



The Bo-Peep Lost Sheep Sanctuary Labels



As everyone knows, to a Welsh farmer his sheep are more than just livestock; they are his flock, his friends, his family, his Well anything more is just rumour and libelous. He will be on first name terms with all of them, so if any should go missing it will be a personal loss.

Founded in 1935 in Rhyadr, The Bo-Peep Lost Sheep Sanctuary exists to repatriate lost sheep with their owners, and to help locate those which have gone astray. The figures speak for themselves. Bo-Pee, as it's affectionately known, now has 8 offices across Mid-Wales and has handled over 50,000 cases since its founding.



From a philatelic viewpoint, Bo-Pee has given rise to some interesting artefacts over the years, examples of these are enclosed.

Firstly there is a publicity label, showing the nursery rhyme character in search of her sheep. This is used on the Sanctuary's mail, and that of its supporters, for publicity purposes since 1958. The basic design hasn't changed over the years, but collectors do look for variations from different printings when alternative paper has been used or slight changes in the format. The original design showed Bo Peep looking to the left, but the Sanctuary's ovine-psychologist pointed out that this gave the impression that the Sanctuary was backward looking, so all subsequent printings have her looking forwards to the right. Sheep rarely look backwards and neither should they. One particular collectable item is the SAY NO TO ROAD KILL overprint from 2001. This was issued as a response to the growing black market in sheep alleged to have been found on the roadside being sold in pubs and car boot sales.

Another type of label issued is the "Have You Seen This Sheep" series in the style of appeals for lost children printed on milk containers. These are issued when a particularly young and vulnerable ewe goes astray. The example enclosed is for 'Mary' who has run away several times and has been found enjoying the high life of the towns, especially during the magic mushroom season. I am pleased to say this label led to a successful outcome and Mary now lives a happy and settled life.

There have been but few labels of the next type - the Wanted label. This example is for Black Sam, a notorious character of myth and legend. Sightings of him crop up frequently over a 2,000 sq mile area of mid-Wales, but most merely turn out to be alien big cats, figments of the imagination or ghostly apparitions. But whenever a young ewe goes missing, it's Black Sam who is blamed. Just where he takes

these ewes is unknown, but it's said that he has a harem of over 500 ewes deep in some lost and remote valley in the mountains.

The style of these labels has changed with each issue, but many of them are now hard to find. It's reckoned that some were produced in quantities of 50 or less, but over 6,000 of the Black Sam label were printed.

The sanctuary ran a Christmas Post from 1997-1999. As a registered charity it is permitted to do this, though there are restrictions on the scope of the service. It is mostly Scout groups who take advantage of this relaxation of the Post Office monopoly to raise funds for good causes. A single stamp was issued with a value of 25p depicting a wintery sheep in typical festive mood. Surprisingly this venture was not a success. Too many labels were produced – 25,000, sufficient for the next two years as well. Some say that this was because instead of paying a fee the sheep farmers just swapped cards at the local markets in the weeks running up to Christmas.

A bonus item with this issue is the little booklet of labels issued around 1955 to publicise National Sheepdog Week. The booklets held 5 adhesive labels in a strip. They appear to have been hand perforated. It is included because some specialists regard these as the forerunner to the Bo-Peep labels as some of the producers were involved in both organisations. From the cover and the stamps it's obvious they are referring to a Collie type dog, rather than the more decorative Old English Sheep Dog. These booklets were sold for 2½d (1 pence in today's money) and were sponsored by Collie-Wobbles dog food.

The labels crop up in collections from time to time used on a cover, but entire booklets are more common. The Welsh Cinderella Stamp Club has made a detailed study of these booklets and catalogued several variations including:

- The stamps are folded forwards (normal) or backwards

- Size 10 or size 12 staples used

- Double stapled booklets

- Different papers used resulting in noticeable variations in print colour

- Stamp strips inverted in the booklet

- Unstapled strips which have never been made up into a booklet

- Imperforate strips of 5

- Right rather than left margin stapling

- Booklets with a strip of 4 or even 3 labels; not uncommon due to incorrect paper width. These are easily distinguished from forgeries by the margins.

- And the very rare inverted, inversely stapled and backward folded booklet.

However most collectors are content with one label imperforate on top and bottom and the first one in the booklet that is imperforate on three sides.