Spatializing the Métis Historical database using Google Maps API

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Abstract

Since August 2007 members of the British Columbia Métis Mapping Initiative (BCMMI), together with Métis Nation of British Columbia (MNBC), have been developing the capacity to create and share information pertaining to the historic and present Métis community in BC through a Google Maps interface. The Google Maps prototype being built will allow Métis Nation members to search and access information from the pre-existing non-spatial web-based databases and locate and display it in a geographic format through the commonly understood medium of the map. The interface will also enable the geo-location and uploading of user materials including digital video and images. This paper will present on the design and initial development of the ongoing BCMMI as well as demonstrate the prototype map portal.

Background and Relevance

The BCMMI utilizes the internet-based capabilities of Google Maps API to share, present and communicate cultural and historical information. The Google Maps prototype being built will allow Métis Nation members to search and access information from the pre-existing non-spatial web-based databases, and then geo-locate and display relevant information through a Google Maps interface. The BCMMI map portal also enables the end-user to turn on or off layers of proprietary data (including information categorized by periods of time, information type or geographic extent) as well as undertake basic analysis related to measuring distance and areas. Furthermore the map interface will be used to locate and upload end-user information (including digital video and images) and other text-based documentation that will in turn be incorporated into the existing MNBC databases.

The core benefits of using Google Maps is that information that in the past has been hard to access can be easily shared, retrieved and then made available to the widely dispersed Métis Nation members. This in turn will enable the membership (as well as non-members) to have a clearer picture of the extent and types of interaction that the Métis people have had and continue to have on the land throughout British Columbia.

Methods and Data

Over the last two years researchers have been collecting and digitizing primary and secondary historical documents pertinent to the Métis presence in BC. These documents run the gamut from death certificates and letters to the Hudson Bay Company records, through to ethnohistorical documents, old photographs and other archival materials. Initially they have been stored and managed through a non-spatial database, which has been designed to also allow community participants to upload and download documents. Using mash-up scripting, the

mapping stage of the project now seeks to take these documents, automatically scan them for spatial indicators, geo-reference them according to this available information and then present them through the Google Maps interface. This geo-referencing system allows the mapping of a document density pertaining to Métis presence on the BC landscape. It is also being designed to act similarly on information contained within contemporary datasets, including a hunting and harvesting database and a citizenship database.

Results

The BCMMI is an ongoing project currently in the prototype stage. At present there are no research results.

Conclusions

This paper will present on the design and initial development of the ongoing BCMMI as well as demonstrate the prototype map portal. It is the hope of the authors that the Spatial Knowledge and Information meeting will be an excellent forum to discuss with other Canadian researchers this mapping project, its challenges, as well as the future applications of Google Maps in a community context.