

One unforgettable journey for a Spanish map



A unique investigation — reminiscent of a classic treasure hunt — became a reality when a 526 year-old map stolen from the Spanish National Library was located in Australia. The investigation united law enforcement agencies around the globe in a quest to track down and seize the artefact and return it to its European home.

In February 2007, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Anthony Byrne formally returned the 15th century world map to the Ambassador for Spain Antonio Cosano, and brought to a close the hunt for one of the most valuable artefact in Spain's cultural heritage.

The AFP had a small, but important, role to play when in October 2007 the Australian Government responded to a Spanish Government request via Interpol to help with the map's seizure and repatriation.

National Manager for Economic and Special Operations Assistant Commissioner Paul Jevtovic said the AFP had worked in conjunction with the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) and other Australian Government and overseas agencies in an investigation that spanned the globe.

"The out-posted AFP officer Federal Agent Matthew Heather has been working with DEWHA as part of a secondment arrangement which commenced in 2005," Assistant Commissioner Jevtovic said. "In a coordinated effort, he and members from the Department, were able to pursue a successful outcome in the recovery of the cultural property."

In a six-month investigation, the hunt for the stolen documents spanned four continents and involved the Spanish Civil Guard, Federal Bureau of Investigation and United Kingdom and Argentinean authorities. In Australia, the NSW Police, DEWHA, the National Library of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the AFP joined the effort to secure one of the maps which had made its way to Australia.

The hunt for the map begins

Federal Agent Heather said that in August 2007, a total of 18 rare historical documents were reported stolen from the Spanish National Library in Madrid.

"The matter created political uproar in Spain and resulted in the resignation of the Head of the Spanish National Library," he said "The incident was widely publicised throughout Europe and the Spanish Government commenced a world wide search for the stolen documents."

In early October 2007, the AFP accepted a referral from Interpol to assist with the recovery of one of the maps dating from the year 1482, which they and the Spanish Civil Guard had tracked to a gallery in Sydney.

The AFP and NSW Police worked together

to progress the seizure of the map and, as Federal Agent Heather says, he was fortunate to carry out this role with the assistance of a heritage protection officer from DEWHA.

"Under the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*, I was able to seize the map as a 'protected foreign object'," he said. "It was voluntarily surrendered by the possessor in Sydney and the seizure was not contested."

Following this seizure, and in accordance with this Act, the map became forfeited to the Australian Government. AFP Sydney office Manager Warren Gray and his team hosted the Consul-General of Spain, Enrique Sarda Valls, who was keen to see the map and requested a photo to show his Government. The office also used the AFP's forensic photography unit to confirm the authenticity of the map.

According to DEWHA, the commercial value of the map was considerable and estimated at up to \$160,000 on the international market. However, 'independent of its commercial value the map is invaluable as part of Spain's scientific and cultural heritage' (Source: www.heritage.gov.au).

No prosecution of the importer was pursued in this case. Prior to being



Photos courtesy of DEWHA

Left and bottom right: 15th Century Ptolemy world map; Top right: AFP National Coordinator Special Operations Alan Ross, Manager Special Operations Ray Johnson, Spanish Ambassador Antonio Cosano, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister Anthony Byrne and Federal Agent Matt Heather

purchased by the Australian-based gallery, the map was bought by a London auction company and a US map dealer. Full cooperation was received from the Australian parties in returning the map to its rightful owners.

A journey like no other for Ptolemy world map

Federal Agent Heather was amazed that the map was still in good condition as the investigations revealed it had a journey unlike like no other he knew of.

“This 526 year-old fragile paper travelled to places unknown to the world at the time it was printed,” he said. “Can you imagine, from Spain to Argentina, New York and London and finally half way round the world to Australia, and even more surprising it survived inside a basic cardboard mailing tube.”

The map is considered by a range of professionals including librarians and historians as significant for several reasons. The Ptolemy world map sheet was printed for the 1482 edition of Ptolmey’s *Cosmographia* and is considered one of the most important atlases of the 15th century. Claudius Ptolemy was a Greek mathematician, geographer and astronomer. He invented the cartographical technique of projecting

the spherical globe onto a flat map to represent the known world.

The work of Ptolemy was rediscovered in Europe during the Renaissance, with this map being in the first print run to occur outside of Italy. It is the first map to include additions to the strictly classical world map, known by the ancient Greeks, and shows an extended northern border of Europe, including Scandinavia.

As such, it represents an important step in the evolution of the completed map of the world. It also shows how the world was viewed before the discovery of North America by renowned explorer Christopher Columbus and the discovery of Australia by Europeans by more than 100 years later.

A special handover

During the handover ceremony on 4 February at the National Library of Australia, Mr Byrne said Australian authorities were helping their international counterparts ensure the safety of cultural heritage.

“The return of the Ptolemy world map is an excellent example of how we’re helping protect significant – ultimately, irreplaceable – cultural heritage items of other countries,” he said.

Key dignitaries who attended the event included: the Ambassador for Spain Antonio Cosano, the Director of the National Library of Spain Milagros del Corral, Captain Miguel-Angel Villanueva and Sergeant Jose-Manuel Mora from the Guardia Civil, Madrid, the Director-General of the National Library of Australia, Jan Fullerton, and the Manager of the AFP’s Special Operations Ray Johnson.

Federal Agent Johnson said that the AFP was committed to maintaining its relationship with DEWHA and working collectively to assist the Australian Government in combating illegal trade in cultural objects.

Fossil and relic smugglers beware

Over the years, the AFP has also worked closely with the Department on a number of investigations, and this year both organisations were satisfied when seizures of fossils from the past three years were returned to their country of origin.

At a special ceremony held on 16 January at the Chinese Embassy, Canberra, the Australian Government returned 750 kilograms of illegally imported dinosaur, mammal and reptile



fossils to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, handed the fossils back to Ambassador of the PRC, Zhang Junsai and highlighted the cultural and scientific significance of the objects.

"They are national treasures that tell a fascinating story about different geological periods as well as ancient environments," Mr Garrett said. "Some are believed to be up to 450 million years old...and range from several types of dinosaur eggs to marine reptiles, fish and crustaceans."

In September 2004, *Operation Flambeau* began when, the AFP accepted a referral from DEWHA for a joint investigation into the illegal import to Australia of a large number of dinosaur fossils from China and Argentina.

On 4 March 2005, about 50 AFP officers (assisted by DEWHA staff members) executed five simultaneous search warrants in Melbourne and, as a result, significant quantities of dinosaur fossils were seized.

Following advice from the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, no charges were laid under the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*. The fossils were transferred to DEWHA to facilitate their return to the countries of origin.

Assistant Commissioner Paul Jevtovic explained that criminal activities like the Spanish map and fossil smuggling come under the category of environmental crime.



"The role of Special Operations includes the investigation and recovery of illegally imported heritage items," he said. "This type of smuggling is relatively new to Australia and, while Australian has had legislation since 1986 to protect national and foreign objects, it is only recently that some foreign countries have had similar laws."

Federal Agent Heather also explained that there was a healthy market for trading in art and historical artefacts.

"Internationally there is a substantial trade in art and other heritage objects," he said. "And this market creates opportunities for people to profit from the sale of protected objects."

While there is little evidence that Australia is used for laundering or is a major destination for illegal heritage objects, the AFP continues to work in cooperation with government agencies and international law enforcement agencies to combat the illicit trade in cultural objects.

If you have information relating to actions that may harm or have the potential to cause harm to the Australian environment or alleged breaches of Commonwealth environment laws, you should report them directly to the appropriate

Australian Government department which can be found at <www.afp.gov.au>. If you are unsure where to report information, contact Crime Stoppers on the toll free number 1800 333 000.

Top right: F/A Heather, Heritage Minister Peter Garrett, Ambassador Mr Zhang Junsai, Assistant Commissioner Peter Drennan and First Assistant Secretary of the Heritage Division Mr James Shevlin; Left: *Keichousaurus* fossil seized by F/A Heather in April 2007.

Federal Agent Matthew Heather's role as an out-posted AFP officer is to aid DEWHA in building its capacity to conduct criminal investigations in the environment laws it administers. He assists in formal training programs run by the Department for its employees, provides general advice on investigation matters, and, as the liaison between the two agencies, develops and maintains a mutually beneficial working relationship.

In addition to this role, he has also been involved in DEWHA investigations into offences committed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999*. This includes illegal smuggling and possession of wildlife and the destruction of important habitats which may impact on the survival of threatened species.

Federal Agent Heather has previously worked in AFP Sydney office operations, working on drug and fraud investigations from 2002 to 2005. He was also on the Australian Crime Commission Money Laundering Taskforce from 2005 to 2006.

He has a Degree in Environmental Engineering from the University of Wollongong.