

## **AXIS OF EVIL MAPPING NEWSLETTER # 4 OF 2017 – end of April – New Titles: see below for details**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Lan and I spent two weeks during April in China as members of a tour group – the first time that we have travelled this way. We went with Sinorama, a Chinese tour operator with offices around the world. We can recommend them. Our group of 33 proved to be mostly Canadian, with only a family of 6 from the USA to flesh out the group. As expected, most of the participants were older people and some were too frail to really enjoy parts of the trip, but some were younger couples. We participated in a group tour for two reasons: first, as we normally travel as independent ‘freelance’ individualists, we decided it was time to discover how the great majority of people travel; second, as a result of recent travels, my normally robust health suffered serious problems. I spent three days in hospital hooked up to an IV machine that pumped me full of five litres of fluid to get my kidneys to re-start. Having three days to lie there looking at the ceiling gave me time to think and I decided that my days of back-packing around weird corners of the planet are coming to an end. I’ll still be able to visit places like Uzbekistan and Mongolia, but in a more ‘western’ manner. In addition to our China tour, we also spent ten days driving roads and exploring the routes less followed in Sarawak, Brunei, and the Malayan Peninsula. Reports on these areas follows.

### **QUOTE OF THE MONTH: HUMOUROUS DIVISION**

Recognizing that we live in peculiar times, where politics has been turned on its head by the insanity coming out of Washington these days, one becomes used to ridiculous statements being made by a variety of supposedly sensible individuals. Recent comments made by US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin about China and currency manipulation are so staggeringly insane as to worthy of quoting, so I will:

“To manipulate a currency you have to be doing it to disadvantage the United States. To the extent that you manipulate a currency that advantages the United States, that’s not currency manipulation”. (Financial Times, April 19). This is such an absurd statement that I could not, at first, believe that an adult had made it, let alone the man in charge of ensuring the integrity of the US dollar. Unfortunately, such absurdities seem to be all too commonly being made by several of Trump’s billionaire cabinet members, reinforcing the belief that one can be rich while still being an ignoramus. Sorry, but currency manipulation has very little to do with any specific country and everything to do with boosting exports. That’s why the World Trade Organization exists (to stop such activities through investigation).

### **CHINA; STILL A TRAVEL BARGAIN**

This month, we visited Beijing, Chongching, sailed the Yangtze River through the Three Gorges, stayed in Wuhan, and Shanghai as part of a package tour that was affordable, well-organized, and respectful of individual needs. Sinorama is a Chinese government tour operator that brings about 5,000 visitors to China each month. We actually had a blue sky and minimal pollution in Beijing, a city renowned for its lack of air quality, so felt we had a bonus. For a city of some 20 million people, the city appears to have relatively little to offer touristically, but we did the routine and visited the Heavenly Temple and the Forbidden City once again. I noticed the non-uniformed, black-suited secret police scattered all around Tiamenen Square, famous for the massacre of the students a generation ago. Actually, there were three ‘T’s that our guide advised us were forbidden subjects for him to discuss: the first was the Tiamenen Square Incident, the second was Tibet, and the third was Taiwan – all being extremely sensitive topics for the Chinese communists. He did, however, tell us what he claimed were ‘personal’ experiences of life under Mao, the early days of communist rule, and the murderous rampages of the Red Guards, and they were plausibly accurate, if somewhat muted in their restraint. If you’re reading this and don’t know what I’m talking about, let me know and I’ll expand in a later newsletter. China has a rather sordid history.

This is a travel article, not a political diatribe, but it is difficult to separate the two when discussing China. We also visited a re-built section of the Great Wall north of Beijing, which was originally a fortress cum troop emplacement protecting a pass just north of the Imperial City in ancient times. For the government, it is also a convenient controlled environment for them to herd tourists under a high degree of supervisory control, unaware that everything is modernly rebuilt. In fact, the ‘traditional Chinese village’ that supposedly occupied the interior of the fortress is still under construction. The fact that there never was such a village is beside the point – people want to shop, right?

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We also spent a little time in crowded Chongching, formerly Chungking and the capital of China from the mid-1930s to 1949, when the President, Chiang kai Chek moved the capital to Taipei, Formosa, now the disputed country cum province known as Taiwan. Chungking was merged in with two other cities to create the most populous urban area in the world (some 34 million people) in the early 1990s. Our tour group felt rather intimidated by the jostling hordes of people that seemed to be everywhere. It was quite different to Canada, where one always has space! I visited the city in 1982 and couldn't recognize more than the riverfront. New skyscrapers are everywhere, and put on an excellent 'son et lumiere' portrayal every night as an artistic attraction.

The five-story river ship that carried us downstream was nicely fitted out with en-suite rooms and a large buffet-style dining area. However, the rising waters created by the Three Gorges Dam make the trip less of an adventure than it used to be, and the cities along the route are all new towns, housing people displaced by the creation of the dam (some 1.2M were relocated by rising waters). As an exercise in gargantuan economic alteration, the Three Gorges dam and the massive lake upstream is impressive; as an economic achievement, it generates a fair amount of electricity and protects downstream areas from flooding. China is now building 40 nuclear power plants to replace the coal-driven plants used today. Everything in China is gargantuan; cities of millions of people are commonplace, and using enormous tracts of land to build high-rises to house 1.4 billion people makes the construction crane China's national bird (our guide's joke). Seeing 100 identical 40-storey apartment blocks in one part of one city was a sight one could not imagine outside of China!

As a country, China is no longer the travel bargain it used to be. Prices approximate Canadian values for food and accommodation. Fortunately, we were on a pre-paid tour, so could stay at five-star hotels without realizing the costs, and eat ten-course meals routinely, but we realized that our trip was massively subsidized. Notwithstanding, it was an incredible ten-day extravaganza and I'm glad we went. It is not possible to see China in ten days, but we feel that the trip was interesting, affordable (\$1,300cdn for flight, accommodation, and most meals) and met the needs of most of the people in our group. Our guide was superb at juggling a timetable that had to be flexible, re-arranging dinner times to meet the needs of traffic congestion, and herding people obviously unused to being herded into planes, boats, buses, and trains while keeping his cool and maintaining a sense of humour. He had to keep his talks within what was politically acceptable, and I was hard-pressed not to correct some of his politically 'correct' statements, but it was a tour, not a tutorial, and I reserved comments whenever I could. Still, one could do worse than see China on a tour. We can certainly recommend the experience.

#### **MALAYSIA: STILL ATTRACTIVE AS A TRAVEL DESTINATION**

We flew to Kuching, in Sarawak, Malaysia, from Shanghai, via Kuala Lumpur. We rented a car at the airport for half the price of the vehicle we had reserved on the internet and started driving eastwards the next morning. Sarawak is one of our mapping areas, and we'd never been to the island before, so we hooked our computer into GIS mode and started downloading road information as we travelled. Although the road network isn't complicated (basically, there is one east-west highway, with side roads leading to towns on the coast or in the interior), the highway is in the process of being twinned (a sort of motorway, but with intersections and side exits to commercial activities) and the alignment is changing somewhat as curves are taken out and modern machinery carves away hillsides. It will be quite nice when finished, but a bit of a chore to drive right now.

We did manage to drive some new roads, which will enable us to update future editions of Malaysia. As a bonus, we found that one can take a rental car into Brunei, so we went all the way to the border to test out this unusual feature. That was when we discovered that our vehicle had no ownership papers in it, no insurance documents, and no contract to say that we had the right to drive the car. Furthermore, I'd left my driver's license in Canada, so couldn't even prove that I had the right to be driving! Regardless, the border official could see that the car was rented, and just waved us into Brunei. We spent six hours in this small country. Apart from saying that it is neat and tidy, we couldn't say that it has much touristic appeal. Road signs were in Arabic or in Malay and few seemed to follow any formula that I would consider to be sensible, but we survived, eventually found the central core of the capital and took some pictures of a mosque and of a Chinese temple, and of what appeared to be a racecourse with one wall decorated by a huge portrait of the country's ruler. We then returned to Miri, a city in eastern Sarawak, where we found a \$15 hotel for the night, driving back to a town east of Kuching the next day along a scenic coastal road.

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We then flew to KL, as everyone seems to call Kuala Lumpur, a modern city that has spread out over most of the Klang Valley. The name means 'Muddy Confluence' and refers to its early days, when tin mining was the mainstay of its economy. KL survived because it was halfway between the two economic powerhouses of Singapore and Penang, and although it is now the capital of a prosperous developing country, Islamic extremism is rearing its ugly head and political tensions exist. The non-Muslim portion of the population has shrunk from 40% at independence to 24% today, new mosques are being erected throughout the country, while non-mosques are discouraged, and non-Muslims are forbidden to use the word Allah. Most women and even young girls now wear headscarves and some states have instituted Sharia law parallel with common law. I would say that extremism is in its early stages of takeover, but it is happening and is making the Chinese community nervous. The country has two educational systems, one for Chinese and one for everyone else and this leads to lack of community relationship. Most Malays only learn Malay and this limits work opportunities; actually, Malaysia seems to me like two countries inhabiting the same area, with neither side acknowledging the other. It is a very pleasant country, with beaches and hill resorts. It is friendly to tourists and prices are quite reasonable. A good standard hotel would cost about \$20us for a double with private bath and air-conditioning. Gas is ridiculously cheap, food in restaurants and grocery stores is very affordable, cities are clean and modern, credit cards are usable in most stores, shopping malls abound, and my one complaint is that there tends to be an over-emphasis on chicken. This was explained to me by one of our hosts – the Muslims won't eat pork, many Chinese won't eat beef, fish is not a big part of most Malay diets, so only chicken is left. KFC is very popular! As usual, we were not in the country as tourists, but were intent on driving as much as possible to update our map's information with satellite imagery, so most of our time involved hours and hours of rural driving. Fortunately, Malaysia is reasonably well-developed, so the road network is quite good and well-maintained. Of all the countries in the Far East, Malaysia comes out high as a developed society that would interest tourists. Singapore is Asia as it should be, but Malaysia has great potential – if it can overcome religious extremism.

### **BORCH RELEASES NEW EDITIONS**

I have just been advised that Borch Verlag is in the process of releasing sixteen new editions. None have had a chance to reach here, and apparently none have new ISBNs or prices, but as time passes we should see fresh printings of Amsterdam, Athens, Copenhagen, Costa Rica, Crete, India North, Lisbon, Los Angeles, Manhattan, Moscow, NYC, Seattle, Singapore, Toronto, Vancouver, and Vienna. Apart from anything else, Borch's commitment to maintain titles confirms my off-stated contention that paper maps are still in good demand. Face it, we wouldn't be publishing as many titles as we do if there was no demand.

### **WHAT'S NEW WITH ITMB**

At this point in time, we are trying to prepare the way for new editions for the rest of 2017. Lan and I are involved in a lot of travel at the moment and this is delaying some administrative matters such as year-end summing up, but we're making progress on getting out new maps, as can be seen below. We are convinced that the market for paper maps remains strong, and continue to invest in new editions and new titles, so be assured that we'll be producing maps for many years to come. Our sales went up last year by a margin larger than I expected, reinforcing my contention that paper maps are still a formidable marketing product. However, travel needs are changing, and we are finding that many of our maps of sections of a country sell less well than previously, while maps of entire countries show improvement. Why? I don't know.

### **CURRENT PROJECTS AND OUT OF STOCK ITEMS**

Albania is running low on inventory (65 copies left). A new edition is in preparation.

Brasil is approaching the end of its print run; about three months' supply left.

Canada is running low on inventory (88 copies left). A new edition is in preparation.

Delhi is almost out of copies (7 left). A new edition is being prepared; no ETA.

Dominican Republic/Haiti is almost out of copies (6 left). A new edition is being prepared.

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Japan Travel Atlas is almost out of print. A new title will replace it, concentrating on the train routes.  
Kuala Lumpur is almost out of copies (3 left). A newly updated map is being prepared.  
Kyoto/Western Japan is running out of copies (80 left). A new edition is underway.  
London and SE England is approaching the end of its current edition (74 copies).  
Mexico Pacific Region/Guadalajara is now out of copies. A new edition is being prepared, no ETA.  
Mexico South is getting low on copies (10 copies), so a new edition will be needed before summer.  
Nova Scotia is out of copies. A new edition is at press and expected in July.  
QCI, or the Queen Charlotte Islands, is out of copies. We are re-naming this map Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Is. to reflect the more current practice used in BC.  
Saint Lucia is running out of copies (71 left).  
Sao Paulo is running out of copies (88 left).  
Surinam/French Guiana is running low on copies (98 left).  
USA Pacific Coast is selling faster than expected and running out of copies (42 left).  
USA as a country map is just about out of stock (83 copies left).  
Vancouver/Gtr. Vancouver is temporarily almost out of copies; more expected soon.

#### **NEW TITLES FOR MARCH, 2017**

**Africa West Route Travel Atlas (Tangier to Cape Town via Senegal) 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. 2017 127 pg., perfect bound 1:3,400,000, with numerous city maps ISBN 9781771290111 UPC 817712901118 \$16.95cdn/us E14.95 13.95GBP – AVAILABLE**

**Cuba East Travel Reference Map 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. 2017 1:420,000 ISBN 9781771291620 UPC 817712916204 \$12.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP – AVAILABLE**

**New York State & New England Travel Reference Map 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. 2017 1:800,000 ISBN 9781771295642 UPC 817712956422 \$9.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP - AVAILABLE**

**Oregon and Washington States Travel Reference Map 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. 2017 1:750,000 ISBN 9781771298971 UPC 817712989710 \$10.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP – AVAILABLE**

**Thailand North Travel Reference Map 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. 2017 9781771297943 1:830,000 on waterproof paper ISBN 9781771297943 UPC 817712979438 12.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP – AVAILABLE**

**Washington State & SW British Columbia Travel Reference Map 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. 2017 1:800,000 ISBN 9781771290869 UPC 817712908698 \$9.95cdn/us E9.50 8.96GBP – AVAILABLE**

#### **NEW ITMB TITLES FOR APRIL, 2017**

**Edinburgh and Southern Scotland Travel Reference Map 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 2017 1:10,000/1:370,000 9781771292597 UPC 817712925978 \$11.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP – Scotland is a lovely country to visit and Edinburgh is its crown jewel. This third edition is a modest update on the previous one; the city map extends from the zoo in the west to east of Holyrood and from the harbour south to below Holyrood. The regional map on the reverse is centred on Glasgow, and goes north to Fort William/Pitlochry and south to Carlisle/Newcastle. As usual, both sides include touristic information appropriate to the map's scale. A feature added to both sides is a Top Attractions list, emphasizing such sites as Robert Burns' birthplace and Drumlanrig Castle (north of Dumfries off the A76). **AVAILABLE****

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**Newfoundland & Labrador Travel Reference Map 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 2017 1:800,000/1:300,000 ISBN 9781771295635 UPC 817712956354 &10.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP** – Newfoundland, Britain's first and oldest American colony, joined Canada somewhat reluctantly in 1949. It was re-named Newfoundland and Labrador some years later to reflect the political reality of a huge tract of land that was given to it. The province has blossomed into a treasured part of Canada and a touristic haven par excellence. The island portion is well known for its one east-west road, and St. John's as the oldest city in the Americas north of the Caribbean. Access to the province is a tad difficult. One either takes a ferry from Nova Scotia, weather permitting, or flies in. There is now a road north from the eastern edges of road connections in Quebec north to Labrador City and east to Goose Bay, with a southerly stretch of 500kms to a seasonal ferry across the Strait of Belle Isle to a spot on the northern island coast, not far from L'Anse aux Meadows, the historic site of the first European Norse settlement in the New World, circa 1,000AD. The map is double-sided, to reflect the importance of both portions of the province, and the island side includes insets of St. John's and Conception Bay. It also includes the nearby French possession of St. Pierre et Miquelon, the only colony left for France after the British conquest of Quebec in 1759/60. **AVAILABLE**

**Salzburg and Western Austria Travel Reference Map 2nd Ed. 2017 1:15,000/1:380,000** – We published a map of Salzburg a year ago, along with our map of the country of Austria. Unfortunately, we spelled the name of the city incorrectly, creating some problems for some of our distributors. As we had to re-do the map in any case, we decided to expand the scale of the regional map as there was nothing wrong with the Salzburg map itself, and created a new map concentrating on the western half of Austria (essentially, that portion immediately below Germany and including Liechtenstein, a bit of Switzerland and the northernmost portion of Italy). The regional map is excellent, showing the road network in great detail, and using hill shading to portray mountains. This makes the map very easy to read. Salzburg itself is shown admirably, using the system common in Europe of showing urbanized areas in orange, motorways in yellow, main roads in a reddish orange, significant roads in pink, and local streets in white. As the Altstadt (historic city centre) is relatively small, we have included an expanded inset map noting the major buildings, plazas, bridges, and touristic points of interest. We will be continuing to market the earlier map as a map of all of Austria until we can complete the artwork for the country map later this year, but we encourage our customers to switch their focus to this map for the city and regional coverage. **AVAILABLE**

**Tanzania Travel Reference Map 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. 2017 on waterproof paper 1:1,300,000 ISBN 9781553414438 UPC 815534144386 \$12.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP** – Tanzania is one of the marvels of Africa – an enormous land mass administered reasonably sanely, with great touristic appeal. The map is double-sided, essentially divided into northern and southern portions. Most of the developed touristic attractions are on the northern side – Serengeti, Mount Kilimanjaro, Zanzibar, and Lake Victoria. The reverse side shows Selous, Dar es Salaam, Mafia Island, and Lake Malawi. Insets include Dar, Arusha, and Stone City. **AVAILABLE**

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