

MAPS

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A Briefing

For any visitor that seeks to discover a foreign place, one might try to manage the prospect of its unknowability in advance.

In attempting to know a place better, crossing over to the place of the other, you try to transcend the limits of language, terrain and cultural difference with various tools and activities that may include:

a list of interview prompts

a journal for field notes

a terrain map

an itinerary

insect repellent, a hat, and walking shoes

hiring an interpreter and a location guide

chats with colleagues and people in the know

various recording devices to juggle as you go, and so on,

You do this knowing, however, that no amount of research and equipment can prepare you fully for the events ahead, and that, in some way, the moments of incomprehension simply can't be imagined when you first set out. And that itself is the beginning of the experience.

*Instructions To Make A Booklet Of Memory Maps Of
A Walled-in Community of Indigenous Tribespeople,
As Told By A Visitor From A Faraway City
Recalling The Journey*

Ready to go?

To create your first page, take a dead horse, and march it all around the circumference of a desired territory. Wherever the scent of the carcass carries, there marks the boundary of your terra nova, your new land. That will do as your creation story for now, as we get on our way.

Start on a fresh page. Here we are. We are arriving at a magical village, surrounded by acres of fertile land. Vistas of cropland are opening up before you, a breathtaking sweep of vegetation. Somewhere within the patches of green are hired help tilling the soil -- they aren't part of the tribe, and we won't get close this time round.

It's late afternoon, and the sun's light is dispersed equally.
We are going by van, where it feels no van has gone before.
The road is incredibly rocky, but we can make it. Some
shaky lines to represent that, please, and sudden drops.

Leaves and branches brush past your window, threatening to
scratch the lens of your glasses. The lanes are awfully nar-
row, just about the width of your van. Maybe fill the ruled
lines with thick, large text that say, D-A-N-G-E-R-O-US...!
Seat belt please.

Draw three lines in the centre of the page, roughly equally
apart.

The first line represents First Street.

The second is Second Street.

The third -- and maybe you could scratch in a fourth or fifth
as dotted lines, I can't be sure -- represents Third Street.

A few lanes. Some roofs. Big houses and small ones.

Make it planned, somewhat of a grid, but not too planned.
Have it feel very old, quiet and crumbly.

With your writing instrument follow the dead horse smells
and make a decent margin, making sure the three lines are
surrounded. That will do for the walls that go around the
village. There are four gates, you can mark those out as well.

We'll need you to colour in some pictures now.

We are at the entrance to the community. A motorcycle zooms past, carrying fruit. An old lady ambles over with produce. People are hanging out. There is a sign showing you where the toilet is, behind what seems to be a security post.

The pavement is broad, made of large cobblestones, undulating upwards into the a main square as you enter. In the centre of the plaza is a raised, open-air longhouse. It is used for village meetings, but there isn't one being held today.

The quiet is pierced by the sounds of roosters crackling from within upturned straw baskets. Sound: *Krekk-aww-krekk-aww-pkawokawpkaw*. Every morning, the farmhands bring food to every doorstep. Part of the privilege of being a son or daughter of the community is never having to work for your keep, unless through some willful transgression or exertion of independent choice, one decides to fall out of the ranks. In which case, re-admittance into the community is case-by-case basis.

A bull walks by and defecates. Caption: Watch out for that pile!

If you zoom up high and look down on the village from above, it will be hard to discern signs of life -- the traffic of everyday life is slow and interspersed. Down low, construction is under way. A new market is being constructed, as a tie-up with local government.

Let's come back down to street level.

Within one of the houses on First Street, where today a few tourists have come seeking local crafts, there is the steady sound of weaving. *Geringsing* -- the name of the artform conjures the sound of parts of the wooden tool scraping against itself, as nimble fingers knot tapestries of stars, horses, and geometric patterns. Perhaps they recall creation stories? Events? Animistic symbols?

On Second Street, a middle-aged man in a sarong beckons to you, and plays a stringed guitar-like instrument with glee. It's indiscernible whether he is selling something (which is surprising considering the villagers supposedly don't have to work for their livelihoods) or simply enjoying your company.

If you'll leaf through the attached calendar of events, you'll see that festival ceremonies are the lifeblood of the place, they mark the times and lives of its inhabitants.

Allow me to switch to an animated segment to illustrate this.

It's an exciting day. Music is being played, loudly and proudly, and a great Ferris wheel-like structure, about four men tall, is swirling, carrying excited passengers on it.

The focus switches to a part of a ceremony where males may appeal for the attention of their chosen ladies, clad in elaborate woven costumes. Take a still of this, and stick it on the page under the events section.

Draw in a fence that suggests we may go no further. Perhaps some fruit is being grown there which they are trying to keep from unlawful picking, so we must turn back. Add in a growly dog with a stare.

On your way out, pencil in some people, and erase them. Pencil them in again, and erase them. Crumple the maps you've drawn, and then flatten them out. Tear them out, and piece them together again. You now have traces and textures that signify the loss of detail through the haze of remembered experience.

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Characters

The Ikat Weaver

The Calendar-Calligraphing Craftsman

The Mustached Musician

The Dodgy Ikat Dealer

The Village Elder

A Mother's Son Holding A Metal Bowl

Children At Play

Questions

*Maybe life is simpler there, or maybe it isn't.
Maybe their way of life is more sustain-
able and progressive than capitalist economy.
Maybe it's not.
What if a natural disaster happens, flooding, or a drought?
How do closed communities continue to exist in our world today?
Have things changed for Tengagan, or have they stayed the same?
Maybe there will come a time when they have no choice
but to engage the world beyond their walls more actively.
Maybe it's not for us to know or question.
What of modern ambition?
People seem content. They keep the peace; they
say there have been no major conflicts there.
How is that possible?
Surely every tribe and society has its own rifts.
They don't think ahead to the future -- there isn't that sense of
"kita kita" or upward progress here that you find in Asian cities.
Are the things that threaten their lives the same as ours?
What drives them?
What drives us?*

ARRIVING

Getting in at
midnight after a
turbulent flight
in darkness

Haptic wayfinding
and negotiating
the landscape

Chance happenings
that you cannot
predict

Gathering
information
and making sense
of it

Observing and
reacting with
all your senses

Altering your
behavior to
the environment

Being made to
challenge your
assumptions

Recording
information
for closer scrutiny
when you return

DEPARTING

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