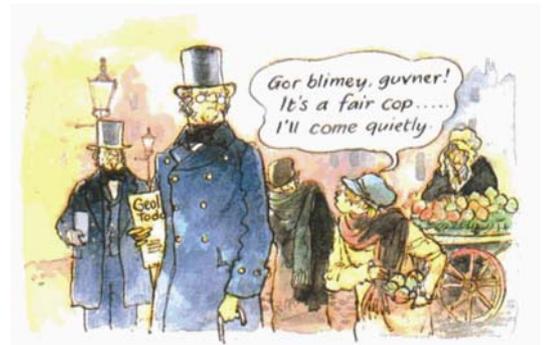


Voyages of Discovery – from Darwin to the Moon and beyond

Early Field Mapping

The geological surveying of the UK landmass has been fundamental to the activity of the Geological Survey since its foundation in 1835.

Up to 1845 when the British Geological Survey was a branch of the Ordnance Topographical Survey and the first field staff, in tight fitting brass-buttoned blue frock coats, (they looked rather like the police of the day) carried hammers, notebooks and the equipment needed by surveyors to map the bedrock of Britain. By this means the Ordnance maps were coloured to show the geology. The scale of the map was best suited to a Survey that was established to “explore the mineral wealth of the Kingdom” (especially the coalfields) and to demonstrate “the application of geology was useful to the purposes of life”.



Initially only bedrock geology was mapped, but by 1860 more attention was paid to the superficial deposits.

Questions were asked of the Director, Sir Henry De La Beche, on how long the mapping process would take, because it was assumed the whole process would be quickly completed. He was very adept at parrying such questions and he suggested that the geological mapping would be finished at the same time as the Ordnance Survey finished their map coverage. Later directors gave more precise estimates as progress fell further behind the forecast, especially during the interval between the world wars. During this time the geological surveyors were detailed to map British occurrences of raw minerals that were usually imported from abroad.



Even into the twentieth century regulations required that fieldwork should occupy nine hours per day, six days a week and field geologists were expected to live in the mapping area and no field allowances were paid. Geologists and their families rented accommodation in their districts and remained until told to move, when they were given one night's subsistence, a first class rail ticket and a luggage allowance.

The progress of a field surveyor was measured by the number of square miles mapped and the number of miles of boundary traced, but this could vary depending on the complexity of the terrain covered.

Up to 1853 the cost of geologically surveying the whole of the UK was estimated at £1.00 per square mile, the travel costs shared between rail fares, passage by ship, coach fares, horseback (there was a hay allowance) and the bicycle which was endorsed by an official mileage rate.

Image no P575728 Henry De La Beche. Cartoon by Robert Geary, FCSD formerly with the Geological Museum London 'Reproduced with the permission of the British Geological Survey ©NERC. All rights Reserved'



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