

NO DEAD RABBITS*

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In the late 1940s and early 1950s most geography graduate programs required students to take a field course or to enroll in a summer field camp. My introduction to graduate geography in the summer of 1947 was the field camp in Lannon, Wisconsin, jointly sponsored by Northwestern and Syracuse Universities and staffed by such now-legendary scholars as Clarence F. Jones, Preston E. James, Robert E. Dickinson, and Joseph A. Russell.

We spent most of our time in field camp making maps (Davis 1954), because back in those days we had to make our own. Today it is hard to realize that less than half of the United States was covered by topographic maps in 1949 and that more than half of the existing topographic maps were woefully outdated or otherwise totally inadequate (Finch and Trewartha 1949, 19).

Some of us even had to learn to read maps. We had topographic maps for part of the field-camp area, and I can still remember how startled we were when, in the third week of camp, one of the new graduate students brightly asked one of the instructors, "What are those wiggly little brown lines running all over the topographic map?"

Mercifully we were not forced to learn how to set up and use plane tables, a rudimentary form of surveying, but we did spend an enormous amount of time working on pointless exercises in fractional code mapping, the GIS of the 1940s and 1950s.

Back in those days some geographers honestly believed that if only we made enough maps the reason for having made them would somehow eventually become clear, and "the field research question" would emerge. I have my own pet theory about the geographer who perpetrated this idea on his students, but I dare not set it forth on paper unless the laws of libel are repealed. Some of his students went to their graves still baffled because "the field research question" had never emerged from all the maps they had made.

The field camp, and to a lesser degree the field course, built a wonderful camaraderie in the new graduate group, and it greatly enriched our folklore. Remember the dark predawn when Flash Gray mistook Otto Guthe's tube of mustache wax for a tube of toothpaste, or the time Jimmy James plowed his Studebaker into that old sow sleeping in the middle of a dusty road, or the way K. C. McMurray used soils geography to cope with prohibition in the hills of southeastern Kentucky, or a hundred more that have enlivened many an evening session at our meetings?

* I greatly appreciate all I have learned from Neil Salisbury, one of the finest field geographers of our times, and the word-processing skills of Jodi Larson.

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