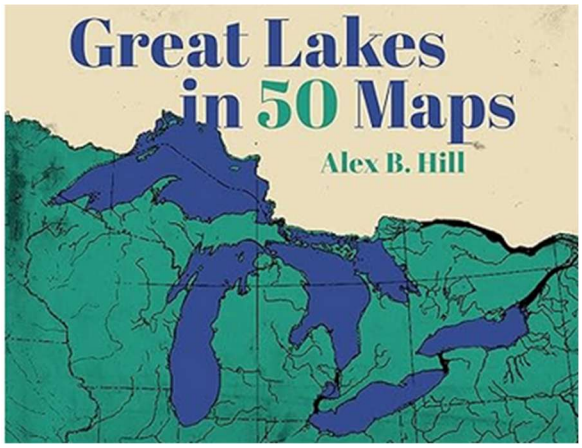
Great Lakes in 50 Maps, By Alex B. Hill



Hill, Alex B. Great Lakes in 50 Maps. Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2025. 127 p. $30 US. ISBN 978-1-5402-7000-9

This hardback, landscape-format, letter-paper-sized book presents maps of the Great Lakes region, nearly all drawn by Hill, covering a variety of geographical topics, both human and physical. Each topic occupies a two-page spread, with a map and textual discussion on opposite pages. The book is divided into four sections: History & Culture, Ecology, Infrastructure, and Physical – the last being more of a catch-all – and ends with a list of data sources.

Almost all the maps feature the same base: the entirety of the eight US states bordering the Great Lakes in a medium grey fill, the adjoining portions (only) of Ontario and Quebec in a light grey, an overlaid dense light-grey hatching for the "Rust Belt/Megalopolis" (unexplained until p.35), and a black dashed line indicating the boundary of the Great Lakes watershed.

On this base, Hill overlays various digital datasets – point, line and/or polygon, to cover the almost fifty topics he discusses (several topics have more than one map, to make up the fifty maps of the book's title).

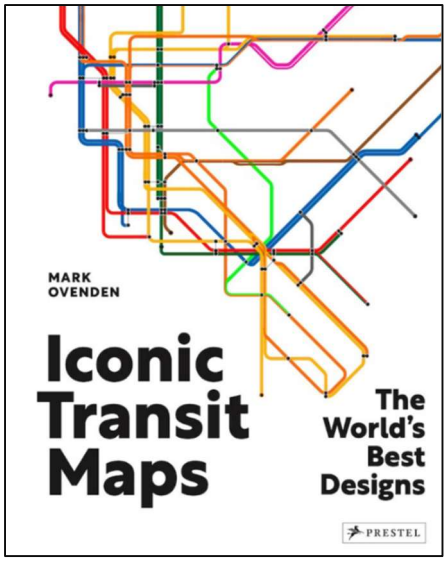
Many of the topics mapped are what one would expect: indigenous names, territorial evolution, population density (both as a county-wise choropleth, and as a dot map), wetlands, bathymetry (titled "Lake depths"), flood risk, lighthouses, pipelines and oil spills, islands, bird migrations. Others seem included for their quirkiness rather than for any true educational value: major-league football stadia, start-ups, U-Haul locations, lake monsters. Some are inexplicably limited to only part of the watershed (Lake Huron water supply), while many omit data for Canada entirely, even where this would be easy to include: primary roads, passenger rail, commercial airports,…). But many topics I was expecting to see stand out by their complete omission: Geology, soils, Indian languages/tribes, routes of the explorers, War of 1812, commodity flows and processing/refinery sites, international border crossings and ports of entry, passenger/vehicle ferries, land use and tenure, crops (only pumpkins are included), January/July surface or air temperatures, average rainfall (admittedly there are four "Climate change" maps, showing "projected change …based on a twenty year average", but no baseline climate data).

Hill is described as a cartographer on the rear cover, and a "data director" in the "About the author" note and has previously published a similar book "Detroit in 50 maps" (Belt Publishing, 2021). But the maps in his new book exhibit many basic cartographic flaws. Apart from the lack of Canadian data in many of the maps, the choice of class values for the various choropleth maps are confused or unexplained ("count of drownings" classes overlap: 1-2, 2-7, 7-17… (p.98)), as are some data; ("Count of Sugar Maple [trees]" is measured to one decimal place (p.70); "Invasive fish risk score" (p.65) is undefined). The map of sub-watersheds is completely misaligned with the "Great Lakes watershed"

base. The solid green splodges representing wine regions (p.106) extend far beyond the base map, making the map look like its color separations are grossly misaligned. The several maps of bathymetry lack any contour values (pp. 57 & 115-123).

This is not an academic or scientific text, but a coffee-table book, aimed explicitly at "anyone who appreciates the history, nature and future of the ...lakes". But as both a cartographer, and someone new to the Great Lakes region eager to learn more about the geography of my new home, I found the book disappointing in content, and sloppy in execution. I can only recommend it as a case-study in poor cartographic technique.

Iconic Transit Maps: The World's Best Designs, By Mark Ovenden



Ovenden, Mark. Iconic Transit Maps: The World's Best Designs. London: Prestel Publishing, 2024. 200p. ISBN: 978-3-79138-025-4

Iconic Transit Maps by Mark Ovenden takes a tour through cities around the world via the maps and graphic design of their transit systems. It emphasizes the importance of understandable graphic design for transit systems; as Erik Spiekermann writes in the foreword, "If a transit map looks inviting and legible, the city itself becomes accessible." While the ebook provides the images and text adequately, the print version of this book is beautiful. The oversized format allows for large, high-quality images of the transit systems and historical photographs, allowing the reader to see more details.

Ovenden is an author, lecturer and television/radio presenter in the U.K. He primarily focuses on design, architecture, cartography, signage and typefaces in the world of transport. He has published several previous books on metropolitan transit map design, including two looking specifically at the metro maps of Paris and London.

The volume looks at fifty-three transit systems from around the world, organized by continent. Each profile provides a brief history of the transit service and the development of its infrastructure and design, including historic and contemporary maps, designs, diagrams, plans, and photographs. The profiles discuss map design characteristics such as fonts, lines, images, alignment, and colours. There is some Canadian content in this book; Ovenden praises Montreal's Metro for its dark background and 35-degree angles, and the Toronto Transit Commission for its inclusion of streetcar routes.

Given their longer histories and significant sizes, several of the European and North American cities get more detailed entries than those of smaller, newer systems. There are extensive sections on the systems of New York, London, Paris, and Berlin. Berlin's profile is especially interesting, given its history of division and reunification, which also applies to its transit systems and their design, as well as the actual city. Most of the