“Uncle Joe goes worldwide”

John Davies

Sheetlines, 75 (April 2006), pp.43-44

Stable URL: http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue75page43.pdf

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Published by
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps
www.CharlesCloseSociety.org

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.
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At the same time as Sheetlines 74 was published, the series of stories about Soviet military mapping that had appeared in recent editions\(^1\) was posted on the Internet.\(^2\) The response has been most rewarding. Not only have the articles been extensively downloaded by readers around the world but valuable new information has been offered and new avenues of research opened up.

In the first three months over 30,000 visitors have viewed the Soviet section of the website. The articles were posted as images of the Sheetlines pages (known as PDF files) and about 11,000 copies have been downloaded of some or all of the articles.

The global reach is surprising. The visits have originated in at least ninety countries. Although every visit is logged, it is actually only possible to identify the country of origin of about 30% of visitors, so the true number of countries may be higher. Of the identifiable visitors, 25% are from Russian Federation and 15% from UK.

So how did all these far-flung surfers discover the site? The answer lies in the power of the ‘bloggers’, those who run web logs and pass on tips about ‘cool new stuff’. Soon after the articles were posted a blogger in Canada mentioned them and quickly the word spread. Soon, several sites serving the interests of academic, cartographic, geographic and military history communities picked up the story and provided links for their readers to access the site. From time to time ‘spikes’ appear in the log where a rush of visitors has followed the appearance of a new link.

The most interesting feedback has come from the response from a Russian collector, a member of a group which has acquired and catalogued many thousands of Soviet maps and their successors.

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\(^1\) ‘Uncle Joe knew where you lived’, Sheetlines 72, 73; ‘Soviet military mapping’, Sheetlines 74.
\(^2\) at www.Jomidav.com
From this dialogue has come the discovery that at least two previously unrecorded map series were produced. One is a short-lived series at the scale of 1:300,000 produced in the 1940s and 50s. The other is a series of maps produced in 1970s and 80s based on a different projection and having completely different sheet lines and reference system and lacking any co-ordinates. This is the so-called 1963 series, presumably created for training purposes to conceal actual world locations. Plenty of scope here for further research!

**Soviet military maps of Baldone, Latvia.**

Left is part of 1:50,000 sheet dated 1983, on the standard 1942 projection, with grid lines and sheet numbering scheme conforming to the worldwide UTM reference system (in this case, grid square O-35). Below is part of 1:25,000 sheet, dated 1968 to the 1963 projection. The grid lines and sheet reference (C-51) are different and, as can be seen at the margins, the map lacks any identifying grid numbers or latitude/longitude indications. Both have 1 km grid squares.