



Activity – Maps and Power

We have seen how maps help us make sense of the world. We should reflect on the importance of deciding to map something. But we must also consider how such maps were and are produced.

What became known as the Great Trigonometric Survey of India is a very good example of the usefulness of accurate maps. The Royal Geographical Society later named the highest peak in the world after the Surveyor General George Everest, though the mountain is known by other names in different cultures.

Read this short summary of the survey by Tim Middleton in the Cambridge science magazine *Bluesci*:

'History: The Great Trigonometrical Survey': <https://www.bluesci.co.uk/posts/history-the-great-trigonometrical-survey>

- Why was an accurate map deemed necessary?
- How important was the survey to the British administration of India?
- What did the completed map of India allow that had not previously been possible?

Conclusions:

The Great Trigonometric Survey is one very famous example where a process of surveying was deemed instrumental to the government of a place, here the British administration of India. This colonial example may seem quite dramatic, but there are more contemporary and everyday examples where maps help make important political points.

Beyond Geography...

Brian Friel's play *Translations*, which is set against the backdrop of the Ordnance Survey's mapping of Ireland, raises important questions about language, names and cultural change. What role do you think maps might have played, or continue to play, in producing such change?