

**Geology and Health: closing the gap**  
 Skinner, H. Catherine W. and Berger, Antony R.  
 Oxford University Press 2003  
 ISBN 0195162048

This book introduces us to the rapidly expanding field of Medical Geology with a wide variety of examples where geology and health can be related and it illustrates the many areas of overlap between these disciplines. The volume grew out of a meeting held in Sweden in 2000 where scientists — medical, dental and veterinary and geological — discussed the relationships between human and animal health and rocks, soils and water. The book is by no means an all-embracing account with some important areas, for example

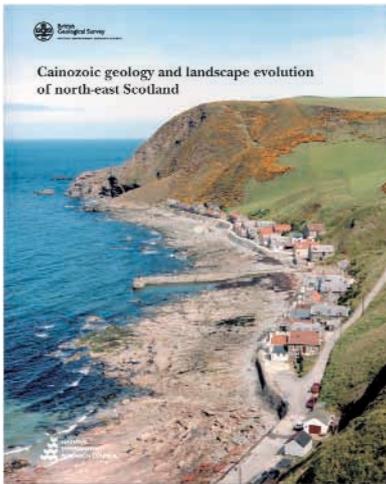
environment and the way it affects health, and finally a group of papers on how health hazards can or have been identified. It has always been a problem getting medical and geological scientists working together to identify and help remedy environmentally related health problems. This is a two way process and this work does help to close the gap — particularly from the earth science direction.

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radioactivity and agriculture, significantly absent. However, it does well to stimulate an interest with contributions from some of the principal players in this sphere of work. One such example is Robert Finkleman and colleagues' fascinating account of the health problems associated with coal combustion in China. There are many topics of wide general interest ranging from 'Human Geophagy' to 'Life in a Copper Province', 'Geochemistry and Vertebrate Bones' to 'Anthropogenic Distribution of Lead'. These all help to illuminate the diversity of potential problems and the possibilities for crossovers between geology and health, a stated intention by the authors, and one I believe they succeed well in doing. For anyone who has an interest in their own health, and shouldn't we all, this account gives some good general insights as to the harm we are doing to our environment and the associated dangers to our health.

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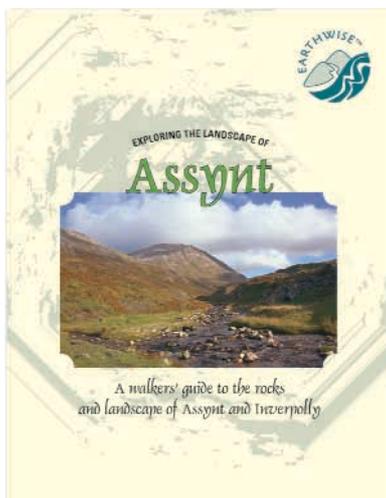
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Born in Scotland in 1792, Roderick Murchison was a man who left a remarkable scientific legacy. His interest in science developed into a lifelong passion for geology and formed the basis of his long career. His lifetime's work included the establishment of the Silurian system through extensive work in England and Wales, and the systems of the Devonian, Carboniferous and Permian. He was invited to produce a geological map of Russia by Czar Nicholas in 1840 and Murchison, suspecting that these systems extended throughout northern Europe, leapt at this opportunity to further his knowledge. His map and findings were published as *Geology of Russia in Europe and the Ural Mountains* in 1845. During his Russian field-seasons, he kept private journals where he recorded his thoughts and reflections — lively accounts of life in St Petersburg and Moscow, meetings with the Czar, logistical problems and hazards of travel through unmapped territory. He kept these journals with the idea of publishing them on his return as a nineteenth century popular science book — a 'geological travelogue' to relate his accounts of his travels and make his discoveries accessible to the public.

This was never done: *Murchison's Wanderings in Russia* is Murchison's unpublished travelogue.

This book is a gold-blocked hardback, containing a full-colour life-size reproduction of Murchison's original geological map of Russia and colour reproductions of his accompanying cross-sections. These maps and cross-sections are enclosed in a box bound into the book. The book is also lavishly illustrated with etchings of Murchison's field-sketches. ■

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