

MAPPING ROCK OUTCROPS FROM LANDSAT DIGITAL DATA

A Thesis

Submitted to

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

The University of Manitoba

In partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Pakiraiah Chagarlamudi

July, 1980

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
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## ABSTRACT

Pre-field maps showing the distribution of rock outcrops are an important aid in effective planning and conducting of geological mapping. These maps are, traditionally, prepared from aerial photographs using photogeological methods. An automatic system of producing rock outcrop maps from standardized Landsat digital data has been developed. This system employs a hierarchical classification scheme in identifying rock outcrops and in discriminating among rock types. The system developed in this study has been calibrated and tested in the Coppermine area of the Northwest Territories of Canada.

Rock outcrop and rock type maps of two intensive study areas in the Coppermine area have been produced by the automatic system. Maps have also been prepared for these areas from visual analysis of simulated color infrared images produced by a simple digital enhancement procedure developed in this study. The maps and the digitally enhanced images have been compared with aerial photographs and known geology.

The enhanced images have been found to be superior to aerial photographs in identifying large (about 30 x 30 m) rock outcrops and in discriminating among these outcrops. The accuracy of identifying rock outcrops with the automatic system was better than 90% compared to the visual analysis method, taken as standard, in both the intensive study

areas. The rock type separation accuracies were as high as 86% for dolomites and 57% for basalts with intercalated sandstones, and 77% for sandstones in typical rock outcrop areas of the intensive study areas.

Spectral signatures of nine different cover types were derived from standardized Landsat digital data for establishing threshold values used in discriminating among the cover types. The differences in signatures among rock types were subtle and susceptible to misclassification even with minor contamination due to other rock types or cover types.

The cost of generating rock outcrop maps from Landsat data by the computer method is estimated to be less than 20% of the cost of producing the maps with aerial photographs using conventional methods. A unique benefit of the method is in easily providing mensuration data on cover types identified, which are helpful in planning field mapping programs. Other benefits include the use of digitally enhanced simulated color infrared images as base maps and in field studies, although these benefits are more directly attributable to the Landsat data characteristics than to the automatic method.

It is cautioned that the system developed does not replace conventional geological mapping but rather aids the field geologist in efficiently carrying out the mapping. It is recommended that the system be tested in other areas to

further validate the calibration procedures and accuracies obtained in identifying rock outcrops as well as in discriminating rock types. It should be realized that rock outcrops must be relatively large for recognition by the system as the spatial resolution of the Landsat Multi-Spectral Scanner data used is 50 m x 50 m.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my dear wife - Vijaya and to my wonderful children - Raghu, Radhi, and Rekha. The "price" they have paid for it is extravagant and surpassed even my most optimistic estimates.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful completion of the studies herein reported was made possible by the splendid cooperation of many individuals and organizations. To all those who in any manner aided in the work, the author expresses his sincere thanks. He is especially grateful to Dr. D.H. Hall, Dr. A.F. Gregory, and Dr. D.T. Anderson for their interest and wise counsel throughout the progress of this work.

This work was initiated when the author was employed by Gregory Geoscience Ltd. and received their continued support. My present employer, Deloitte Haskins and Sells Associates has always shown keen interest on the work and encouraged me to complete it.

Canada Centre for Remote Sensing (CCRS) generously provided the computer and other equipment facilities used in this study. CCRS also donated the time and facilities to do research on digital interpretation techniques, while the author was employed by them as a summer student. In particular, the author would like to thank Dr. W.M. Strome, Mr. E.A. Godby, Ms. F. McDonnell, and Mr. J.C. Henein.

Discussions on the geology of the study area with Drs. P. Hoffman, W.R.A. Baragar of the Geological Survey of Canada, Dr. A. Donaldson of Carleton University, and Mr. H.D. Moore of Gregory Geoscience have been very helpful.

Dr. J.S. Schubert and Mr. J.E. Hanneson have spent hours listening to the author's thoughts and always acted as good "sounding boards".

Staff of the Department of Earth Sciences have been very helpful during the author's stay at the University of Manitoba. The author takes this opportunity to thank all of them and in particular Drs. D.H. Hall, D.T. Anderson, and C.D. Anderson.

Financial assistance was received from Hudson's Bay Oil and Gas Co. of Calgary through a scholarship during 1973 - 75. The author has also received financial help from the Department of Earth Sciences through teaching and research assistantships, from the Government of Manitoba through a bursary program, and from the Government of Canada through a student loans program. The author acknowledges the financial help from all the above organizations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	. . .	i
1. INTRODUCTION	. . .	1
2. LANDSAT SATELLITE DATA AND THE STUDY AREA	. . .	10
2.1 LANDSAT SATELLITES	. . .	10
2.1.1 Historical Aspects	. . .	10
2.1.2 Orbital Characteristics	. . .	11
2.1.3 Sensor Characteristics	. . .	13
2.1.4 Transmission and Reception of Data	. . .	18
2.2 LANDSAT DATA PRODUCTS	. . .	20
2.2.1 Photographic Products	. . .	20
2.2.2 Digital Data Products	. . .	22
2.3 THE STUDY AREA	. . .	24
2.3.1 Location and General Setting	. . .	24
2.3.2 General Geology	. . .	27
2.3.3 Economic Geology	. . .	29
2.3.4 Advantages of Selecting This Area	. . .	30
3. METHODS	. . .	32
3.1 VISUAL ANALYSIS	. . .	32
3.1.1 Visual Analysis Using Standard Images	. . .	32
3.1.2 Advantages of Using Digital Data	. . .	34
3.1.3 Computer Enhancements	. . .	36
3.2 STANDARDIZING THE LANDSAT DATA	. . .	41
3.2.1 Need for Standardization	. . .	42
3.2.2 Factors Requiring Standardization	. . .	43
3.2.3 Standardization Procedures	. . .	43
3.3 SPECTRAL SIGNATURES AND THRESHOLD VALUES	. . .	49

3.3.1 Spectral Signatures and Their Uses	. . . 50
3.3.2 Reported Laboratory Spectra of Rocks	. . . 52
3.3.3 Derivation of Signatures From Landsat	. . . 56
3.3.4 Establishing Threshold Values	. . . 59
3.3.5 Contamination of Spectral Signatures	. . . 61
3.4 A NEW CLASSIFICATION SCHEME	. . . 63
3.4.1 Automated Classification Approaches	. . . 64
3.4.2 Need for a New Classification Scheme	. . . 65
3.4.3 Mechanics of the Proposed Scheme	. . . 68
3.5 GENERATING MAPS FROM THE MSS DATA	. . . 72
3.5.1 Geometric Distortions and Corrections	. . . 74
3.5.2 Methods Used in Generating Maps	. . . 75
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS	. . . 81
4.1 SPECTRAL SIGNATURES	. . . 81
4.1.1 Spectral Signatures of Cover Types	. . . 81
4.1.2 Threshold Values for Identification	. . .102
4.1.3 Contamination of Spectral Signatures	. . .111
4.2 ROCK OUTCROP IDENTIFICATION	. . .121
4.2.1 Visual Analysis	. . .121
4.2.2 Computer Analysis	. . .136
4.3 ROCK TYPE DISCRIMINATION	. . .149
4.3.1 Visual Analysis	. . .150
4.3.2 Computer Analysis	. . .156
4.4 COST ANALYSIS AND BENEFITS	. . .169
4.4.1 Cost Analysis	. . .170
4.4.2 Benefits	. . .175
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	. . .181
5.1 CONCLUSIONS	. . .181

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS	. . .183
REFERENCES	. . .185
APPENDIX A - COMPUTER PROCESSING METHODS	. . .A-1
APPENDIX B - LISTINGS OF PROGRAMS DEVELOPED	. . .B-1

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Scanning arrangement of the Multi-Spectral Scanner on Landsat Satellites	. . 15
2. Map showing location of the study area	. . 25
3. Generalized geological map of the study area showing the intensive study areas	. . 26
4. Landsat image of the study area showing locations of sample areas used in deriving spectral signatures.	. . 60
5. Computer classification scheme used in identifying rock outcrops and surficial materials	. . 70
6. Computer classification scheme used in discriminating rock types	. . 73
7. Spectral intensities for sample areas of water imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 83
8. Spectral intensities for sample areas of vegetation imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 84
9. Spectral intensities for sample areas of sand imaged on August 5, 1975	. . 86
10. Spectral intensities for sample areas of soils/ boulders imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 88
11. Spectral intensities for sample areas of dolomites imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 89
12. Spectral intensities for sample areas of granites imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 91
13. Spectral intensities for sample areas of felsites imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 93
14. Spectral intensities for sample areas of basalts imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 94
15. Spectral intensities for sample areas of sandstones imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 96
16. The distribution of spectral intensities among bands for cover types imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 98
17. Spectral intensities of cover types in the sample areas imaged on 5 August, 1975	. . 99
18. Spectral intensities of cover types in the sample areas imaged on 22 June, 1975 and 5 August, 1975	. . 101

19. Spectral intensities in Bands 5 and 7 for vegetation relative to other cover types	. . 104
20. Spectral intensities in Bands 4 and 5 for sand relative to other cover types	. . 106
21. Spectral intensities in Bands 6 and 7 for dolomites relative to other cover types	. . 107
22. Spectral intensities in Bands 5 and 7 for sandstones relative to other cover types	. . 109
23. Spectral intensities in Bands 5 and 7 for soils/ boulders relative to other cover types	. . 110
24. Average spectral intensities of four different rock types and vegetation	. . 113
25. Changes in the average spectral intensities of dolomites due to contamination from other cover types	. . 116
26. Changes in the average spectral intensities of basalts due to contamination from other cover types	. . 117
27. Changes in the average spectral intensities of granites due to contamination from other cover types	. . 118
28. Changes in the average spectral intensities of sandstones due to contamination from other cover types	. . 120
29. Enhanced Image of Landsat data acquired on 5 August, 1975 over Mouse River area	. . 123
30. Aerial photograph of Mouse River area	. . 124
31. Map showing rock outcrops prepared from visual analysis of enhanced image over Mouse River area	. . 126
32. Generalized geological map of Mouse River area showing known locations of rock outcrops	. . 127
33. Enhanced image of Landsat data acquired on 22 June, 1975 over Mouse River area	. . 128
34. Enhanced image of Landsat data acquired on 5 August, 1975 over Coppermine River area	. . 130
35. Aerial photograph of Coppermine River area	. . 131
36. Map showing rock outcrops prepared from visual analysis of enhanced image over Coppermine River area	. . 132
37. Generalized geological map of Coppermine River area	

showing known locations of rock outcrops	. . 133
38. Enhanced image of Landsat data acquired on 22 June, 1975 over Coppermine River area	. . 135
39. Rock outcrop map produced from computer analysis of Landsat data acquired on 5 August, 1975 over Mouse River area	. . 137
40. Rock outcrop map produced from computer analysis of Landsat data acquired on 22 June, 1975 over Mouse River area	. . 141
41. Rock outcrop map produced from computer analysis of Landsat data acquired on 5 August, 1975 over Coppermine River area	. . 144
42. Rock outcrop map produced from computer analysis of Landsat data acquired on 22 June, 1975 over Coppermine River area	. . 147
43. Rock type map prepared from visual analysis of enhanced image over Mouse River area	. . 152
44. Rock type map prepared from visual analysis of enhanced image over Coppermine River area	. . 155
45. Rock type map produced from computer analysis of Landsat data acquired on 5 August, 1975 over Mouse River area	. . 157
46. Rock type map produced from computer analysis of Landsat data acquired on 22 June, 1975 over Mouse River area	. . 161
47. Rock type map produced from computer analysis of Landsat data acquired on 5 August, 1975 over Coppermine River area	. . 164
48. Rock type map produced from computer analysis of Landsat data acquired on 22 June, 1975 over Coppermine River area	. . 167

LIST OF TABLES

1. Band identification numbers and corresponding spectral regions in the MSS Subsystem on Landsat satellites	. . . 17
2. Color representation of cover types on digitally enhanced simulated color infrared images	. . . 40
3. Number of sample areas and total number of samples used in deriving spectral signatures of cover types.	58
4. Mensuration data on cover types identified using 5 August, 1975 data in Mouse River area	. . . 139
5. Mensuration data on cover types identified using 22 June, 1975 data in Mouse River area	. . . 142
6. Mensuration data on cover types identified using 5 August, 1975 data in Coppermine River area	. . . 146
7. Mensuration data on cover types identified using 22 June, 1975 data in Mouse River area	. . . 148
8. Mensuration data on rock types separated using 5 August, 1975 data in Mouse River area	. . . 160
9. Mensuration data on rock types separated using 22 June, 1975 data in Mouse River area	. . . 162
10. Mensuration data on rock types separated using 5 August, 1975 data in Coppermine River area	. . . 166
11. Mensuration data on rock types separated using 22 June, 1975 data in Coppermine River area	. . . 168
12. Comparative costs of producing rock outcrop maps using Landsat and airphoto based methods	. . . 176

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Geological mapping is of fundamental importance in economic and engineering geology, as well as in geological research. The purpose of this study is to develop a system to map rock outcrops from Landsat digital data as an aid in geological mapping. To be viable the system must, at least, generate maps comparable to those obtained from conventional sources and be cost effective.

Historically, geological mapping has been done entirely based on field evidence or ground-based methods. However, over the past 40 years or so, aerial photographs have been used to supplement information acquired in the field. This use of aerial photographs through photogeological interpretation has been proven to aid the geologist in field mapping and be cost effective.

Work maps or pre-field maps are prepared using information obtained through photogeological methods. Geologists spend considerable time in preparing the pre-field maps. These maps usually contain locations of rock outcrops and some structural information. The pre-field maps are used in planning the field mapping program and to augment information collected in the field. In planning the mapping program, the maps are used in estimating time requirements in the field, familiarizing the geologist with the area, and also in directing the geologist

to locations of outcrops. The quality and quantity of information present on the maps greatly influences the time required in the field and how effectively this time is utilized.

The availability of aerial photographs is a prerequisite for making the pre-field maps. Aerial photographic coverage exists for almost all regions of Canada, although it may not be current, at the scale required by the agency involved in mapping, and acquired in a season suitable to extract maximum utility. However, photographic coverage does not exist for all regions of the Earth. Flying large areas to acquire aerial photography is costly. Unfortunately, in areas where aerial photography does not exist, geological mapping is generally limited.

Landsat data may now be thought of as an alternative to aerial photographs in preparing the pre-field maps for regional mapping. Landsat satellites have been providing images of almost all regions of the Earth repeatedly since 1972. The data acquired by Landsat satellites have several advantages over aerial photographs. Some of the more salient advantages are that they provide synoptic coverage under essentially the same illumination conditions, are acquired in several spectral regions of the electromagnetic spectrum thereby providing color imagery, and are in digital form allowing data manipulation using computers.