call in the usual way and the number of stored units decreases as the call progresses. At the end of the call the card is ejected with whatever units remain unused on it and can then be used again until all units are used and the card expires. One system swallows the empty card at that stage but in most systems it is finally ejected and is of no further use - except, of course, to collectors!

There are several different telephone card systems and these fall into three groups- magnetic, optical and electronic.

Magnetic

Most systems are magnetic - that is they store and record changes in information on a ferrite layer in much the same way as a tape recorder. Countries which utilise a magnetic system include: Italy (Urmet system), Hong Kong and Korea (using the Autelca 'Watermark' system), Australia and Japan (using the Japanese Anritsu or Tamura systems) and Turkey and China (using Bell Alcatel).

With most magnetic cards, there is a single magnetic strip across the card which indicates to a collector whether the card has been used or not.

Cards which utilise the GPT system (as used in New Zealand, Singapore, the UK Mercury cards and in many other countries) have seven small ferrite areas on the reverse. When in use, all the information is stripped off the card and handled in the telephone's computer to be returned to the card at the end of the call.

As one cannot see the process of magnetism, it is impossible to see whether many magnetic cards have been used or are in mint condition (except by general wear and tear). The Anritsu cards used in Australia have a small hole punched in them at the end of each call. GPT has a system which makes a little dent against a scale on the back of the card after each call. This technology is more expensive so only Singapore and Jersey use it at present. The Urmet cards (used in Italy) use a different approach: the corner of the card is perforated across like a stamp and has to be broken off before the card can be used in the telephone. One can see if it is unused but not how much of the card has been used.

Optical

The optical system manufactured by Landis and Gyr (a Swiss manufacturer), is used in many countries. Countries utilising this system include the UK (British Telecom), Belgium, Taiwan, and the Netherlands.

These cards have an 'optical strip', a 1.5mm wide ribbon of metal foil, across the surface of the card. This 'strip' has a series of patterns embossed on it and when the card is inserted in the telephone, a beam of infra-red light shines up through the card (which looks black to the eye but is transparent to infra-red) and is reflected off the pattern to a detector.

If it is the wrong pattern for that telephone, for example a card from another country, it misses the detector and will not work. If the pattern is right, the light reflects off a unit for a period of time after which a hot 'finger' comes down from above to destroy the pattern and the beam of light moves on to the next section of the pattern.

Most countries have a white 'thermagraphic' paint, which goes black when heated, over the optical strip so it is easy to see how many units have been used but one can see the little indentations even on British Telecom cards where this is not used if the card is held at the right angle to the light. Some people refer to these cards as 'holographic' but this is wrong as the cards have nothing to do with holography.

Electronic

Electronic or 'smart' cards were introduced in France some seven years ago and are now used in several other countries including Germany, Spain, Sweden and Norway.

Information is stored in a silicon memory chip embedded in the card and is accessed through a pattern of metal contacts on the surface of the card. Up to 150 units are stored and are deleted one by one as calls are made, as in the magnetic systems. It is a 'clever' system and can store telephone numbers, transfer charges and limit calls to certain numbers.

The disadvantage with these cards is that they are expensive to produce with the minimum cost of a rechargeable card of this type being about $A10, while cards which can't be re-used cost about $A4. There is no way of telling whether cards have been used or not unless you can try them in a telephone so these cards are often sold in sealed packets.

New systems are being developed all the time to give greater security, bring down costs and avoid other peoples' patents.

While the basic technology of the adhesive stamp has changed little in the past 160 years, the technologies of telephone cards are always changing. Telephone card collecting is a young, 'hi-tech' cousin of stamp collecting.

Countries with members of the ITCS:-

Australia	Hong Kong	Oman
Austria	Indonesia	Papua New Guinea
Belgium	Isle of Man (UK)	Portugal
Bulgaria	Italy	Saudi Arabia
China	Japan	Singapore
Falkland Islands	Jersey (Channel Is, UK)	Sweden
Finland	Malaysia	Switzerland
France	Netherlands	Taiwan
French Polynesia	New Caledonia	United Kingdom
Germany	New Zealand	USA

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