“Comrade Baranow, the bouncing Czech, Penkillan Head and the World Map”

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Following the brief mention of the Soviet World Map in *Sheetlines* 77, two documents have come to hand which shed some intriguing light on this gargantuan project, together with a clue as to the source of the content.

The first is a book of papers about mapping in the German Democratic Republic which has recently been translated into English.¹ Appendix 5 contains a report of a visit to Moscow by Comrades Schilling and Nischan (technical director and editor, respectively) of VEB KD (the East German state-owned Cartographic service) and their meeting on 29 May 1964 with Comrade Baranow, Head of Main Administration for Geodesy and Cartography and others in Comrade Baranow’s office. The following extract is taken directly from the minutes.

**Item 1: World Map 1:2.5 million.** The view was taken that the advertisement and marketing of the World Map could begin (also in the foreign capitalist states). The best opportunity would be the International Geographers Congress in London in July. It would be mentioned in a conference paper (Dr Haack) that the socialist countries have produced this World Map or will be completing it by 1965. The first sheets (produced in the GDR) should be presented to the Congress. Great success is expected.

The finished sheets of Rome, Madrid, London and, if possible, those of South America should be shown at the exhibition in London. It is absolutely necessary that the sheet index (nomenclature) of the World Map is made available in sufficient numbers both for the Congress and for general advertising. An advertising brochure will need to be printed in Russian, French, English and German. Comrade Baranow agreed to the prices suggested by Prof Radó. He stated that by 1965 the Soviet Union would have completed 100 sheets.

In connexion with the fact that the People’s Republic of China is not participating in the production of the World Map and that, as a result, the data regarding the Chinese territory are, at this time, not being compiled, Comrade Baranow suggested that the Geodesy Office of Hungarian People’s Republic and the GDR should take over production (6 sheets each). He reported that in 1960 Soviet Union had printed an atlas of China in large numbers but, due to a request from People’s Republic of China had to refrain from publishing it.

Whether or not sample sheets were ready in time for the 1964 Congress is not known, but the London, Rome, Madrid sheets were published in Berlin in 1965 and the South American sheets were published in Berlin in 1964 and 1966. Production of the China sheets was shared between Budapest, Sofia and Moscow, appearing from 1973. The series was eventually completed in 1976, the other offices contributing to the project being Bucharest, Warsaw and Prague.

The second document, unearthed by Richard Porter, is the original promotional brochure. This was published by Pergamon Press, (proprietor Robert Maxwell, the ‘bouncing Czech’ who maintained close links with the socialist regimes).

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This undated brochure is headed ‘World Map Series scale 1:2,500,000; The First and Only Complete Comprehensive and Uniform World Map Series in this scale’ and states that place names on the map are in their official form using the Roman alphabet. (As noted previously, places in the Irish Republic are named solely in Irish.)

The sheet diagram shows 234 sheets, which are described as being uniform paper size of 80 × 100 cm. In fact there are also about another forty sheets of smaller size providing overlap where projection changes occur. The text describes the sheet numbering system based on the 1:1 million International Map of the World system of lettered bands at 4° intervals of latitude and numbered zones at 6° intervals of longitude. In the 1:2.5 million series, each sheet comprises at least three such bands and zones.

The clue to the source of the content comes from the appearance of the name ‘Penkilan Head’ at the southern-most point on the Llyen Peninsula. This name has never appeared on any OS map (subject to anyone contradicting this assertion), but does appear in the publications of John Bartholomew from (at least) the Library Atlas of 1890 to the Times Atlas of 1985, as well as the eponymous half-inch maps.

The original idea of an International World Map, with consistent content and specification at a scale of 1:1 million, was proposed by Albrecht Penck (1858-1945) at the Fifth International Geographical Conference in 1891. The project officially began in 1913, but few sheets were completed by the beginning of World War I with another 400 during the 1930s. After World War II, the United Nations took on the project, which was never completed and eventually abandoned in the 1980s.

By contrast, the Soviets mapped the world twice! The secret military mapping of the world at 1:1 million was produced, revised and re-issued throughout the period from 1930s to 1990s. The non-secret 1:2.5 million series was a separate one-off production. To demonstrate the distinction: Penkilan Head is not so named on the military map; here it appears as ‘Trwyn Cilan’, as on Ordnance Survey maps.