

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

The New Way to the Forks of the Ohio: Reflections on John Potts's Map of 1758

In the course of his illuminating discussion of cartographic symbolism in *The Power of Maps*, Denis Wood laconically observes that the adage “Every map is out-of-date before it’s printed” is not one over which “cartographers lose sleep.”¹ This must certainly have been true in the instance of Pennsylvania Surveyor-General Nicholas Scull, who in 1759 published his watershed map of the “Improved Part of the Province of Pennsylvania,” dedicating it to the “true & absolute Proprietaries Thomas & Richard Penn.” Already obsolete and inaccurate in its rendering of several important trans-Susquehanna features, the map intimates that Scull must indeed have slept soundly to have published it when and where he did.²

During the previous year, 1758, Brigadier General John Forbes and his able executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Bouquet, had reversed the tide of disaster released upon the Pennsylvania frontier by the defeat of Major General Edward Braddock in July of 1755. Forbes’s combined British and Provincial six-thousand-man army had cut its way through the virgin forests and over the ridges of the Alleghenies, thereby capturing the French stronghold of Fort Duquesne and eliminating the immediate French and Indian menace.³ To a populace interested in tracing the sinuous and daring route of Forbes’s new road to the Forks of the Ohio, in locating the site of near-mythical Fort Duquesne (renamed Fort Pitt), and in obtaining a clearer understanding of the ongoing war as Bouquet tried to push the French and the Indians out of the Ohio altogether, Scull’s map would have disappointed,

¹ Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York, 1992), 125.

² For a discussion of Nicholas Scull’s career as surveyor-general, see Hubertis M. Cummings, “Nicholas Scull,” *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Internal Affairs Bulletin* 30 (July 1962), 26–29, and (Aug. 1962), 2–4, 20.

³ The French evacuated and burned Fort Duquesne on Nov. 24, 1758.

for it envisioned a Pennsylvania essentially as it existed before Forbes secured the western parts of the province and established Fort Pitt as the center of military operations there. Scull's verbal explanation in the left margin lamely situating the site of the French fortification—he still identified it as “Fort du Quesne”—some seventy miles to the northwest could not have satisfied anyone familiar with the western territories (fig. 1).

Notwithstanding the apparent deficiencies of his map, historically the first published map of Pennsylvania's trans-Susquehanna regions, Scull boasted in another marginal insertion that he had, in effect, consulted several of the actors in the recent campaign—“Major [Joseph] Shippen who favou'd me with his drafts. And . . . Coll. [John] Armstrong, George Stevenson, Esqr., Benj. Lightfoot, John Watson & . . . others.” His declaration, however, fails to justify why he evidently never incorporated details from several recently compiled manuscript maps, at least four of which the above-mentioned individuals would certainly have put at his disposal. Two of the maps are thought to have been drafted by Major George Armstrong, brother to Colonel John Armstrong, the commanding officer of the Pennsylvania Regiment and deputy-surveyor of Cumberland county who was cited by Scull. A third map, now in the British Library, appears to be an official rendering based on Armstrong's drafts.⁴ George Armstrong had been commissioned by Forbes himself to reconnoiter a possible route for a new road to Fort Duquesne. At the beginning of the campaign Forbes reported to Bouquet that he had “sent up Major [George] Armstrong with one Dunning ane old Indian trader who has been many a time upon the road from Raes town to Fort du quesne, he says there is no Difficulty in the road across the Laurell Hill and that He leaves the Yohageny all the way upon his left hand about 8 miles.”⁵

Essentially in agreement with one another on the location of geographic features and the sites of forts and taverns, the two maps attributed to Armstrong dramatically if roughly visualize—as the Scull map does not—the location of Fort Duquesne (fig. 2). Additionally, they correctly situate McDowell's fortified mill (and by implication nearby Fort Loudoun, erected in 1756) to the southwest of Shippensburg and Chambers's fortified mill

⁴ Reprinted in C. Hale Sipe, *Fort Ligonier and Its Times* (Ligonier, Pa., 1976).

⁵ John Forbes to Henry Bouquet, July 14, 1758, *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, 2: *The Forbes Expedition*, ed. S.K. Stevens, Donald H. Kent, and Autumn L. Leonard (Harrisburg, 1951), 208.



Fig. 1. Detail from "Map of the Improved Part of Pennsylvania," by Nicholas Scull, 1759. (Historical Society of Pennsylvania.)

(today's Chambersburg), and they accurately locate Anthony Thompson's trading post and tavern on the Tuscarora Ridge at a critical turn in the road. Scull's map errs in all of these. The Armstrong maps do not, however, trace the actual route Forbes's army took. Instead, they simply sketch in a proposed completion of Burd's 1755 road, thus linking Raystown with the Braddock Road at the Three Forks of the Youghiogheny or the Turkey Foot (today's Confluence). For reasons too complex to explore here, I date these maps as belonging to the last half of 1756, certainly not the year Forbes cut his road.⁶

A fourth map is preserved among the Shippen papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. It is contained in a folder including two maps relating to Fort Burd erected in 1759 by James Burd and Joseph Shippen. Known as the Potts Map for its apparent maker John Potts, this fourth map details Forbes's actual route to Fort Duquesne (shown as "Pittsburg" by Potts), together with the principal encampments and landmarks lining that route. It is the only extant map of the expedition's route prepared by an actual participant in the Forbes campaign.⁷ Compiled by a mere soldier from the backcountry of then Cumberland County, its exaggerations and inaccuracies, however, pose additional problems to the modern interpreter; nevertheless, it records information that Scull might readily have used. Clearly, Potts's map confirms that the most recent data were available had Scull chosen to publish a truly up-to-date chart of Pennsylvania soon after the fall of Fort Duquesne.⁸

Potts's map exhibits several unusual features suggesting either that it was designed to make a certain kind of political, and possibly even metaphysical, statement, or more probably that it simply reflects philosophical ideals and attitudes that can help us appreciate both its maker and the community it

⁶ See James P. Myers, "Mapping Pennsylvania's Western Frontier in 1756," *PMHB* 123 (1999), forthcoming, which examines the dating of these and other similar maps.

⁷ Edward G. Williams, *Bouquet's March to the Ohio: the Forbes Road* (Pittsburgh, 1975), 13–14. A crude sketch of Forbes's route, by Colby Chew, is in the George Washington Papers, Library of Congress, 9:1096.

⁸ Although on a far more ambitious scale, the publishing in 1765 of the Reverend William Smith's treatise, replete with the most current maps, on the recently completed Bouquet campaign against Pontiac illustrates a successful effort to satisfy widespread interest. See Smith's *Historical Account of the Expedition under the Command of Henry Bouquet Against the Ohio Indians* (Philadelphia, 1765).

was intended to benefit. John Potts's map is a provocative and teasing projection of the cultural landscape of Pennsylvania during the time it was drawn. Its several odd features inescapably invite speculation on its character and purposes. The following discussion essays to clarify several questions tacitly posed by its presentation, and in so doing to explore the often unexpressed purposes maps embody and the expectations they speak to.

One of at least four men known during that period by the same name, the John Potts who drew the map lived at the northern end of the Path Valley in today's Franklin County.⁹ Thus, he is probably also the John Potts named by Richard Peters in 1750 as one of the squatters in that area who were evicted from their houses and whose cabins were burned for occupying Indian land "over the Kittochtinny Mountains."¹⁰ A 1760 memorial to General John Stanwix described Potts as "formerly An Indian Trader On the River Ohio, And Guide And Surveyor of the Roade to Ohio Under General Forbes, And Late Ensign in the Pennsylvania Regiment."¹¹ The *Pennsylvania Archives* confirm that a John Potts was licensed to trade with the Indians in 1744.¹²

"An enigmatical and obscure figure,"¹³ Potts appears to have acquired something of a reputation as an eccentric. It is to this presumed eccentricity that Edward Williams attributes "the erratic nature of the map of the road."¹⁴ In what ways is Potts's map to be construed as "erratic" and "eccentric"? Williams refers to its well-known "inaccuracies in both measurements and in directional bearings."¹⁵ Yet close study of the Forbes

⁹ Except as noted, I here draw details of Potts's life from Williams's discussion in *Bouquet's March*, 14–17.

¹⁰ *Colonial Records*, 5:444 (hereafter cited as *Col. Rec.*).

¹¹ Public Record Office 294, WO 34/82, f. 106; cited in Williams, *Bouquet's March*, 16.

¹² *Pennsylvania Archives* (hereafter, *PA*), 5th ser., 1:372.

¹³ Williams, *Bouquet's March*, 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

road over the course of thirty or more years convinced Williams of its veracity in locating the road and identifying topographic features. Williams, in fact, often came to rely upon the map in helping him to chart precisely the route Forbes's army took during the summer and autumn of 1758. Moreover, no less an authority than William A. Hunter allows that its alleged eccentricity "does not impugn the accuracy" of the map.¹⁶ The Sideling Hill crossing, for example, illustrates important details recorded by Potts (fig. 5). Construction of the Sideling Hill tunnel bypass on the Pennsylvania Turnpike destroyed what remained of the famous switchbacks carefully delineated by Potts.

Most viewers examining the Pott's map cannot avoid experiencing its "oddness," cannot avoid being arrested by its presence—indeed, cannot withstand being overawed by its immediate invitation to examine it closely.¹⁷ The power exerted by the chart derives in part from its sheer size: Potts's map is monumental; it is a kind of cartographic architecture, the complex symbolism of which seems to embody significant assumptions underlying its culture's mythology.

The map consists of two separate sections, the eastern half 29-1/2 inches long by 21 inches high, the western 29-3/4 inches by 20-3/4 inches. Fitted together, the resulting diagonal which ascends from the lower left to the upper right corner, from Fort Loudoun to Fort Pitt—the beginning and the end of the Forbes road—measures no less than 65-1/2 inches (fig. 3).¹⁸ A much smaller format, even one of the two sections, would illustrate the road

¹⁶ Cited in Williams, *Bouquet's March*, 16.

¹⁷ In confirmation of this subjective appraisal, when I was examining the map at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania several people passing my table stopped to query me about what I was looking at. It is no exaggeration to note that their curiosity was other than idle. For the map as artifact, consider the words of David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), xciii, who wrote: "We respond to relics as objects of interest or beauty, as evidence of past events, and as talismans of continuity. These responses may mistake their original function, but do evince at least some concern with the past. All knowledge of the past requires caring about it—feeling pleasure or disgust, awe or disdain, hope or despair about some aspect of our legacy."

¹⁸ Strictly speaking, the Forbes Road extended from a point about four miles west of Raystown (Bedford) to Fort Pitt. The road which began at Shippensburg and passed north along the western side of Path Valley, crossed the Tuscarora Mountain at Cowan's Gap, and then ran southwest via Juniata Crossings before reaching Raystown was first cut by James Burd in 1755 for the Braddock campaign. This earlier section is properly designated as the Burd/Forbes Road or, because Bouquet used and improved it during his 1763 campaign against Pontiac, the Burd/Forbes/Bouquet Road.

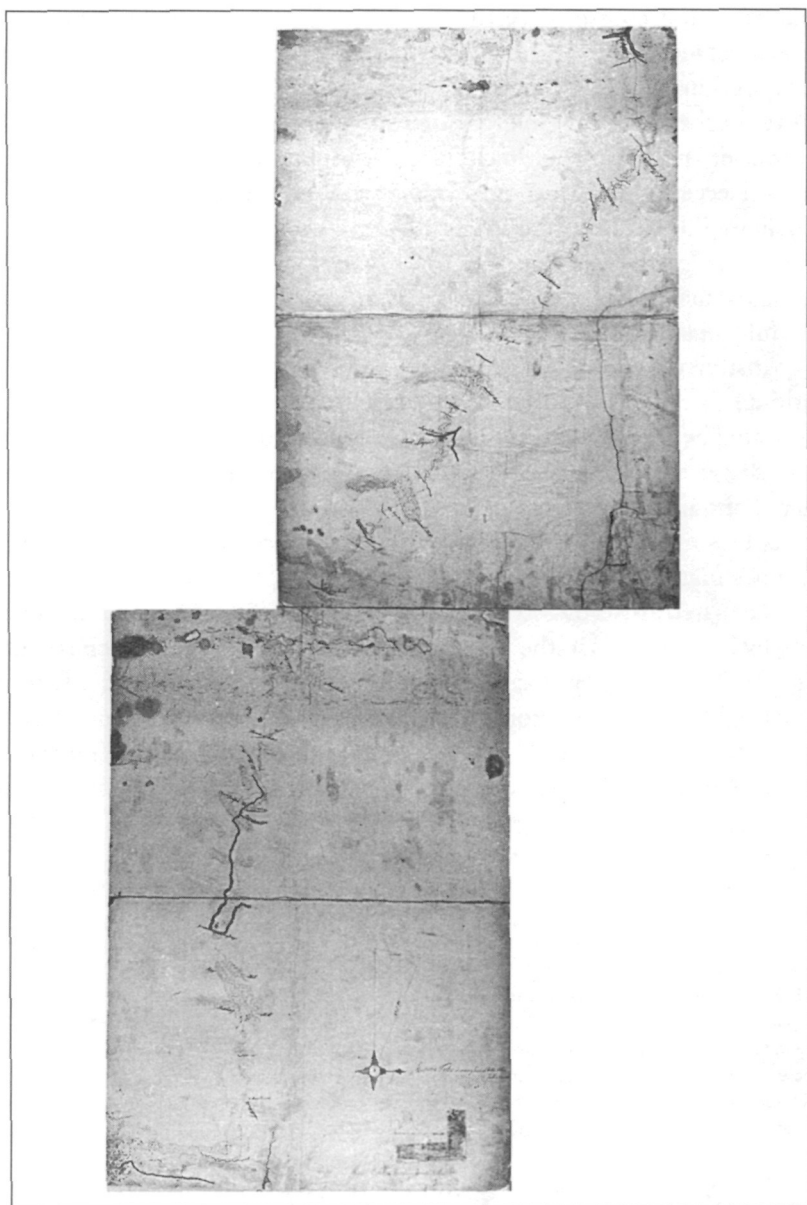


Fig. 3. Manuscript map entitled "General Forbes marching Journal to the Ohio," by John Potts, 1758. (Shippen Col., Historical Society of Pennsylvania.)

less awkwardly, but Potts elected to present his chart on such a scale that the modern viewer requires a large library table in order to take in the whole. If Potts had endeavored to incorporate a great amount of topographic detail clearly and legibly, one might appreciate his using the large, two-piece format, but another striking fact about his map is that it illustrates only the road, together with the significant topographic features that mark its actual course, giving us then a dotted line that undulates like a snake across an otherwise empty background (figs. 5–10). Reasonably, one might expect to see some recognition of the old Burd Road of 1755 which was reopened in the event that Forbes might decide to employ Braddock's route or to see the new road that had been cut south from Raystown (Fort Bedford) to Fort Cumberland on Wills' Creek in Maryland. Potts shows neither. We may ask then: why so much paper and space to delineate what could more conveniently and economically and just as clearly be comprehended on a much-reduced scale?

It is not, however, only size which draws our attention. The two parts do not join as we would expect, left half (east) flush to right (west); rather, they must be fitted together in a staggered fashion, like two steps, east rising to the west, if one is to trace in unbroken continuity the line representing Forbes's march from Fort Loudoun to Fort Duquesne.¹⁹

A third outstanding feature of Potts's chart involves its great exaggeration in directional bearing to describe the relationship of newly named "Pittsburg" to Fort Loudoun. In no other near-contemporary rendering—say, in William Scull's 1770 map of Pennsylvania, which supplied several outstanding omissions of his grandfather's 1759 map—do we see anything like the sharply accentuated angle rising from lower left to upper right corner. In a map the details of which Williams came to authenticate during years of study, how can we account for this glaring directional distortion, one which the map's huge scale accentuates more than if the chart had been confined to a smaller format? Before considering some possible answers to questions prompted by the size of Potts's map, we must first examine an additional cluster of issues it calls to mind. Whereas the first set of problems bears upon obvious cartographic expectations regarding

¹⁹ Admittedly, the step-like configuration might be the result of later cropping, from the top of one and the bottom of the other, but there is no evidence of this.

space, the latter expressly derives from the not-so-evident temporal character of maps.

The opening discussion of this essay highlights one facet of a map's temporal identity. Nicholas Scull's 1759 map of Pennsylvania, purporting to put before the viewer an up-to-date map of the "Improved Part of the Province," actually presented an obsolete image. Scull's map dramatically reveals one of cartography's perennial paradoxes: namely, that any map is but a static dated rendering of geographic truths as defined and fixed by its maker or makers. It removes from flux, from history, a perception of how things are geographically defined and related to one another at a certain historical moment. A map tries to "get a fix" on space, to hold it "there." But in doing so, a map, as it exists in the continuous present, drifts further and further from the way things are—from reality, ever-shifting, ever-evolving or ever-devolving.

By identifying the salient boundaries of its world, a culture also lays claim to it, stakes out what it interprets as belonging to it. Maps visualize a historical perception; they immortalize how, at a decisive moment, a culture endeavored to define its geographic-political-metaphysical world and its relationship to that world, how it momentarily, as it were, idealized or demonized—romanticized—that world. But altogether too soon, maps become cultural relics.

Aside from distinctions of obsolescence and currency, of fixity and flux, maps assert a temporal dimension by which space itself must be apprehended and indeed measured. Maps represent space not only visually by positioning spatial symbols in various relationships with one another, but they also affirm, tacitly or otherwise, that time and distance are functions of one another: space is linear as it unfolds and is thus experienced as duration as one moves from place to place. In Denis Wood's apt perception, "time is literally distance"; time collapses into space.²⁰ Denis Wood again: "Time is always present in the map because . . . it is inseparable from space. Time and space are alternative and complementary distillations, projections of a space/time of a higher dimensional order. We cannot have a map without

²⁰ Wood, *Power of Maps*, 129.

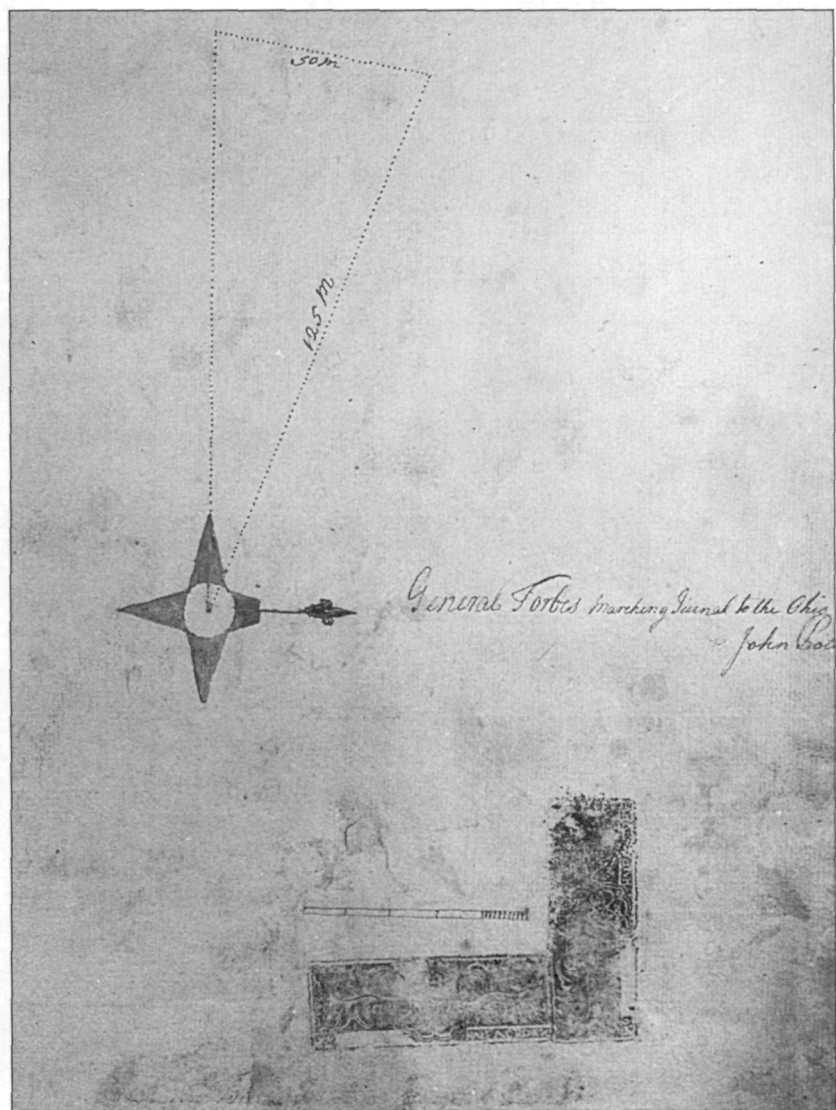


Fig. 4. Detail of Potts map showing compass rose and stationer's stamp.



Fig. 5. Detail of Potts map. First stage showing Forts Loudoun and the Lyttleton and Sideling Hill switchbacks.

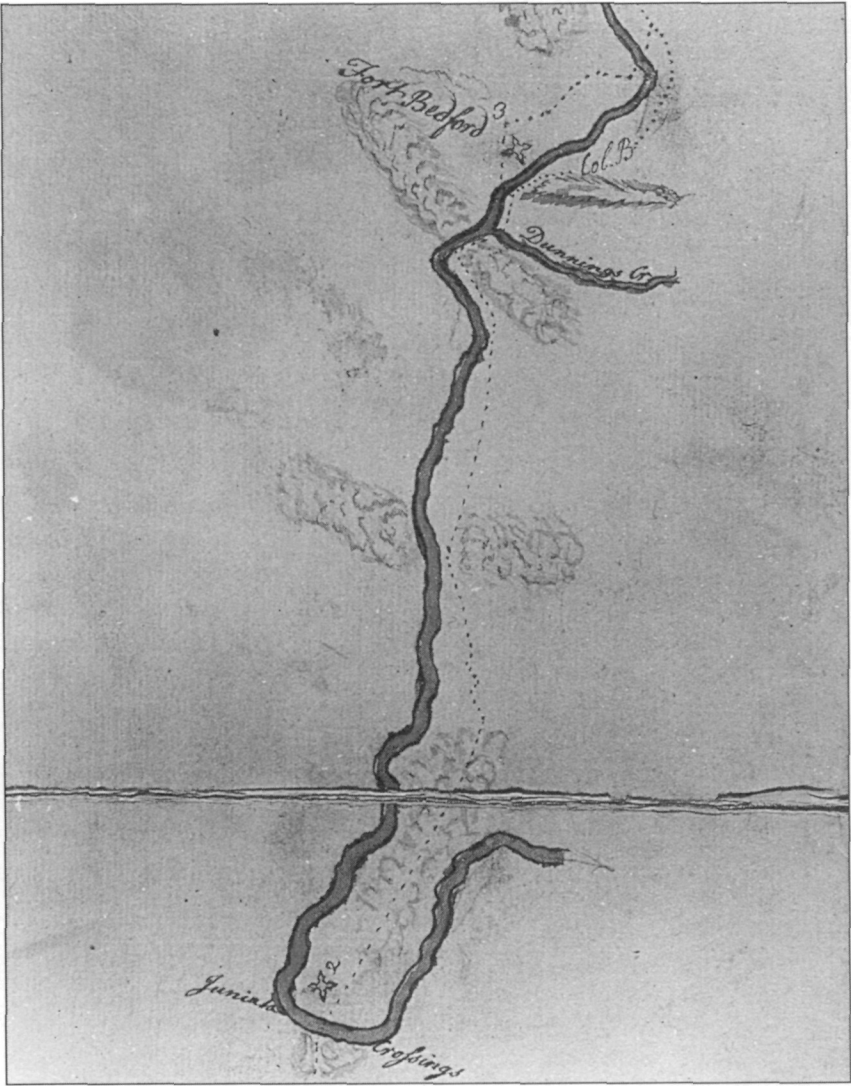


Fig. 6. Detail of Potts map. Second stage showing Fort Bedford.



Fig. 7. Detail of Potts map. Third stage showing junction with Burd Road.

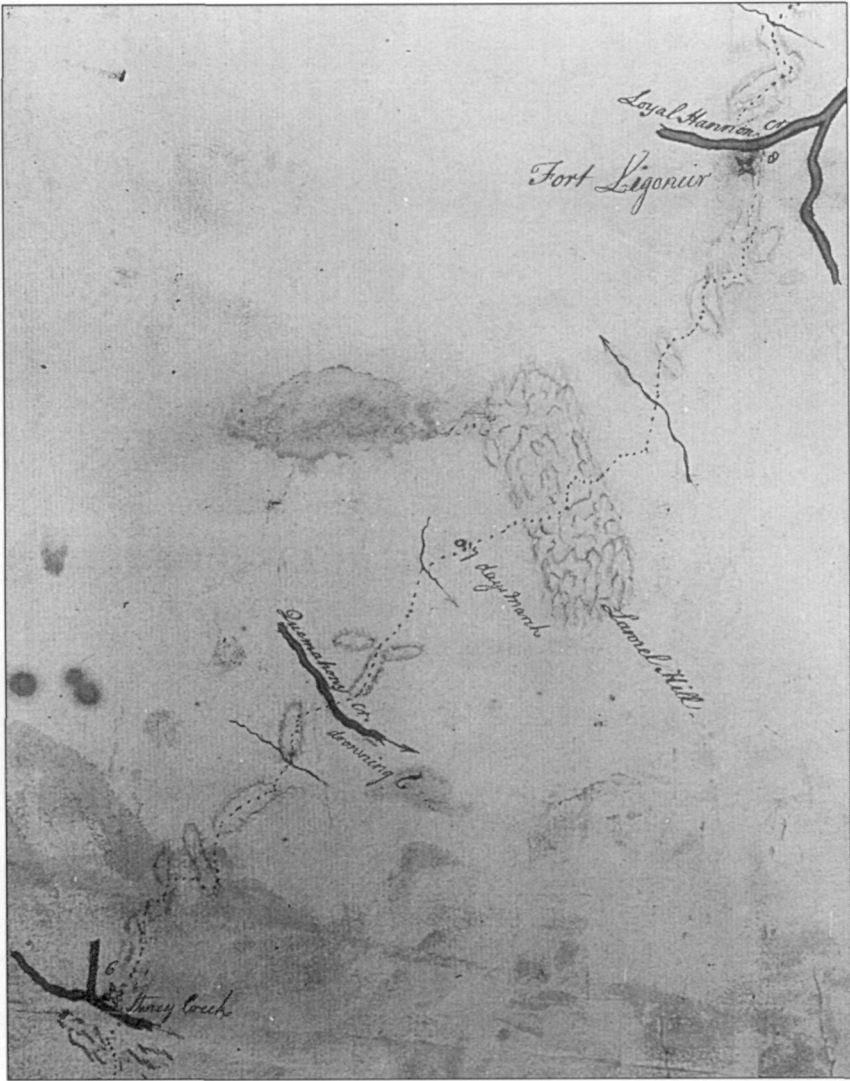


Fig. 8. Detail of Potts map. Fourth stage showing Fort Ligonier.



Fig. 9. Detail of Potts map. Fifth stage showing "4 Redoubts & Camp" (called by Washington and Bouquet "the Three Redoubts").



Fig. 10. Detail of Potts map. Sixth stage showing Forks of the Ohio and "Pittsburg" (Fort Pitt).

thickness in time unless we can have a map without extension in space. We cannot squeeze time out of the map, only onto it."²¹

It is for this and other reasons that maps often try to subvert their identities as "maps," that is, as purely spatial representations. Faithful to their dual spatial and temporal character, they frequently deemphasize the more obvious (spatial) in order to stress the less apparent (temporal). Sometimes subversion occurs when a map advertises itself as a *chart*, that is, as something other than a *map*.²² In the instance of Potts's map, the subversion is startling and almost total, for Potts employs a noun that almost incongruously suppresses its spatial character in favor of its temporal reality, thereby giving us a possible key to appreciating some of the deeper implications of both the map and the expedition whose route it traces across Pennsylvania to Fort Duquesne. Potts entitled his monumental map a *journal*: "General Forbes marching Journal to the Ohio." After setting aside initial perplexity over the term and studying the map, one perceives Potts's choice as appropriate. Instead of indicating distance between encampments as miles, he records the number of days required to negotiate the new, often difficult road. Linear space has transparently become duration, has been translated into historical moments.

The practical wisdom of Potts's emphasis should be obvious. When General Forbes sent George Armstrong off into the wilderness to find a new route to the Forks of the Ohio, he also expected the latter to record distances.²³ The collected Bouquet papers preserve an ongoing discussion of distances and record several arduous reconnaissances to obtain the needed intelligence.²⁴ As far back as the late 1740s, the Pennsylvania proprietary had been endeavoring to determine how far west the province extended by measuring well-used east-west Indian trails and traders' paths, a need that became acute when Pennsylvania had to cut a road across the Alleghenies to link up with Braddock's north-south road. During that time, experienced

²¹ Ibid., 130.

²² Ibid., 129.

²³ See George Armstrong to Bouquet, July 26, 1758, *Bouquet Papers*, 2:280, and the report of James Dunning, who accompanied Armstrong, "Estimate of Distances to Fort Duquesne," July 1758, *ibid.*, 279–80.

²⁴ See particularly the estimates reported by several scouts, *Bouquet Papers*, 2:234–46.

Indian traders and other travellers such as Hugh Crawford, Andrew Montour, John Harris, George Croghan, Conrad Weiser, and William West submitted estimates of distances.²⁵ John Patten produced a now-lost map which proved so valuable that the Provincial Council sent it to England.²⁶

Although the reporters helped somewhat to fill in the empty spaces on Pennsylvania's western reaches, their estimates often disagreed. Additionally, as John Patten and Andrew Montour, among others, stressed, naked numbers did not provide a useful gauge of the arduous travel required: "Both Mr. Montour and Mr. Patten say that the Road from the three Springs to Ohio is very crooked, going in many Places to the North, and in many to the South of a Strait line."²⁷

Soldiers on the move, convoys bearing supplies to the encampments strung out like gems on a necklace, a general planning to invest an enemy fortress before the winter snow—all needed to know how long it would take to march from point to point. Distance is temporal, and it was this truth to which Potts's marching journal remained faithful. In baldest terms, it diagrammed the new track to Fort Pitt and recorded, in segments, how long the journey required. It thus fulfilled the overt and expressed expectations of its promulgators, its maker, and those who needed to consult it. All maps of course variously perform this pragmatic task. In the perception of Denis Wood, a map serves "as a model on which we may act, in lieu or anticipation of experience, to compare or contrast, measure or appraise, analyze or predict. It seems to inform, with unimpeachable dispassion, of the objects and events of the world."²⁸

A map which, like Potts's, calls attention to what Williams and others term its eccentricities, diverts our attention from its supposedly objective character to more subjective features. Its designation as a *journal*, its great size, its exploitation of emptiness, its step-like configuration when laid out as it should be, the accentuated angle of ascent it in effect describes—these

²⁵ See *Col. Rec.*, 5:348, 747–51, and 758–61; and *PA*, 1st ser., 2:132–6

²⁶ The Library of Congress has the left half of a manuscript map (G 3703.05 1753 M3 Vault) which appears to be the western half of Patten's lost map.

²⁷ "Information of Mr. Peters to the Governor," *Col. Rec.*, 5:762.

²⁸ Wood, *Power of Maps*, 116.

prompt questions that focus us on issues other than the pragmatic, and in doing so, it expresses what Wood construes as a map's essential mythic function: "As *myth* . . . [a map] refers to itself and to its makers, and to a world seen quite subjectively through their eyes. It trades in values and ambitions; it is politicized."²⁹

The outburst of mapmaking that occurred during and after the French and Indian War provides us with unambiguous material evidence of cartography's twin functions. The explosive expansionist energies and territorial cataclysms that climaxed in the Seven Years' War, locally known as the French and Indian War, found commensurate cartographic expression in the great abundance of mapmaking that occurred around the year 1755.³⁰ Nicholas Scull's map conspicuously and importantly contributed to that cartographic flurry. Politicians and diplomats needed to know exactly where the boundaries were, and soldiers required accurate charts of where to march and what to defend and attack. The great maps of Lewis Evans, John Mitchell, Jean Nicolas Bellin, Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville, and Didier Robert de Vaugondy, however, exhibit as much artistic inspiration as practical justification, for they were intended to persuade, to argue, to overawe, as well as to inform. Writing of John Mitchell's watershed "Map of the British and French Dominions in North America, with Roads, Distances, Limits, and Extent of the Settlements" (1755), Seymour I. Schwartz argues, for example, that "the map was devised as a conscious cartographic rebuttal to French boundary claims proposed on maps prior to the French and Indian War and it distinguishes British and French possessions in eastern North America and the administrative subdivisions of the British colonies."³¹ Maps are political statements, claims to territory, assertions of power, and as such are far removed from popular conceptions

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See Seymour I. Schwartz and Ralph E. Ehrenberg, *The Mapping of America* (New York, 1980), 157–63, for a discussion of this point. Seymour I. Schwartz's *The French and Indian War, 1754–1763: The Imperial Struggle for North America* (New York, 1994) presents an excellent cartographic history of the conflict. Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune* (New York), 128–29, also explores the notion of the 1755 maps "as weapons."

³¹ Schwartz and Ehrenberg, *Mapping of America*, 160.

of them as innocent servants "of that eye that sees things as they really are."³²

These "semiological," that is, value-making, purposes may help to explain several of the unusual features associated with John Potts's map. As with the justly famous published maps referred to above, it is presented to the viewer as a kind of monument intended to awe and dominate. Although it lacks the majesterial power of, say, Mitchell's or Lewis's great maps, Potts's map nonetheless succeeds in communicating a feeling of emptiness, an emptiness, moreover, that has been conquered in part by the army which had cut the very road illustrated on the map.

If the Potts map rejects representing in topographic detail the interior of the Allegheny region—thus moving to the other end of the spectrum occupied by the grand maps of 1755—it may do so for several reasons. By one convention, eighteenth-century road maps are lean offerings—they rarely show more than the course of the road and the features it touches that help define its transit. But the very physical magnitude of Potts's "journal" implies that the Forbes Road has partially subdued a disturbing emptiness, hitherto a veritable blank on the received geographic interpretations of Pennsylvania. It stubbornly refuses even to indicate where the road is joined by the new road to Fort Cumberland or by the old Burd Road striking to the southwest just west of Bedford. The points represented by Forts Loudoun and Pitt are now joined, no longer separated by the Allegheny desert (that is, "deserted place") symbolized by white (*blanc*, blank) space. With this in mind, it does not take a great imaginative leap to interpret the road as a kind of artery or nerve through which the nurturing materials and values of civilization can flow, however sinuously, to the remote reaches of the newly secured western territory.

Although the Forbes Road may snake its course over and through the Allegheny backcountry, the exaggerated angle at which the map locates the position of Fort Duquesne in relation to Fort Loudoun suggests further that the new way west is actually an ascent, a climb. Accentuated and visually reinforced by the step-like configuration created by joining the two halves, the map evokes archetypal associations between arduous climbing and successful achievement, if not indeed salvation, albeit of a secular order. There can be no question but that the principal actors in the expedition's quest for the Forks of the Ohio at least occasionally perceived their

³² Wood, *Power of Maps*, 106.

experience as something akin to an ascent of Dante's Mount Purgatory or, more appropriately for a largely Presbyterian army, Bunyan's Hill of Difficulty.

That such a reading is not fanciful is reinforced in two ways. The archetypal motif of a laboring, purgatorial climb through adversities to a summit which redeems all tribulation appears to have inspired the genesis of several other contemporary road maps. Many much cruder than Potts's, these maps employ a projection that places the point of beginning at the base, the desired or desirable goal at the apex of a line—the vastly simplified road—representing a precipitous climb over barrier ridges and creeks, themselves imaged as rungs or steps on a ladder. A sketch entitled the "Frontiers of Virginia," for example, situates Winchester ("civilization") at the foot, Fort Cumberland (the desirable defensive outpost in the wilderness) at the top, slightly to the northeast when in reality Cumberland lies appreciably to the northwest.³³ Similarly, a drawing among the Forbes papers, with nearly all the place designations blurred to illegibility, clearly renders the road from Fort Bedford to Fort Duquesne as a climb "up" the Allegheny wilderness interpreted as a sequence of ascending rung-like barriers.³⁴

A second justification for interpreting the expedition as a purgatorial, ascending quest may be found in letters authored by Forbes and his officers. Beset by insufficient provisions and one of the rainiest summers in memory; confronting virgin forests and vast jungles of mountain laurel (often denoted on eighteenth-century maps as "shades of death") and mountain ridges (the Kittochiny, Sideling Hill, Allegheny Ridge, and Laurel Ridge) which challenged to the utmost the collective skill of Forbes's engineers and road

³³ British Museum, Add. MSS. 21658, f. 14, reproduced in the *Bouquet Papers*, 2: facing p. 82.

³⁴ Anonymous sketch, Dalhousie Muniments, Scottish Public Records Office (Edinburgh), 2/103. Colby Chew's crude map referred to above in note 7 also suggests Forbes's route as arduous ascent. The 1756 sketch in the Lamberton Scotch-Irish Collection at HSP (reproduced in William A. Hunter, *Forbes on the Pennsylvania Frontier, 1753-1758* [Harrisburg, 1960], 384) showing the location of Fort Granville reverses this apparent spatial symbolism. Reaching the site of Fort Granville (erected in 1756), however, required no great military undertaking; the fort was, moreover, destroyed in the autumn of 1756 by the French and Indians. In this drawing, Carlisle seems to float over the ridges and creeks separating it from Fort Granville like a heavenly city or, perhaps more appropriately, like Swift's flying island of Laputa in *Gulliver's Travels*. Although somewhat different in the arrangement of its symbolic components, the implied purgatorial stairway or ladder ascending to the "heavenly city," though here from the "hell" of the frontier, still obtains.

builders; often uncertain of how or where to move on, the general and his staff occasionally voiced despair over reaching the promised end, especially as autumn turned to winter and almost half the army succumbed to sickness or began to desert. Colonel George Washington's September 28 letter to Virginia governor Francis Fauquier epitomizes the army's gloomy perception that the Alleghenies had defeated any hope that the army would successfully achieve a position to confront, no less take, Fort Duquesne:

there is [not] time enough to accomplish our Plan this season: . . . the Road is not yet opened half way, and not 20 days provision for the Troops got the length of this place—which can not be attributed to a juster cause than the badness of the *road*; altho' many other reasons are assigned for it. We find that the frosts have already changed the face of nature—among these mountains. We know there is not more than a month left for the Enterprize: we know also, that a number of Horses can not subsist after that *time*, on a Road stripped of its herbage—and very few there are who apprehend that our affairs can be brought to favourable issue by that period. nor do I see how it is possible, if every thing else answered, that men half-naked can live in Tents much longer.³⁵

Washington's letter is not unique; fellow officers voiced similar despondency.³⁶ Desertion became epidemic, and jealousies and rivalries undermined the army's ability to carry on smoothly. Writing to Forbes on October 28 about a recent setback his commander had experienced, Bouquet himself reveals how profoundly depression had rooted itself: "I . . . am keenly affected by the impression which our misfortune made on you. Natural obstacles are not the only ones you will find on your road. The prevailing spirit in the army forecasts other storms. I have seen them gathering for a long time, they are beginning to break, and as they do not yet dare go up to you, they are making trials on me."³⁷

³⁵ *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series* (Charlottesville, Va., 1988), 6:53.

³⁶ See the following selection of letters suggesting the army's despondency and near despair: Washington to Fauquier, Sept. 25, 1758, *Washington Papers*, 6:45; Forbes to Bouquet, Oct. 10, 15, 21, 24, 1758, *Bouquet Papers*, 2:550–1, 561–3, 582–6; Bouquet to Forbes, Oct. 28, 1758, *Bouquet Papers*, 2:588–9; John Armstrong to Bouquet, July 25, Aug. 28, Sept. 2, 1758, *Bouquet Papers*, 2:272–3, 442–3, 463–5.

³⁷ Bouquet to Forbes, Oct. 28, 1758, *Bouquet Papers*, 588–9.

A week earlier, his progress at a standstill on the Allegheny Ridge, Forbes himself had confided to Prime Minister William Pitt that "I am this Moment in the greatest distress . . . I cannot form any judgement, how I am to extricate myself, as every thing depends upon the Weather, which snows and rains frighteningly . . ." ³⁸

In one of the most suggestive letters to survive, Lieutenant Colonel Adam Stephen, driving his road cutters through the laurel jungle known as the Shades of Death (shown by Potts as "Edmunds Swamp"), wrote the following to Bouquet: "the Shades of Death, a dismal Place! [It] wants only a Cerberus to represent Virgils gloomy description of Aeneas's entering the Infernal Regions." Stephen's comparison with Aeneas's descent into Hades also recalled for him the ordeals of Hercules: "I design to give you as Easy a passage through them [that is, the "Shades"] as possible but it will be an Herculean Labour; and few men I can employ after a days hard working, will Scarcely leave their marks at Night." ³⁹ The Hesperidean Garden was indeed far off.

If any single force kept the army moving westward, it was, as surviving testimony makes clear, the sterling determination of its dying commander to persevere heroically, ⁴⁰ to set an uncomplaining example to his men: "Whatever you and I may suffer in our minds," he wrote Bouquet, "pray let us putt the best face upon matters, and keep every body in Spirits." ⁴¹ Eventually, however, even Forbes had to surrender to the melancholic truth.

The council of war he convened at Fort Ligonier on November 11 officially ratified the feeling of defeat that had poisoned the entire army. ⁴² But hardly had the staff decided that taking Duquesne that winter would be impossible than a couple of near-miraculous reversals occurred, climaxing

³⁸ John Forbes to William Pitt, Oct. 20, 1758, *Writings of General John Forbes*, ed. Alfred Proctor James (Menasha, Wis., 1938), 240.

³⁹ Adam Stephen to Henry Bouquet, Aug. 8, 1758, *Bouquet Papers*, 2:341.

⁴⁰ Throughout the entire campaign, Forbes fought the debilitating effects of a mortal disease. Wracked with migraines and frequently unable even to stand, he was carried from camp to camp in a horse-litter. He died on Mar. 11, 1759, in Philadelphia and was buried in Christ Church.

⁴¹ Forbes to Bouquet, Oct. 25, 1759, *Bouquet Papers*, 2:586.

⁴² "Council of War," *Bouquet Papers*, 2:600-1.

with the wholly unanticipated burning and evacuation of Fort Duquesne by the French, and thereby giving Forbes's little army its victory without having to endure the final tribulation of protracted siege warfare.⁴³ The same men who found themselves trapped, as it were, just below the summit of their goal now experienced a jubilation that admitted almost no limits. They had persevered; they had suffered; they had been rewarded, as if by the gift of grace. Several letters announcing the investment of Duquesne register the army's understandable elation, but none so unequivocally as this anonymous notice that appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*:

Blessed be God, the long look'd for Day is arrived, that has now fixed us on the Banks of the *Ohio*! with great Propriety called *La Belle Riviere*. . . . These Advantages have been procured for us by the Prudence and Abilities of General FORBES, without Stroke of Sword, The Difficulties he had to struggle with were great. To maintain Armies in a Wilderness, Hundreds of Miles from the Settlements; to march them by untrodden Paths, over almost impassable Mountains, thro' thick Woods and dangerous Defiles, required both Foresight and Experience, . . . consider . . . [General Forbes's] long and dangerous Sickness, under which a Man of less Spirits must have sunk; and the advanced Season, which would have deterred a less determined Leader, and think that he has surmounted all these Difficulties, that he has conquered all this Country, has driven the *French* from the *Ohio*, and obliged them to blow up their Fort Thanks to Heaven, their Reign on this Continent promises no long Duration!⁴⁴

Beyond its objective recording of cartographic facts, we can detect in the provocative peculiarities of John Potts's "General Forbes marching Journal to the Ohio" innuendos of the myth that later fueled Pennsylvania's—and

⁴³ After virtually resigning itself to going into winter quarters at Fort Ligonier, the army captured three prisoners in the course of beating back a French attack. From two of the prisoners, Forbes learned that the French had reduced their garrison drastically and were even worse off than their attackers. The prisoners also reported that the Indian allies of the French had begun to return home in great numbers. Wholly demoralized, on Nov. 24 the French set Fort Duquesne afire after evacuating it. The following day, without a shot, Forbes took possession of the fortress, immediately renaming it Fort Pitt.

⁴⁴ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Dec. 14, 1758. Vocabulary, syntax, and cadence suggest that the expedition's Anglican chaplain, the Reverend Thomas Barton, may have authored the letter. For a discussion of Barton's style, see James P. Myers Jr., "The Rev. Thomas Barton's Authorship of *The Conduct of the Paxton Men, Impartially Represented* (1764)," *Pennsylvania History* 61 (1994), 167–70.

America's—westward expansion: namely, that the barren and empty no-man's-land lying to the west of civilization might indeed be conquered, granted a willingness to struggle; to surrender, if momentarily, to darkness and wilderness; but to persevere stubbornly in a world that poisons hope. More than this, though, the push westward, toward the setting sun, is also a movement back in time, paradoxically into barbarism where roads do not exist and where the blood-edged tomahawk reigns, and then further back beyond even time itself toward a goal numinous with intimations of salvation—call it the heavenly city of God, the light on the hill's summit, the promised land, the new Eden, or simply a brave new world.⁴⁵ On Potts's marching journal to the Ohio, Forbes's army can be charted day-by-day slowly snaking its way through a bewildering, blank no-man's-land to ascend finally, in the very nick of time and at the map's ultimate and remotest corner, into “the finest and most fertile Country of *America*, lying in the happiest Climate in the Universe,”⁴⁶ a fabled garden watered by the fairest and loveliest of all rivers—*La Belle Riviere*.

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⁴⁵ Wayne Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago, 1979), explores this and other perceptual attitudes underlying exploration narratives and maps. His introductory chapter, “Language and Event in New World History,” is especially provocative, particularly when he discusses Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785). His interpretation of a passage in Jefferson's book parallels the reading of the Potts map offered here: “In his movement through the ‘breach’ one can trace . . . the remnants of an epic-chivalric situation (Thermopylae and Roncevaux come to mind), even if the ‘war’ in this case has been fought between the rivers and the mountains, and the traveler's own deed is abstracted, intellectualized, as linear as the road which he follows. Indeed, the road itself is a chivalric sign, an indication that beyond the present rough road of history is a realm of suggestive renovation” (p. 32).

⁴⁶ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Dec. 14, 1758.