

Photo-feature



World of Geology

World of Geology is a book that was born from the back pages of *Geology Today*: a celebration of the richness of the diversity of geological sites worldwide, and a fitting tribute to the impact of a magazine that is marking its thirty-fifth year in 2019. This photo-feature revisits some of the spectacular images that have featured on its back pages over the years

Classic Images: classic locations

The back covers of *Geology Today* have become very popular with readers of the magazine. This is perhaps hardly surprising: as the spectacular photographs of various geological wonders, along with the bite-sized pieces of text, are where many readers first turn to after the magazine arrives in the post. However, today's consumers may be more likely to download the feature articles, and might miss out on this visual experience—so this photo-feature revisits some of

the best images, all of which will feature in the new book, due out in Summer 2019—*World of Geology*. This volume will feature images from more than a hundred of the back covers that have been gathered together in a single book that promises to be a visual delight of geology.

Back cover story

The story of the cover photos goes back to 2001, in the days when *Geology Today*, like so many other

Tony Waltham

Nottingham, UK
tony@geophotos.co.uk



Fig. 1. The Colorado River in the magnificent red-rock country of Utah's Canyonlands, seen from the top of **Dead Horse Point**. Acclaimed as one of the finest views anywhere, this was the first to be featured on the back cover of *Geology Today*, in January 2001.



publications at that time, was printed in black-and-white—and the only flash of colour was on the front cover. But that year saw the launch of a new format for the magazine. Up until this point, the front cover was the only part of the publication that carried any semblance of colour—and the back cover had been little other than a vehicle for advertisements drawing attention to various other publications. But as adding colour to the back cover would add no cost, and because the paper was already going through the full-

Fig. 2. The classic view along the **Grjótagjá fissure**, near the lake if Myvatn in northeastern Iceland. This site is famed as one of the world's most accessible and most obvious divergent plate boundaries, though the open fissure is actually only one of many within a wide zone of fissures and rifts. It was however, an easy choice for the cover of *World of Geology*.



Fig. 3. A collection of iron meteorites welded onto steel columns to form 'street art' in a shopping mall in **Windhoek, Namibia**. This is one of my favourites among sites photographed for *Geology Today*, because it is so under-publicized and so unexpected in its setting, yet constitutes truly spectacular geology.

colour printer, the then editor Peter Smith took on the idea of using the back cover to produce a colour photograph of some site or feature of geological interest, along with a short explanatory text. And the rest is history.

The original concept was that pictures and words would be sent in by readers, so the editor asked me to

produce the six items for the first year, just to launch the concept of the back cover presentations. However, as the few offerings that came in were not really up to print quality, I continued to provide the covers. Then, as years went by, the back cover became a bit of an institution, and the editor and his successor took to regarding it as my domain. The pattern was set.



Fig. 4. It could not make it onto the *Geology Today* back cover, nor into the new book, but the **Hoba meteorite** continues the amazing story of Namibian meteorites. Weighing around 65 tonnes, it is close to the theoretical maximum size for a meteorite that can land on the Earth's surface without disintegrating within its own impact crater.

I am still supplying the photos on a regular basis, and have promised more for a few years to come. Even since *Geology Today* took to colour on all pages, the back cover seems to have remained a popular feature.

World of Geology

Compiling the back covers into a book was an idea that has now come to fruition in *World of Geology*. This book is essentially the back covers, more than a hundred of them, though in a modified format with each large photograph alongside a short text on the opposite page within a double-page spread. Many of the photographs have been on the *Geology Today* covers, though some are variations on the themes, some are new, a few were on the front of the magazine, and some may appear in the future. All the texts from the past covers have been revised and up-dated, and the new ones have been prepared in matching style.

The book's sub-title of *Travels to Rocky Places* is really very descriptive of the contents, which are the product of some forty years of travelling to many parts of the world, always armed with a camera. The resultant extensive collection of photographs

has been cherry-picked for this book. Many of the photos are of geological subjects, and many more reflect a background story that is geological. Some are well-known classics of geology, but others are rarely visited even though they are truly spectacular. Then there are yet more that cover a huge variety of what could be called travel subjects, and include many of the world's classic sites and sights.

Seen in its entirety, the book has evolved into a visual insight to the world of geology, and has become much more than just the back covers of *Geology Today*. It has grown into a world-wide overview of just a fraction of the magnificent sights, both natural and influenced by mankind, that make the geological world so totally fascinating and frequently so beautiful. This collection of photographs cannot cover the whole world, because they are just from the travels of one person, and also because it would take a thousand photographs to cover the fabulous variety of spectacular geological features. Instead, they offer just a taste of the visual delights within the world of geology.

Perhaps the whole book is best viewed as a glorious journey of discovery. I hope it can provide some joy for armchair travellers, and perhaps some inspiration for active seekers of new destinations.



Fig. 5. Gasterntal, in Switzerland, is geologically famous because it was the location of the Lötschberg tunnel disaster in 1908, when the tunnelling team broke through into unexpectedly deep alluvial sediments. The photograph was on a front cover of *Geology Today*, when the tunnel story was a full-length feature within the issue's pages, and also appears in the book with a summary text.

Fig. 6. Some sites do not lend themselves to the square format of the *Geology Today* back covers, even though they would warrant a place in any pictorial record of the geological world. **Mexico's Copper Canyon,** cut into the ignimbrites of the world's greatest silicic volcanic provinces, is just one such visually spectacular site.





Fig. 7 (above). One of the world's best-known geological panoramas is provided by the incised meanders known as the **Goosenecks of the San Juan River** in southern Utah. A wonderful view, but not one for a square format.



Fig. 8 (above). In 2018, my wife and I went to Mount Paektu in North Korea, to take a photograph of its spectacular and beautiful caldera lake, but it was totally lost in cloud (with no chance of a repeat visit within the politically constrained schedule). So the rather lovely **Quilotoa caldera lake** in Ecuador became the alternative in this view.

Fig. 9 (below). Geometry created by geology, with beach deposition forming a perfect arc where waves radiate from a narrow opening, **Trabane Bay**, in Ireland's Donegal, provides yet another aspect of the world of geology.





Fig. 10. My long-suffering wife appears on many of the photographs, but of course purely for the purpose of showing scale. The limestone cliffs of the **Aran Islands**, off Ireland's west coast, just had to have a scale figure at the obvious point.

Acknowledgments

This introduction was prepared at the request of the editor of *Geology Today*, but the book will be critically reviewed in a future issue.

World of Geology will have a cover price of £18.99. Whittles has a special offer for *Geology Today* readers, of £16.99 (plus p&p). Email sue@whittlespublishing.com or telephone 01593 731 333, and quote GTWPGeology. Available only until the end of July.