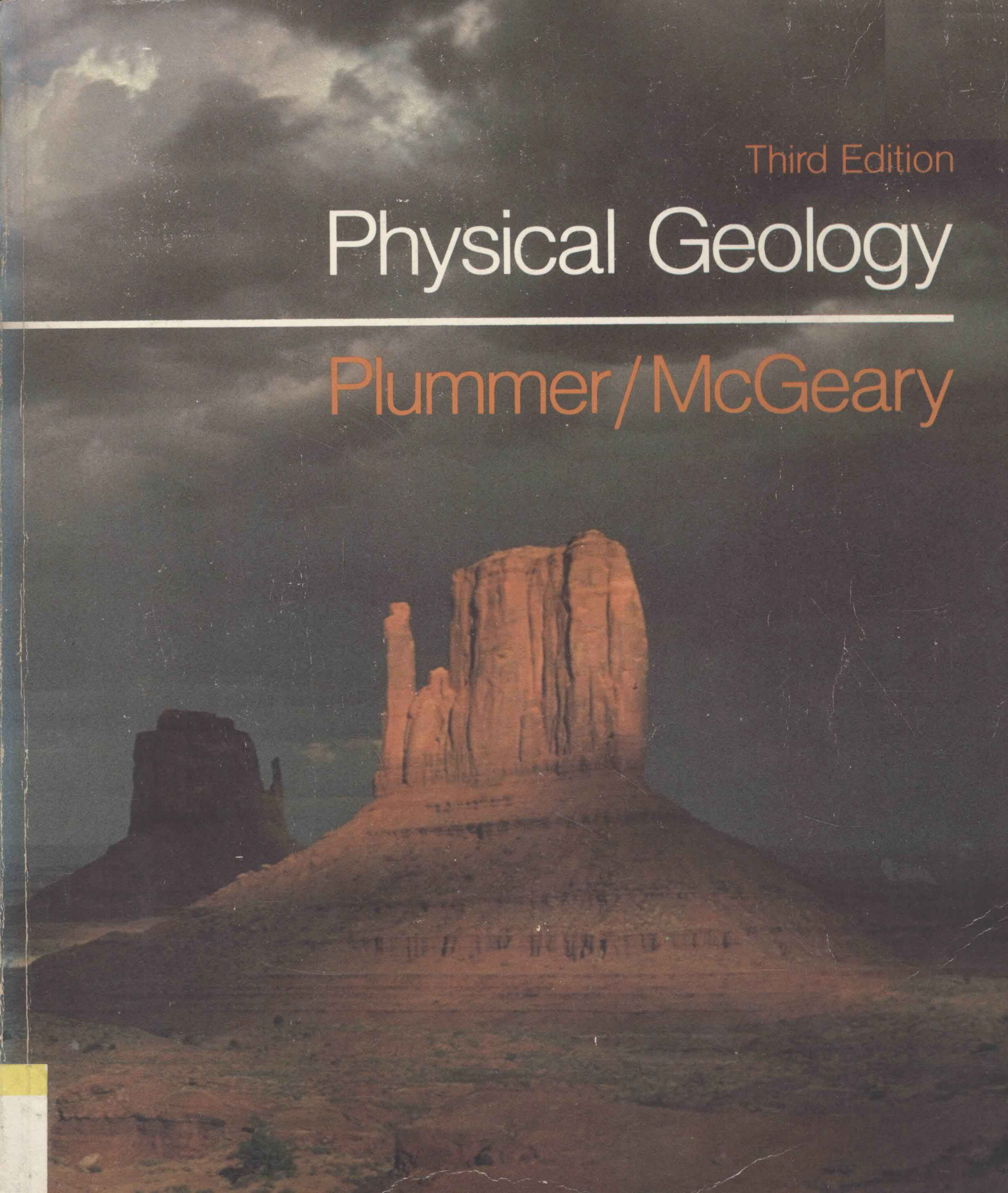


Third Edition

# Physical Geology

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Plummer/McGeary



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Third Edition

# Physical Geology

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Charles C.

David

Plummer/McGeary

California State University, Sacramento

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# Physical Geology

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# Preface

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This third edition of *Physical Geology* is a straight-forward, easy-to-read introduction to geology for both geology majors and nonmajors. The organization of the book is traditional and matches the organization of most lab manuals. Each chapter has been written to be as self-contained as possible so that the instructor can reorganize the chapter sequence if desired.

Most of the changes in this edition are in the illustrations. The artwork and labels for many of the line drawings have been improved and several new line drawings have been added. These changes should be particularly noticeable in the chapters on geologic time, rivers, beaches, and mountains and continents. We have changed many photographs and added several new ones. The introductory chapters on rocks contain many new photos of hand specimens. New photos of landscape features (including several photos by John S. Shelton) improve many chapters, especially those on geologic time, mass wasting, rivers, glaciers, deserts, and beaches.

We have rewritten several sections of the book to make them more readable and have reduced the number of boldface “terms to remember.”

We have changed the order of three chapters near the end of the book at the request of many of you who use the book. Chapter 18 now describes sea-floor features and sedimentary processes but does not discuss sea-floor spreading. Chapter 19 shows how plate tectonics was derived from the concepts of continental drift and sea-floor spreading. It discusses the *origin* of those sea-floor features *described* in the previous chapter. Chapter 20 describes mountains and continental crust as a result of plate tectonics, including the accretion of “suspect terranes.” Also in this chapter is a new box on the thin-skinned tectonics of the southern Appalachians, as interpreted from

recent COCORP profiles. We (and several adopters) feel that this new organization presents relatively difficult material in a new, logical sequence.

The boxes within the text are of two types: (1) topics of special human or environmental concern, such as the dangers of living in river cities or the amount of fresh water stored in glacial ice; and (2) topics slightly more difficult than the rest of the text, such as the electrostatic charge on clay minerals. The boxed material, while informative and interesting, should be considered supplemental to the text.

*Physical Geology* is accompanied by an instructor’s manual, student study guide, and a laboratory manual. The Instructor’s Manual, written by the authors of the text, gives specific learning objectives for the twenty-two chapters in the text as well as numerous suggestions for demonstrations, discussions, lab experiments, and exam questions. The manual also suggests course outlines and a lab schedule and provides lists of suppliers of films, slides, rocks and minerals, and information for the course as a whole.

The Student Study Guide provides a solid foundation for a beginning geology student. Written by Esther Tuttle, a science editor, and Sherwood D. Tuttle, professor of geology at the University of Iowa, the guide stresses the fundamentals of geology, the vocabulary of the science, and the techniques for successful learning in the field of geology.

The Laboratory Manual, by James Zumberge and Robert Rutford, has been especially designed to be used with *Physical Geology*. It presents a good selection of experiments for use in the laboratory.

We have tried to write a book that will be useful to both students and instructors. We would be grateful for any comments by users, especially regarding mistakes within the text or sources of good geological photographs.

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### **Acknowledgments**

Susan Clark Slaymaker, of the Geology Department of California State University, Sacramento, wrote chapter 22, "Astrogeology," in *Physical Geology*. We are grateful for her assistance.

The successful completion of *Physical Geology* is largely due to the efforts of our reviewers, who gave us invaluable advice and guidance throughout the writing and revision of the manuscript. We extend our special thanks and appreciation to those who reviewed all or part of the manuscript, including Richard Smosna, West Virginia University; Greg S. Conrad, Sam Houston State University; Stephen H. Watts, Sir Sandford Fleming College; Barry Haskell, Los Angeles Pierce College; and Charles R. Singler, Youngstown State University.

# Contents

Boxes xi  
Preface xiii

## Introduction to Physical Geology 1

Purpose 1  
The Earth: A Giant Machine 2  
    *Understanding Our Surroundings/Supplying Things  
    We Need/Protecting the Environment/Avoiding  
    Geologic Hazards*  
An Overview of Physical Geology 9  
    *Internal Processes: How the Earth's Internal Heat  
    Engine Works/The Earth's Interior/The Theory of  
    Plate Tectonics/Surficial Processes: The Earth's  
    External Heat Engine and the Hydrologic Cycle/The  
    Rock Cycle and Equilibrium*  
Geologic Time 18  
    *Uniformitarianism*  
Summary 19  
Terms to Remember 20  
Questions for Review 20  
Questions for Thought 20  
Supplementary Readings 20

## Atoms, Elements, and Minerals 21

Purpose 21  
Atoms and Elements 22  
    *Chemical Activity/Ions/Bonding*  
Chemical Composition of the Earth's Crust 25  
    *The Silica Tetrahedron*

Minerals 30  
    *Crystalline Solids/Natural and Inorganic Substances/  
    Definite Chemical Composition/Physical Properties/  
    The Important Minerals*  
The Physical Properties of Minerals 32  
    *Color/Streak/Luster/Hardness*  
    *External Crystal Form/Cleavage/Fracture/Specific  
    Gravity/Other Properties/Simple Chemical Tests*  
Summary 41  
Terms to Remember 41  
Questions for Review 41  
Questions for Thought 42  
Supplementary Readings 42

## Volcanism and Extrusive Rocks 43

Purpose 43  
Volcanism 48  
    *Effects on Humans/Eruptive Violence and Physical  
    Characteristics of Lava/Scientific Investigation of  
    Volcanism/Chemistry of Volcanic Rocks/Viscosity of  
    Lava*  
Types of Volcanoes 52  
    *Shield Volcanoes/Cinder Cones/Composite  
    Volcanoes/Volcanic Domes*  
Lava Floods 59  
Submarine Eruptions 60  
    *Pillow Basalts*  
Identification of Extrusive Rocks 63  
    *Composition/Textures*  
The Source of Lava 65  
    *Plate Tectonics and the Origin of Basalt/Plate  
    Tectonics and the Origin of Andesite*  
Summary 69  
Terms to Remember 70

Questions for Review 70  
Questions for Thought 70  
Supplementary Readings 70

## **Intrusive Activity and the Origin of Igneous Rocks 71**

Purpose 71  
Intrusive Bodies 73  
    *Shallow Intrusive Structures/Intrusions That  
    Crystallize at Depth*  
Identification of Intrusive Igneous Rocks 77  
    *Ultramafic Rocks/Varieties of Granite*  
Abundance and Distribution of Plutonic Rocks 80  
How Magma Forms 81  
    *Sources of Heat for Melting/Factors That Control  
    Melting Temperatures*  
Theories About the Origin of Magmas 82  
    *Differentiation and Bowen's Reaction Theory/  
    Assimilation/Mixing of Magmas/Partial Melting*  
Explaining Igneous Activity by Plate Tectonics 87  
    *The Origin of Basalt and Ultramafic Rocks/The Origin  
    of Granite and Andesite*  
Summary 89  
Terms to Remember 90  
Questions for Review 90  
Questions for Thought 90  
Supplementary Readings 90

## **Weathering and Soil 91**

Purpose 91  
How Weathering Alters Rocks 92  
    *Effects of Weathering*  
Mechanical Weathering 95  
    *Frost Action/Abrasion/Pressure Release*  
Chemical Weathering 98  
    *Role of Oxygen/Role of Acid/Solution Weathering/  
    Chemical Weathering of Feldspar/Chemical  
    Weathering of Other Minerals*  
Soil 101  
    *Soil Horizons/Residual and Transported Soils/Soils,  
    Parent Rock, and Time/Soils and Climate*  
Summary 105  
Terms to Remember 105  
Questions for Review 105  
Questions for Thought 106  
Supplementary Readings 106

## **Sediments and Sedimentary Rocks 107**

Purpose 107  
Some Lengthy Definitions 108  
    *Sediment/Lithification/Sedimentary Rock*  
Sediment 108  
    *Transportation/Deposition*  
Types of Sedimentary Rocks 110  
    *Clastic Sedimentary Rocks/Chemical and Organic  
    Sedimentary Rocks*  
Sedimentary Structures 117  
Interpretation of Sedimentary Rocks 120  
    *Source Area/Paleogeography/Environment of  
    Deposition*  
Sedimentary Facies 125  
Summary 126  
Terms to Remember 127  
Questions for Review 127  
Questions for Thought 127  
Supplementary Readings 127

## **Metamorphism, Metamorphic Rocks, and Hydrothermal Rocks 129**

Purpose 129  
Factors Controlling the Characteristics of Metamorphic  
Rocks 131  
    *Composition of the Parent Rock/Temperature/  
    Pressure/Foliation/Effects of Fluids/Time*  
Classification of Metamorphic Rocks 135  
Types of Metamorphism 136  
    *Contact (Thermal) Metamorphism/Regional  
    (Dynamothermal) Metamorphism/Intensity of  
    Metamorphism*  
Plate Tectonics and Metamorphism 140  
Hydrothermal Processes 141  
    *Metasomatism/Hydrothermal Rocks/Sources of  
    Water*  
Summary 143  
Terms to Remember 145  
Questions for Review 145  
Questions for Thought 145  
Supplementary Readings 146

## Time and Geology 147

---

- Purpose 147
- The Key to the Past 148
- Relative Time 149
  - Principles Used to Determine Relative Age/Correlation/The Standard Geologic Time Scale*
- Absolute Age 158
  - Radioactive Dating*
- Combining Relative and Absolute Ages 161
- Summary 163
- Terms to Remember 164
- Questions for Review 164
- Questions for Thought 164
- Supplementary Readings 164

## Mass Wasting 165

---

- Purpose 165
- Classification of Mass Wasting 167
  - Rate of Movement/Type of Material/Type of Movement*
- Controlling Factors in Mass Wasting 168
  - Water*
- Common Types of Mass Wasting 171
  - Creep/Earthflow/Mudflow/Rockfall/Rockslide/Debris Slides, Falls, and Avalanches*
- Summary 182
- Terms to Remember 182
- Questions for Review 182
- Questions for Thought 182
- Supplementary Readings 182

## Streams, Stream Action, and Landscape Development 183

---

- Purpose 183
- Channel Flow and Sheet Flow 184
- Drainage Basins 185
- Drainage Patterns 187
- Longitudinal Profile 187
- Factors Affecting Stream Erosion and Deposition 187
  - Velocity/Gradient/Channel Shape and Roughness/Discharge*

- Stream Erosion 191
- Stream Transportation of Sediment 192
- Stream Deposition 193
  - Bars/Braided Streams/Meandering Streams and Point Bars/Meandering Versus Braiding/Flood Plains/Deltas/Alluvial Fans*
- Valley Development 202
  - Downcutting and Base Level/The Concept of a Graded Stream/Lateral Erosion/Headward Erosion*
- Slope Development and Regional Erosion 205
- Two Stream Features That Are Difficult to Interpret 209
  - Stream Terraces/Incised Meanders*
- Summary 211
- Terms to Remember 212
- Questions for Review 212
- Questions for Thought 212
- Supplementary Readings 212

## Ground Water 213

---

- Purpose 213
- The Hydrologic Cycle 214
- Porosity and Permeability 214
- The Water Table 214
- The Movement of Ground Water 215
- Springs and Rivers 216
- Aquifers 217
- Wells 218
  - Artesian Aquifers and Wells*
- Pollution of Ground Water 220
- Balancing Withdrawal and Recharge 221
- Effects of Ground-Water Action 222
  - Caves, Sinkholes, and Karst Topography/Other Effects*
- Hot Water Underground 224
  - Geothermal Energy*
- Summary 229
- Terms to Remember 229
- Questions for Review 229
- Question for Thought 230
- Supplementary Readings 230

## Glaciers and Glaciation 231

---

- Purpose 231
- The Theory of Glacial Ages 232
- Glaciers—Where They Are, How They Form and Move 233



<i>Distribution of Glaciers/Types of Glaciers/Formation and Growth of Glaciers/Movement of Valley Glaciers/Movement of Ice Sheets</i>	
Glacial Erosion	238
<i>Erosional Landscapes Associated with Alpine Glaciation/Erosional Landscapes Associated with Continental Glaciation</i>	
Glacial Deposition	244
<i>Moraines/Outwash/Glacial Lakes and Varves</i>	
Effects of Past Glaciation	248
<i>The Glacial Ages/Direct Effects of Past Glaciation in North America/Indirect Effects of Past Glaciation/Evidence for Older Glaciation</i>	
Summary	254
Terms to Remember	255
Questions for Review	255
Questions for Thought	256
Supplementary Readings	256

## Deserts and Wind Action 257

Purpose	257
Distribution of Deserts	258
Some Characteristics of Deserts	258
Desert Features in the Southwestern United States	261
Wind Action	265
<i>Wind Erosion and Transportation/Wind Deposition</i>	
Summary	270
Terms to Remember	272
Questions for Review	272
Questions for Thought	272
Supplementary Readings	272

## Waves, Beaches, and Coasts 273

Purpose	273
Water Waves	274
<i>Surf</i>	
Nearshore Circulation	275
<i>Wave Refraction/Longshore Currents</i>	
Beaches	277
Longshore Drift of Sediment	278
<i>Human Interference with Sand Drift/Sources of Sand on Beaches</i>	
Coasts and Coastal Features	281
<i>Classification of Coasts/Coastal Landforms</i>	

Summary	285
Terms to Remember	285
Questions for Review	285
Questions for Thought	285
Supplementary Readings	286

## Geologic Structures 287

Purpose	287
Tectonic Forces at Work	288
<i>Stress and Strain/Stress and Strain of Bed Rock</i>	
Structures as a Record of the Geologic Past	290
<i>Implications of Horizontal and Inclined Layers of Rock/Geologic Maps and Field Methods</i>	
Folds	293
<i>Geometry of Folds/Interpreting Folds</i>	
Fractures in Rock	299
<i>Joints/Faults</i>	
Unconformities	307
<i>Disconformities/Angular Unconformities/Nonconformities</i>	
Summary	308
Terms to Remember	310
Questions for Review	310
Questions for Thought	310
Supplementary Readings	310

## Earthquakes 311

Purpose	311
Causes of Earthquakes	312
Seismic Waves	313
Locating and Measuring Earthquakes	313
<i>Seismographs and Seismograms/Determining the Location of an Earthquake/Earthquake Strength/Earthquakes in the United States</i>	
Effects of Earthquakes	321
<i>Tsunamis</i>	
Distribution of Earthquakes	324
First-Motion Studies of Earthquakes	326
Earthquakes and Plate Tectonics	327
<i>Earthquakes at Plate Boundaries/Subduction Angle</i>	
Earthquake Prediction	331
Earthquake Control	332
Summary	333
Terms to Remember	334
Questions for Review	334
Questions for Thought	334
Supplementary Readings	334

## The Earth's Interior 335

---

- Purpose 335
- Evidence from Seismic Waves 336
- The Earth's Internal Layers 337
  - The Earth's Crust/The Mantle/The Core*
- Isostasy 341
- Gravity Measurements 344
- The Earth's Magnetic Field 345
  - Magnetic Reversals/Magnetic Anomalies*
- Heat Within the Earth 348
  - Geothermal Gradient/Heat Flow*
- Summary 350
- Terms to Remember 350
- Questions for Review 351
- Questions for Thought 351
- Supplementary Readings 351

## The Sea Floor 353

---

- Purpose 353
- Methods of Studying the Sea Floor 354
- Features of the Sea Floor 357
- Continental Shelves and Continental Slopes 357
- Submarine Canyons 358
  - Turbidity Currents*
- Passive Continental Margins 360
  - The Continental Rise/Abyssal Plains*
- Active Continental Margins 361
  - Oceanic Trenches*
- The Mid-Oceanic Ridge 362
  - Geologic Activity on the Ridge*
- Fracture Zones 363
- Seamounts, Guyots, and Aseismic Ridges 364
- Sediments of the Sea Floor 364
- Oceanic Crust and Ophiolites 366
- The Age of the Sea Floor 366
- Summary 368
- Terms to Remember 368
- Questions for Review 368
- Questions for Thought 369
- Supplementary Readings 369

## Plate Tectonics 371

---

- Purpose 371
- The Early Case for Continental Drift 372

### *The Ideas of Alfred Wegener/Skepticism about Continental Drift*

- Paleomagnetism and the Revival of Continental Drift 376
  - Additional Evidence for Continental Drift/History of Continental Positions*
- Sea-Floor Spreading 379
  - The Driving Force/Explanations*
- Plates and Plate Motion 381
- How Do We Know That Plates Move? 382
  - Marine Magnetic Anomalies/Another Test: Fracture Zones and Transform Faults*
- Diverging Plate Boundaries 386
  - Oceanic Divergence/Continental Divergence*
- Converging Plate Boundaries 391
  - Ocean-Ocean Convergence/Ocean-Continent Convergence/Continent-Continent Convergence*
- Transform Boundaries 398
- Plate Size 398
- The Attractiveness of Plate Tectonics 400
- What Causes Plate Motions? 401
  - Mantle Convection/Plumes and Hot Spots*
- A Cautionary Note 405
- Summary 406
- Terms to Remember 407
- Questions for Review 407
- Question for Thought 408
- Supplementary Readings 408

## Mountain Belts and the Continental Crust 409

---

- Purpose 409
- Characteristics of Major Mountain Belts 411
  - Size and Alignment/Ages of Mountain Belts and Continents/Thickness of Rock Layers/Patterns of Folding and Faulting/Metamorphism and Plutonism/Episode of Normal Faulting/Thickness and Density of Rocks/Features of Active Mountain Ranges*
- The Evolution of a Mountain Belt 417
  - The Accretion Stage/The Orogenic Stage/Uplift and Block-faulting Stage*
- The Growth of Continents 426
- Summary 427
- Terms to Remember 429
- Questions for Review 429
- Questions for Thought 429
- Supplementary Readings 429

## Geologic Resources 431

21

- Purpose 431
- Types of Resources 432
- Energy Use 433
- Petroleum and Natural Gas 433
  - The Origin of Oil and Gas/The Occurrence of Oil and Gas/Recovering the Oil/How Much Oil Do We Have Left?*
- Heavy Crude and Tar Sands 439
- Oil Shale 439
- Coal 440
  - Origin of Coal/Occurrence of Coal/Environmental Effects/Reserves and Resources*
- Uranium 443
- Metals and Ores 444
- Origin of Metallic Ore Deposits 444
  - Ores Associated with Igneous Rocks/Ores Formed by Surface Processes*
- Metal Ores and Plate Tectonics 447
- Mining 450
  - Environmental Effects*
- Some Important Metals 451
  - Iron/Copper/Aluminum/Lead/Zinc/Silver/Gold/Other Metals*
- Nonmetallic Resources 453
  - Construction Materials/Fertilizers and Evaporites/Other Nonmetallics*
- Substitutes, Recycling, and Conservation 455
- Some Future Trends 455
- Summary 455
- Terms to Remember 456
- Questions for Review 456
- Question for Thought 456
- Supplementary Readings 456

## Astrogeology 457

22

- Purpose 457
- The Sun 458
  - The Sun's Structure*
- The Planets 459
- The Asteroids 459
- Comets 459
- Satellites and Rings 460
- Meteors and Meteorites 460
  - Effects of Impact/Classification*
- The Moon 461
  - Surface Features/Lunar Minerals/Lunar Rocks/The Moon's Interior*

- Mercury 464
- Venus 465
  - Surface Features/The Atmosphere of Venus/Venusian Rocks*
- Mars 466
  - Surface Features/The Martian Atmosphere and Wind Activity/Polar Regions/Martian Rocks/The Martian Interior/Life on Mars?/Mars's Moons*
- The Jovian Planets 470
- The Satellites of Jupiter and Saturn 471
- The Origin of the Solar System 473
- A Short History of the Terrestrial Planets 473
- Summary 474
- Terms to Remember 475
- Questions for Review 475
- Questions for Thought 475
- Supplementary Readings 475
  
- Appendix A Identification of Minerals 477
- Appendix B Identification of Rocks 481
- Appendix C The Elements Most Significant to Geology 486
- Appendix D Periodic Table of Elements 488
- Appendix E Selected Conversion Factors 489
- Appendix F Rock Symbols 490
- Glossary 491
- Index 509

# Boxes

---

**Box 1.1** The Alaska Pipeline—Threat to the Environment or Bulwark of the American Economy? 8

**Box 1.2** Plate Tectonics and the Scientific Method 15

**Box 2.1** Our Largest Nuclear Power Plant—The Sun 26

**Box 2.2** Diamonds—Expensive and Unscratchable 33

**Box 2.3** On Time with Quartz 40

**Box 3.1** Eruption of Mount St. Helens, 1980 44

**Box 3.2** An Icelandic Community Battles a Volcano—And Wins 61

**Box 4.1** Pegmatite—A Rock Made of Giant Crystals 79

**Box 4.2** Harnessing Magmatic Energy—A Solution to the Energy Crisis? 86

**Box 5.1** Hard Water and Soapsuds 100

**Box 5.2** Clay Minerals and Plant Growth 102

**Box 6.1** Pore Space, Water, and Oil 113

**Box 6.2** Sedimentary Rocks Worth Money 117

**Box 6.3** Naming of Rock Units 122

**Box 7.1** Failure of the St. Francis Dam—A Tragic Consequence of Geology Ignored 134

**Box 7.2** The United States' Largest Man-made Hole—The Bingham Canyon Copper Mine 144

**Box 8.1** Sedimentary Rock Layers That Transgress Time 156

**Box 8.2** The Longest Movie Never Shown—The Earth's Story 162

**Box 9.1** Disaster in the Andes 166

**Box 9.2** Preventing Downslope Movement of Soil 170

**Box 9.3** Los Angeles, A Mobile Society 175

**Box 9.4** Preventing Rockfalls and Rockslides on Highways 181

**Box 10.1** Preventing Sheet Erosion on Farms 186

**Box 10.2** River Cities 199

**Box 11.1** Prospecting for Ground Water 219

**Box 12.1** Glaciers as a Water Resource 233

**Box 12.2** To Mars on a Glacier 239

**Box 12.3** Causes of Glacial Ages 249

**Box 13.1** Desert Varnish 268

**Box 14.1** Rip Currents—A Common Cause of Drowning 276

**Box 15.1** Is There Oil Beneath My Property?—First Check the Geologic Structure 298

**Box 15.2** Faults and Nuclear Power Plants 301

**Box 15.3** California's Greatest Fault—The San Andreas 304

**Box 16.1** Earthquakes in the Eastern United States—Rare but Occasionally Strong 332

**Box 18.1** Vertical Exaggeration 357

**Box 18.2** Geologic Riches in the Sea 367

**Box 19.1** Backarc Spreading 399

**Box 19.2** Plate Tectonics and Sea Level 401

**Box 20.1** Ultramafic Rocks in Mountain Belts—From the Mantle to Talcum Powder 416

**Box 20.2** Geosynclines and Geoclines 420

**Box 20.3** Thin-skinned Tectonics 423

**Box 21.1** Salt Domes 435

**Box 21.2** Alternative Sources of Energy 443

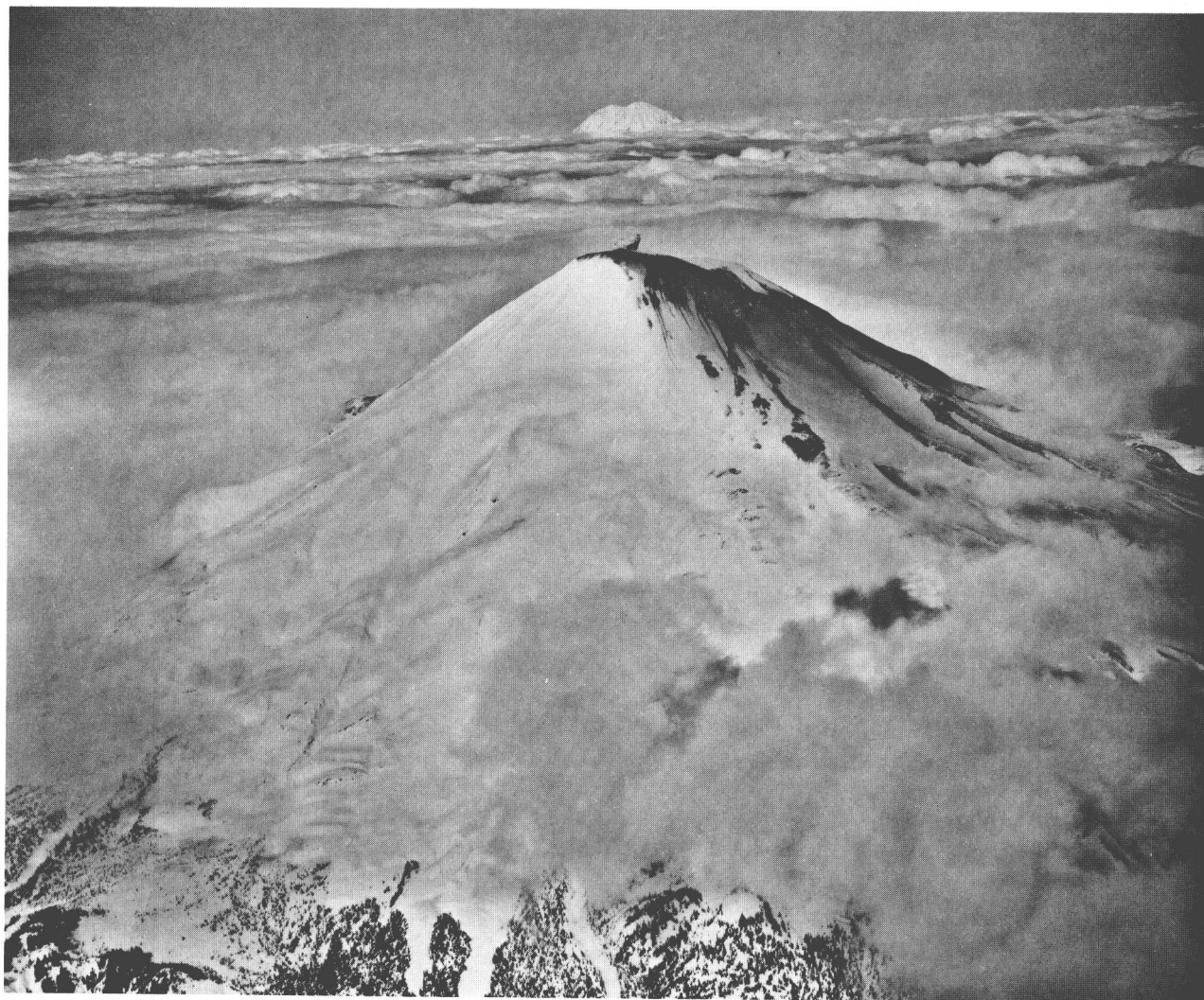
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# Introduction to Physical Geology

## Purpose

Geology uses the scientific method to explain natural aspects of the earth—for example, how mountains form and valleys develop, or why oil resources are concentrated in some rocks and not in others. This chapter briefly explains how and why the earth's surface, and its interior, are constantly changing. It relates this constant change to the major geological topics of the modern theory of plate tectonics, the rock cycle, and geologic time. These concepts form a framework for the rest of the book. Understanding them will aid you in studying the chapters that follow.





**Figure 1.1** Mount St. Helens before May 18, 1980. A minor eruption is taking place.  
Photo by U.S. Geological Survey.

## The Earth: A Giant Machine

In March 1980, after over a century of inactivity, Mount St. Helens in the state of Washington came to life. For six weeks the eruptions were relatively minor (figure 1.1). A series of steam explosions puffed out fragments of old rock. Then on May 18, 1980, the once beautifully symmetrical, snow-capped cone blew apart with a force equal to about 10 million tons of dynamite exploding—500 times the energy released by the first atomic bomb (figure 1.2).

As the north flank of the peak disintegrated, a huge avalanche composed of volcanic ash and searingly hot gases roared downward. This was followed by a tremendous lateral blast of steam and ash from the flank of the volcano, destroying about 600 square kilometers of forest. Great volumes of volcanic debris billowed into the atmosphere to be carried eastward by the prevailing winds (figure 1.3). During the next few days large parts of Montana, Idaho, and eastern Washington were blanketed by volcanic ash



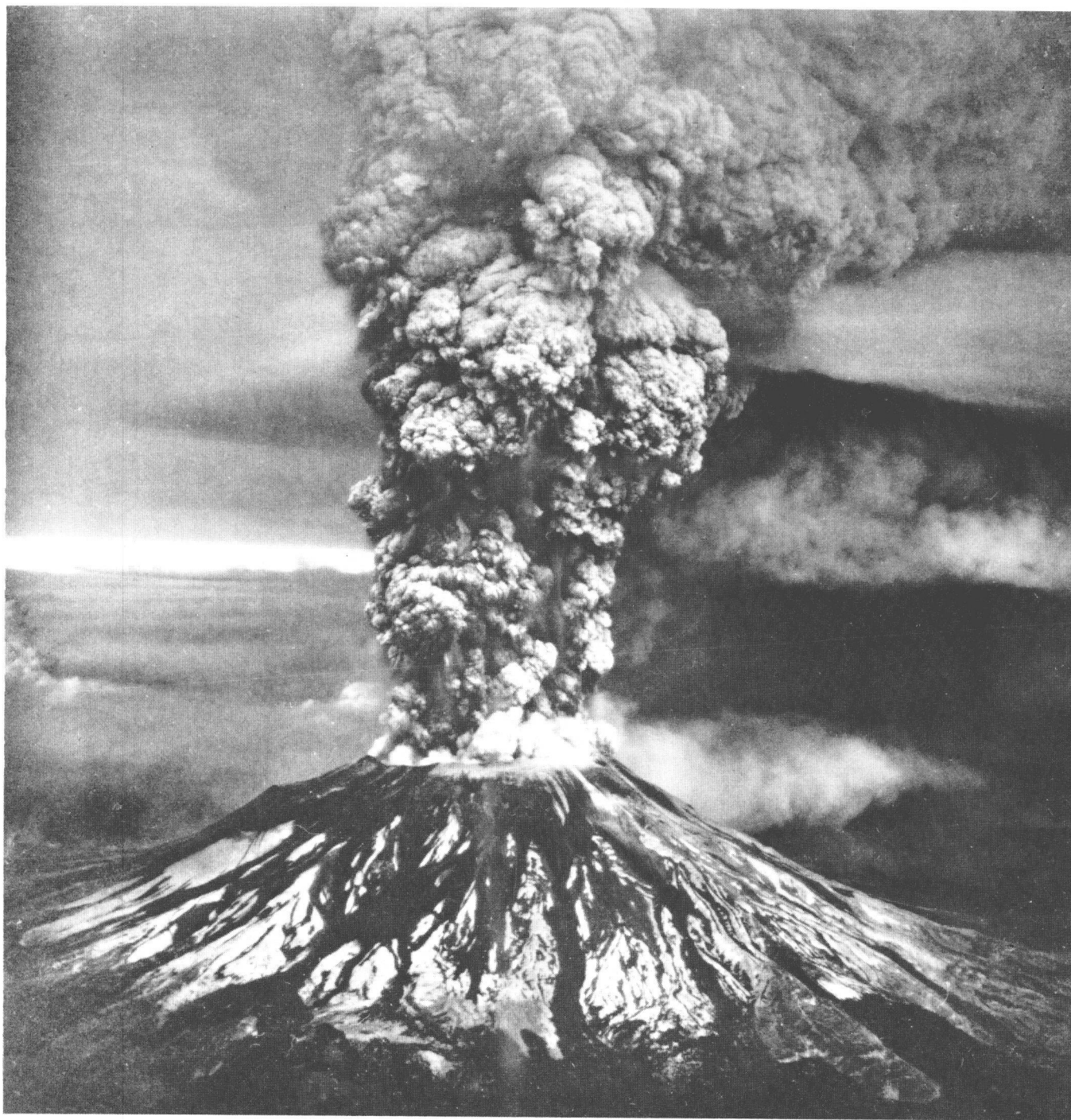
**Figure 1.2** Mount St. Helens, June 4, 1980. View of what once was the northern flank of the volcano.  
Photo by U.S. Geological Survey.

fallout. Volcanic dust in the very high atmosphere was carried completely around the world.

Heat from the eruption melted the snow and glacial ice on Mount St. Helens. Mudflows (slurries of volcanic debris and water) sped down stream channels (figure 1.4). A particularly large mudflow topped the banks of the Toutle River, destroying bridges and paralyzing traffic on major highways. Debris carried by the Toutle River was dumped into the Columbia River, blocking ship traffic between Portland, Oregon, and the Pacific Ocean.

The awesome energy released in this spectacle was a product of the earth's machinery, machinery driven by forces both within and on the earth. Mount St. Helens is only a small part of the constant, ordinarily slow, changing of the earth. Ocean basins open and close. Mountain ranges rise and are worn down to plains. Studying how the earth's machinery works can be as exciting as watching a great theatrical performance. Understanding the changes that take place in and on the earth, and the reasons for those changes, is the challenging objective of **geology**, the scientific study of the earth.





**Figure 1.3** Mount St. Helens, May 18, 1980.  
Photo by U.S. Geological Survey.