

Earth History

Precambrian Continents and Plate Tectonics

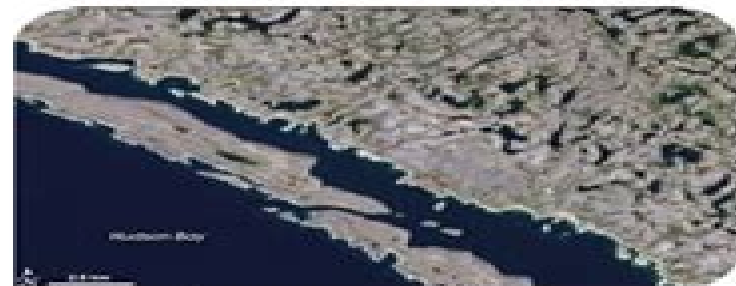
Content of Cratons

Little is known about the **paleogeography**, or ancient geography, of early Earth. The earliest continental crust is found in **cratons**, which are the ancient cores on continents. They also contain all three types of rocks that each tells their own story about the Precambrian era.

- Felsic igneous rocks are the remains of the first continents.
- Rounded sedimentary grains show that early rivers and seas existed and that erosion occurred.
- **Greenstone**, a metamorphic volcanic rock, shows the location of subduction zones because they are found in ocean trenches

Study Tip

The forming of continents was similar to the forming of our planets: Many small pieces (microcontinents) collided to create bigger pieces.



Notice the greenstone lining the Canadian shield, which has been exposed by the scraping of glaciers.

Formation from Cratons

Shields are where cratons crop out at the surface. Many Precambrian shields are about 570 million years old. Cratons covered by younger rocks are called **platforms**. When these platforms undergo erosion, the Precambrian craton is exposed.

Early Crustal Plates

Early crustal plates were small due to faster mantle convection and stronger plate tectonics processes. These processes also created more subduction zones.

Plate Tectonics

Plate tectonics: Smaller **microcontinents** collided to create bigger **supercontinents**, which resulted in the formation of massive mountain ranges. An active period of convergence was between 1.5 million and 1.0 million years ago. Cratons collided with microcontinents and oceanic island arcs to form **Laurentia**, which is part of the supercontinent **Rodinia**. Around 750 million years ago, oceans began forming in between continents as the result of **Rodinia's** disintegration.



The supercontinent Rodinia 1.1 billion years ago

Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers

**David E. Sadava, Gordon H.
Orians, Craig Heller, William K. Purves**



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Earth Science ,2001 *Scientific and Technical Aerospace Reports* ,1994 Lists citations with abstracts for aerospace related reports obtained from world wide sources and announces documents that have recently been entered into the NASA Scientific and Technical Information Database

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Table of Contents Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers

1. Understanding the eBook Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers User Reviews and Ratings
 - Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers Free and Paid eBooks
 - Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers Public Domain eBooks
 - Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers eBook Subscription Services
 - Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers Budget-Friendly Options

6. Navigating Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers Compatibility with Devices
 - Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers Enhanced eBook Features
7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Interactive Elements Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
8. Staying Engaged with Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Setting Reading Goals Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Precambrian Earth Study Guide Answers
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements

- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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