

# Apple and Google face off in battle of the maps

From this week on, Google Maps has been removed from every Apple phone and replaced with a homegrown alternative. With mapping technology blossoming, are traditional paper maps now obsolete?



GEOGRAPHY  
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Once upon a time, every map was a treasure of enormous value: a vital store of rare knowledge and a great accomplishment in artistry and precision. Today, every smartphone carries with it an intricate map of the entire world, accurate down to the tiniest village or alleyway. As recently as twenty years ago this information would have filled a large library.

These online electronic maps are fast eclipsing their paper ancestors: in the UK, sales of road maps have dropped by 50 percent in the last six years. And new mapping technology is dominated by one company: Google. Every smartphone using an operating system from Apple or Android has, until this week, come with Google Maps installed.

But now the monopoly is broken: in its new operating system upgrade, Apple has replaced Google Maps with a rival application. The battle lines are drawn for yet another struggle between the two tech



London, then and now: a 1593 map next to a taste of Google's upcoming 3D technology.

giants.

Spurred by this competition, Apple and Google are set to funnel even more money and energy into developing the perfect mapping software. Already, Google is developing three-dimensional interactive maps, including full plans of indoor locations. They will display in-depth, hyperlocal information, updated in real time.

These ever more detailed maps are not without their problems. One is privacy. Street View, a feature of Google Maps that allows users to browse a 3D photographic landscape, has been banned in some places because it includes compromising photographs taken without their subjects consent.

Some also worry this technology inhibits our ability to learn about our environment. A recent study found that certain areas of the brain that deal with spatial awareness are actually physically smaller among people who regularly use satellite navigation.

## WORLDS AWAY

Then there are other, more abstract concerns. For many people, maps are more than just a practical tool: they are rich interpretations of our environment. Whether its subject is mountains or motorways, they say, each map is unique in the information it presents – and how it is presented. Poring over a chart of distant lands made far away or long ago gives a window into whole other worlds. Sure, maps are partly about finding the way from one place to another; but they are about exploration and discovery – and that is something that a dull, generic iPhone app will never be able to match.

But technophiles dismiss these concerns as sentimental, nostalgic waffle. From overviews of the entire globe to photographs of our street corner, they say, we can literally carry the world in our pocket. That is surely as thrilling and romantic as any faded antique wall map.



## Q & A

**Q** A map's a map – as long as it's accurate, who cares what it looks like?

**A** Maps reveal much about the people who make them. Early Christian maps, for instance, put Jerusalem in the centre of the universe, and marked non-Christian territories with fearsome beasts.

**Q** But surely we're over that kind of nonsense now?

**A** Not so fast – plenty of cartographic debates are still going strong. For instance, the most common projection of the world, the 'Mercator', has been widely criticised for making Africa and Latin America smaller, while Europe and North America are expanded.

**Q** And that reflects an imperialist world view?

**A** That's the theory. But since the Earth is round, it is impossible to create a flat version without distorting either size or shape – and the Mercator's solution is one of the simplest.



## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'Every adventure starts with getting lost.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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### WORD WATCH

**Artistry and precision** – One of the most celebrated areas in the spectacularly grand Palace of Versailles near Paris is a room full of maps. Altogether, these maps took decades to produce and cost huge sums of money. The first modern scientific map took so long to produce that its creator died before it was finished.

**Yet another struggle** – Between them, Google and Apple own 85 percent of the iPhone market, making them fierce competitors in this area. Recently, Google has

also intensified its quest to gain a foothold in tablet computing – an area which Apple currently dominates.

**Hyperlocal** – A technology called Google Glass, which will probably be on the market by next year, will eventually be able to give live information about something as soon as you look at it. You will be informed what lies around the corner, when the next train goes, whether you can park in a particular spot – and this could be only the beginning.

**Technophiles** – Word ending in suffixes like ‘-phile’, ‘-philia’ or

‘-philic’ usually have to do with love or attachment, from the Greek word meaning ‘brotherly love’. A technophile, for instance, is simply somebody who loves technology.

**Mercator** – If you spread a piece of paper round a globe, it will become creased and distorted in many places. This is why two-dimensional map can never be accurate. In the Mercator, land towards the equator is squeezed, while land nearer to the poles is expanded. Alternatives like the Gall-Peters Projection fix this problem – but only by making most of the world look unnaturally long and thin.

### YOU DECIDE

1. If no paper map was ever produced again, would that be a sad thing?
2. If technology has made a good sense of direction redundant, does it matter that we are losing the ability to find our way around?

### ACTIVITIES

1. Make a map of your local area. What have you included, and what have you left out? Write a short paragraph explaining your decisions.
2. Research different projections for the map of the world, and draw up a table comparing their strengths and disadvantages. Indicate which one you think is best, and your reasoning.

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 **NOTES**

