Earthly Travels by Ucaoimhu

In honor of my 20th journey across the earth to the ACPT, this cryptic incorporates a special item. Specifically:

(1) All but four Down answers must be altered before entry by adding one of four one-or-two-letter sequences; altered entries will include two hyphenated words and a cheese. The wordplay in each Across clue yields a letter sequence that either (a) is missing one letter, or (b) has one extra character (not always one letter); the (a) letters, and separately the (b) characters, each in clue order, will each tell you (in different notation) what all the one-or-two-letter sequences added to Down answers collectively constitute.

(2) The four other Down answers (which share an common ending) must be altered before entry by selecting the letters in certain positions, in a certain order (the same in all four cases); one altered entry will be a brand name’s slang form. In each Across clue, where (i) the letter from (1a) or (ii) the character from (1b) would be in the nth position from the end of the answer, circle the nth letter from the end of the clue; the circled letters for (i), and those for (ii), will each describe one pair of altered Down entries, and will also describe how I could have gotten to the ACPT (but did not).

(3) Apply (2)’s alteration to (1a)’s result to see where to put (1a)/(1b)’s result to get the special item. For each Down answer from (1), (1b)’s result assigns a number m to its added one-or-two-letter sequence; circle the corresponding Down clue’s mth word. The circled words will form an ambiguous cryptic clue with two answers, whose enumerations are the number of (1a) Across clues and the number of (1b) Across clues. The former answer will be the special item; the latter answer will be something else reached (this year, at least) by going to the ACPT.

ACROSS
1. Cosmopolitan lass holds bola backward (6)
2. Slanted study about dropping river temperature
3. Mark that you don’t see on a flawless paper collection!
4. A Spanish article is too bad
5. Officers won’t hold on to red fish
6. Utter oaths as scoundrels get naked
7. No one that’s ignoring Henry’s rising rank
8. Maine’s flat-topped high spot (4)
9. Stranger I locate is debutante, perhaps
10. Township near a 900-acre city in the northwest (6)
11. Felt small pangs linked in a twisty way with ingested guanine
12. Officers won’t hold on to red fish
13. Confused sow utters a bovine cry (4)
14. LDL-blocking unit left in avuncular twin (4)
15. Dye social insect with petroleum product (4) [N13]
16. A spar Roosevelt (by the way) will whirl (5)
17. “Cinders? Gevalt!” is the cry of a mariner (4)
18. Greetings sent west, furthermore, express derision (4)
19. Person who enchants crop makes one Zulu $1000
20. The heart is going out of food place on Alice
21. Turn around slightly when upset, cross, and drunk
22. Egg near borders of China elevated protein
23. Lagomorph swallowing fifty-eight-legged invertebrate resident of Manhattan
24. Gambling game is OK with musician Brian (4)
25. Wanting what others have essentially gutted outside of Nevada
26. Incorrectly intone “Alien cake-finishers I’m flipping over” [N12]

DOWN
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