

The Great Polish Map of Scotland

Anyone familiar with the Scottish Borders region will be aware of its romantic landscape and wealth of historical visitor attractions, ranging from ruined medieval abbeys and tower houses to country houses from later periods and even, from more recent times, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Eskdale. Now, thanks to a voluntary restoration group, these are being joined by a new and unusual visitor attraction, one built in the recent past and which, because of its uniqueness, defies simple categorization.



Imagine a large area equivalent to almost half the size of a football pitch, or, alternatively, the length of two tennis courts laid end to end. Now envisage that space filled with a concrete, three-dimensional scale model of the Scottish landscape - the mainland and western isles to be precise - measuring 50 by 40 metres and set in a sunken, oval-shaped basin. This remarkable artefact exists in the grounds of the Barony Castle Hotel, just outside the village of Eddleston on the A703 between Penicuik and Peebles. Built almost forty years ago during the Cold War, it was the work of two young Polish cartographers and a handful of hired labourers from the Jagiellonian University of Krakow. Though they may not have realised it at the time, they were building what is now believed to be the largest terrain model of a country anywhere in existence. Only recently has its undocumented history been pieced together on the basis of oral testimony by volunteers who, calling themselves Mapa Scotland, intend to restore “The Great Polish Map of Scotland” to its original condition.

Local people have known of the map's existence ever since it was built in the mid-1970s at the instigation of Mr. Jan Tomasik, a Polish hotel proprietor who, having moved to Peebles, sold up his hotel business in Edinburgh in 1968 and bought the Hotel Black Barony (as it was then named), hoping to expand it as a business to support him in retirement before passing it on to the next generation of his family.

Born in 1917 in Krakow, Poland and a builder by trade, Tomasik had been a soldier in the Polish forces which regrouped in France after his country's defeat by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in September 1939. Around the time of the Dunkirk evacuation during the Fall of France in June 1940, some 17,000 Polish soldiers, Tomasik among them, were transported to Britain and directed to temporary camps in southern Scotland. In October 1940, the War Office decided that these troops could be used to bolster the defence of Scotland's east coast at a time when the country was facing the prospect of imminent invasion. Although the main thrust of any invasion was expected to take place in the south of England, the strong possibility existed of a diversionary attack on the Scottish coast from the direction of Nazi-occupied Norway. To counter this threat, the Polish army in Scotland was moved to bases north of the River Forth, in Fife and Angus, and put to work on strengthening the existing coastal defences. Polish reserves were stationed around Dundee and Perth to mount a counter-attack in the event of the beach defences being breached.



“I shall leave my map as a gift to the Scottish people” -- Jan Tomasik

In February 1942, after a long wait to be re-equipped at a time when British forces, following disastrous material losses in France, were given priority, some of the Polish units in Scotland were reorganised as the 1st (Polish) Armoured Division under the command of General Stanisław Maczek. In April the Division moved to the Borders

to begin training in newly supplied tanks. Later that same year, Tomasik, a lance-sergeant in the Division who was stationed in Galashiels, met and married Catherine Kimlin, a Scottish nurse who attended him while he was being treated for the effects of a wound (or possibly a training injury) in the town's Peel Hospital. It was also in 1942 that the Hotel Black Barony was requisitioned for use by the Polish Army as its Higher Military School providing courses for staff officer training; the original school having suspended its activities with the fall of Warsaw in 1939.

A new life

After demobilisation in 1946-7 many Polish veterans, having no desire to return to a Poland under Communist rule behind the 'Iron Curtain', chose to remain in Scotland and make it their home. Yet, for many, difficult years lay ahead. As foreign nationals, for whom the Polish Government-in-Exile had been responsible during the war, none received a military pension or any other form of financial assistance from the British government. Consequently, they had to rely on their own resourcefulness to make a living. From humble bed-and-breakfast beginnings Tomasik built up a successful business, The Learmonth Hotel, in the West End of Edinburgh. General Maczek fared less well, reportedly working in the 1950s as a storeman in the small Co-operative shop in the village of Gifford, East Lothian, situated at the foot of the Lammermuirs where his Division had done part of its training. Eventually, the paths of these two men crossed when, in the early 1960s, Maczek became Tomasik's near neighbour in Edinburgh. Tomasik employed Maczek as a barman in his hotel. According to Tomasik's family, the former NCO always felt a deep respect, amounting to reverence, for his erstwhile commander, and over the years the two became firm friends. His respect was shared by other Division veterans, who regarded the general as almost a father-figure (nicknamed *Baca*, meaning 'shepherd') and a focal point of their post-war community. Later, when he was made an honorary Dutch citizen and awarded a pension from Breda, one of the towns in the Netherlands liberated by his Division in October 1944, Maczek and his family were able to move from rented accommodation to a modest main-door tenement flat in the relatively affluent Marchmont area of Edinburgh. After Tomasik acquired Black Barony he made a room in the hotel freely available to the Maczeks who spent summers there in the 1970s during the map's construction.

The 1960s were a golden age of mass tourism, particularly European coach travel, before the oil embargo of the OPEC countries ushered in the 1973 oil crisis and caused a surge in the cost of oil to western consumers. According to his son-in-law, Marek Melges, Tomasik was always acutely aware that most European visitors to his hotel had little or no appreciation of the geography of the country they were visiting, far less the spatial relationships or distances involved between Edinburgh and other places on their itinerary. When he bought Black Barony in 1968, he determined to remedy this deficiency. Although his new visitors would come predominantly from within the United Kingdom, he believed they were just as unlikely to know much about Scotland geographically; and so he decided to build a large map of the country in the grounds of his hotel, inspired by a model map of Belgium he had seen on a visit to the Brussels World Fair in 1958.

During the Learmonth years Tomasik's hotel had been the favoured choice of accommodation for Polish sportsmen, Festival performers and dignitaries visiting

Edinburgh. In the course of these visits he met Professor Klimaszewski, head of the Geography Department and vice-rector of the University of Krakow, and also a high-ranking member of the Polish government under Edward Gierek. Klimaszewski's special responsibility lay in cultivating links between the Polish People's Republic and members of the Polish diaspora, of which Tomasik, as a successful British businessman, was a conspicuous example. When Tomasik sought his advice on building a model map, the professor responded by sending two members of his department, including his most promising student Kazimierz Trafas, to Scotland to explore the possibility.

Work begins

They arrived and undertook preliminary work in the summer of 1974, returning the following year with three university co-workers employed as hired hands, and again in 1976, by which time the bulk of the work was completed. In this they were assisted by Tomasik's son-in-law and hotel manager, Marek Raton, to whom Tomasik intended to hand over eventual ownership of the hotel. He in turn was assisted by the hotel's general maintenance man Bill Robson. After the Poles' departure Tomasik family members and hotel staff continued to work intermittently on the map, labour also being supplied along the way by Polish exchange students in Britain who would turn up seeking casual summer employment. Thanks to one of the Krakow team, Janusz Szewczuk, a detailed written account exists of the map's construction and its technical challenges. This can be found on the Educational Resources page of the Mapa Scotland website (www.mapascotland.org).

While the Polish cartographers applied their mapping skills to shaping and sculpting a physical representation of Scotland to scale, using Bartholomew maps to guide them, Tomasik incorporated some of his own ideas. He wanted water from the nearby Dean Burn piped into the map basin to create surrounding seas and, through a system of submerged pipes, feed the sources of Scotland's main rivers. These enhancements were carried out by the summer of 1980. Yet Tomasik's vision went beyond simply creating an additional hotel and wider tourist attraction. He was fond of pointing out parts of the Scottish coastline which Polish forces had been entrusted with defending in 1940-41, and spoke to hotel patrons of the map being his "gift to the Scottish people" in recognition of the friendship and hospitality Scots had shown the Poles during the war.

Moreover, he confided in his family his hope that the map would be officially 'opened' by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, whom the Polish veterans in Scotland seem to have held in particular affection, having appreciated her and King George VI's morale-boosting visit to them in Arbroath in March 1941. Sadly, this did not come to pass. No sooner had the map reached completion than disaster struck in the shape of a fire which severely damaged the hotel's main block in 1981. After a costly rebuild and upgrade, the hotel, by now taken over by Tomasik's son and namesake, proved financially unviable and closed in 1985 (re-opening under new owners in 1990). The condition of the map deteriorated steadily, largely as a result of frost damage, until it became overgrown and forgotten. Jan Tomasik died in 1991; General Maczek in 1994.

Also in 1994, Professor Trafas, as he now was, visited Edinburgh as part of an EU-funded project involving town planners from Krakow and Edinburgh interested in the question of how modern development can be best managed in the context of historic cities. His casual inquiry of one of the Edinburgh participants about the state of the map, which had never been widely publicised, helped spread a new awareness of its existence some ten years before his death in 2004. Two years after Trafas' visit Keith Burns (now Secretary of Mapa Scotland) stumbled across the map by chance while attending a conference at the hotel. A lifelong hill runner with a love for the Scottish mountains, he soon made contact with those who already knew of the map and after retiring began recruiting a team of fellow enthusiasts and Eddleston residents with a view to saving the map and restoring it to its original condition.



Volunteers cleaning up the north-west Highlands

As a result, Mapa Scotland (after the map's Polish name *Mapa Szkocji*) was formed in 2010. Today, after arranging free public access with the current hotel owners and successfully securing funding from several sources, the group, now a registered charity, campaigns to raise awareness of the map and has embarked upon a full restoration which it aims to complete over the next three years. Success will establish the map as a permanent feature in the landscape, providing the Borders with a novel visitor attraction and valuable educational resource. Granted Category B-listed status by Historic Scotland in 2012, it will serve as a reminder of the contribution Polish soldiers made to the defence of Britain during the Second World War and their continued presence in Scotland after the war. By working to bring Poles and Scots together to achieve its restoration Mapa Scotland hopes that "The Great Polish Map of Scotland" will continue to symbolise links between Poles and Scots in the past, as well as those being forged in the present.

A full description of the building of the map, together with accounts of its history and the progress of its restoration, can be found on the Mapa Scotland website at www.mapascotland.org

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