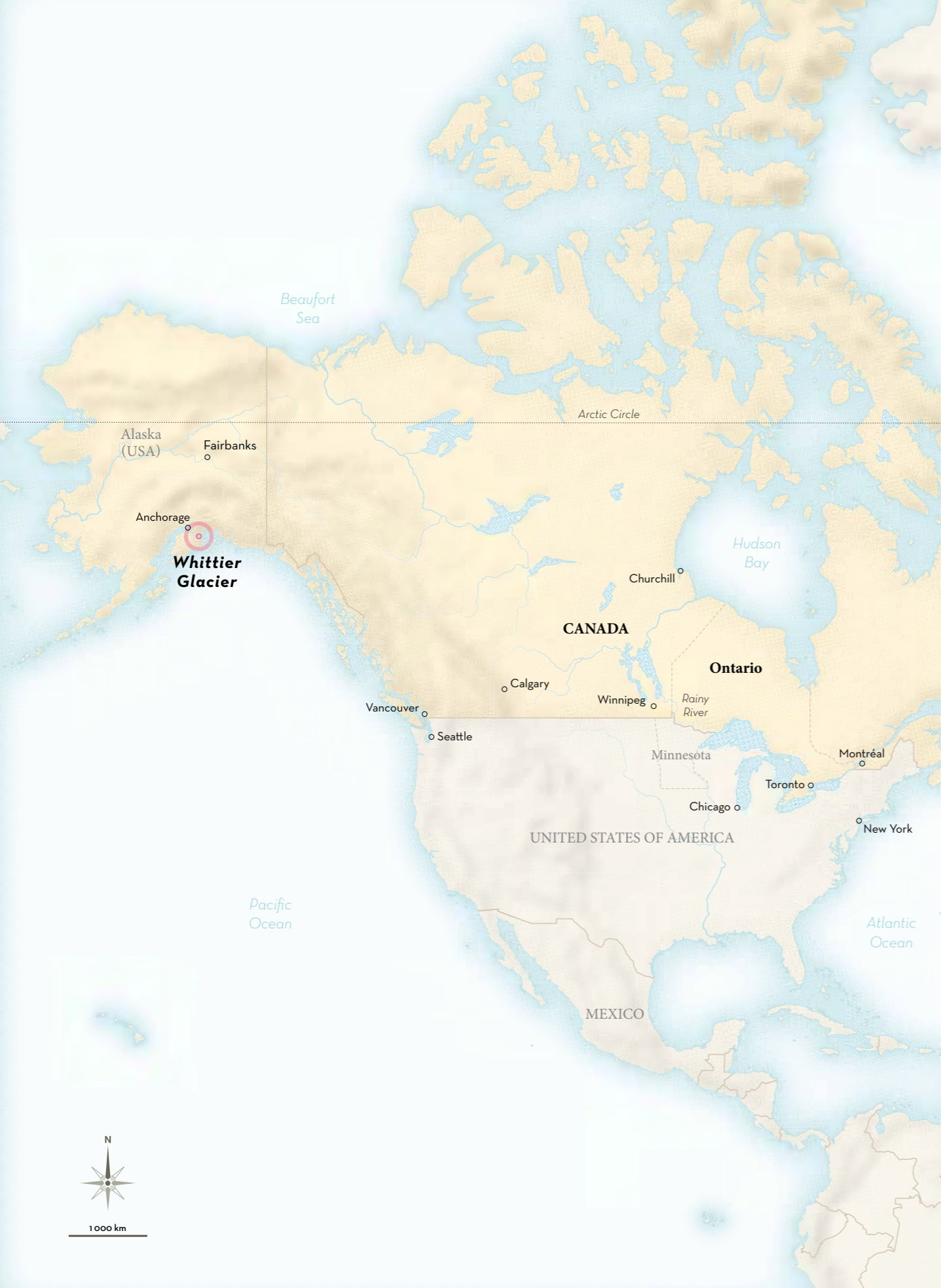


VITALI VITALIEV

ATLAS  
OF  
*geographical  
curiosities*



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING



## Whittier • Alaska, USA

*The world's only municipality under one roof*

The “city” (as it insists on being referred to) of Whittier on the shores of Prince William Sound in Alaska could market itself as the world’s only one-house municipality, for nearly all its 205 residents live in the 14-storey Begich Tower, Alaska’s tallest building.

Whittier’s history is fascinating. Not long after the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands during World War II, the US Army began looking for a spot to build a secret military installation. The proposed base needed to be an ice-free port and as inaccessible as possible. Whittier was perfect, thanks to 3,500-foot peaks surrounding it and covering it in cloud for much of the year. To provide access to the Seward Highway to the north, the Army blasted a supply tunnel out of solid granite, and the Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel remains one of Alaska’s great engineering marvels. Completion of the tunnel led to construction of what at the time was the largest building in Alaska, to house more than 1,000 workers.

The Army maintained Whittier until 1960, leaving behind the Begich Towers, where most of Whittier’s 205 residents live today – one third fewer than in the year 2000, when the tunnel was overhauled to accommodate auto traffic along with the Alaska Railroad.

To be precise, only 204 people reside in the skyscraper: one maverick chose to escape high-rise living by settling down in an abandoned bus in the harbour.

The tower has all necessary conveniences: shops, restaurants, a laundromat, post office, museum (down the hall from the post office), beauty salon, church and even a small B&B on the top two floors with lovely views of the Sound. There used to be a small jail there too, but it had to close for lack of offenders. One floor is occupied by the ‘city government’, including the mayor, known as the city manager, and three key departments: administration, public safety and public works.

The initial decision to house all the residents in one building was an attempt to minimise clearing away of snow, of which there’s no shortage in Whittier in winter. When the military left in 1963, the town went into hibernation, only occasionally interrupted by the Alaska Railroad trains from Anchorage bringing tourists for glacier cruises in the Sound.

The railroad had been the mini-city’s only link to the outside world (if not to count a tiny airstrip, left by the military and locally known as “Whittier International Airport”) until the Whittier-bound extension of the Alaska Marine Highway was completed.



# Yonge Street • Canada

*The longest designated street in the world, at 1,896 km*

If you ask somebody in Toronto for directions and they say “it’s at the end of the street”, you better make sure you’re not standing on Yonge Street, where the end of the street could be 1,896 km away. Yonge Street is, in fact, the longest street in the world (according to Guinness World Records) if we stick to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of ‘a street’ as “a thoroughfare with abutting property”, not limiting it to one particular city, town or village. Even for Canadians used to huge distances, the concept of living on the same street as someone a quarter of a continent and a time zone away is a bit hard to swallow. Yonge Street roars through Toronto and straight through the Ontario wilderness into the sub-Arctic, across the top of the Great Lakes. The street ends only when it smacks straight into the US border at Rainy River, Minnesota. The trip up the street takes four days.

Yonge Street was integral to the original planning and settlement of western Upper Canada in the 1790s, forming the basis of the concession roads in Ontario today. Once the southernmost leg of Highway 11, linking the provincial capital with northern Ontario, it has been referred to as “Main Street Ontario”. Today, no section of Yonge Street is marked as a provincial highway.

Ontario’s first colonial administrator, John Graves Simcoe, named the street for his friend Sir George Yonge, an expert on ancient Roman roads. The first stretch, completed on 16 February 1780, was 55 km. Yonge Street – a commercial main thoroughfare rather than a ceremonial one – became important in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as one of the routes down which the furs and other riches from the north came to market in Toronto.

Rainy River on the Ontario–Minnesota border marks the spot where Yonge Street finishes. A lonely road sign reads, simply, “ENDS”. Standing there, Toronto is but a distant memory.

## The world's shortest street

By comparison, Ebenezer Place, in Wick, Caithness, Scotland, is credited by *Guinness World Records* as being the world's shortest street, at 2.06 metres. The street has only one address: the entrance to No. 1 Bistro, which is part of Mackays Hotel.







# The Four Corners • USA

*The only point in the USA where four states meet, with one suing another over a border controversy*

The Four Corners is a region of the south-western United States which includes the south-western corner of Colorado, the south-eastern corner of Utah, the north-eastern corner of Arizona, and the north-western corner of New Mexico. The area is named after the quadripoint where the boundaries of the four states meet. Marked by the Four Corners Monument, the point is the only location in the United States where four states converge.

The United States acquired the region from Mexico after the end of the Mexican–American War in 1848. The first boundary, which was defined in 1850, created the New Mexico Territory and Utah Territory. The border between the two was defined as the 37th parallel north. In 1861, the eastern part was taken from Utah Territory to create the Colorado Territory. The Colorado Territory's southern border would remain as the 37th parallel north, but the new border between the Colorado and Utah Territories was defined as the 32nd meridian west from Washington (a reference line used at the time as the Washington meridian).

In 1863, after a claim that the New Mexico Territory was too big to be properly administered, an Arizona Territory was created by Congress, using the same borders of 37th parallel north and of the 32nd meridian west. Since the early twentieth century, controversies have arisen regarding the accuracy of the monument's location: it was found that the borders did not always follow the lines of meridian and parallel, as intended, due to the primitive surveying technology available at the time. This discrepancy left the four states asking if the correct borders were the exact lines of meridian and parallel (and if new, more accurate, surveys needed to be done), or if the markers placed during the initial surveys were now the actual border.

For this reason, after New Mexico sued Colorado in 1919, the Supreme Court ruled in 1925 that the markers placed during the initial surveys were the actual borders, even if they were off in some locations (like in the case of the Four Corners Monument, which is roughly 550 metres east of where it should be). The issue was resolved, and today's legal description of the borders is based on the original markers, not the written description of the borders created when the territories were formed. Because of this, the borders between these states are not perfectly straight, and often zigzag.

Canada also has a four-corner area, where the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut meet. Nunavut was officially separated from the Northwest Territories in 1999, though the boundaries had been defined in 1993 by the Nunavut Act and the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Both documents define Nunavut's boundary as including the "intersection of 60°00'N latitude with 102°00'W longitude, being the intersection of the Manitoba, Northwest Territories and Saskatchewan borders". The intersection of the boundaries of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Northwest Territories, surveyed before the creation of Nunavut, is marked by a metre-high aluminium obelisk.





## Northwest Angle • USA

*Reachable from the US only by boat or through Canada,  
the only place outside Alaska where the US extends north of the 49th parallel  
is the result of historical bad mapping*

Roughly in the middle of the USA–Canada border, which at 8,900 km is the longest international frontier in the world, the borderline bends north to the Northwest Angle, the only place outside Alaska where the US extends north of the 49th parallel.

Sticking up like a chimney on the roof of Minnesota, reaching into Ontario and Manitoba in Canada, the Northwest Angle is therefore the northernmost point in the continental US. Like Point Roberts (see page 17) and Alaska, it is reachable from the US only by boat or through Canada.

This geographic oddity is a result of bad mapping in the eighteenth century and a lengthy negotiation between the US and Great Britain.

During the drafting of the Treaty of Paris (the official end to the American Revolutionary War in 1783), negotiators, including Benjamin Franklin, Minister Plenipotentiary for the USA, worked out a border from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. After cutting across the Great Lakes, the frontier was to follow smaller lakes and rivers (such as the Rainy) from Lake Superior to Lake of the Woods. The border was then supposed to extend at a north-west angle across Lake of the Woods and cut due west to the Mississippi River.

But surveys of the area were rudimentary and negotiators in Paris were using the faulty Mitchell Map, which showed the Mississippi mistakenly extending too far north beyond its actual source at Lake Itasca. Also, the mapped shape (like a large egg) and location of Lake of the Woods were wrong. It quickly became clear the proposed borderline could not be drawn.

The error became clearer after the Louisiana Purchase (1803), which also came with unspecified borders that required mapping and negotiation.

Therefore, after the 49th parallel had been agreed as the line dividing American and British possessions west of Lake of the Woods, in 1818 another line was drawn due south from that northwesternmost point towards the 49th parallel. It created the 90-degree upward bend locals called “The Angle”.

Several times in the nineteenth century, the British tried to negotiate, bringing the Angle back into Canada, but for historical reasons and pride, the US never wanted to change anything negotiated in the Treaty of Paris.

The Northwest Angle today spans 1,500 sq km, 1,200 of which are water. Roughly 120 US citizens are spread out along the shores of Lake of the Woods and its islands. The town has no traffic lights, hospitals or grocery stores. It does have a one-room schoolhouse, the last of its kind in Minnesota.

Citizens who want to go shopping must make a 120 km overland trek through Canada and back into Minnesota, crossing the international border twice and using gravel and dirt roads much of the way. There are no ferries across Lake of the Woods and the Northwest Angle has no direct, all-season road access to the US.





## Point Roberts • USA/Canada

*A peninsula in the USA that connects  
by land only with Canada*

Point Roberts in northern Washington state (population 1,300) is situated on a peninsula that connects by land only with Canada. For an American to reach it by land, they must cross the border twice. Territorially, therefore, it is an exclave, and the only way to get there by car from the USA is through Canada.

Under different circumstances, the isolated 1,200-hectare peninsula would have been an overlooked corner of the sprawl surrounding Greater Vancouver. But the community owes its strange existence to the 1846 Oregon Treaty, which divided the Pacific Northwest along the 49th parallel – unwittingly sealing off a small enclave of US land.

British colonial authorities offered a more accessible plot of territory in exchange, but their entreaties were stubbornly ignored and, only 40 years on, some settlers over the border laid the foundations for Canada's third largest city: Vancouver. Today, Point Roberts relies heavily on offering a miniature US to its 2.5 million next-door neighbours.

The community's five gas stations abound with British Columbia Canadian licence plates filling up with fuel at 10¢ to 30¢ less per litre than in Canada. A liquor store sells cut-rate spirits and obscure US beers and retailers offer low-price dairy products. Restaurants serve medium-rare burgers – a delicacy so scorned by British Columbia's health codes that they are virtually non-existent in Greater Vancouver.

Of the more than 2,000 houses on the peninsula, roughly 1,300 are seasonal homes for vacationing Canadians. During the summer, the population balloons to 5,000.

Many of the community's permanent residents are Canadians with green cards or joint citizenship. Vehicles fly Canucks flags and Point Roberts youngsters play in Canadian sports leagues.

Confusingly, all Point Roberts veterinarians, healthcare providers and even high schools are in mainland Washington, accessible only by two border crossings through Canadian territory, which automatically creates a kind of 'gated community'. That is not to say it is free of crime. In 2009, Ryan Alexander, the accused murderer of California model Jasmine Fiore, used the porous Point Roberts border to slip into Canada. Later, Colton Harris-Moore, the teenage "Barefoot Bandit", made a foray into Point Roberts during his two-year spree of West Coast burglaries and vehicle thefts.





## Svalbard • Norway

*A Norwegian territory where any country can freely exploit the local resources*

A Norwegian archipelago in the Arctic Ocean, between Greenland to the west, the archipelago Franz Joseph Land to the east and Continental Europe to the south, Svalbard offers the unique authorisation for any country to freely exploit its local resources.

The origin of this status dates back to the Treaty of Spitsbergen (9 February 1920), which recognised the sovereignty of Norway over the territory in exchange for a clause stipulating it be declared a “demilitarised zone”, authorising the citizens of diverse countries to exploit its natural resources “on an absolutely equal footing”. Being a region abundant in coal, it was the stage for territorial disputes between Great Britain, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway.

Today, for geopolitical reasons of presence, only Russia uses this right by continuing the extraction of coal, even if it is at a loss. After exploiting a similar establishment for many years in Pyramiden (abandoned in 2000), Russia now has only one permanent establishment, in Barentsburg.

Until the 1990s, the Russian population of Spitsbergen was greater than the Norwegian population, but it is no longer the case. Now, out of 2,500 inhabitants, the majority are Norwegian, despite the presence of about 800 Russian and Ukrainian citizens and around 15 Polish scientists.

After obtaining the full administration of the archipelago as early as 1925, Norway decided to rename it Svalbard (literally ‘cold coast’ in Icelandic), and kept the name of Spitsbergen (‘pointed mountain’) for the main island of the archipelago, which had previously been called Western Spitsbergen. It was the northernmost land of Norway, 500 km north of the continental coasts of Norway.

Its unique status has other practical consequences: it is not subject to Norwegian taxation, its surface area is not included in Norway’s surface area and it is neither a member of the Schengen Area nor of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Foreigners are equally accepted without a tourist visa or work permit.

Although certain sources mention a discovery of the archipelago by the Icelanders or the Russians in the thirteenth century, the first uncontested discovery of the archipelago was made by Dutch navigator Willem Barents in 1596. He gave his name to the Barents Sea, between Norway, Svalbard and the island of Novaya Zembla (Russia).

The islands were used as an international base for whaling during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and as a base camp for many Arctic expeditions.

Svalbard was the scene of a little-known struggle between the Third Reich and the Allies. Led by Norway from Scotland in 1942, Operation Fritham aimed to prevent the Germans installing air force bases in the archipelago and gaining possession of the island’s rich coal mines.

Since February 2008, the territory has been the home of the Global Seed Vault in Svalbard, a bank of seeds belonging to the Norwegian government and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Syngenta Foundation and other private organisations. It conserves (at -18°C) the seeds of trees and all food crops on the planet. At the beginning of 2017, 930,000 varieties, essentially of agricultural origin, were present in the bunker 120 metres under the ground.



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# Claridge's Hotel · London, Great Britain

## Suite 212

*Declared Yugoslavian territory for one day  
so that Crown Prince Alexander II could be born on his own country's soil*

On 17 July 1945, the United Kingdom may have become a little smaller, and Yugoslavia a little bigger. How come? During World War II, King Peter II of Yugoslavia and his wife were exiled and spent most of the war living in Claridge's Hotel, London.

The time came for the birth of the king's son and heir to the throne. The heir had to be born on Yugoslav soil, so suite 212 of Claridge's is said to have become Yugoslav territory for a day on 17 July 1945 on the orders of Winston Churchill. There are rumours that soil from Yugoslavia was even placed under the bed where the queen gave birth. This story features on Claridge's website, which states: "At the request of Winston Churchill, suite 212 is declared Yugoslavian territory so that Crown Prince Alexander II could be born on his own country's soil."

It is also mentioned on The Royal Family of Serbia website, which reads: "On 17 July 1945 while living in Claridge's Hotel, Queen Alexandra gave birth to a son – HRH Crown Prince Alexander of Yugoslavia. Crown Prince Alexander, the heir to the throne, was born on Yugoslav territory as the British Government under the orders of Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill declared suite 212 in Claridge's Hotel Yugoslav territory. His Holiness Patriarch Gavrilo of Serbia baptized the newborn Crown Prince in Westminster Abbey with Godparents King George VI and HRH Princess Elizabeth (now HM The Queen Elizabeth II)."

No other evidence of the temporary enclave has been found. Speaking to the BBC in 2016 about the king's deal with Winston Churchill, Crown Prince Alexander said: "Unfortunately, all the files long ago disappeared from my father's office."

### Some other temporary enclaves:

- **Camp Zeist**, a former United States Air Force base in the Netherlands was, in 2000, temporarily declared sovereign territory of the United Kingdom, to allow the Pan Am Flight 103 (Lockerbie) bombing trial to take place.
- In 1943, **the maternity ward at the Ottawa Civic Hospital** in Canada was temporarily extra-territorial so that Princess Juliana's daughter, Princess Margriet, would have Dutch (through her parents' nationality) instead of dual nationality, because of her potential birth on Canadian soil. Dual nationality would have excluded her from royal succession.
- In 1979, at **Sender Zehlendorf**, East Germany, an area of 300 metres in radius around a radio tower construction site was made an exclave of the Soviet Union. A Soviet fighter plane had collided with a transmissions mast, causing it to collapse, and the Soviet Union agreed to rebuild it. Stricter German safety regulations would have slowed construction, so the area was declared a Soviet exclave for the duration of the work.



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## Ely Place · London, Great Britain

*The last privately owned street in the British capital  
is not geographically part of London*

Ely Place is a quiet little cul-de-sac off Holborn Circus in central London, with ornate iron gates separating this street from the hustle and bustle of the city and leading to a straight, treeless lane. It is the last privately owned street in the British capital and the former residence of the Bishops of Ely, but is not geographically part of London. It is a little corner of Cambridgeshire, still enjoying freedom from entry by the London police, except by the invitation of the Commissioners of Ely Place – its own elected governing body which changes every year. The results of the latest elections, duly dated and certified by the “Clerk to the Commissioners”, are displayed on the noticeboard of the magnificent St Etheldreda’s Church – the oldest Roman Catholic church in Britain, where Sunday Mass is still conducted in Latin, halfway up the street.

One of London’s best-kept secrets, Ely Place is a living anachronism from the sixteenth century, when the influential bishops were determined to remain in their Cambridgeshire diocese even while on ministerial missions in the capital. They bought the land in Holborn, then in the outskirts of London, built a palace on it and declared it part of their native Cambridgeshire, so they could carry out their ministerial functions unhindered. They also started growing strawberries in their gardens and were said to produce the finest in the whole of England. A “Strawberry Fayre” is still held in Ely Place every June. In Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, the as-yet-uncrowned Gloucester tells the Bishop of Ely:

*“My Lord of Ely, when I was last in Holborn,  
I saw good strawberries in your garden there.  
I do beseech you send for some of them”*

In the lane’s own Ye Olde Mitre pub, the second oldest in London after Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, off Fleet Street, which also features London’s smallest pub lounge and whose licensing hours were until fairly recently set by the justices of the Isle of Ely, one can view a stack of recent letters addressed to “Ye Olde Mitre Tavern, Ely Place, Holborn Circus, London, Cambridgeshire”.





# Wolford Chapel • Canada/Great Britain

## *A chunk of Canada in Devon, England*

A piece of Canada in the heart of rural Devon, Wolford Chapel is the burial site of Lord Simcoe, 1st Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada. Maintained by a local charity, the chapel and the burial grounds around it are, literally, the territory of the Canadian Province of Ontario. A Canadian flag flies above them.

John Graves Simcoe was born at Cotterstock, near Oundle, in 1752, the son of a captain of the Royal Navy. He embarked on a military career and fought in the Revolutionary War, where he was wounded at the siege of Yorktown in 1781.

Simcoe was sent home to England to recuperate and, while convalescing, he met and married an heiress named Elizabeth Gwillim. Elizabeth's money paid for Wolford, a 5,000-acre estate near Honiton where the couple built Wolford Lodge. The lodge remained the Simcoe family's main residence until 1923.

In 1791 Simcoe was placed at the head of British administration in Upper Canada, taking in a territory roughly equivalent to southern Ontario, Lake Superior and Georgian Bay. He held the post for just five years but, during that time, he tried to create a model community based on conservative principles, with an established aristocracy at its head: an idealised version of British law and tradition opposed to the American vision of democracy and Republican ideals south of the border. He founded the city of York, now Toronto, and abolished slavery long before it was abolished in England.

Simcoe later served as Commander in Chief of British forces in India, and died in 1806.

John and Elizabeth Simcoe were buried in the chapel they had built in 1800 near Wolford Lodge, and the couple's children were laid to rest at the chapel near their parents. The chapel and estate were later bought by wealthy publisher Sir Geoffrey Harmsworth.

In 1966, Harmsworth granted the chapel, its historic furnishings and the grounds as a gift to the Ontario Heritage Trust and gave the deed to the chapel to John Robarts, then serving as Premier of the Province of Ontario, making it extraterritorial and effectively part of Canada (a virtual temporary enclave), administered and maintained by the trust and the Canadian Embassy in London.

At the same time, a permanent right of way to the property was established across the Simcoe Estate.

A plaque commemorating the gift of Wolford Chapel to the Province of Ontario can still be seen on the chapel's west wall.



© Alison Day at Flickr



100 km





# Bishop Rock • Great Britain

*The world's smallest island with a building*

The lighthouse-turned-guest house at Bishop Rock, about 6 km west of the Isles of Scilly, can house up to four visitors. The historic 49-metre-tall structure, which was lit by paraffin lamps and candles, now has modern power and even a helipad. It is perched on a small, rocky Atlantic ledge 46 metres long by 16 metres wide, making this the world's smallest island with a building on it, according to the *Guinness Book of Records*.

Bishop Rock is at the eastern end of the North Atlantic shipping route used by ocean liners in the first half of the 20th century; the western end being the entrance to Lower New York Bay. This was the route ocean liners took when competing for the transatlantic speed record, known as the Blue Riband.

The rocks around the Isles of Scilly have wrecked many ships. When Sir Cloudesley Shovell's squadron of the British Fleet sank in 1707 along with at least 1,300 men, the Elder Brethren of Trinity House decided the lighting off the Isles of Scilly was inadequate. They resolved to build a lighthouse on the most westerly danger: the Bishop Rock.

So, in 1847, it was decided to build a screw-pile lighthouse at a cost of £12,000. The first task was to sink cast-iron legs into the solid granite, braced and stayed with wrought-iron rods. Engineer-in-chief James Walker's idea was that the waves would crash through the piles instead of slamming into a solid masonry tower. Within two years it was complete, apart from lighting apparatus. But, the following season, a heavy gale swept away the whole structure on 5 February 1850.

Walker shrugged off the news and turned to the idea of a granite tower. It was a dangerous task, because the sea was rough and the island too small. The workmen had to be housed on a nearby, barren islet, where living quarters and workshops were built. The men were carried to and from the site as the weather permitted. All the granite was brought from the mainland to the islet depot, where it was shaped and numbered before being sent to the rock. After seven years, the tower was completed in 1858.

Bishop Rock was converted to automatic operation in 1991 and the last keepers left the lighthouse in December 1992.

The lighthouse is now controlled from Trinity House's Planning Centre in Harwich, Essex.





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## Sark • Great Britain

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*The world's last feudal state*

The island of Sark, like all other Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, constitutes a part of Great Britain outside the United Kingdom. None of those islands was ever part of the EU.

Not part of the UK, Sark (5.45 sq km, population 500) is the Commonwealth's smallest semi-independent state. It makes its own laws and manages its own money.

Administered by the Seigneur, a hereditary ruler who held the island for the British crown, Sark was the last feudal community in the Western world until 2008, when the islanders voted for democracy and the Seigneur's powers were cut.

The Seigneur, however, still pays an inflation-free tax to the Queen of £1.79 a year. That was obviously a fortune 500 years ago when it first came into force and constituted "one twentieth part of a knight's fee".

Cars are banned from Sark and planes are not allowed to land there or to fly over the island under 2,000 feet.

The place is engulfed by a strange quiet, broken only by the wailing of wind.

The island still abides by medieval laws, one of which says that "unspayed bitches are not allowed to be kept on the Island, except by the Seigneur". This law was adopted in the seventeenth century, when Chief Pleas (the island's parliament) decided that too many dogs could cause problems with sheep farming.

Another law states that 40 local family heads, including the Seigneur, are obliged to keep muskets to protect the island from invaders.





A modest-looking brochure (*Constitution of Sark*), written by the island's former Seigneur Michael Beaumont, states that, under Norman custom, a person can obtain immediate cessation of any action he thinks is an infringement of his rights. At the scene, he must, in front of witnesses, recite the Lord's Prayer in French and cry out in *patois*: "*Haro, Haro, Haro! À mon aide, mon Prince, on me fait tort!*" At which point, all actions must cease until the matter is heard by the court.

During World War II, when Sark was occupied by a garrison of 300 Germans, not a single shot was fired from either side and locals still refer to it as a "model occupation". Once, the German commandant of Sark refused to take any action against locals who defied the occupation authorities by keeping short-wave radios at their homes, which was an offence punishable by death anywhere else in occupied Europe.

Exempt from the UK's ailing social security and health schemes, the island takes good care of itself. Special community funds help young people through schools and universities, pay medical bills and provide pensions for the old.

#### **The spot of the last French invasion of Britain (in 1989)**

In 1989 the island experienced another foreign invasion, albeit on a much smaller scale, when it was taken over by a drunken Frenchman. André Gards landed on Sark with a rifle and a small load of explosives. In a 'manifesto', written in broken English and pinned on the village noticeboard, he announced he was taking control of the island. Having stated his intentions, he retired for a refill to a village pub, where he was apprehended and disarmed by the constable (head of Sark's part-time police force) and frogmarched to the island's miniature prison – one small windowless cell.

The constable soon came to regret his bravery, for another island law made him responsible for feeding prison inmates and the Frenchman proved to be extremely hungry. Luckily, two days is the maximum jail term in Sark, and the gluttonous invader was deported.





## Akrotiri and Dhekelia • Great Britain/Cyprus

*A forgotten part of the UK within Cyprus,  
with the euro, not the pound, in circulation*

The British Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia (population 14,000, area 254 sq km) comprise those parts of Cyprus which stayed under British jurisdiction and remained British sovereign territory when the 1960 Treaty of Establishment created the independent Republic of Cyprus.

They constitute a semi-independent British Overseas Territory, governed by the Administrator, who is also the Commander of the Armed Forces.

The bases remain formally a part of the United Kingdom, but can only be used for military, not commercial or any other purposes. They are the only parts of the UK where just the euro, not the pound, is in circulation – a scenario that remains unchanged even after Britain's departure from the EU.

Akrotiri and Dhekelia have their own legal system, distinct from the UK and Cyprus, but kept as close as possible to the laws of the latter.

The Court of the Sovereign Base Area is concerned with non-military offences, committed by any person within Akrotiri and Dhekelia. Law and order is maintained by the Sovereign Base Areas Police, while military law is upheld by the Cyprus Joint Police Unit.

There is no specific citizenship available for the bases.

Because they are run as military units, the Sovereign Base Area Administration reports to the British Ministry of Defence in London, rather than the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

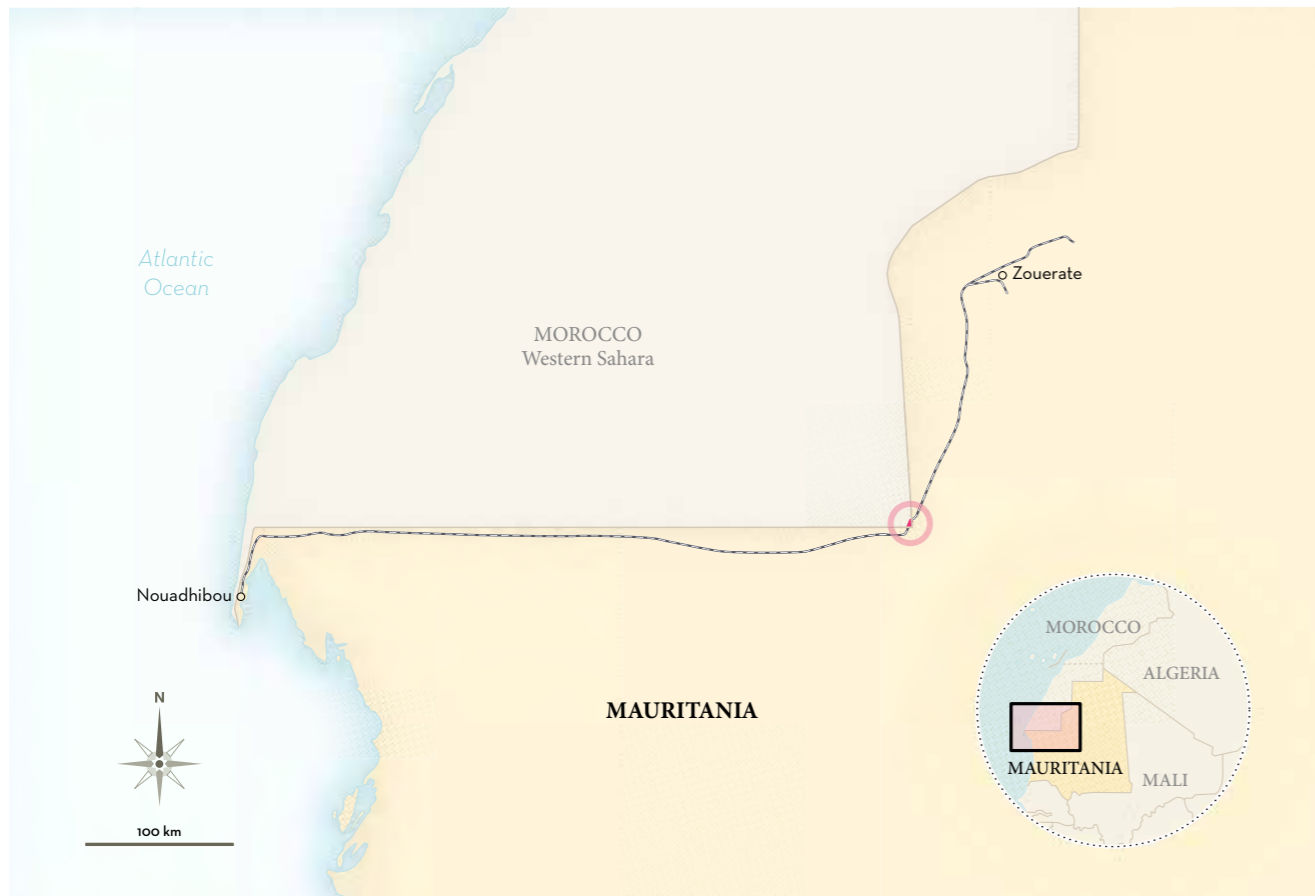
They are a British Overseas Territory, with a civilian administration working under an Administrator who is Commander of the British Forces, Cyprus.

Dhekelia (81 sq km) also has four enclaves within its territory; they are all exclaves of the Republic of Cyprus, sovereign territory of the Greek Cypriot government. They include the fully-enveloped villages of Ormideia and Xylotymvou and Dhekelia Power Station along the coast, which is cut in two by a British road. The enclaves appeared in 1960 as the UK tried to avoid including villages, cities and agricultural areas in its military bases.

Part of Dhekelia is also the area of Ayios Nikolaos, linked to Dhekelia by a corridor which doubles as a UN buffer zone, with the Turkish area north of this line.







## The desert train • Mauritania

*A rare train that runs through another country for 5 km, allowing entry to Western Sahara without a visa*

Built between 1961 and 1963, Mauritania's only railway line runs for 704 km, linking the iron mine of Zouérat in the north of the country to the port of Nouadhibou on the Atlantic coast.

Constructed in the colonial period by France (Mauritania was part of French West Africa), the special feature of the line is a large detour along the former colony's border with the erstwhile Spanish colony of Rio de Oro (today known as Western Sahara, a territory that was disputed between Morocco and the Polisario Front), without entering what was Spanish territory. This is how, in difficult and mountainous terrain, the 2 km-long tunnel of Choum was built, 460 km from Nouadhibou, where the border between the two countries forms a right angle.

Since 1991 and until the end of the Western Sahara Conflict (even if the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front is far from over), a 5 km-long track has been built across Western Sahara on much flatter territory than that of the tunnel, avoiding a difficult climb for trains often heavily loaded with iron ore. The train is, in fact, considered one of the longest (and heaviest) in the world: it is pulled by three or four locomotives and can reach a length of 2.5 km with up to 210 wagons. Occasionally, carriages for passengers are added to the goods wagons.



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# Tristan da Cunha • Great Britain

*The world's most remote human settlement*

Tristan da Cunha (population 266) is a remote archipelago in the South Atlantic more than 2,000 km from the nearest human settlements of St Helena, and Cape Town in South Africa. It is the world's most remote human settlement.

The island group consists of Tristan da Cunha, Nightingale, Inaccessible, and Gough Islands. Gough and Inaccessible Islands are World Heritage Sites. After its discovery in 1506 by the Portuguese Tristan da Cunha, the first attempt to settle was made by Jonathon

Lambert, from Salem (Massachusetts, USA), who led a party of three men in 1810 to establish a trading station on Tristan, which he renamed "Reception" and wished to be known as the "Islands of Refreshment". Tomasso Corri from Livorno in Italy was the only survivor of this fledgling community when HMS Seiramis arrived in 1813. He reported that Lambert, with two companions, had drowned in a fishing accident. Legends of Tomasso's treasure are still current in the Tristan community and are explored in several books.

In the 1860s, Tristan da Cunha became increasingly isolated from shipping after three important world events. The 1861–1865 Civil War in the USA curtailed the already declining whaling industry, whose ships had often called on Tristan for supplies. The Suez Canal's opening in 1869 gave a safer and much quicker passage to Far East markets, avoiding the perils of the South Atlantic and Cape of Good Hope. Finally, steam replaced sail, effectively isolating Tristan da Cunha.

As World War II approached, German U-boats and the battleship Graf Spee were sighted off Tristan and, in 1942, a top secret naval station code named Job 9 (later HMS Atlantic Isle) was established on Tristan. Its role was to monitor U-boats, which in those days needed to surface to maintain radio contact, and maintain a meteorological station.



Tristan da Cunha was garrisoned by the British in 1816 to prevent any attempt to rescue Napoleon from St Helena.







## The French domains of Saint Helena • France/Great Britain

*A French-owned property on an island belonging to the United Kingdom  
due to Napoleon's exile there between 1815 and 1821*

Saint Helena is a volcanic island spanning some 122 sq km located in the South Atlantic, 1,850 km west of the north-west coast of Namibia and the south-east coast of Brazil. Although the island is officially a British overseas territory belonging to the UK, it has buildings that officially belong to France.

The island is famous for being the place where Napoleon I went into exile from 14 October 1815 until his death on 5 May 1821. Historically, the island exerted an important strategic role over the passage of the East India Company's fleet, which it lost when the Suez Canal was opened in 1869.

Today, the French domains of Saint Helena cover 14 hectares, including Longwood House and the Valley of the Tomb in the district of Longwood, and Briars pavilion in the Alarm Forest district.

The domains are home to a museum, and exhibitions on the life of the emperor are held there. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures the upkeep of the buildings and land, which have been administratively attached to the French consulate in Cape Town, South Africa, since 2004.

Detained at Longwood House from 1815, Napoleon died there in 1821. The next day, the governor of the island, Sir Hudson Lowe, is quoted as saying to those around him: "Well, gentlemen, he was England's greatest enemy and mine too, but I forgive him for everything. On the death of such a great man, we must only feel deep pain and sorrow."

In accordance with his last wishes, Napoleon was buried, on 9 May, near a spring, in Geranium valley, which is now known as the Valley of the Tomb. On 27 May, the whole French colony left the island. In 1840, the king of France's request to reclaim the emperor's body was granted by the UK. Napoleon's body was sent back to France and buried in the Invalides, in Paris.

Napoleon III bought Longwood House and the Valley of the Tomb from the British government in 1858, and named it "The French domains of Saint Helena". Briars pavilion, the emperor's first home on the island, was added to the domain in 1959 when its last owner donated it to France.





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SAINTE-HELENE. — Habitation impériale de Long-Wood.





# Wakhan Corridor • Afghanistan

*A narrow strip of territory in Afghanistan  
designed to protect the British Empire from the Russian empire*

The Wakhan Corridor is a narrow strip of territory in Afghanistan (350 km-long, but less than 14 km-wide) that lies between China, Tajikistan and Pakistan.

This strip of land was created in 1893 as a buffer zone between the territories of British India (including today's Pakistan and India) and Tsarist Russia (including today's Tajikistan).

The corridor is part of a political creation from The Great Game between the British Empire and Russian Empire for most of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a fight for influence and power over Afghanistan and neighbouring territories in Central and South Asia.

In the north of the corridor, an agreement in 1873 made the Panj and Pamir Rivers the border between Afghanistan and the Russian Empire. In the south, the Durand Line was designed in 1893 by Mortimer Durand, a British diplomat of the Indian Civil Service, with Abdur Rahman Khan, the Afghan Emir.

This agreement, which marked the boundary between British India and Afghanistan, left a narrow strip of land ruled by Afghanistan as a buffer between the two empires, which became known as the Wakhan Corridor in the twentieth century.

The border with China, formally demarcated in 1963, is officially closed, making the Wakhan Corridor a particularly remote area.

The Wakhan Corridor has historically been an important transit path of the ancient Silk Road. Even Marco Polo used it. In the fourth and fifth centuries, the passes across the Pamir led Chinese pilgrims to the Buddhist centres in today's Afghanistan and India and were used by Persian merchants to sell their goods in the Chinese market. Until the collapse of the Mughal Empire in India, the Wakhan Corridor was one of the main routes for traders and merchants between India, China and major cities like Bactria and Bukhara in modern-day Afghanistan and Central Asia.

With the rapidly developing use of sea routes by Westerners to reach India and China in the late fifteenth century, the importance of the Wakhan Corridor and the Silk Road declined.



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# ATLAS

OF

## *geographical curiosities*

VITALI VITALIEV

A country that does not really exist, an island which is Spanish for six months of the year and French for the other six, a hotel room whose bedroom is in France and whose bathroom is in Switzerland, one of the very few territories on earth not claimed by any country, the only place in the world where in a 20-minute walk around the town you can cross an international border at least 30 times at 30 different points, a Norwegian territory whose natural resources any country can exploit, a railway in Germany that belongs to Belgium, a surprising Italian exclave in the heart of Switzerland, the world's only private organisation with country status, a semi-independent theocratic state where women and female animals are banned, a means of crossing Russia from Finland or Estonia without a visa, a London hotel room that became part of Yugoslavia for a day so that Crown Prince Alexander could be born in his own country, a city consisting of a 14-storey skyscraper, the longest street in the world, an American peninsula only accessible via Canada and an Austrian valley only accessible from Germany ...

The world is full of little-known geographical anomalies, sometimes the source of diplomatic friction but always of wonderment.

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