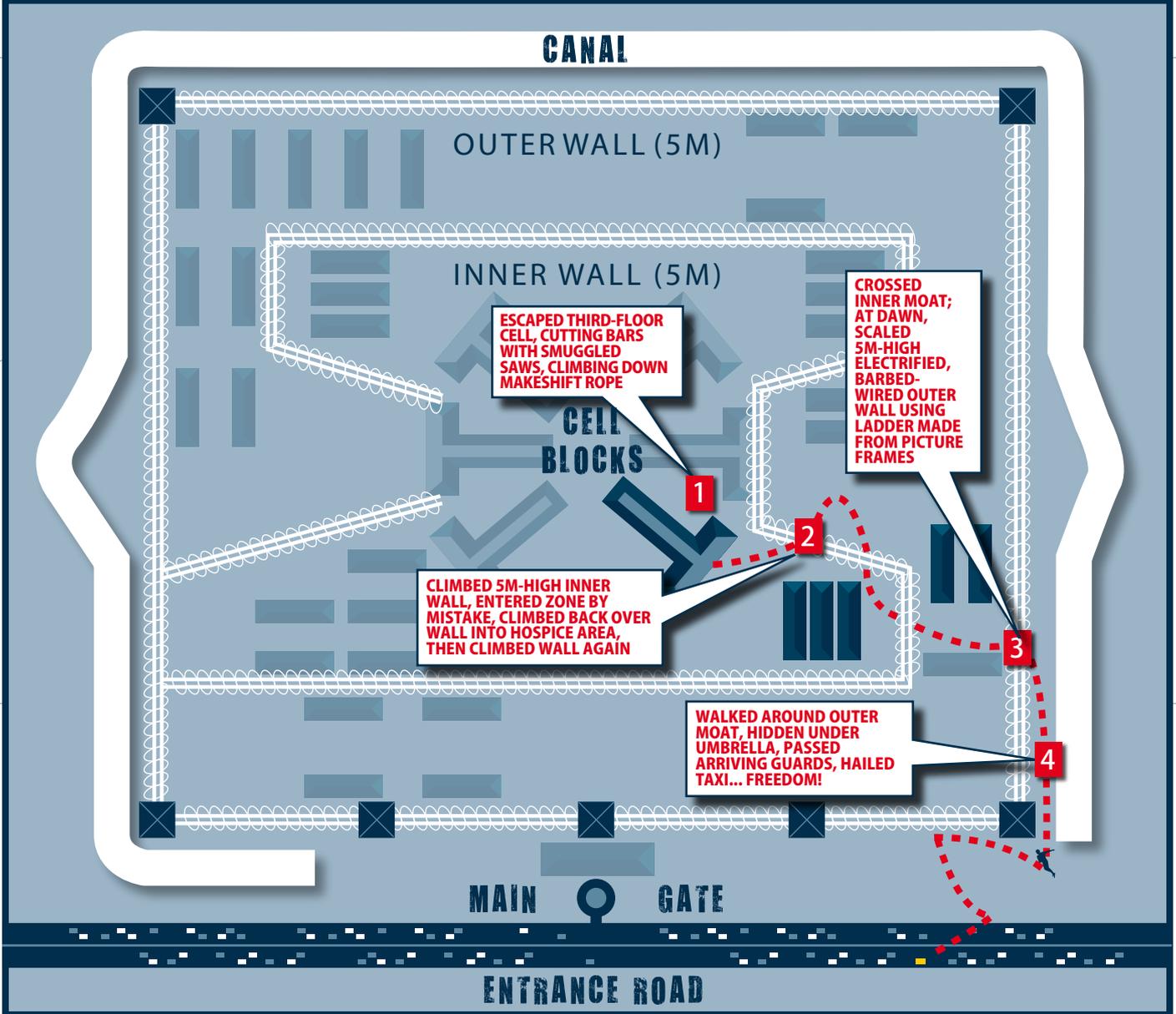


KLONG PREM PRISON DAVID McMILLANS'S ESCAPE ROUTE



they offer power. It still astonishes me that so many are satisfied with the grubby powers bestowed upon them in a closed environment. I guess that could apply in any institution. The most useful device in preparing for any escape is to appear perfectly happy and productive. Yet ultimately, secrecy is everything. I'm sure you know that very few people can keep a secret.

What do you think would have happened if you'd been caught in Singapore instead of Thailand?

Caught in SQ? Well, the courts [in Singapore] are at least a little careful about evidence before sending a man to the gallows, so I might well have been acquitted. That aside, I'd be dead or free by now – and I wouldn't be dead for all the money in the world!

The returns for couriers (in the book you mention a going rate of about US\$7,500 per trip) seem relatively low, given the possible sentences – especially in Asia. Why do you think people still opt to take the risk?

Couriers are still paid poorly considering the risks. Few couriers take the work due to their dire poverty – poor people make for the most obvious couriers despite the new suits. Most couriers are dedicated fantasists; gamblers by nature. Despite a complete absence of hard evidence, they feel they are destined to be lucky.

What advice would you give someone who wanted to go into smuggling, and what advice would you give someone who wanted to write a book?

If a young person wishes to go into smuggling, I can suggest no better start than to get himself arrested and imprisoned for about six months in Amsterdam. The jail conditions are fine, and he or she will be released with a fat address book and a headful of dreams. Unfortunately, smuggling these days is mostly spade work – prices collapsed along with the Berlin wall. As for writing, I'm sure it's best to write about others even if the story is about you. If the despair in Klong Prem taught me anything, it was that few succeed who don't understand themselves, and the mirror to that understanding is in the faces of others. ■