

OS mapping from AA and AZ

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In the spring of 2012 the publishing arm of the Automobile Association announced the issue of 29 sheets of a 1:25,000 *Walker's map* and 30 sheets of a 1:50,000 *Leisure map*, with both series selling at £7.99 a sheet. The AA website said that they embodied 'Trusted and reliable Ordnance Survey data with a familiar look and style.'¹

The use of the word 'data' proved to be interesting. My own understanding of it is in the sense of 'information' rather than 'presentation': the latter for maps I understand as 'cartography'. Accordingly, told that a map embodies OS 'data' I expect its appearance to differ somewhat from what the OS produces. The excellent qualities of AA cartography since its cartographic unit was established over 40 years ago might lead one to expect a new perspective on an established scale. After all, when the AA produced a motoring atlas at 1:100,000 in 2006 they used OS data, but the look was quite distinct from anything that has emerged from Southampton.

In the event it isn't just the scale that's well-known: so also is the cartography. The 'familiar look and style' is that of the OS *Landranger* and *Explorer* mapping. 'Do you know what the difference is?', asked the pleasant young man in Waterstones in Exeter as I bought *Leisure map* 22, *Exeter, Sidmouth and Torbay*, *Walker's map* 13, *Exmoor*, and three entirely OS maps, including the recently issued edition C5 (dated 2011) of *Landranger* 192, *Exeter & Sidmouth*. (He must have suspected something. What ordinary person would buy two similar maps of the same area?) I said that I thought they were on different sheet lines. Well: some are and some aren't. *Exmoor* differs in position by 1 kilometre west-east from OS 1:25,000 *Explorer* OL 9, *Exmoor*: it costs the same. On the other hand, *Leisure map* 22 covers the southern two-thirds of *Landranger* 192 and (with the help of an inset) the eastern half of 202, and is unquestionably useful: so is *Leisure map* 17, *The Chilterns*, which is essentially the southern half of *Landranger* 165 and the northern part of 175. But *Leisure map* 2, *Torbay and South Dartmoor*, is practically the same as *Landranger* 202, moved slightly further north to include Teignmouth; 14, *Truro, Falmouth and The Lizard*, is a version of *Landranger* 204 shifted west to include more of the Lizard. The recommended price of the *Leisure maps* is £7.99, £1 more than the *Landranger*, and whilst the difference is certainly worth it for sheets such as 17 and 22, it is questionable for the likes of 14, and – well, inexplicable for such as 2.

The design differences between OS and AA are few and relatively superficial. First, the outer frame is omitted, so that, as the paper sizes are the same as used by the OS, there is a good deal of white paper in the margins: this does not alter

¹ The sheets reviewed here are *Leisure map* 22, *Exeter, Sidmouth and Torbay*, ISBN 978-0-7495-7284-6 and *Walker's map* 13, *Exmoor*, ISBN 978-0-7495-7319-5. As usual with reviews in *Sheetlines*, these were purchased in the normal way by the writer, rather than solicited as 'review copies'. Information about other 'titles' has been obtained from inspection of retail stock and from the AA website (theAA.com/shop).

the ratio of map area to overall paper as compared with the OS, but it does imply that a kilometre or so more horizontally and vertically could easily have been fitted in. Second, the same basic border design is used on both, of dicing the grid at 100 metre intervals: the effect is similar to that on the OS 1:25,000, though the AA uses screened infill where the OS uses a single parallel rule. I think the AA style preferable. Third, the legends are wholly in English, which is certainly an improvement in consistency. The OS have been unusual in putting giving part of the legend on the *Landranger* in French and German: the usual European practice is either a fully monolingual legend – as on the OS *Explorer* – or else a fully multilingual one. Those conventions which the *Landranger* explains only in English are, to my mind, precisely those where explanation is most needed. The road classification can be broadly inferred from the hierarchical presentation, whereas conventions for such as religious buildings and vegetation need explaining across cultures and countrysides. One might say facetiously that it would need an Act of Parliament to get this done: it took the influence, rather than the letter, of the Welsh Language Act to provide a full Welsh legend on those *Landranger* sheets that include Welsh territory. Perhaps Brussels or Strasbourg will have to do their worst to bring the *Landranger* fully into line with practice elsewhere. Two other differences are the omitting of latitude and longitude values, though the five-minute intersections are retained on the map face, and the lack of any compilation information beyond acknowledgement of OS ‘database rights’. I do not know how the paper will wear – this is the sort of map I buy for my library rather than to use on the ground – but it has a ‘white’ quality that is noticeably lacking from *Landranger* 192, edition C5, which is noticeably ‘grey’ and ‘dull’ by comparison. But how many of the general public would notice this? The OS has what one might call a marginal advantage, in that names do not cut the sheet lines, as they are liable to do on the AA offerings. The effect is that of ‘custom mapping’, and not always elegant. Against that, the AA prices are reasonable: the OS Custom Mapping service offers 6400 square cm of mapping at 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 for £16.99, whereas for £7.99 the AA will supply 6400 sq cm of 1:50,000 or 19,200 sq cm of 1:25,000 mapping.

These maps might perhaps be bought for convenience of sheet lines; they might perhaps be bought for ‘brand loyalty’ to the AA, though one does wonder if such things count for much in these demutualisation days. It is possible that some people have bought them thinking that, with an ‘April 2012’ publication date, they must be closer to ‘ground truth’ than are the corresponding *Explorers* and *Landrangers*. In this last regard they may be disappointed. Comparison of OS and AA, in respect of *Leisure map* 22 and *Walker’s map* 13, suggest that whether or not one ‘goes private’, the service is pretty much the same. However, I have noticed an oddity on the south side of Exeter. *Landranger* 192, edition C4 of 2008, shows a group of buildings and roads centred on SX 952898, with a golf course symbol to the north-east. (*figure 1*) The buildings were a former naval stores depot, which has recently been demolished and the site cleared, pending redevelopment. On *Landranger* 192, edition C5, there is a ‘white space’ at 952898, the golf course symbol is replaced by words (a correct description of the

ground, but ‘wrong’ for the *Landranger* specification), and buildings and roads appear at 959903: this is The Rydons, an estate that is still in a fairly early stage of development. (*figure 2*). *Leisure map 22* shows something that *Landranger 192* does not: the old depot and The Rydons co-existing. (*figure 3*) Possibly the answer is that the depot site is in square SX 98 and The Rydons is in SX 99, and that the AA were supplied with an ‘unrevised’ SX 98. As it happens, 192-C5 is a good example of the map getting out of date as soon as the surveyor has left the ground: the road system west of The Rydons has been reconfigured, there is no recognition that the cycle route running mostly alongside the railway from 976874 to 998834 has been surfaced and functions also as a footpath, and worse of all, there is no hint of the impressive cycle bridge over the M5, to connect Exeter with the new science park at 969935. In this regard purchasers of OS and AA suffer equally.

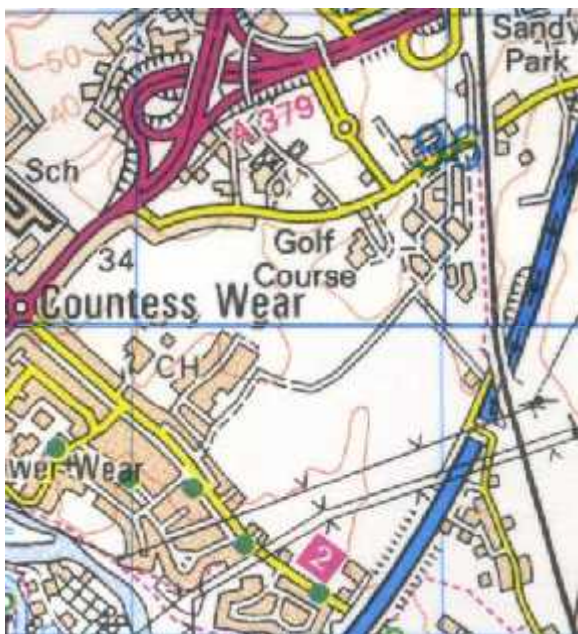
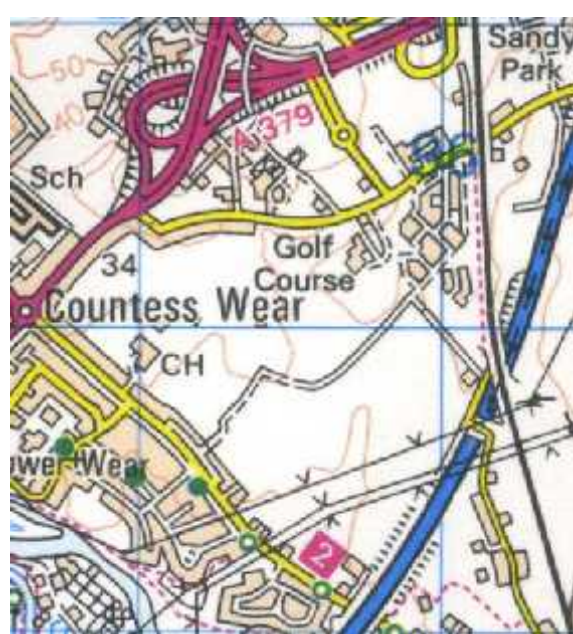
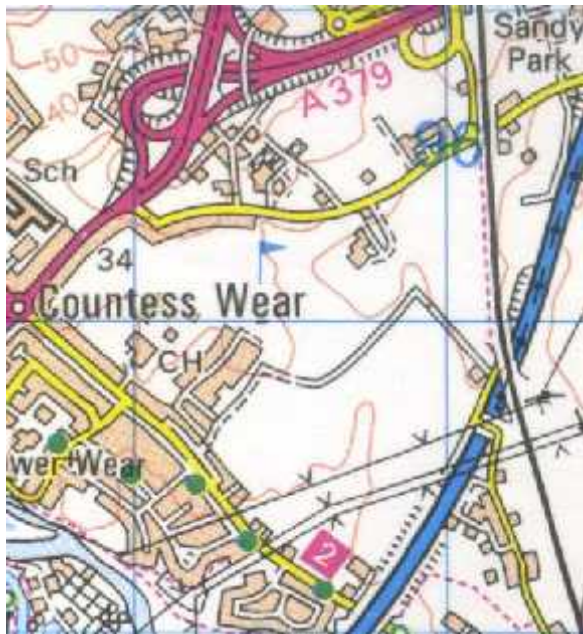


Figure 1 (above left). OS 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 192, edition C4 (2008)

Figure 2 (above right). OS 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 192, edition C5 (2012)

Figure 3 (left). As shown on AA Leisure map 22 (2012)

So why have these maps been published? Perhaps it pays OS equally well to licence a commercial firm to use the ‘data’ (and the cartography) as to handle production and publication itself. One might buy a sheet such as *Leisure map 22* for convenience of cover, but I am puzzled as to what claims can be advanced on behalf of *Leisure map 2*, and slightly improved cover of the ‘Doone Country’ (SS 7945) hardly seems a justification. Readers and followers of RD Blackmore would probably prefer a shift of 10 km to west or east. It remains to be seen whether these two series develop, or whether they come – and go.

It will be equally interesting to see what the future holds for the *AZ Adventure Atlas* series.² In one way this is a similar concept, repackaged OS mapping, but in another it is quite different, as it is offered in atlas form with a gazetteer. So far, only four have been published: I have the *Dartmoor* offering to hand.³ As compared with OS *Explorer* OL 28, *Dartmoor*, it is the same ‘folded’ size (about 13.6 by 24 cm), weighs a little more (about 130 as compared with about 120 grams: the ‘OS Active’ version is about 185 grams), and contains less mapping (1155 as compared with 1271 sq km), though it includes a strip on the east that is outside OL 28, which is of some advantage to those of us living a little to the east of the area. The price (£7.95) is a shade cheaper than OL 28. The basic map area of each page is 3.0 by 5.5 km, but there is a 250-metre (1 cm) overlap onto adjacent sections. As usual in atlases, the value of the overlap is lessened a little by bold indications of adjacent pages and alpha-numeric referencing, but against this the gutters – so often the downfall of atlases – are exemplary, with no information loss. Whilst the smallness of the opening increases the possibility of having to move from one section to another, the overlaps mitigate this. The gazetteer goes down to the level of villages, hamlets, notable hills and named cross-roads – a Devon speciality, this, with their names given on the signposts – but excludes farms and woodland. If a selection had to be made, then at least it seems to have been made intelligently rather than mechanically. References are both alpha-numeric and six-figure grid. There has been some discreet editing of the text on the source mapping: grid figures are confined to the margins, 10 km grid lines are not emphasised, and certain ‘large’ names, such as of towns and MOD ranges, are repeated from section to section. There is a full legend at the start, and the ‘access’ symbols are repeated on flaps inside the covers. As with the AA mapping, the paper is ‘whiter’ than that favoured by OS and the general effect crisper; for those of us with ‘green’ concerns, it is noted as from ‘responsible sources’. For those areas where I have walked recently the mapping seems to be reasonably up to date. Whereas an AA reinterpretation of the 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 would be interesting, I have never been so enthusiastic about AZ’s own style, and am happy to forego their reinterpretation for the present.

Whereas one is left wondering what real justification there is for the AA

² But is it ‘A-Z’, ‘AZ’ or ‘AtoZ’? All three appear on covers as registered trade marks. As the title of the series is ‘AZ’, I have used that.

³ *AZ Adventure Dartmoor*, Sevenoaks: Geographers’ A-Z Map Company, 2012: ISBN 978-1-84348-854-5. The others are *Lake District Southern Fells*, *Lake District Northern Fells*, and *Snowdonia*. The curious are referred to <http://www.az.co.uk/adventure>

enterprise, that of AZ has an element of innovation: this is something that I might use out of doors. It will be interesting to see whether and how this series develops.

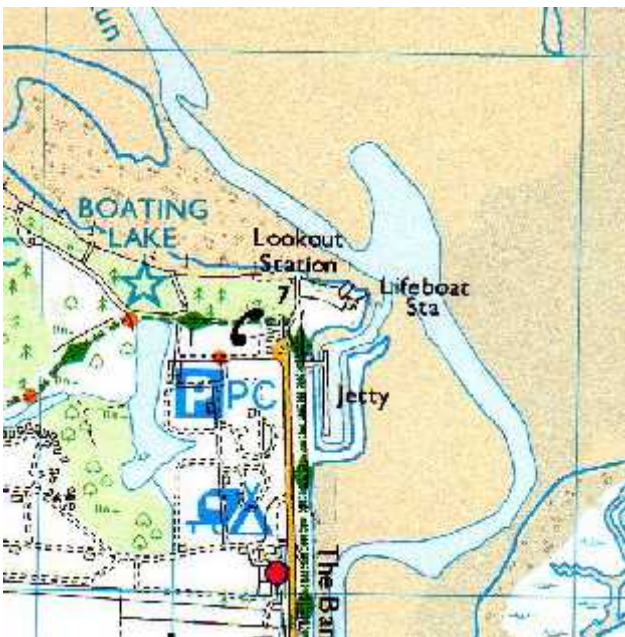
That said, the distinguishing feature of both AA and AZ offerings is that, in cartographic and content terms, they are strikingly unoriginal. The OS *Explorer* and *Landranger* data are raster-scans of material produced by analogue means in 1962-89 and 1971-88 respectively, and revision, extra information and more elaborate colour-schemes cannot disguise this. Whilst the *Explorer* remains a good map, the *Landranger* appears increasingly overcrowded, and cries out for a fundamental redesign. So long as both series are produced from raster data, such wholesale redesign is out of the question, as is any meaningful customisation, either for commercial users of the data such as AA and AZ or those of us who are bold enough to think that 'customised mapping' should imply a degree of control by the customer over the content and colour of the map, and perhaps the output scale as well: in default of a proper 1:100,000, the 1:50,000 ought to be offered at half-scale, and perhaps at 1:62,500. This is for practical rather than sentimental reasons: the enlargement of scale from 1:63,360 to 1:50,000 in the 1970s meant an increase of 1.267 in scale but 1.56 in the amount of paper required. Metrication and 'internationalisation' are not necessarily more 'green'. Direct derivation ought also to allow for more up-to-date mapping, and avoid instances such as *Landranger* 192 edition C5, of being out-of-date before it even goes on sale.

Redesign and real customised mapping depends on vector data that is not yet available. It has been a long-standing aim of the OS to derive its smaller-scale mapping from what was formerly known as Landline and is now known as MasterMap data. It was hoped that, when the *Explorer* mapping was republished from 2004 onwards to show access land, it would be produced by direct derivation, and indeed an experimental sheet was produced for consultation purposes. Most at least of its questionable features – replacing churches by buildings with spires and towers was the most notorious – were nothing to do with automated production, and everything to do with misjudgement and perhaps outright ineptitude or ignorance in some quarter at OS. If these innovations caused the attempt to be abandoned, then it was throwing out the baby with the bathwater. More recently work has been done on a directly derived 1:50,000, and to judge from the tiny published specimens the fault is all the other way, of a lack of innovation in design: but still there is no sign of such mapping reaching the shops.⁴ Official small-scale mapping in Britain lives in a time-warp.

So perhaps the real 'meaning' of the AA and AZ mapping is not commercial or social, but rather an old-fashioned technical one: a negative expression of the

⁴ Much of the Ordnance Survey Special Issue of the *Cartographic Journal*, 44 (3) (2007) is relevant, but see in particular Nicolas Regnault and Patrick Revell, 'Automatic amalgamation of buildings for producing Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 scale maps' (pp 238-50), Patrick Revell, Nicolas Regnault and Stuart Thom, 'Generalising and symbolising Ordnance Survey base scale data to create a prototype 1:50 000 scale vector map' (pp 251-7) and Lars Harrie and Patrick Revell, 'Automation of vegetation symbol placement on Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 scale maps' (pp 258-67).

OS's inability to offer its 'consumer mapping' in other than a form reflecting the world of three, four or five decades ago. Whatever the benefits of raster map-production for the OS's internal economics, they are not apparent for the consumer, either as an individual or as a commercial publisher. One positive aspect of these two groups of publications is that there is still a good demand for paper mapping. The question is whether its form and content are suitable for the digital age.



Further evidence that the AA mapping does not correspond to current Ordnance Survey data is seen in the representation on AA 1:25,000 *Walker's map* of the harbour at Wells-next-the-sea, Norfolk.

Construction work was completed in February 2010 of the new basin in the outer harbour as a base for the supply vessels serving Sheringham Shoal off-shore windfarm development.

The upper extract shows grid square TF 9145 as depicted on AA sheet 21 *North Norfolk Coast*, 1st edition, April 2012. The new jetty, already two years old, does not appear.

It is however shown on the previously-published OS *Explorer* 251, edition A4, revised for selected change 2011 (*lower*).

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