Report for the Commission on Map Projections
2002 – 2007

Terms of Reference:

The public at large refers to maps often. Their perception of the world is informed by maps. If they cannot properly interpret maps, their perceptions cannot be accurate. At the scale of world maps, at least, the public ought to understand rudiments of map projection.

Map projections, which have always been important to maps, are more practically available now than they ever have been. They play, or ought to play, an important role in the daily work of cartographers everywhere in order to improve the maps they produce. Hence the cartographer ought to be knowledgeable about map projections and ought to have practical access to the best tools for and information about map projections.

Many researchers are active in the field of map projections today. Their efforts have lacked coordination, standardization, and accessibility. Researchers ought to be able to efficiently research map projections as well as coordinate and disseminate their results.

To advance the knowledge of the public, the skills of the cartographer, and the efficiency of the researcher, we establish this COMMISSION ON MAP PROJECTIONS under the auspices of the International Cartographic Association. The commission was approved as an ICA group at the 21st International Cartographic Conference on 16 August, 2003, in Durban, South Africa.

Projects in Progress

(1) Develop the public web site, describing the commission, its activities, and presenting its products;
(2) Develop a multilingual glossary of map projections terminology;
(3) Develop a recommended list of map projection names;
(4) Develop a bibliography of map projections.

Progress Report

The commission has started all of the projects, but none of them have seen much work. At the current pace they will require many more years to complete. Participation has been very light. 85% of the membership of 65 categorizes itself as “corresponding”. Of the remainder, none earn a living or academic standing on the basis of map projections, so, while all are interested, few are motivated.

Public web site: Content is to be largely determined by products of the other projects. The home page is present, as well as the commission charter. University of California at Santa Barbara hosts the site.

Glossary: Many terms have been listed from a few sources. Some come with definitions. Equivalents of a few have been listed for French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian. The English section is perhaps 10% complete. This project uses "wiki" collaborative editing software, hosted by University of California at Santa Barbara.

Map Projection Names: A large list of projections described in the literature or in use has been created, but it is by no means exhaustive, and appropriate bibliographic and historic annotations are very sparse. Equivalents in the languages listed above are given in some cases. The English section is perhaps 10% complete. This project uses "wiki" collaborative editing software, hosted by University of California at Santa Barbara.

Bibliography: JP Snyder's comprehensive bibliography is intended to provide the foundation for this project, with corrections, plus updated constantly. Snyder's bibliography is available in electronic form but needs to be converted to a form that is editable and collaborative. About 20% of Snyder's entries have been registered. This project uses the WIKINDEX data base and editing software, hosted on a private server of the commission chair.

Ancillary Activities

The Commission held a workshop in conjunction with the 2006 AutoCarto conference in Portland, Oregon, USA. The workshop dealt with commission business and planning; a tutorial and demonstration on using the commission tools for working on the commission projects; a presentation by the commission chair titled, "Elements of Map Projection Programming"; and a tutorial session on map projections definition and use in ArcGIS. Attendees generally rated the workshop as very successful.

Daniel Strebe
Commission Chair
2007