

Topographic Maps and Recreational Access in the New Zealand Outdoors

By Pete McDonald

In June 2004, Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) briefed its geospatial users – who include its map-users like you and me – on three of its geospatial initiatives. One of these projects will define LINZ's future role in providing topographic information online. As a part of this process, in early August 2004 LINZ started an online survey that invites individuals or group representatives to contribute feedback.¹ The closing date for responses is Friday 20 August 2004.

LINZ will be making some far-reaching decisions. In a sensible world, recreators' national associations would be high-priority addresses on LINZ's distribution lists; these bodies would all by now be aware of the survey and would be planning their responses. Yet as I write this, on 8 August, it is unclear how many national recreational associations have heard of this survey. It is also unclear how many ordinary individual map-users know about it. Furthermore, LINZ has been careful to remind us of its restricted statutory mandate:

Topographic Information Online Strategy. LINZ is developing a long-term strategy for the future of topographic mapping information on-line and the impact of phasing out of paper maps. No decision has been made to phase out paper maps. The strategy needs to be reviewed in the broader context of LINZ's mandate to provide topographic information primarily for emergency services, defence and constitutional purposes.²

There is a possibility, then, that a fundamental problem with LINZ, from a recreator's viewpoint, might be that it does not have a solid enough statutory duty to cater for recreators (or tourists).

The main debates implied in the LINZ online survey are three-fold:

- first, the question of paper maps versus online maps;
- second, the question of what topographic data LINZ should produce; and
- third, the question of what role LINZ should occupy in delivering this topographic information.

The way I see things, as an outdoor recreator, any debate about paper maps versus online maps is a side issue. A very important one, yes, but still secondary to the main issue. Similarly, even the significant matter of who delivers the information – LINZ or other mapping organisations – is also a subordinate issue. The key concern for walkers and mountain-bikers is the second one, the question of what information LINZ should produce.

The basic deficiency of the Topographic Map 260 series is the lack of access information. I face this problem every time I use one of these maps, which is nearly every weekend. They do not

'LINZ will be making some far-reaching decisions.'

'The basic deficiency of the Topographic Map 260 series is the lack of access information.'

show the boundaries of national parks, of other Department of Conservation lands, or of other public lands. You cannot tell from the maps whether the foot-tracks are public or private. Most seriously, you cannot tell whether a road is a public road or a private road; moreover, many unformed public roads are not marked at all.

Purists might reply that access information is cadastral, not topographic, and that it therefore has no place on topographic maps. This is an absurd argument. British topographic maps have included access information since 1959.

To give you a local, Dunedin example, arranging walking or cycling access to the private roads and lands of City Forests and of Wenita Forest Products Ltd involves obtaining permits from these companies. At first glance these requirements might seem straightforward. In practice, though, many of the commercial forests, such as Waipori Forest, are criss-crossed by a mosaic of roads, some of which are private and others of which are legal roads. Last year's ministerial report, *Walking Access in the New Zealand Outdoors*, acknowledged that 'there is no longer a government agency responsible for ensuring that cadastral information [eg, on the location of public roads] is readily available ... for the public at minimal cost'.³ How, then, does a mountain-biker who is bound for the Waipori Forest determine whether their route will follow public roads or private roads? They cannot. So they will not know whether they need a permit.

This lack of information on public roads is a national problem that awaits a national-mapping solution.

In failing to provide access information, the Topographic Map 260 series fails to provide vital information that walkers and mountain-bikers need. One result of this basic deficiency of the 260 series could be that topographic maps are not a strong part of our everyday culture. My impression is that these maps do not play as important a part in the lives of New Zealanders as, say, Ordnance Survey topographic maps play in Britons' lives. Last March, Dunedin City Council reported on some recent research into Dunedin's tracks.⁴ One hundred and eight track-users were interviewed, at five sites. When the interviewees were asked how they had obtained information about the track, the most frequent answers were word of mouth, guidebooks, articles, pamphlets, and signposts. The whole 192-page report does not mention topographic maps. Why was nobody using the Dunedin topographic map? Why does Joe PublicNZ not think in terms of topographic maps? I'm not sure. There are probably many answers to these questions. But one answer is that the maps do not show access rights.

The 1:50,000 topographic maps, whether on paper or online, should be the primary source of information on tracks. All the Accessible, Easy, Moderate, and Hard tracks listed in the Dunedin City Council tracks database should appear on the relevant topo maps, assuming that their waymarking meets the Topographic Map 260 standards for depiction as foot tracks. (An exception being crowded tracks that cannot be shown at 1:50,000, such as the Botanic Gardens tracks.)

Ideally, tracks classified as Routes in the City Council tracks database would be shown on the topo maps, but the Topographic Map 260 series does not have a separate symbol for a Route. It

A Better Service for LINZ's Key Stakeholders

'Making NZTopo available through the Internet is consistent with the department's e-LINZ strategy and parallels other initiatives within the organisation to progressively adopt the Internet as the principal method for the delivery of information and services. This service is designed to provide better access to topographic information for the emergency services, government departments and other key stakeholder.'

Land Information New Zealand, 'What Is It?' (No date) <<http://www.nztopoonline.linz.govt.nz/needhelp/whatisit.htm>> [accessed 8 Aug 2004].

lacks this important recreational data. In contrast, Parkmaps, now published by the Department of Conservation, have shown Routes for many years.

Leaflets, guidebooks, and local knowledge from friends do not make up for out-of-date and inadequate topographic maps. This is a nationwide problem, only very vaguely identified in *Walking Access in the New Zealand Outdoors*.⁵ The matter was raised at one of the land-access public meetings, at Invercargill on 15 October 2003:

Englishman Joe Sheriff said he would like more information about where public access was and who to contact to obtain permission. 'Your topographical maps are dreadful. They are not even accurate.'⁶

I touched on topographic maps in my diary, 'Going Out for a Bike Ride'.⁷ I covered them in more detail in 'High-quality Access'.⁸ We await national change, such as a public-access map series. This may be many years away. Until our maps include access information, all the technological wizardry of the 21st century will not provide the most vital information that walkers and mountain-bikers need.

*

This article is available as a PDF file from:

<http://homepages.vodafone.co.nz/~pete.mcd/tm/tm.pdf>

Until our maps include access information, all the technological wizardry of the 21st century will not provide the most vital information that walkers and mountain-bikers need.

Endnotes

- 1 The Topographic Information User Survey questionnaire is located on the LINZ website at <<http://www.linz.govt.nz//staticpages/topography/Toposurvey2.htm>>.
- 2 Land Information New Zealand, 'Land Information Newsletter: Geospatial News' (June 2004) <http://www.linz.govt.nz/docs/supporting_info/publications/geospatialnews/spatial_news_20040629.pdf> [accessed 6 Aug 2004].
- 3 Land Access Ministerial Reference Group, *Walking Access in the New Zealand Outdoors: A Report by the Land Access Ministerial Reference Group* (Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2003), pp. 64, 77.
- 4 Community and Recreation Services of Dunedin City Council, *Dunedin Track Research 2003–2004: Final Report* (Dunedin, NZ: Dunedin City Council, 2004).
- 5 Land Access Ministerial Reference Group, p. 77.
- 6 Julie Asher, 'Land Access Talks Draw 80', *Southland Times*, 16 Oct 2003.
- 7 Pete McDonald, 'Going Out for a Bike Ride: An AOK Diary, 2002–3' (2003) <<http://homepages.paradise.net.nz/petemcd/gob/gob.htm>> [accessed 8 Aug 2004], web version pp. 12–13, 58–60.
- 8 Pete McDonald, 'High-quality Access: A Response to the Feedback Questions That Were Attached to the Report, *Walking Access in the New Zealand Outdoors*' (2003) <<http://homepages.paradise.net.nz/petemcd/hqa/hqa.htm>> [accessed 8 Aug 2004], pp. 13–15.