

Mapping Speed 2 – AIR

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Abstract:

In 1934 the MacRobertson Centenary Air Race was held. Competitors raced from London to the far-flung edge of the British Empire, Melbourne, Australia. As well as general literature, guides, regulation booklets, etc., a number of maps were produced for competitors, interested ‘armchair spectators’, public information sites in city streets, newspapers, cinema news and for school children in Australia to follow the route and cities traversed that were part of ‘The Empire’.

This paper provides information about the race, the maps produced and describes a project that used contemporary geospatial data and mapping packages to produce a map that evoked the spirit of the competition and the general design styles of the day. The map was designed to MAP SPEED (in the air and trans-continental). The research reported here follows an earlier research project that related to the Mille Miglia automobile race (Cartwright *et al.*, 2024).

The London to Melbourne Air Race, 1934:

In 1934 the City of Melbourne, Australia, a far-flung city at the very edge of the British Empire, was celebrating its centenary. The MacRobertson Centenary Air Race was held as part of the activities to celebrate the centenary (State Library of NSW, 2016). A prize of £15,000 (£10,000 for the fastest aircraft) and a grand trophy was presented to the winners. As well a gold medal was awarded to each pilot who completed the course within 16 days (Jewell, 1988).

The distance to be covered by the competitors was 18,000 miles (29,000 km). The race began at RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk, England, on October 20, 1934, and finished at Flemington Racecourse in Melbourne. Competitors were required to make five compulsory stops along the way, including Baghdad, Allahabad, Singapore, Darwin, and Charleville. Between the compulsory stops pilots could choose their own route. There were two divisions for the race – ‘speed’ and ‘handicap’ – with no limits to aircraft size, power or crew (State Library of New South Wales, n.d.).

There were 20 planes from seven countries. 11 planes finished the race. The winners were Flight Lieutenant Charles William Anderson Scott and Captain Tom Campbell Black, of Great Britain, in a de Havilland DH.88 Comet (aeroplanes purpose-built for the Race (HistoricWings, 2016)), in a flying time of 71 hours and 54 minutes.

Maps and the race:

Competitors were issued with a 'Guiding Brochure and Route handbook', containing general instructions, rules of the race and an assorted number of airport diagrams. Also included in the information provided to the air crews was a map showing the general route to be taken. For those following the race, a plethora of maps were available – in newspapers, city information sites and as educational material for schoolchildren.

Producing a map in the spirit of the 1934 race:

The map chosen as the best sample to develop and test the methodology was The Centenary Air Race Chart by J.W. Alexander (1934), produced for the Centenary Celebrations Council in association with 'Happy Educators' Pty Ltd, Melbourne (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Centenary Air Race from London to Melbourne Alexander, J. W. (1934).

Source: State Library of Victoria. Persistent Link:

https://find.slv.vic.gov.au/permalink/61SLV_INST/17t4912/alma9913086133607636

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The 'look and feel' of the maps associated with the 1934 race event was used to inform the development of a design brief to guide the design and production of a map in the same genre or 'spirit' of the original maps produced for information and education. Contemporary cartographic tools and databases were employed to make maps that had a similar spirit of those published in 1934.

The map shown in Figure 2 was designed and produced by co-author, Emily Meriam, using ArcGIS Pro (Figure 2).

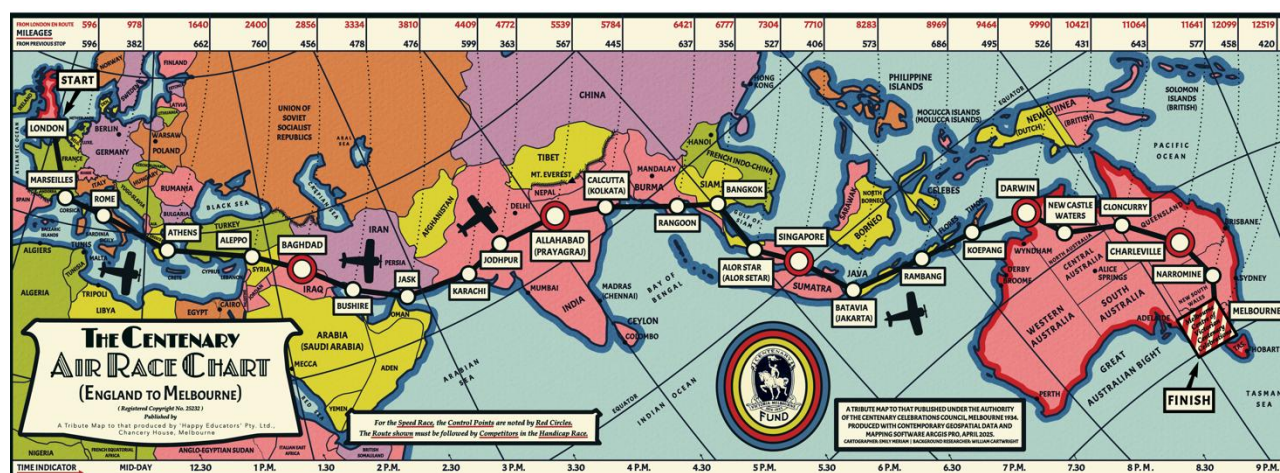


Figure 2. Tribute map. Emily Meriam (2025).

The background behind the maps from the event and the contemporary map production methodology will be presented at the conference.

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