

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

by
Sandra Lach Arlinghaus

*Oh, East is East, and West is West,
and never the twain shall meet.
Till Earth and Sky stand presently
at God's great Judgment seat;
But there is neither East nor West,
Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face,
Tho' they come from the ends of the earth!*

Rudyard Kipling

"The Ends of the Earth" is a poetic concept that is elusive to capture. Indeed, where should one look on the earth-sphere to find its "ends"? There is an infinite number of pairs of antipodal (diametrically opposed) points; is each pair, including the north and south polar pair, a pair of "ends"? Are only the pairs whose antipodal points are both on land the "ends" (Figure 1, Arlinghaus and Nystuen, 1986; see also Tobler, 1961 and Kumler and Tobler, 1991)? Do maps, formed from projecting the earth-sphere on paper, outline the ends of the earth with the neatlines of the map? Indeed, there are some who might call poor Mercator a northern hemisphere bigot, based on the manner in which his projection of infinite extent is often truncated to show more of the northern hemisphere (containing the majority of the world's landmasses) than of the southern hemisphere. Assumptions about truncation, and what it implies about motivation, are risky – at the very least.

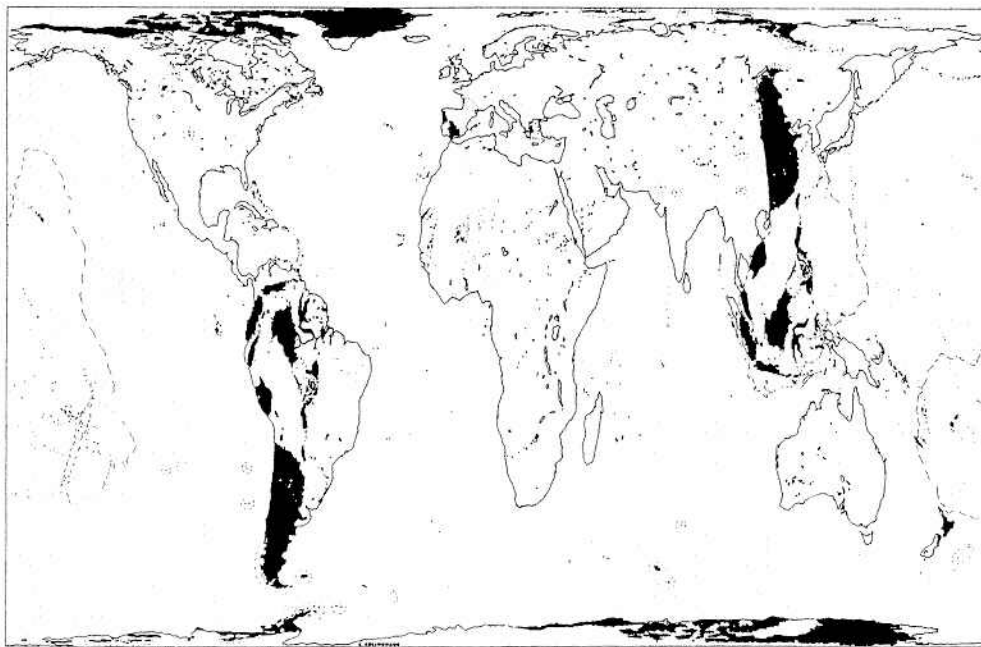


Figure 1. Terrae Antipodum. Landmasses whose antipodal points are also on land are shaded black.

Nowhere, however, is the problem of truncation more severe than in creating maps on postage stamps; what was once a giant wall map, complete with names, mountain ranges, lakes with islands, and a host of minute, but important detail, cannot possibly be displayed in full on a backdrop the size of a postage stamp. Reductions of large maps offer some possibility to include more than one might would fit on a stamp; enlarging the size of the stamp also helps, as does running a continuous image across the perforation of a single stamp to produce a sheet of stamps with a variety of images on it. Still, truncation is inevitable in most cases if one is to be able to have a map with resolution of detail sufficiently fine to be readable, yet still depict a complete story within the frame of the stamp borders. When truncation is carefully done, it can be provocative – what lies beyond, as well as within, the borders? What lies hidden, just around the corner? What else might one find within the stamp image were one to zoom in on a part of it?

The 1993 U.S. mini-sheet, "Turning the Tide," commemorating the 50th anniversary of various World War II battles (Scott 1765 a-j) has five stamps above, and five stamps below a map of the earth (Figure 2; see also, *The Carto-Philatelist*, Vol. 38 No. 3, 1993, p. 89). Surrounding the margins of this mini-sheet are these ten snapshots of history, obtained from zooming in, historically, on particular locations of the earth and looking at them in far more detail than mere enlargement of the maps would reveal. Crossing the map neatlines of perforations allows one, in this case, to jump from space to time. One might thus wish to consider what else lies along the map-border of this elegantly designed mini-sheet.



Figure 2. U.S. mini-sheet, Scott no. 2765 a-j.

A small part of the left-hand side of the upper map-border serves as a bridge across the Bering Strait, calling to mind the idea of a land bridge and the movement of peoples from Asia into North America. Indeed, from land bridge to stamp bridge across the Bering Strait, there is also a recent sculpted commemoration of the Bering Strait barrier / carrier – a hidden bridge lurking just beyond the edge of this stamp map border.

The Arctic Arc Peace Project 1986-1991 (sculptor David Barr) is composed of two installations of sculpture: one at Wales, Alaska (1988) and one at Naukan, Siberia, Russia (1991). The site in Alaska is at the western tip of the Seward Peninsula at Wales, 65°34'59"N, 168°14'W. The site in Siberia is on the Chukotskiy Peninsula at Naukan, 66°01'N, 169°45'W. Geographer John Nystuen was instrumental in helping Barr find appropriate locations on which to site these pieces. Figure 3 shows the elements of this installation: an outstretched symbolic handshake from the Russian side, across the Bering Strait, returns the greeting of the hand raised in peace on the Alaskan side – Eskimo artist Joe Senungetuk, born in Wales, added a huge flying dove emerging from the palm of Barr's sculpted upright hand. Figure 4 shows the location of the sculpture sites straddling the Bering Strait – just at the top left border of the mini-sheet! As is the case with map-stamps, here too there is additional symbolism involved in looking beyond the physical components of this sculpture in both space and time.

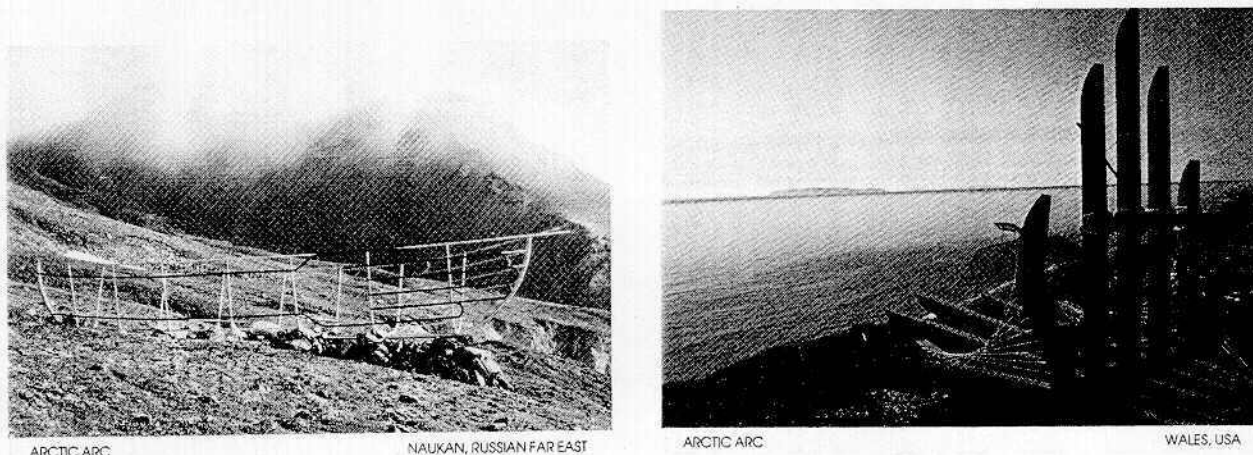


Figure 3. Arctic Arc Peace Project, 1986-1991, sculptor David Barr.

The stainless steel rods joining the fingers of the Alaskan piece are hollow and were calculated (by the author) to align Barr's sculpture to the astronomical solstices and equinoxes. The lowest tube is positioned (inclined at an angle of 0.917 degrees to the horizon) so that one may sight on the sun at noon on the winter solstice; the central tube is aligned similarly with the position of the sun in the sky at noon on the autumnal and vernal equinoxes (inclined at an angle of 24.417 degrees); and, the highest tube is angled to capture a glimpse of the sun through it on the summer solstice (inclined at an angle of 47.917 degrees).

In addition to tying this sculpture, directly, to earth-sun relations, the angling of these rods relative to the celestial sphere is dependent on knowing the latitude of this position adjacent to the Bering Strait. Were one to allow the beams of sunlight, on the solstices and equinoxes, to pass through the rods to form small points of light on the ground, and then mark them so that their positions might be recorded for at least one year, the marked positions would be located correctly to serve as benchmarks for an analemma (graduated scale in the shape of a figure "8" used to show the declination of the sun – its angular distance north or south of the equator of the celestial sphere – for each day of the year). The analemma calls to mind the declination of the sun and in turn the Equation of Time, the astronomical work of Kepler and Copernicus, and the great controversy of our ancestors as to whether or not the universe is one

that is "geocentric" or "heliocentric." Indeed, any sculpture that permits equinox and solstice sun-sighting using focused tubes, grooves, or other physical devices offers one the same opportunity to reflect on the history of science and its relation to art.

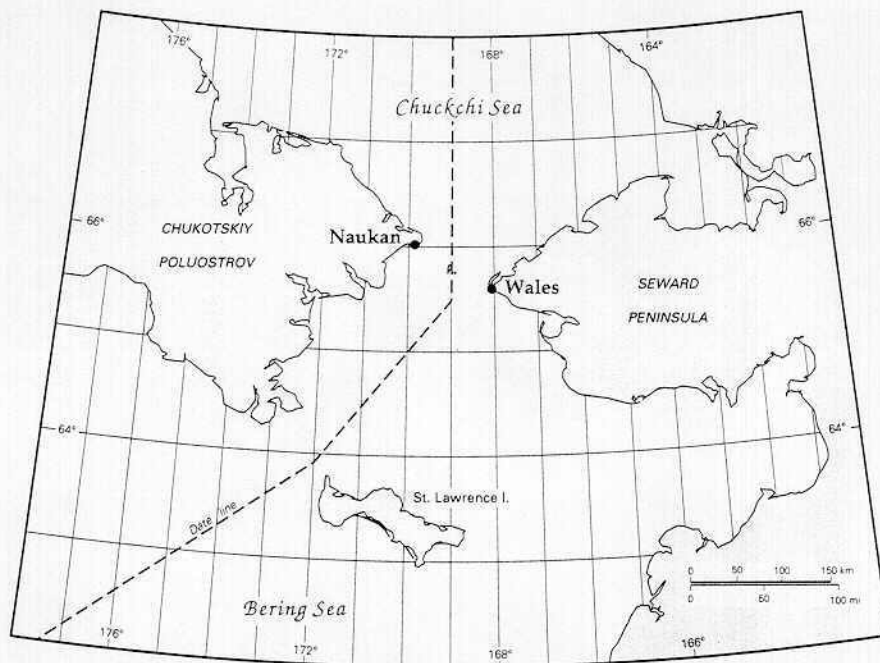


Figure 4. Site map of the elements of the Arctic Arc Peace Project.

What maps on stamps offer is the opportunity to imagine what might lie at the ends of the earth beyond, along, or within the stamps border. When maps on stamps are provocatively designed, they can offer a fresh perspective on the way we look at various components of our world and cause us to reflect on connections we might not otherwise consider.

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