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Is Baffin Island really that big?

by BRIAN LOCKHART

There is a map of the world on the wall of my home office.

I use it at various times when writing a story or doing research. It is the same map you probably had on the wall in your school classroom showing all the countries of the globe.

Canada is huge, with its northern arctic islands stretching upward across the map.

Russian dominates the others side of the map spreading so far east it turns up again on the west side of the map where the Bering Strait separates it from Alaska.

Greenland is a huge island in the middle of the North Atlantic ? a massive island of ice and snow around the same size of the United States, yet is only has a population of around 56,000.

China is large, but seemingly not large enough to hold its entire population of around 1.4 billion people.

South America is down below and smaller and narrower than the other continent in the western hemisphere.

Africa is roughly the same size as South America, but appears to be the other half of a jigsaw puzzle as the two continents were apparently one, at one time in the past.

While you may use the map to find places on the globe, here's something to consider.

That map is not an accurate depiction of the Earth. In fact, it's actually very different that the real layout of the earth'sland masses.

The map you saw in school, was most likely the version called the Mercator Projection. It is centuries old and has been used as the standard ever since it was created by Flemish Cartographer Gerardus Mercator.

The map is based on the lines of latitude and longitude. It was, and is, useful for navigation purposes when you are sailing a ship and trying to find a destination.

The problem with the map is it distorts land masses and inflates the size of land the farther you get away from equator.

The difficulty with creating a world map, is the fact that you are trying to place something that is a sphere, on a two-dimensional surface.

The result is a view of the world that is very distorted.

Remember the massive Canadian arctic islands that are so impressive on the map? Turns out they are shown at more than four times their real size, and the farther north you go, the bigger they appear.

That huge island, Greenland, can actually easily fit inside several of the northern African countries.

Russia isn't nearly as large as depicted on the map while China is actually quite a bit larger than shown

Africa is much larger than the map shows and so is South America. Once you see the real size of the continents, you realize the

entire US can fit inside the Sahara Desert.

There are other maps that have been created that more accurately show the layout of the continents, but they don't seem to be widespread.

Apparently the marine world still uses the map because it allows ships to plot a course of bearing as a straight segment and does not require course corrections once you are underway.

It makes you wonder how many other things we have been given as fact but do not really represent the truth of a situation.

I use the map at various times for different things like locating a capitol city or finding distances between locations. Although I used the map less frequently now than I did a few years ago.

Information from the internet is faster and more reliable.

You can visit Google Earth and find a location in seconds and narrow things down to a single address if you need to.

I've used Google Earth to cruise down city streets in various parts of the world that I know I will never see in person. It's interesting to visit a suburban neighbourhood in Paris, London, or Lima.

I used Google Street view to go down the street and see the house where my grandfather was born in Northern Ireland.

I'm not sure if schools have updated their maps or not, or maybe they don't even have a map on the wall anymore because it's easier to look up whatever you need on whichever device you have on your desk.

Finding out how inaccurate our world map is really has me looking for other things we were taught, but are either not right, or distorted to give a different view of the world around us.