

the MapPlace

A jewel of a tool

BY JULIE DOMVILE

In a nutshell, the MapPlace is an Internet-based tool that, through your browser and in the comfort of your home or office, provides you access to data themes that cover the full gamut of almost everything map worthy in B.C. Themes include communities, bedrock geology, satellite images, surficial geology, topographic features, bush roads, metallic and industrial mineral potential ranking, detailed rivers and lakes, regional silt and water geochemical surveys, mineral occurrences, exploration assessment reports and mineral title locations. These themes can be combined with other georeferenced datasets, such as administrative boundaries, aquifers and other related map-based information, including raster images like digital elevation model shaded relief and aeromagnetics to produce user-defined map views.

Why this form of information delivery?

British Columbia Geological Survey Branch (BCGSB) started working with large digital databases and recognized that the Internet was the best way to deliver data to the industry in the most cost-efficient manner. The decision to cut out paper and go digital resulted in a tool that literally puts the department's entire database at the fingertips of the user. The beauty of this innovative tool is its speed, comprehensiveness and simplicity.

Who developed the MapPlace and who maintains it?

Ward Kilby began developing the MapPlace in 1997. Thanks to his pioneering efforts, British Columbia was the first jurisdiction to provide significant amounts of geoscience data in map format over the web. Larry Jones of the BCGSB now maintains and promotes the site with the help of active clients who phone in suggestions on how to improve the site.



MapPlace in the field: The beauty of this innovative tool is its speed, comprehensiveness and simplicity.

Who should use it?

Absolutely everyone who has an interest in maps of the province and uses a computer. This site is not just of interest to those in the exploration industry. It is also used extensively by land-use planners, foresters, emergency planners and fishermen. It should be bookmarked on everyone's terminal.

How does one access it, what does it cost and how easy is it to use?

Go to www.MapPlace.ca. The site is designed to be user-friendly so that even novice users can research everything from bedrock and surficial geology to mineral, coal and petroleum tenure locations with the ease of just a few clicks. As with most software, the biggest challenge is the installation of free software and there are mechanisms in the program to guide users through the process. "We receive very few complaints about the installation," Jones says, "because the engine that runs the maps is automatically installed on the computer as soon as you open up a map and once that is done, you have access to the maps."

Follow the links from the main page to download the AutoDesk MapGuide Viewer. According to Jones's *Web-based Solutions for Geoscience Data* guidebook, the Viewer, less than two megabytes in size, "transforms your browser into a map viewer that works over the Internet. As a type of geographic information system (GIS), the Viewer enables non-technical users to zoom in and out on a map; find, select and display information about specific features; collapse or expand layer groups; make queries; create buffers; print to scale and much more. The efficient Viewer only downloads the information required or selected to display on a map." This means you can work with large databases using a modem and phone line.

How is the data organized?

Available data in the Viewer is presented in forms of layers, with each layer representing one entity, such as rivers, coal boreholes, or B.C. Mining Divisions, much like transparencies in books. Each layer selected from the legend is stacked on the previous one, and the

whole package is displayed as a single map. The layers have been grouped by themes.

What maps are available?

There are 22 theme-based maps. The best map to start with is the BCGS Geology Map, as it allows you to see all the databases in their most generic form. The Exploration Assistant Map allows users to search and display elements of four main databases. Each map has links to more details. With this tool, users can build custom maps and produce top quality map reports for printing and presentations.

How current is the information?

While much of the data is archival in nature and doesn't change, the real advantage of the MapPlace is that the user can access the most current published government information. New geoscience survey data is posted on the site as soon as it is finalized. While this sometimes means there is a lag in posting the information, more data is being published sooner at no cost to the user. ■

Testimonials

- "Best site in the world for a geologist. The site is like air – you sure miss it when you don't have it." – *Adam Travis, Viceroy Resources*
- "After reviewing many of the provinces and states, it appears that the B.C. Survey is a leader in having GIS data available." – *Larry Freeman, Alaska Geological Survey*
- "I can now do research that once took two weeks in the library, in one evening on your website." – *Dick Billingsley, Heritage Resources*
- "It has become a valuable tool for many of us in the minerals business. I confirm my congratulations once again." – *Dave Blann, Standard Metals Exploration*
- "The 're-discovery' of a property we acquired and are currently exploring was due in large part to the information available on the ministry website." – *Dave Caulfield, Rimfire Minerals*
- "The most impressive site I have ever seen." – *Don Hryhor, Consultant*
- "Now I have everything: geology and legend. It's really quite an amazing setup!" – *Dr. Rene Barendregt, University of Lethbridge*
- "Far and away better than anything I have seen anywhere else in the world." – *Greg Dawson, Consultant* □

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