

# GPS 1.0 beta, AKA Britannia Depicta...

(or *Travel Commentary in Strip Maps*)

By Leigh Lockwood

I won't bore you with the reasons (which means I haven't figured them out), but I have always enjoyed strip maps: Columnar maps of a single road giving detail along the route—known as AAA TripTiks in the US and AA Route Planners in the UK. As far as I know, the first UK strip maps were created by Ogilby in 1675 and published in a 100 map atlas, although Matthew Paris may have implemented a similar idea about 400 years earlier. Each Ogilby page depicts elegant three-dimensional scrolls tracing a route at one inch to the mile. Each strip defines towns, mileage markers and some features such as manors, towns, streams, and bridges but does not give much detail or any commentary. Ogilby's folio atlas traces over 7,000 miles.

According to Hodgkiss in *Discovering Antique Maps*, "The Impact of [Ogilby's] Britannia on ensuing roadbooks was such that only derivatives appeared until John Cary made a new survey at the close of the eighteenth century." Ogilby's direct influence lasted over a century.

This article describes Owen & Bowen's *Britannia Depicta Or Ogilby Improv'd Being a Correct Coppy of Mr. Ogilby's Actual Survey of all ye Direct & Principal Cross Roads in England and Wales: Wherein are exactly Delineated & Engraven, All ye Cities, Towns, Villages, Churches, Seats, & Situate on or near the Roads, with the respective Distances in Measured and Computed Miles, And to render this Work universally Usefull & agreeable [beyond any of it's kind] are added in a clear & most Compendius Method 1, A full & particular Description & Account of all the Cities, Borough-Towns, Towns Corporate & their Arms, Antiquity, Charters, Priviledges, Treade, Rarities, & with- Sutable Remarks on all places of Note drawn from the Best Historians and Antiquaries*—... The title goes on for another few paragraphs, but I found the "Sutable Remarks" amusing and intend to quote after a bit more description. (See Figure 1)

Taking the place of Ogilby's coffee table (tea table) folio edition, *Britannia Depicta* was published from 1720 to about 1760 in various pocket-size, traveler's editions. My 1751 fourth edition of *Britannia Depicta* contains 273 pages and about a like number of maps, and is printed from copper plate, double sided. The volume contains a mileage chart, table of crossroads, index of towns described, explanations, and a short description of the counties. Each of the approximately 250 pages of strip maps contain hundreds of data points such as mileage

markers, bridges, forests, mountains or valleys, manors, churches, hedges, side roads, rivers, streams, ponds, and more. Each strip has a compass rose totaling either 4 or 5 per page.

To get an idea of the magnitude of the Britannia Depicta project, I extrapolate: Three columns per page times 11 miles per column times 250 pages equals about 8,000 miles of detailed strip mapping—measuring mileage, documenting geographic details, all the while weathering the taunts of an unappreciative populace along the routes. (All my estimates are subject to correction, denial, or to be blamed on the editor).

Pardon the side trip (and the groan-producing pun), but following is a quote from a letter written by the surveyors to the publisher of the 1804 strip map atlas "*Traveller's Directory or A Pocket Companion Shewing the Course of the Main Road From Philadelphia to New York and from Philadelphia to Washington*" (quoted from the Princeton University website). (See Figure 2) Working almost a century before, the surveyors for Britannia Depicta must have faced similar public appreciation, enhanced by the sharp British wit and sarcasm:

"...After twelve days driving our way through an immense multitude of Questioners, Observers, laughters, & Critics, who generally thronged around us at every place, to our great discomposure at first ... we are at length arrived here. If astonishment would ensure success to a work, we may entertain strong hopes indeed of ours; but it has nearly exhausted our health, as every violent effort naturally must..."

The road to Washington was a 300 mile frolic compared to the 8,000 or so miles in *Britannia*...

While this article is about Owen & Bowen's *Britannia Depicta*, I can't resist two references to Pennsylvania towns in the *Traveller's* TripTik mentioned above. Tully Town is described, "At the twenty four mile stone, is an insignificant place...." Or would you rather be from Moreton's Tavern described as, "This place is noted for the first public execution in the County of Bucks...?"

So let me quote some of my favorite "Sutable Remarks" from *Britannia Depicta* (question marks mean I could not decipher the letters).





Figure 1. Page from 1750 "Britannia Depicta," describing Lady Godiva's ride.





Figure 2. Four strips from 1804 "Traveller's Directory ... Philadelphia to New York." Note the dearth of information compared to "Britannia Depicta" which was many decades older.

Page 225 (My favorite): "Old Radnor. Called by the Britains Maisyved (?) & Pencraig from its mountainous situation, is believed by the judicious Author to be the Magos or Magnos of Antonius, whereas 'tis related in the Notitia Provinciarum ye Commander of the Pacencian Regiment lay in Garrsion in the time of Theodosius the Younger; the inhabitants of the County [as the same learned author observes] being called Magestecens.... This Town was burned by Khys ap Gruffudh in the reign of Kings 7 we find nothing remarkable of it ever since." Author's note: That's 600 very uneventful years.

Page 216: "Donnington Castle. The Ancient Seat of Geoffrey Chaucer, where under shady Oak, still called Chaucer's Oak, he is to have penned many of his excellent poems." And the 2012 entry (submitted by my UK colleague Ian Watts) would be: "Donnington Castle has stood solid in Nottinghamshire against the waves of sound generated by the "Monsters of Rock Festival" over many decades. Would be invaders have included AC/DC and Black Sabbath and their legion of followers."

Page 33: "Kensington. It is a pretty town well built and populous. In it is a Palace Royal though not magnificent is very convenient and delightful. Its curious gardens are frequently visited by the nobility and gentry."

Page 119: "St. Albans is so call'd St. Alban the English Proto Martyr, who suffered in the Persecution under Diodesian Anno 203 and had afterwards a church built here in Memory of him by King Offa. .... In this town Anno 429 was held a Synod against the Pelagian Heresy which Agricola a Bishop & Monk of Bangor & Scholar of Pelagin's had infected with. But by the sound and convincing arguments of German Bishop of Auxere..... Who were present at said Synod, was by degree Extinguished. In this town was executed JOHN BALL, that seditious libeler under Richard the 2d for his rebellious designs."

Page 129: "Southampton. Supposed to stand on the ruins of the Old Clausentium, is a place of antiquity and note, whither the Saxon and Danish Kings used frequently to resort. K. Tanatus after many prosperous Battles, incoming sole Monarch of England &c. happening to be in this Town, the Paresites about him complimented him with Divine Attributes, and would feign have persuaded him all things were subject to His Royal Will."

Page 48: "Leeds Castle: was built by the noble family of the Crevequers & was afterward given to Bartholomew, Baron of Badilsmere by E. 2nd who ungratefully uniting

himself to the other Barons & fortifying this castle against the said King, had it taken from him by siege, and was afterward made prisoner at Battle of Burronbriggs, & executed at Canterbury." And the 2012 entry: "Leeds Castle (confusingly in Kent not Yorkshire) the site of many a wild weekend for gentlefolk of certain years partaking in the entertainment proffered by septuagenarian colonial entertainers. One Robert Zimmerman (Bob Dylan) will be performing there in July 2012."

Page 4: "Rowright: In this Parish stands a remarkable Circle of Huge Stones which (as the Tradition goes) were Men Metamorphized but are more judicially supposed to have been erected by Rollo the Dane in memory of a Victory obtained by him over the Saxons." (Note, Rollo the Dane lived from about 846 to 931).

Just as in today's media, *Brittania Depicta's* contributors reported on intrigue, violence, and nudity such as on page 220 (See Figure 1): "Coventry: In this City there is an Annuall Procession of Cavalcade with a Naked Figure of a Woman on Horse-back, in Memory of Godiva who to ease ye inhabitants of ye Heavy Impositions lay'd upon them by her incensed Husband Leofrick, Lord of ye Town, ??? Edward Confessor, comply'd with his terms of Remission in riding Naked thro' ye City which by means of her long Hair she performed without Exposing her Self."

There are hundreds more of what I would consider charming "Suitable Remarks," but even using Mike Nicholl's ([www.pastpages.co.uk](http://www.pastpages.co.uk)) high resolution images left me with a permanent squint. Special thanks to Mr. Nicholls as this project would have been infinitely more difficult without his kind permission to use his images. In our correspondence he made the interesting observation, "I find road maps very interesting for the detail of wayside data—the windmills, gallows, half-way houses, etc. I can identify many half-way houses as pubs and hotels, still in business."

I think it is remarkable that all this material was engraved, printed, and kept legible (more or less) on a plate size of about 4.75 by 7.5 inches and then printed on both sides. For example, page 220 reproduced with this article contains four strips with 5 compass roses, 50 miles of road, 350 words of remarks, and maybe 250 data points along the road. The second reference below, MacEachren, mentions, "In spite of persistence of the strip map format across time and culture, it has received virtually no attention in the cartographic literature." Indeed, the format has been essentially unchanged for much longer than the 335 years from Ogilby to today.




—Leigh Lockwood's first use of strip maps was in the 1950's (age 7ish) pushing his finger along route 105 from Mexico City to Pachuca, Tamazunchale, Ciudad Mante, Ciudad Valles, Ciudad Victoria, Linares, Monterrey, and ultimately Nuevo Laredo on the annual trip to the US. (Surely you knew there was a Calle Abraham Lincoln in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico). For his suffering parents, it was an interminable three day trip in a 1952 Mercury that overheated in the Sierra Madre passes, and the map was his father's strategy to avoid the interminably repeated question, "Are we there yet?"

Leigh owns three Britannia Depictas and a few pages from Ogilby, and also own the Moore and Jones "Traveller's..." New York to Washington book from 1804. And Humboldt's Santa Fe to Mexico City strip map in three columns covering about 1,500 miles on one sheet. And the 1866 edition of "Hunter & Pickup's Panoramic Guide from Niagara Falls to Quebec," 11 feet long when unfolded! Leigh confesses to some John Cary atlases and maps. And of course several AAA TripTiks. In case his wife reads this, he makes no further confessions.

#### SUGGESTED FOR FURTHER READING:

- Hodgkiss, Alan G. *Discovering Antique Maps*, Shire Publications, Ltd., 2007. Includes a very informative chapter on strip maps.
- Excellent article about history and use of strip maps by Alan MacEachern in which he reproduces a page from my same edition of Moore & Jones "Traveller's...": [www.geovista.psu.edu/.../MacEachern\\_ALinearView\\_86.pdf](http://www.geovista.psu.edu/.../MacEachern_ALinearView_86.pdf)
- Strips maps in action, New York City Subways: <http://secondavenuesagas.com/2011/07/07/more-info-emerges-on-transits-new-platform-strip-maps/>
- Creating speed traps using strip maps: [http://onlinemanuals.txdot.gov/txdotmanuals/szn/developing\\_strip\\_maps.htm](http://onlinemanuals.txdot.gov/txdotmanuals/szn/developing_strip_maps.htm)
- Route 66 strip maps and other information: [www.route66maps.com](http://www.route66maps.com).





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