



Ages in Chaos: James Hutton and the Discovery of Deep Time

Stephen Baxter

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"This book, then, is the story of how a farmer's son from Scotland learned to peer into the deepest abysses of time. It is a drama of personality, landscape and ideas, of an intellectual revolution that shaped our world--and of a man whose vision, rooted in antiquity yet tinged with modern philosophies, was not only ahead of his own time but speaks to our new century."--From the Foreword

In the eighteenth century, the received wisdom, following Bishop Ussher's careful biblical calculations, was that the Earth was just six thousand years old. James Hutton, a gentleman farmer with a passion for rocks, knew that could not be the case. Looking at the formation of irregular strata in the layers of the Earth he boldly deduced that a much longer span of time would be required for the landscape he saw to have evolved. In the lusty and turbulent world of Enlightenment Scotland, he set out to prove it.

He could not have achieved this without the help of his friends. Hutton's entourage in Edinburgh would turn out to be the leading thinkers of the age, including Erasmus Darwin, Adam Smith, James Watt, David Hume, and Joseph Black. But Hutton had his enemies, too. His geological theories would ignite profound religious debate and was condemned as "a wild and unnatural notion" that would lead to "skepticism, and at last to downright infidelity and atheism."

Ultimately, however, his revelation was one of the most extraordinary and essential moments in scientific history. Hutton's discovery of deep time changed our view of humanity's place in the universe forever.

Like Dava Sobel's bestselling *Longitude*, *Ages In Chaos* vividly captures a transcendent moment in the history of human accomplishment.

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