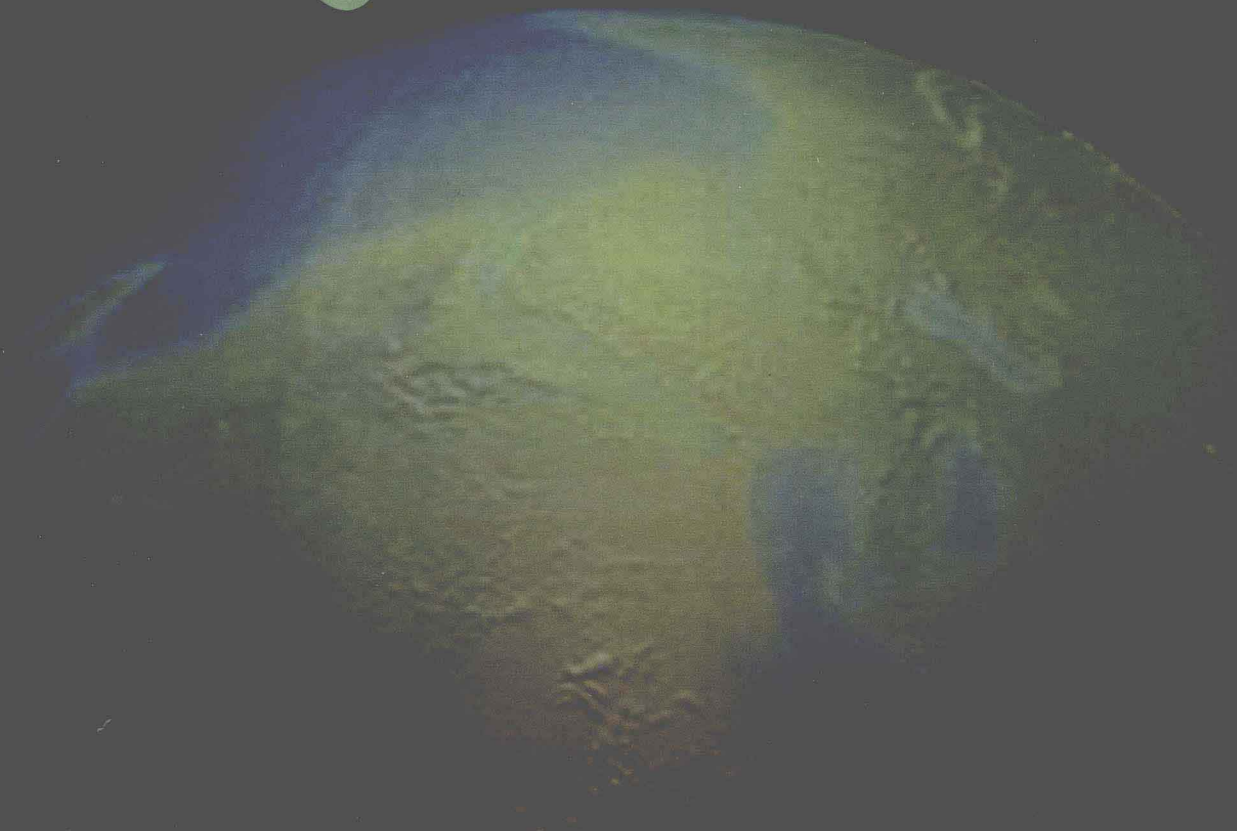


# *Earth Tales*

*New Perspectives on  
Geography and History*

*Henry T. Conserva*



**Earth Tales**  
New Perspectives On  
Geography  
And  
History

**By**

**Henry T. Conserva**

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## INTRODUCTION

For many years I was a teacher of both geography and history in public secondary schools. During that time I never ceased to be amazed at how many of my students asked thought provoking questions. Young people seem to have a knack for asking questions that stump many adults. On many occasions I have had to spend days wrestling with questions that boggled my mind such as “Why are men and women so different?” “Why are there plants and animals?”, “Why are there predators that must kill to survive?”. Questions can excite the mind and stimulate research.

One question that made me think overtime was advanced recently-“Which came first, geography or history?” What a puzzle! Geography deals with space and history deals with time. If space was first, geography would be the answer. If time was first, history would be the answer. Perhaps space and time began simultaneously. I became strongly aware that geography and history are inseparable as illustrated in Earth Tales.

Good questions are more important in education than answers, in my opinion. Educators should try to encourage their students to ask questions and I kept this idea in mind in the writing of this book.

I chose to write Earth Tales because of my past experiences as a student and later a teacher in public schools. In world history classes in high school I was struck by how little of the world was covered in the textbooks. Europe was made the center from which all things flowed to the rest of the world. While attending sessions in global education I was influenced by many leaders in this field who worked to make global education a focus for students in social studies. In Earth Tales I tried to distribute the stories widely to reinforce a global outlook.

Earth Tales is a collection of short stories. I chose the short story format because of my experiences with students while we studied the Holocaust. I became aware of how much students were moved by the story of Anne Frank as opposed to a recitation of factual data about millions of victims of the Nazi slaughter. The tragic story of a young girl stayed with the students and motivated them to want to learn more about the persecution of the Jews. I resolved to use stories as much as I could to hold and maintain student interest in social studies.

This book presents selected stories of the relationship between space (geography) and time (history) in human affairs. The stories represent an infinitely small sampling of the myriad interrelationships of space and time.

Geography is the scientific study of the location of people and their activities on the earth. It is a broad subject being both a physical and social science. Geographers study the distribution of 1) earth’s physical features, 2) human groups, and 3) animal, vegetable and mineral resources on the surface of the planet.

In this work I stress geography as a most important determinate of the course human history has taken, but certainly not the only determinate. People can challenge and overcome many geographical limitations and problems. For example, Japan’s relative scarcity of natural resources has not prevented her from joining the ranks of the world’s most industrialized nations.

History is the record of past events in time. Historians increasingly try to explain why things happened in the past and they try to show the relevance of this information to our lives in the present and future. It’s true to say that history is subjective. What is written about the past often depends on the racial, ethnic, gender, social status, philosophical or religious orientation of the historian. Current thoughts and attitudes are often reflected in the historian’s works.

Very few events have been recorded in relation to the number unrecorded. Given incomplete and fragmentary data, many historians are constantly striving to present the most accurate picture of the past that they can. Ideally, geographers and historians should combine their efforts to understand what people have done, do and might do in the world.

It’s helpful to look at how geography and history have shaped personal lives. Where you were born is a space factor. Imagine your birth into a poor family living on the streets of an urban slum somewhere in the underdeveloped world. Then picture your birth into an affluent family living in an exclusive

neighborhood of a wealthy city. What a range of differences! Friendships, dating and mating partners, occupations, educational and recreational opportunities and so much else is often based on where you were born.

When you were born is a time factor. Think of having been born in any of the past centuries of human history. How different your life would have been. It's likely your life would have been shorter than it might be in present times. Most medical advances have been made in the 19<sup>th</sup> (late 19<sup>th</sup>) and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Life can be viewed as a game of chance with space and time determining our fortunes.

In the field of social studies, as it's commonly taught in many American schools, geography is where space is the focus and history is where time is the focus. This compartmentalization and segregation of academic disciplines might be a convenient way of presenting subject matter but I feel it is a flawed approach. Knowledge of where events occurred in the past cannot and should not be excluded when history is being taught. Americans have been charged with being geographically illiterate. The charge might equally be made that we are generally historically illiterate as well. This book tries to join the two subjects together by presenting a number of selected examples of the interaction of geography and history.

The selected stories in this book are organized into three sections. Section I contains three chapters dealing with the influence of physical geography on history and, in some cases, the influence of history on physical geography. There are chapters in this section covering landforms, water forms and climate.

Section 2 contains three chapters examining the role of resources in both geography and history. The chapters provide selected examples of animal, vegetable and mineral influences on geography and history.

The third and last section of the book is made up of four chapters. These chapters offer selected examples of the organization of political, economic, cultural, scientific, inventive and technological activities of peoples throughout the world. These activities are viewed in light of their space and time interactions.

Reference works for the stories are provided so that readers can pursue a given subject in greater depth.

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**Chapter 1**  
**THE INFLUENCE OF LAND FORMS ON  
HISTORY**

*Henry T. Conserva*



## 1.1 **“YOU NEED A BIG COUNTRY TO HAVE A LONG MARCH”**

The Chinese Communists and the Chinese Nationalists were vying for the control of China. It was fortunate that the Chinese Communists lived in a nation with a large surface area (3,678,470 square miles), and unfortunate for the Chinese Nationalists. The Chinese Nationalists were out to destroy their Communist opponents and their only escape was to march.

The Chinese Communists were the only credible threat to the Nationalist control of China. When the Nationalists, under Chiang Kai-shek, formulated an annihilation policy against the Communists there was only one thing for the communists to do. To survive, they had to leave Kiangsi province, China, and march 6,000 miles to a refuge in Shansi Province, China.

This 6,000-mile trek, known, as the Long March, began in 1934 and ended in 1935. Along the way the communists were harassed by nationalist forces and had to live off the land as they went, begging, borrowing and stealing. The terrain was difficult and the battles numerous. The casualty rate was high; over 100,000 started out and only between 10,000 to 15,000 survived. These survivors later went on to establish communist rule over China.

In a nation with a smaller land area the communists might have been eliminated. China's large size was an ally to those who currently control the main land of China.

Reference: Snow, Edgar *Red Star Over China* Grove Press, New York, 1961