

North Korea Uncovered: The Crowd-Sourced Mapping of the World's Most Secret State

The Philip Lee Phillips Map Society, the Friends Group of the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, will host a lecture on the crowd-sourced mapping of North Korea on February 24th at noon in the Madison Building's Mumford Room of the Library of Congress. The event is free and open to the public; no registration is required.

North Korea is chief among the world's most secretive societies. Curtis Melvin, a researcher at the US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University, has sought to cast light on the mysterious state. From 2006 to 2009, he employed Google Earth to create *North Korea Uncovered*, one of the most detailed maps of North Korea that has ever been available to the public. Mr. Melvin has gone on to help develop *38 North: DPRK Digital Atlas*. The atlas depicts thousands of buildings, monuments, missile-storage facilities, mass graves, secret labor camps, palaces, restaurants, tourist sites, main roads of the country, and even includes the entrance to the country's subterranean nuclear test base, the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center.



Curtis Melvin

The project is unique and noteworthy for its extensive use of publicly available satellite imagery, along with other innovative forms of data collection, such as gathering information from persons who have visited or North Korea or from defectors, and tracking the publicly announced movements of former leader Kim Jong-Il and current leader Kim Jung-Eun to geo-locate buildings and facilities. According to Mr. Melvin, there are special train tracks that carry VIPs to oases of luxury in the impoverished nation. "Several elite compounds have private train stations. We can follow the railway lines through the security perimeters and into the elite compounds."

Mr. Melvin describes the efforts of "citizen cartographers," who contribute geo-data to the atlas, as "democratized intelligence."

The mystery of North Korea can be traced to the end of WWII. Following the war, Korea was divided into two spheres of influence. The land north of the 38th Parallel was under Soviet influence, and the southern territory was under American influence. Both sides wished to unite the peninsula but could not agree on a common system of government.

In 1950, the heavily armed North Korean People's Army blitzed the Republic of Korea without warning and nearly overran the country. The United Nations denounced the unprovoked act of aggression. An international coalition led by the United States and Great Britain dispatched troops to repel the invasion. As the fortunes of war turned against North Korea, the People's Republic of China intervened their behalf. The war raged on until 1953 and left the sides largely situated along the 38th Parallel where the conflict began. Some five million soldiers and civilians lost their lives during the war. Millions of people were displaced and many families were separated by the cease-fire line.

Since that time, North Korea has gone black. Very few people, especially in the west, have been granted entry into the country.

Mr. Melvin, a contributor to the website *38 North* and editor of the blog "North Korean Economy Watch," has been cited in several major media outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*. He received his MA in economics from George Mason University and his BBA in economics from the University of Georgia. He will discuss the origins of the North Korean atlas, the challenges of utilizing open-sourced and crowd-sourced information, and the future of his project.

For more information, please contact Ryan Moore, Cartographic Specialist, at 202-707-7779 or rymo@loc.gov

Links:

DPRK Atlas—<http://38northdigitalatlas.org/>

Philip Lee Phillips Map Society of the Library of Congress — <https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/philips.html>

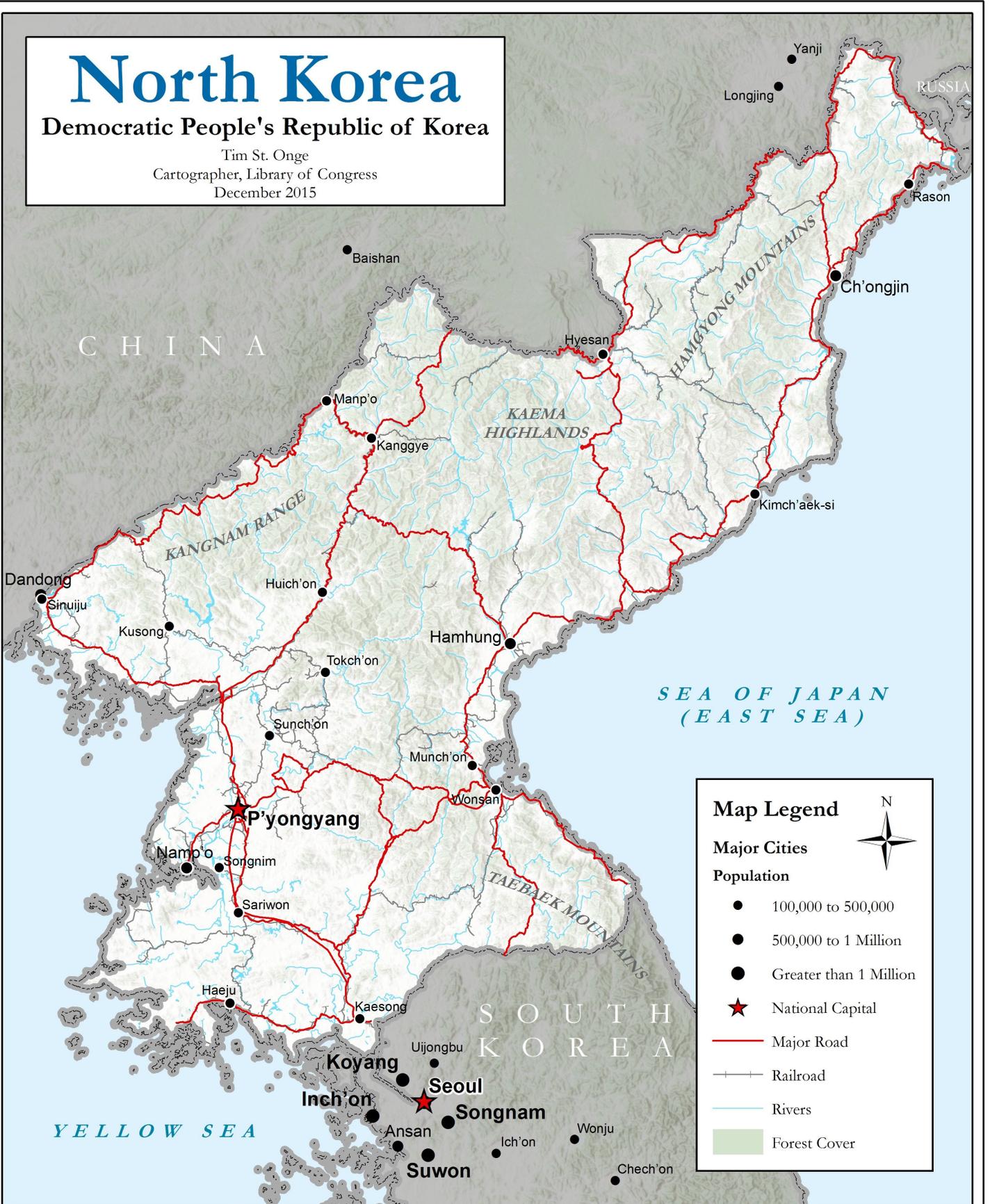


From *North Korea Uncovered*, sites in the capital P'yongyang identified by Curtis Melvin and his team of "citizen cartographers."

North Korea

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Tim St. Onge
Cartographer, Library of Congress
December 2015



Map Legend

- Major Cities**
- Population**
 - 100,000 to 500,000
 - 500,000 to 1 Million
 - Greater than 1 Million
- ★ National Capital
- Major Road
- +— Railroad
- Rivers
- Forest Cover



SOURCES: DeLorme, Department of State, ESRI, Digital Chart of the World, General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans, Landsat 7 ETM+ (Hansen et al. 2013), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (SRTM)

