

MAPPING NEW ZEALAND'S GREAT WALKS

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In mid 2013, Geographx started work on the production of a new series of print maps covering the nine New Zealand Great Walks. This was a significant move for the company as it had never previously produced maps for use in the field. The decision was prompted by confirmation that Government mapping agencies would no longer produce or maintain maps of this genre.



The Routeburn Track, one of the nine New Zealand Great Walks

The Great Walks are 3-4 day hikes (or tramps as we call them in New Zealand) that are managed and marketed as visitor experiences by the Department of Conservation. They all route through national parks, some through alpine environments, some coastal, one is actually not a walk at all but a paddle down the Whanganui River. A Great Walk, if undertaken during the recommended summer season, is considered to be “soft” adventure, a significant commitment and physical challenge for most of us, but requiring no special back-country bushcraft or navigational skills. The tracks are by and large well maintained and sign-posted, and there are shelters, huts, and frequently campsites provided at regular points along the way.

As I saw it, producing these maps would be a challenge to add value to the overall Great Walk visitor experience.

The Plan

1. Identify the target market
2. Tailor the product to the target market
3. Make the maps aesthetically pleasing but 'different'
4. Make the maps fit for purpose
5. Make the maps widely available
6. Make sure the maps provide value for money

The production of a new series of paper maps is arguably an ambitious undertaking in this age of electronic gadgets and seemingly unlimited digital functionality. So I made a plan, or more accurately a list of key factors I felt I needed to consider when designing these maps.

1. Identify the target market

This turned out to be reasonably straightforward. A little research revealed that those embarking on a great walk adventure tend to be a mixture of domestic and international visitors, mostly free independent travellers (FIT). They are not necessarily experienced hikers (or trampers) but they will be reasonably fit, health conscious, and interested in the great outdoors. Within these constraints they could be almost any age.

2. Tailor product to the target market

The market identified above suggests track followers rather than explorers. Track followers are mostly interested in areas immediately adjacent to the trail and points of interest encountered along the way. They will expect to use their map to monitor their progress. They will also use it to identify features seen from the track, including distant features such as mountain peaks and glaciers.

So I designed the maps along “yellow brick road” lines (with apologies to the Wizard of Oz), using a bright, prominent, trail display that sends a reassuring subliminal message: “follow me and you won't get lost”. The information provided on the maps also tends to be more detailed for areas immediately adjacent to the track.

I also wanted maps that helped users relate to and better understand the unfamiliar surroundings in which they would now find themselves. I tackled this by creating pseudo-natural basemaps for the new map series that could be easily interpreted and, hopefully, intuitively understood.

To add real value to the overall visitor experience these maps would have to prove themselves useful not just on the journey itself, but before and also after. So the maps are designed to serve as a planning aid prior to undertaking the walk, with bold bright welcoming colours promising good times ahead, all helping to build a sense of excitement and anticipation. And after the walk, it is hoped the maps will live as tangible souvenirs, a focus for reliving memories and sharing past experiences. I have made them more difficult for people to discard by printing on the reverse side of each map, a smaller scale 3D map poster of the wider region.

3. Aesthetically pleasing but 'different'

While any aesthetic appeal will be in the eye of the beholder, it was important that these maps differentiate themselves from other products in the marketplace. This is achieved in part by the way I have used colour, the strong basemaps, and the added bonus of the 3D map poster on the reverse side.

However a major point of difference lies in the choice of print media. The new maps are printed not on paper made from wood fibre but on paper made from rocks. This stonepaper is a relatively new product made from recycled building materials. It requires very little energy to produce, there are no nasty byproducts, no effluent and no emissions. The paper is photo-degradable (it cannot be bio-degradable as it is made of minerals). It is insect proof, waterproof (you can write on it when it is wet), tear-resistant, and it is safe to wrap your lunch in it.

4. Fit for purpose

The use of stonepaper has allayed any fears about durability of the product itself, and thanks to the research undertaken I am confident our new maps are relevant and fulfill a market need. The maps are printed plan view at a scale of 1:40,000, which I consider is optimal. To ensure accuracy, that is spatial, attributional and temporal accuracy, I have been largely reliant on track and facilities

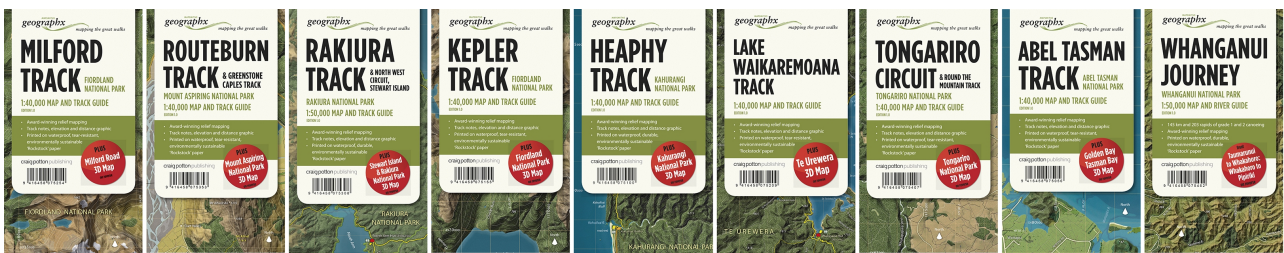
information supplied by the New Zealand Department of Conservation (managers of the Great Walks). I am aware of areas where the quality of this data is less than ideal, an issue I have raised with the Department and which we will jointly try and address.

5. Widely available

I recognised early in the piece that while Geographx may have the expertise to make the maps, it did not have the experience, resources or networks needed to manage the printing, the warehousing, the distribution and the sales. So we entered into a joint venture with Craig Potton Publishing, a company that specialises in this area and with whom I have a long association. In a nutshell, Geographx makes the maps, and Craig Potton Publishing does the rest.

6. Value for money

Decisions on pricing were based largely on the experience and market knowledge of Craig Potton Publishing. All 9 maps are retailed via bookstores, mapshops, and visitor centres, they are also available online, either folded or rolled. Each map retails for NZD 25.



The new Geographx maps covering the nine New Zealand Great Walks





Detail from the Abel Tasman track map



Detail from one of the 3D map posters featured on the reverse side of the track maps.

Software used in the production of these maps

Blue Marble Global Mapper
ESRI Arcview
Manifold Systems
Natural Scene Designer
Adobe Photoshop
Adobe Illustrator
Avenza Map Publisher

Data used in the maps was sourced from..

LINZ (Land Information NZ)
Landcare Research
GNS (Geological & Nuclear Sciences)
NIWA (National Institute of Water & Atmosphere)
DOC (Department of Conservation)
Geographx
crowd sourcing

Conclusions

1. It is too early to determine viability of the venture as a whole, because the final four of the nine maps have only been on sale since early April. We are also now entering the winter off-season, and sales are not expected to accelerate until the Spring. However early sales have been encouraging.
2. The quality of available track and facilities data remains a concern, an area we hope to soon address.
3. The decision to print the new maps on stonepaper appears to have been the right one, however I do have some concerns over the low brightness coefficient in the paper which makes it difficult to 'pop' the maps out from the page.