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From hunch to serious consideration

Hugh G. Owen

In the past, I have been asked verbally to describe the detail of how the map reconstructions for my *Atlas of Continental displacement from the late Triassic – Early Jurassic (200 Ma) to the Present* were made (Owen 1983). Attempting to do this, even with a globe, produced often a glazed look in the questioner and a realisation that he or she had little idea of spherical geometry or indeed that flat maps of the Earth are projected from an oblate spheroid of rotation according to differing projection formulae. It is not the intention here to discuss the growth of expanding Earth hypotheses and the various ideas of mode and timing. This has been done adequately by others elsewhere (e.g. Carey 1976, 1988, Chatterjee and Hotton 1992, Scalera and Jacob[1] 2003, Scalera, *et al.* 2012). In particular, Scalera and Jacob (2003) provide a full coverage of the various ideas together with tributes to the lives of both Ott Hilgenberg (Scalera and Braun 2003) and Sam Warren Carey (Elliston 2003), and a comprehensive bibliography. Flat maps and diagrams have to be the norm in papers on the subject, but globes (terellae) such as those of Hilgenberg (1933), Vogel (1983, 2003) and Maxlow[2] (2003) allow people better to visualise the issues surrounding the question of whether the Earth has expanded or not.

It is the intention here to describe the genesis of the Atlas only - a test of the ocean floor spreading evidence on a constant modern

[1] *See also the chapter by Karl-Heinz Jacob.*

[2] *See also the chapter by James Maxlow.*

dimension Earth and the expanding Earth in accordance with the spherical geometry of the spreading patterns (Owen 1983). It is a curious trait of human nature that novel ideas become a matter of controversy, rejection and to be ignored, even when they are based on good testable data. It applied as much to the original concept of continental displacement (drift) until the data became overwhelming, as it does to the spherical-geometric implications of the ocean-floor spreading patterns and Earth expansion. No previous attempt had been made to test the ocean-floor spreading data against the spherical geometry of a constant modern dimensions Earth. Smith *et al.* (1973) had attempted reconstructions, assuming a modern dimensions Earth and these showed problems with the fit-together of the continents as well as technical problems with the computer program used. With increased ocean-floor spreading data becoming available, Smith *et al.* (1980) published a new series of maps, again assuming a constant modern dimension Earth, in which they allege that the reconstructions are controlled by the spreading data – they are not. These spreading data are not shown on their Mesozoic to Recent reconstructions and therefore, they cannot be tested for accuracy.

Early hunches

Scientific ideas can start as simple observations before the real Science begins. My interest in "continental drift" started as a mature student in the late 1950's early 1960's reading Arthur Holmes original version (1944) of his superbly written *Principles of Physical Geology*. In some respects I have always thought of him as the "father" of modern theory despite Wegener's work (1912), particularly so after his expanded discussion of the subject in his 1965 edition. In those days, there were no adequate studies of continental marginal matches around the Atlantic Ocean and the concept of oceanic crustal spreading was hotly disputed. Not so in the southern hemisphere where Carey organised the Hobart Continental Drift Symposium with its thought provoking papers (1958). Their work prompted me to make accurate cut-outs from a high quality 15 inch diameter globe, of Africa, America, North America, Greenland, Europe and Asia, fitting them together on that globe in order to reconstruct Pangaea as envisaged without the North and South Atlantic. In this respect I was unwittingly following Ott Hilgenberg's much earlier experiments with globes (Hilgenberg 1933, Vogel 1983, 2003, Scalera and Jacob 2003). But, I found that they did not fit together properly on the globe representing the Earth's current size, there being the development of spherical triangular gaps (gores)

away from whatever fit one made. There the matter rested, except for a niggling doubt and the total disbelief that the Earth could have expanded during the time since the break-up of Pangaea – but of course a change of curvature on a smaller globe produced a more accurate fit-together of the continents in the Atlantic – Arctic Oceans region (Figs. 1 A, B).

I had an early interest as a geologist in Cretaceous ammonite biostratigraphy and palaeogeography. It puzzled me that in the Boreal region,[1] these gores that appeared on a constant modern dimensions

[1] *The Boreal region is a vast expanse of coniferous forests, mires and lakes*

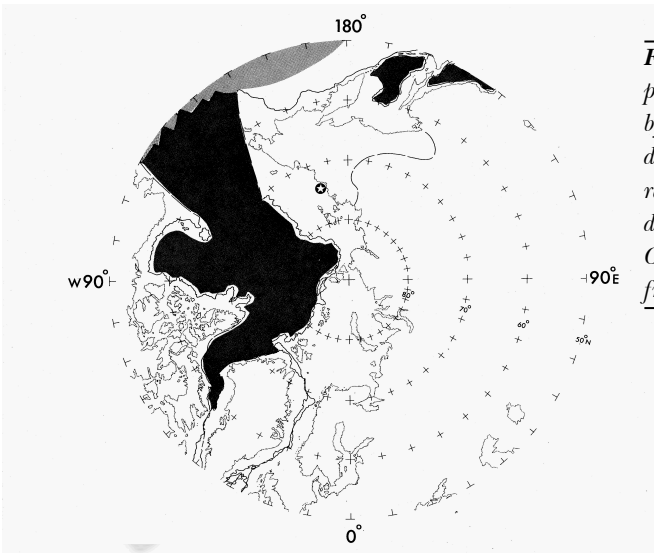


Fig 1A. *The gore (shown black) produced in the Arctic Ocean area by the curvature of a modern dimension Earth when Pangaea is reassembled before the development of the Atlantic Ocean. Out to 50º N. latitude from the projection pole.*

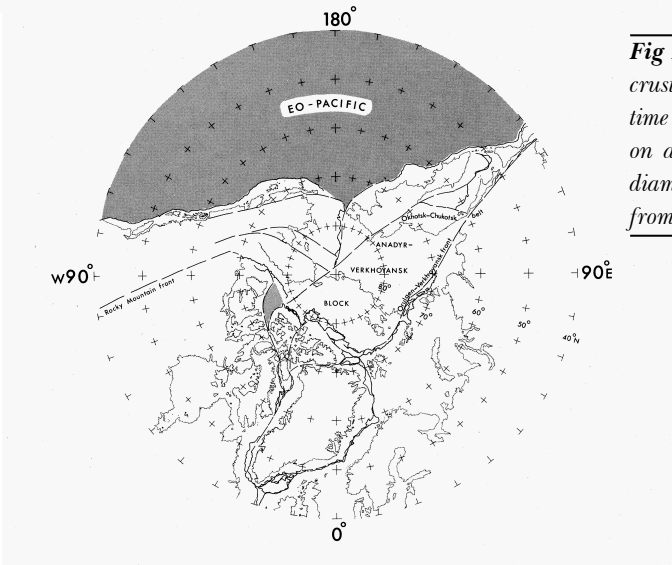


Fig 1B. *The fit of the continental crust in the Arctic region at the time of Pangaea with a curvature on an Earth 80% of modern diameter. Out to 40º N. latitude from the projection pole.*

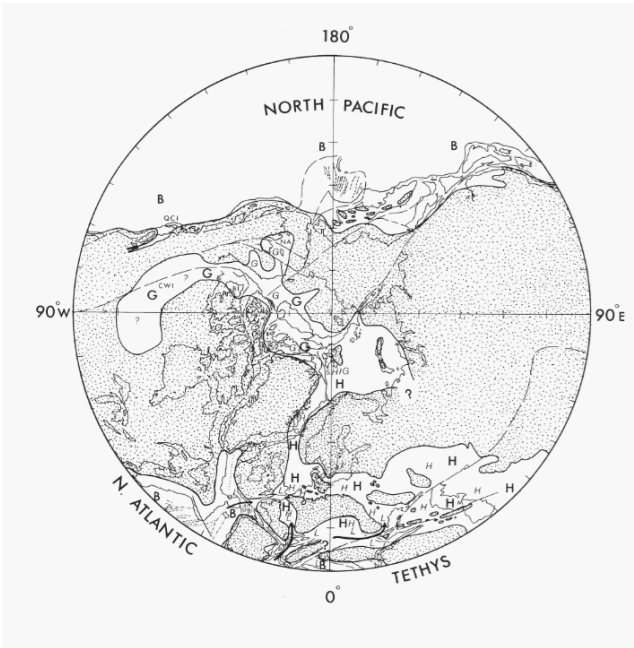


Fig 1C. *The palaeogeography of the Arctic region in the Albian (mid-Cretaceous ca.105 Ma) assuming an Earth of 89% of modern diameter with an opening North Atlantic after Owen (1996, Figure 2).*

Earth reconstruction, were at their widest in the Arctic region. Yet, mid-Cretaceous ammonites of this region were totally distinct from those of Europe, despite there being no obvious continental barrier – why? (Fig. 1C) In the early 1960's we had a talk by Bullard at the then Chelsea College (University of London, now part of Royal Holloway College), during which he demonstrated the least squares fit model of South America and Africa. It rang a bell of caution in my mind because, from the high quality globe, I had already produced accurate cut-outs of both Africa and South America and they did not fit together on an Earth of modern dimensions as was shown in the computer generated least squares fit (Fig. 2). This view was confirmed later in the paper by Bullard, Everett and Smith (1965) of the complete fit of the continents around the Atlantic Ocean including the Arctic. It was impossible on a modern dimensions Earth without the Earth developing a large "carbuncle" and thus losing its spheroid of rotation.

At Chelsea, one of our lecturers was Charles Tozer, a good friend of mine and a lecturer who instilled in us that we should always question why we accepted or believed a hypothesis without consideration of the data on which it was based. In subsequent discussions among us, Charles asked me why I was unsure about the Bullard fit. It started me to question not only continental displacement, but its spherical geometric implications - if indeed, Pangaea had once been the fit

circling the northern hemisphere.

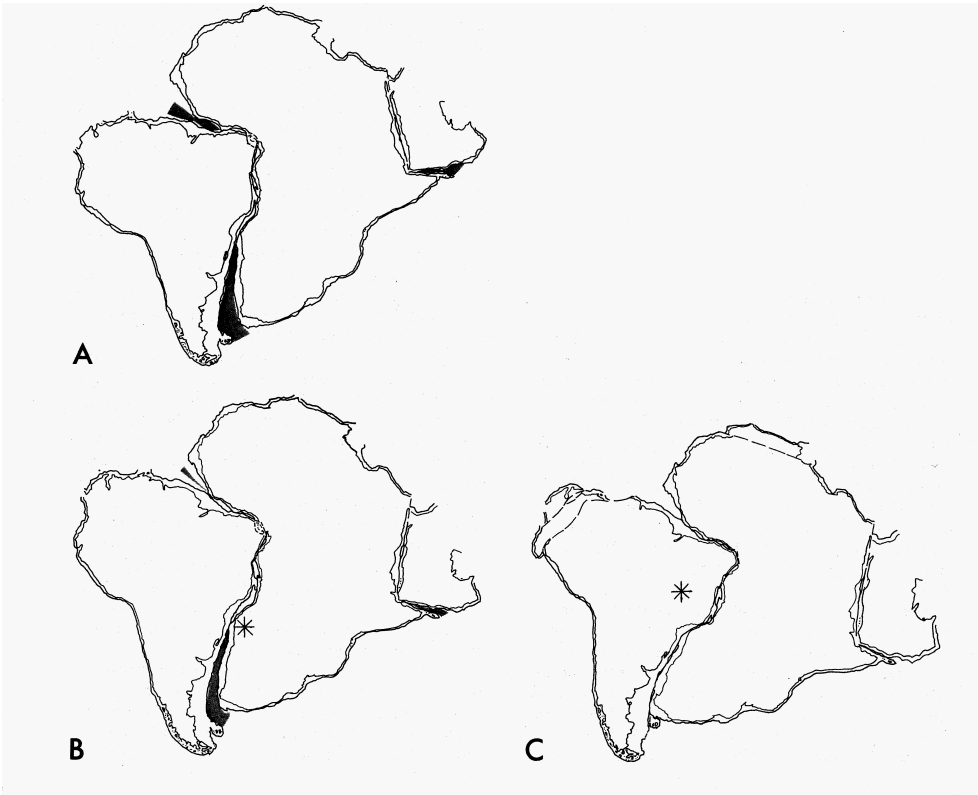


Fig 2. *The fit of South America and Africa before ocean-floor spreading (mid Cretaceous), again to show the effect of curvature. A. centre-projected flat maps put together on a flat surface. B. the fit assuming the curvature of the modern Earth. C. the fit assuming an Earth of 80% of modern value. Star in B and C are the poles of the azimuthal equidistant projection.*

together of the sialic crust as envisaged. My first low-tech. experiments to see at what diameter the continents surrounding the Atlantic Ocean fitted together completely, involved the purchasing from a famous local Knightsbridge store of their remaining stock of exercise ball inner rubber bladders. When inflated, the bulk of these became reasonably spherical and without the confinement of the surrounding leather outer case, were capable of inflating to a greater diameter and thus pressure, than the manufacturers originally intended. Very accurate flexible cut-outs were made of the continental regions using the 1000 m isobaths (the mean of the continental margin) from a 15 inch diameter globe. The bladders were inflated to the point where all the continental "plates" around the Arctic, North and South Atlantic

fitted together pretty precisely. This diameter was 12 inches on a globe representing an Earth 80% of a modern dimensions. The exercise proved instructive in an unexpected way as it suggested that in the southern Ocean region, Africa, India, Australia and Antarctica (Gondwanaland) also fitted together as Carey had predicted (1958). In the case of the Arctic, North and South Atlantic, a check was made of the available geology and tectonic structures which matched the reconstructions. This exercise led to one incident worth recalling. These rubber bladders were stressed far greater than the manufacturer ever intended and prolonged expansion led to their bursting. I arrived at the office one morning to find one of our lady cleaners almost in tears saying that the bladder concerned had exploded while she was cleaning – and it wasn't her fault. One of the bladders had burst quite spectacularly while she was in the room. I was able to re-assure her that exploding reconstructions were a natural hazard. The reconstructions on these bladders was drawn cartographically using the azimuthal equidistant projection with polar and oblique cases and thus the matter rested. Pangaea could only be reassembled on a globe representing 80% of the Earth mean diameter, no greater, no less.

It was serious scientific investigation

In the early 1960's, palaeomagnetic measurements assuming a modern dimension Earth graticule were published (see the history in William Glenn 1982). But there were anomalies in the results and this led Creer (1965) to consider Earth expansion as a possibility. He reconstructed the continental crust into a single spherical shell, an early differentiate of the Earth and from this deduced an Earth diameter of approximately 65% of modern diameter. Such a reconstruction involved substantial dislocations within the modern continents. Checking Creer's hypothesis on the rubber "globes" showed that in terms of the current crustal area, a complete sialic shell would indicate an Earth of 65% - 70% of modern diameter. I know personally that, later, he discounted both expansion and the idea of a complete sialic shell. Unfortunately, it became apparent that there was no information regarding ocean-floor spreading in the Palaeozoic, lasting from about 541 to 252 million years ago, and Creer's suggestion (1965) of a complete sialic crust could not be tested. One thing that had become clear was that the concept of an Earth which had expanded only since the early Jurassic (the so-called fast expansion hypothesis) was not tenable. Just, as in the case of the

famous Bullard fit together of Pangaea (Bullard, Everitt and Smith 1985) which would have produced a "carbuncle" on the spherical Earth, the concept that all ocean-floor spreading and expansion had occurred since the early Jurassic would have produced a spindle-shaped Earth. Workers advocating these extremes apparently could not picture a spheroid of rotation which the Earth is.

Dietz (1961) and Hess (1962) ideas concerning the role of mid-oceanic ridges in the crustal displacement of the continents paved the way for the spreading hypothesis of Morley on the one hand and Vine and Matthews on the other (Vine & Matthews 1963). They demonstrated that the symmetrical magnetic reversal anomalies (stripes) seen in the oceanic crust each side of the mid-oceanic ridges represented the generation of oceanic crust symmetrically from these ridges and reflected the changes in the Earth's magnetic field through time. It should be noted that Morley had his papers turned down for publication by the blinkered referees of his day; an experience shared by Earth expansionists to this day.[1] Within the later '60s and '70s much dated ocean-floor spreading magnetic anomaly crustal data became available from around the globe. Initially this was from US Navy sources, but later from the embryonic DSDP programme. It became possible to plot more accurately the growth of the passive-margined oceans and their timing. The matter became more pressing following the meeting of geomagnetic and ocean-floor spreading workers at the University of Newcastle in April 1972 (Tarling and Runcorn 1973). In particular, the significance of the mismatch in the development of the Arctic Ocean in relation to the growth patterns in the North Atlantic and its solution by an increase in global diameter since Pangaea, was dismissed in the discussions.

The spherical geometric data from the Pangaea configuration around 200 million years ago to the modern configuration of the continents, suggested that Earth expansion was exponential and with the published spreading data during this interval, described the near-linear limb of an exponential curve (Owen 1976, 1983). If so, the complete sialic crust would indeed have been around 700 million years ago on an Earth 60% - 65% of modern diameter as Creer had suggested. My initial analysis was published in 1976 (Owen 1976) and immediately drew strong criticism, not helped by the fact that I had

[1] *The rejection of Morley's paper is infamous. After deducing that magnetic stripes on the sea floor confirmed sea floor spreading Morley submitted a paper to the science journal Nature in February 1963. It was rejected. Meanwhile Vine and Matthews independently came to the same conclusion. Their paper was published in Nature in September 1963. It has since been recognized as a major scientific discovery. The participants describe these events in Oreskes 2001. (editor)*

attempted to marry into one series of maps, two projections with unacceptable interface distortions. It was obvious that to make an acceptable test of the data on a constant modern dimension Earth model and on an expanding Earth model, maps had to be projected with the minimum amount of distortion and with complete spherical geometric integrity. This required a much more precise approach and one requiring far more detailed spherical geometric calculations. Thus was born the idea of producing the *Atlas of Continental Displacement 200 Ma to the Present* (Owen 1983). The Atlas would have to be a straight test of the data and not encumbered by an historical account of various hypotheses presented before.

People have asked me how this was done and I usually reply with great difficulty. No computer in the late 1970's and 1980's was capable of calculating the spherical geometric changes which were necessary with an expanding Earth model. Some workers failed to realise that if you move pieces of crust away from their modern positions on the globe, their position previously depicted on a flat map requires that the map be re-projected because their position relative to the projection pole has changed. Thus, simply fitting together bits of continents from a flat map of suitable projection, produces a chimaera of no spherical geometric validity. Classic examples of these cartoons are the paper by Jackson and Gunnarson (1990) on the fit of the Boreal region to eliminate the Arctic Ocean spreading crust and a similar reconstruction of the Indian Ocean (Johnson e*t al.* 1980, Veevers *et al.* 1980, the latter two cited by Owen 1983 Appendix). We are dealing with a near spherical Earth and no flat map is without distortion and subject to the theory of the projection used together with the pole of projection selected. This fact is totally ignored by many constant dimensions Earth advocates.

By the early 80's there was sufficient good quality ocean floor magnetic reversal anomaly data to attempt a detailed test of that data on both a modern dimension Earth and an expanding Earth. The first exercise was to plot this actual data seen now on our Modern Earth onto maps with the least edge distortion sufficient to make reconstructions. I chose the Azimuthal equal distant projection because its radial distortion from the pole of projection was nil and distortion was circumferential and can be calculated accurately (Fig. 3). I chose segments of 10º by 10º (Fig. 3) using the modern Earth's graticule of longitude and latitude each with its continental crust and /or spreading data, Each 10º by 10º segment was projected from the centre of the segment. This produced a series of small "plates" which when put together formed a globe representing the modern dimensions Earth and from which circumferential distortion was easily

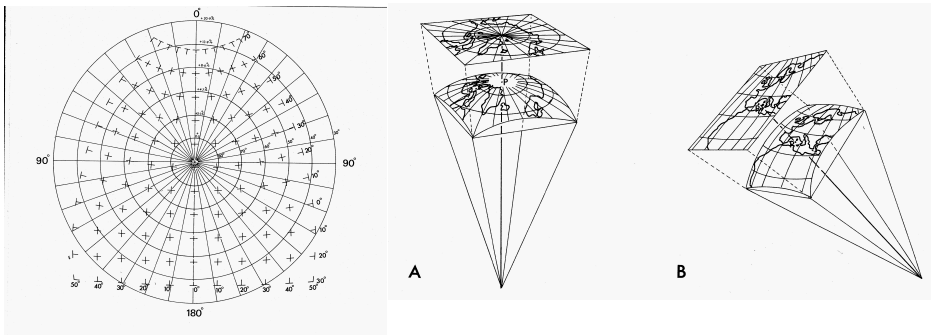


Fig 3A. *The superimposed co-ordinate graticules of the Azimuthal Equidistant projection in the polar case and its relation to the oblique case (projection pole at 22º N and S). Note that radial distances are true in all cases.*

Polar case latitude°	Distortion factor %	Oblique case distance from origin°
90	0.0	0
80	+0.5	10
70	+2.1	20
60	+4.7	30
50	+8.6	40
40	+13.9	50
30	+20.9	60
20	+30.0	70
10	+41.7	80
0	+57.1	90

Fig 3B. *Table of the circumferential distortion in the Azimuthal Equidistant projection away from the projection pole.*

calculated and eliminated. I chose the 15 inch diameter globe to represent the modern Earth. This process was lengthy but straightforward.

The next problem was how to represent the movement of continents with the growth of the oceanic crust with reference to our modern graticule of latitude and longitude. Where was Greenwich at the time of Pangaea? The concept and construction of a fixed graticule in space allowed these movements with time to be calculated precisely, strictly in accordance with the spherical geometric fit for a chosen pair of magnetic anomalies (oceanic crustal stripes). On the constant modern dimension Earth this was relatively simple, albeit that the amount of ocean floor generation is much greater in the southern hemisphere and the break-up and displacement of the continents is not age

constant. The constructed fixed graticule in space had its longitudinal origin in the modern 0º (Greenwich) meridian and the length of all meridians would be constant on a constant modern dimension Earth. This concept allowed an accurate representation of the displacement each side of the spreading axes from their origin in Pangae to its modern graticule position. One simply brought back the continents together in accordance with the selected isochronous magnetic anomaly pairs of the spreading pattern to the modern geographic positions. Of course, on the map, each stage had to be re-projected in accordance with the new position of the continent/magnetic anomaly pair and the change in their position relative to the projection pole. Using the Azimuthal Equidistant projection with Polar and oblique cases made this relatively straightforward and the distortion could be checked for amount and accuracy (Owen 1983). This assumed of course that the selected Greenwich meridian was fixed in space and the symmetrical displacement of the continents from Pangaea to the modern position of the Greenwich meridian by ocean-floor spreading was a simple progression. I realised later (Owen 2012) that the Americas had drifted westward and that the Greenwich meridian had not moved significantly from its modern position, but that is a re-projection complication which I will leave to others.

With the Expanding Earth scenario, the mapped reconstructions were a very different matter and required a much more complicated series of calculations. I used the same concept of a graticule in space as with the modern constant dimensions Earth reconstructions, originating in the modern 0º position as with the constant modern dimension Earth reconstructions. The complication was two-fold because as one went back in time, the spherical curvature of the Earth changed, for which there is much tectonic evidence, but which affected the circumferential distortion of the Equidistant azimuthal map projection. Secondly, the spreading patterns of the oceanic crust of the Earth in the southern hemisphere regions show that this hemisphere has "bellied-out" since break-up of Pangaea at different times whilst the Earth has remained a near sphere of rotation. The Arctic on the other hand does not show a symmetrical increase in ocean-floor spreading to the extent of the Southern and Indian Oceans. Thus, the evidence indicates that the 0º meridian of our notional graticule in space and of course all other meridians were much shorter at the time of Pangaea and they have extended essentially relatively southward up to the lengths of the modern Earth. The added complication in the mapping of different times of continental break-up, evident in the constant modern dimensions reconstructions, is intensified in the Expanding Earth model in strict accordance with the spherical

geometric fit of the magnetic anomaly patterns. So all of the projections needed calculating for both distortion on the maps of a smaller Earth and the changing positions of the continents relative to fixed reference graticule of latitude and longitude in space. This, together with the different times of continental break-up and the commencement of the spreading of the oceanic crust. That these calculations for the expanding Earth model were reasonably accurate, became apparent when I produced inscribed Perspex globes now archived in the Natural History Museum, London.

We next come to the question of the Pacific Ocean and subduction of crust at its surrounding "Ring of Fire". The reconstruction of Pangaea on a constant modern dimensions Earth not only produces the gores already referred to, but also a very large area of Pacific Ocean – a product of the then non-existence of the passive-margined oceans such as the North and South Atlantic, Indian and Southern oceans. The constant modern Earth adherents simply dismiss this very large area of Pacific Oceanic crust until that which is present today, by the process of subduction of the older crust. There are two problems here:

(1) The remnants of the Jurassic and Early Cretaceous spreading patterns generated since the Pangaea stage that one sees in the Pacific, do not support the spherical geometric contraction style required by the modern dimension Earth re-construction.

(2) The amount of subduction which would be required at the Pacific margins from Pangaea onward would show a progressive decrease in the last 200Ma to that seen today, whereas the evidence indicates that subduction has increased significantly since Pangaea, due to the major increase in late Cretaceous and Cenozoic spreading patterns together with the response of the westward displacement of the Americas. The vectors of extension in the Pacific measured even in the minute second of time that we experience today, show overall expansion of area – not contraction.

In the western margin of the Pacific, the constant modern dimensions Earth reconstructions of Pangaea produce a very large gore issuing from the modern Mediterranean region widening eastward into the Pacific region; the so-called Tethys Ocean. The history of the closure of this gore would be a progressive northward displacement of Gondwanaland against the Asian margin. It is argued that the northward displacement of Australia shows this process of closure. BUT, there are two problems with this scenario.

(1) The displacement of Australia northward did not commence until the latest Cretaceous inception of the Southern Ocean spreading pattern.

(2) Traces of late Jurassic – Early Cretaceous spreading is seen in the Wharton Basin of the Indian Ocean, and in the Philippine Sea and Phoenix Plate in the Pacific with E - W trending lineations, indicating N – S extension during this period, the reverse of the requirement of closure (Owen 1983).

The spreading evidence from the remnants of Jurassic-Early Cretaceous oceanic crust in the Wharton Basin, Philippine Sea and Phoenix plate indicates that the western margin of the Pacific was, initially, stretched southward during the late Jurassic – early Cretaceous in response to spreading in the eastern area of the Indian Ocean. From the end of the Cretaceous to the modern day, a major change occurred with the inception and crustal generation of the Southern Ocean and the resulting northward displacement of Australia against the western Pacific margin. The evidence indicates not a gore widening toward the Pacific as in constant modern dimensions Earth models contracting from Pangaea onward, but that Australia was displaced southward away from the Asian margin at least from the Jurassic onward, opening an oceanic crustal area until the development of the Cretaceous to modern spreading. The so-called Tethyan Ocean gore, like the Arctic gore, is a spherical geometric artefact.

The expanding Earth model produces also a Pacific area at the time of Pangaea – the Eo-Pacific (Owen 1983) which would have developed previously through the Palaeozoic if the Earth had retained its spheroid of rotation. All oceanic crust generated through this period of time has long since been subducted. I responded, eventually, to a request for reconstructions of Palaeozoic expansion (Owen 2012) which, in the absence of ocean-floor spreading evidence, can be considered only as speculative. However, the kinematic series deduced from major global tectonic structures together with certain features in the Devonian sedimentary and faunal record, suggests that the Eo-Pacific Ocean opened as a result of the displacement of Australia southward from a relative position in the northern hemisphere between the cratonic areas of Asia and North America (Fig. 4). The remnants of the Jurassic – Early Cretaceous spreading zones with West to East generating axes and southward displacement would be in accord with the late stage of that movement.

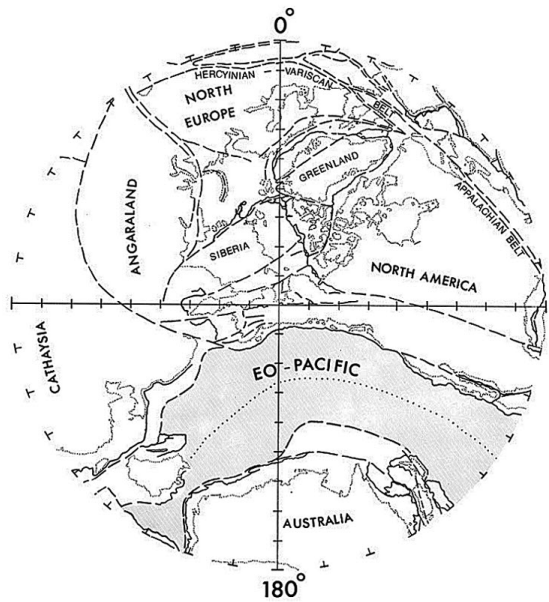


Fig 4. *Mid Carboniferous reconstruction 325 Ma on an Earth of approximately 70% of modern diameter. Azimuthal Equidistant projection assuming a northern geographic pole of the Earth. Postulated growing Eo-Pacific oceanic crust, shown shaded, is part of a kinematic series dependant on the increase in Earth diameter and major tectonic sutures (after Owen 2012).*

Final thoughts

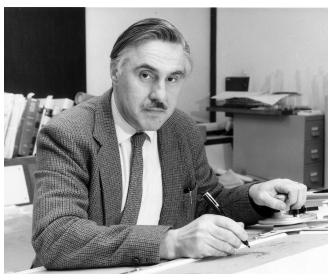
The assumption that I made in the late 70's and early 80's that one could relate continental displacement and oceanic crustal growth simply by symmetrical displacement in relation to the fixed graticule in space that I had constructed originally, I now view to be wrong. The evidence of growth and displacement of the crust in the Pacific region is more in accord with a differential movement of the Americas (North America since the Middle Jurassic Bathonian, South America since the mid-Cretaceous) westward away from Europe – not unlike the concept of Drift of the early workers (Owen 2012). Recent work in China (Wenbin Shen and Sung-Ho Na 2017) appears to support this contention. This is a problem for others to solve.

Production of all the maps for the Atlas was done by hand as there was no computer program available to permit this. So, the *Atlas of Continental Displacement* was completed and published by Cambridge University Press (Owen 1983). There was of course, the constant

modern dimensions Earth adherents who ignored the test as was to be expected, but criticism was not as raucous as in previous years. It was already being realised that the Le Pichon concept of fixed rigid plates was demonstrably wrong, but the concept of subduction is in my opinion correct although I believe, as I said above, that in the eastern Pacific, subduction is due as much by the westward displacement of the Americas against a growing Pacific Ocean floor.

I was asked to update the Atlas some twenty years ago, but the amount of work for very little difference, made this unattractive. Thus we see an example of hunch turning to serious scientific investigation; of low tech experiment to complex calculation. There has been some personal criticism in that I had ignored the work of many others on both the historical aspect of global expansion and those advocating a constant modern dimensions Earth (e.g. Smith *et al.* 1980). I set out purely to provide a test of the ocean-floor spreading data against the two conflicting hypotheses with its implications for palaeogeography and faunal distributions without the burden of historical debate. This essay is concerned only with the development of that Atlas.

About the Contributor



Hugh Owen has written various articles about Earth expansion for well-known science publications like *New Scientist*, produced chapters for various geological books, taken part in the renowned debate, *An expanding Earth?*, held at the Geological Society of London in 1979, presented his evidence for expansion at the *Expanding Earth Symposium* held at Sydney University in 1981, an event attended by about 130 Earth scientists, and later published a full Atlas. Owen's approach in the 1970's and early '80's to the problem of the mode and timing of the break-up of various parts of Pangaea was different to others who concentrated on physiographic fit and possible break-up patterns. He analysed the global ocean-floor spreading patterns and their dating; from them, the spherical geometric implications. He showed the need to correctly project map reconstructions as continents moved their positions in response to the growing oceanic crust, a failure in some reconstructions. Also, that latest Cretaceous to recent spreading was greater in the southern hemisphere than in the northern; the Earth retaining its rotational spheroid.

This essay was first published as a chapter in the 2020 book, *The Hidden History of Earth Expansion*, which is widely available from good bookshops in both Hardback and Paperback editions, as well as a Google eBook.

The *Hidden History of Earth Expansion* presents the personal histories of some of the most well-known researchers into Earth expansion in 14 original essays. In addition to furnishing us with their personal histories, as they strived to explore the seemingly overwhelming evidence for confirmation of Earth expansion, the authors' highlight areas where further research is required.

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