
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Exercise 1: Building Powers of Observation

Objective: To use the data of a photograph to enhance powers of observation.

Materials: One black-and-white aerial photograph, at a reasonable scale: 1:12,000, 1:20,000, or 1:24,000

Procedure: In this exercise, you will first note the date of the photography. Use your knowledge of activities and conditions associated with certain days and times of the year to answer as many questions as possible and to interpret objects on the aerial photograph.

An aerial photograph is a snapshot of only one moment in time.

Month – What season is it? Spring? Summer? Fall? Winter? Relative to the season, what ground conditions might you expect to find?

Example: Winter – no leaves on trees, snow on the ground, ice on water bodies.
Spring – freshly plowed fields, leaves on trees (depending on month), wet fields due to spring rains, new construction
Summer – vegetative cover is lush, activity at parks and beaches, houses camouflaged by trees, agricultural activity
Fall – visible changes in vegetation, plowed fields

Day and Time – When was this photograph taken? Weekday? Weekend? Can you say anything about the time of day?

- You probably don't have a calendar for this particular year. What clues can be extracted from the aerial photograph to help answer this question?
- Locate major and minor roads. What can you say about the traffic? About activity at schools, commercial, and industrial complexes? About cars and buses in parking lots?
- Depending on the season, are there signs of people/activities at parks, beaches, etc?
- What can you conclude from the length of the shadows?

Year – What historical perspective does this photography provide?

- What you see on the photograph is not necessarily what you might see if you visited a site today. What differences might you expect?
- Historic aerial photographs are valuable documents. What are some of the potential applications of historic aerial photographs?

