



# *Sheetlines*

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“Kerry musings”  
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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.

The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

## ***Kerry musings***

***David Archer***

Earlier in the year we had a short holiday in Spain to build ourselves up for the rigours of the AGM. On the fifth day, we decided to repeat a very nice leisurely circular walk, but to go in the opposite direction. I took the local map with me, and spent most of the walk wondering why, especially as I do not like to be seen walking with a map at home, but do like to have a map with me. So, apart from seeing where to go, are there any advantages in having a map on a walk, even an easy walk for which the map is not needed?

Well, it gives you something to compare the scenery with, gives names to many landscape features and tells what is over the hill or where that road goes. So often, even on familiar walks, one notices something for the first time and needs a map to answer questions. I particularly like to stand on a hill and look down, make out the path just travelled and then see it on the map. Especially if I can turn around and see where we will go next, winding our way through the countryside. The route always seems so obvious that I frequently wonder why I brought, nay bought a map in the first place.

Although none of us has done it, numerous people see a map as a tour diary, to be annotated as they progress along the walk. Have you ever come across a map marked with little numbers, usually within a circle and an arrow or arrows pointing out from them, like male symbols? If you can remember your map reading exercises, and put yourself in the position of the map defacer, you will usually be able to identify what was being photographed. Once the walk reaches the cliffs, the vast expanses of pale blue sea are filled with pencilled notes on the local geology, flowers and nesting birds. Such notes are always at right angles to the coastline, pointing to specific locations. Lunch details, including prices in old money, B&B addresses and train times are usually relegated to the white inside covers. Yes, a map makes an excellent souvenir, a reminder of a visit, something to take home and bore people with, especially if it has a few stains or mud splashes, prompting tales of some sort.

Whether they look at it or not, carrying a map re-assures even the most confident walker that they are going along the right route. And if they keep it hidden, they feel rather smug when companions keep looking at their copies. 'Don't worry, we don't need a map, I know the way.' Sometimes at weekends, the babble of an organised walk is heard going past our hedge. If we look out, we often see about thirty or so heading for the Kerry Ridgeway, and you can bet that at least six are carrying a map without looking at it, just following the walk leader, who knows the way and never has a map (visible). I would find it difficult just to be led, and have great sympathy with the map carriers.

Re-assurance is certainly needed when you come to a less walked section of the path, overgrown and very doubtful. Here, the trusty map tells whether there is a way through, whether the way is a dead end or not. It gives comfort as well as re-assurance, things that are not printed on the map. There is nothing worse than being extremely hot/cold/tired and having to re-trace one's steps when

unsure of what happens further along a path. A good map also gives confidence, especially if the leader of a walk has only planned it on paper. When the very doubtful bit is arrived at, and mere mortals are only re-assured, the leader is confident. They know there is a way through, and boldly lead whilst others hesitate. Your path now appears to go through a little garden gate with rambling roses and pretty flowers all around, plus a fierce black and white 'Private' sign just beyond. A nasty looking and defiant person emerges from the house, only to see your map and know that you know their secret : that they know that you know that they know you know that beyond the gate is a public right of way. Don't forget to shut the gate. On our Spanish walk, we emerged from the middle of some farm buildings, through which the path went, and saw the farmer's wife restraining two nasty-looking and barking dogs. Beyond her, and facing us, were an older couple who had obviously just stopped, thinking they had got it wrong. I am positive that on seeing the map in my hand, they hurried past the woman and us, heading in the direction we had come. Seeing our map made them confident that they were in the right place and that we had come along the sought-after path.

Without doubt, carrying a map gives you an identity. It says who you are and what you are doing. When we met the couple at the farm, we were not wearing boots and had no rucksacks, but the folded map in my hand instantly identified us as walkers out walking. Even without a backpack or haversack, being in the wrong place, map in hand, will tell someone an awful lot about you and help ease potentially uncomfortable situations. In the right place, sitting in the sunshine and having a pub lunch, the map on the table will often be a conversation opener to another walker. The map identifies you and what you are doing. It shows your intentions, and maybe when walking, you will meet someone who will warn you of a problem ahead or point out something interesting to see. Something that would not happen without a visible map.

When overseas, a map is very useful in showing you are a bona-fide walker if there are any language problems and you stray onto forbidden territory. It shows you are OK, and probably foreign. Without speaking the local language, if you need directions or are lost, it is something to show, and hopefully the other person can understand it and give directions by pointing, again overcoming language problems. In the mid-1970s we went to Italy and were to meet a friend in Bologna. We knew that we would have the afternoon to ourselves and bought the local map, an ancient looking piece of paper, small scale, uncoloured and dated around 1900. But we still went for a walk with it. Into the wooded hills. And got lost? No, we were just undecided as to where exactly we were. When we heard hammering we found a man renovating a cottage and showed him the map, hoping he would say where we were. But no, the map was so fascinating that we could get no sense out of him, especially after he called his friend to have a look. I cannot remember how we got back, but obviously we did. Thus, a map has the power to impress and can give you the wow factor when one is shown. This happens more often than

one might think, especially overseas, where locals appear to have no idea that such things exist.

The map you carry says a lot about you. Whether on display or not. When on a walk in Britain, I do not like to be seen carrying a map. You look as if you are studying it all the time, rather than enjoying the views. You appear unsure of the way. People look at you. You stand out as a stranger in these parts. Out of sight, a map allows you to move around unnoticed (if lacking boots and rucksack). People who walk locally, (only needing suitable shoes), dog walkers and such, like the old *Pathfinders* because they are compact, fit easily into a pocket and show public rights of way, so no problems or arguments. *Pathfinders* identify people who like an ordered life. *Explorer* users are prepared to put up with a lot; large, bulky, doubled sided maps that are a pest to use in even slightly adverse conditions. And the paper fails after being wetted. On the plus side? Not much as far as walking goes (it has been said). Have they ever considered the old *Pathfinders*? Those who use the 1:50,000 scale for walking are mild risk takers, choosing not to have the advantage of field boundaries to help ease any problems. A dwindling bunch, the old elite, still use the one-inch Seventh Series, liking a good map, a good walk and a good challenge all at the same time. 'Green footpaths on maps are for softies, I know the law concerning trespass inside-out.' 'Nothing much changes in the countryside, these maps are fine.'

I suppose that taking a map with you also gives you someone or something to blame when things go wrong, as in 'That could have been shown better', or 'No way was that half a mile'. Before an event, the map says this or it says that. It talks to you. If things go wrong, we say the map shows this in a confused manner or did not show that. It stops talking to you; you have fallen out as you have questioned its accuracy. Whether a conversationalist or not, a map is a companion, another member of your party, and someone to listen to, unless you fall out.

If things do not work out, the map becomes part of an emergency kit, for you and others. With it, you can work out a plan B or give help and sort out problems for other walkers. Motorists will often stop someone with a map to ask directions. Another good deed done. It is akin to an insurance policy. You know where you want to go, and it should be as simple as walking, but play safe, and for a couple of pounds buy a map, in case the worst comes to the worst. In really desperate times it can be folded into a sun hat or used as a fire lighter, and as a last resort you can write on it in big letters 'Help. We are lost'.