

Data Visualization Assignment - Write Up

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1 The Data

The first step to any form of data visualization is the data itself. The data that our team was assigned involved the heights and coordinates of the highest peaks of India. We were asked to find a meaningful story to tell - or rather, to scrollytell, with the aid of the useful but frustrating Mapbox tilesets.

2 Finding the Story

Our bottleneck was always finding the story to tell, rather than finding ways to represent the story visually. There were a few options - we thought about possibly relating height to the first year the mountain was successfully conquered. This was tricky, we first had to decide whether ascending it successfully was enough, or if we had to include climbs where the person who reached the summit failed to make the descent. Then we had to find the data, and data on anything, as we discovered, was perniciously difficult to find.

Another option was to relate the number of tourists to a mountain, once again, based on height. Height was the primary attribute we were trying to relate here (because it was one of the few base fields of data that we were given to start with). Again, figures were difficult to come by, the few that we did find had rather unreliable sources. At this point we briefly discussed flying to Kanchenjunga to make observations ourselves...it seemed like that would be faster.

Eventually, we did find one point of data that seemed somewhat easier to find. Deaths. Plenty of people die on mountains, and deaths are events of

at least some importance. These statistics were easy enough to find, though it was important to remember that the number of deaths could be fewer on a mountain due to fewer attempts. We did not take this into account during our scrollytelling endeavour.

3 Telling the Story

So how did we represent deaths? Mountains were circles, and the radius of the circle was proportional to the height (more precisely, to the square root of the height) of the mountain. We needed to find a way to represent the additional dimension, and eventually we settled on colour.

Red is usually the colour of death, and we had originally planned to use red. Unfortunately, one of our team members was colour blind, and could not see the difference between different shades of red. For more accessibility (and specifically for *his* accessibility), we switched to blue.

The story therefore was told through colours and sizes. To finally add the scrollytelling dimension, we created a fictional tourism agency that purports to advertise treks to these mountains. It was written in a semi-humorous fashion, but important statistics like heights and deaths were weaved into the narrative. There exists a very real fear of death, and it was important to leverage this against the height of the mountain, because mountains are just as terrifying. The pictures played an important visual role in establishing this connection. We ended with a tongue-in-cheek note about deaths at sea level...an important, but relieving observation, after a long journey through a list of potential journeys.