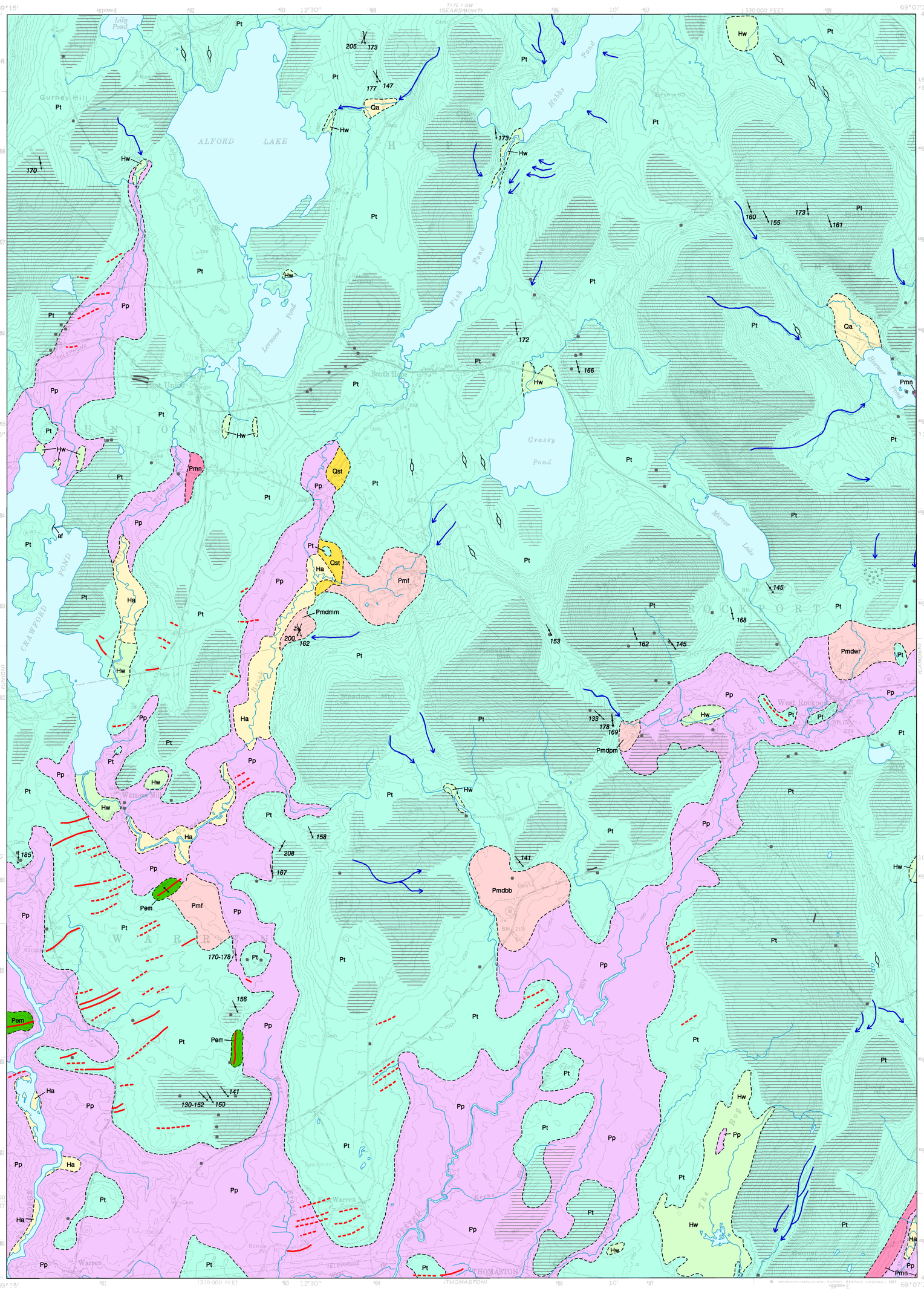
Surficial Geology



SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Surficial geologic mapping of the West Rockport quadrangle was conducted by Woodrow B. Thompson during the 2009 field season. Funding for this work was provided by the U. S. Geological Survey STATEMAP program and the Maine Geological Survey, Department of Conservation.

Quadrangle Location

SCALE 1 : 24,000

1 — 0 — 1 MILE

1000 — 0 — 1000 — 2000 — 3000 — 4000 — 5000 — 6000 — 7000 FEET

1 — 0 — 1 KILOMETER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET

TRUE NORTH

Topographic base from U.S. Geological Survey West Rockport quadrangle, scale 1:24,000 using standard U.S. Geological Survey topographic map symbols.

The use of industry, firm, or local government names on this map is for location purposes only and does not impute responsibility for any present or potential effects on the natural resources.

West Rockport Quadrangle, Maine

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SURFICIAL GEOLOGY OF MAINE

Continental glaciers like the ice sheet now covering Antarctica probably extended across Maine several times during the Pleistocene Epoch, between about 1.5 million and 10,000 years ago. The slow-moving ice superficially changed the landscape as it scraped over mountains and valleys, eroding and transporting boulders and other rock debris for miles. The sediments that cover much of Maine are largely the product of glaciation. Glacial ice deposited some of these materials, while others washed into the sea or accumulated in meltwater streams and lakes as the ice receded. Earlier stream patterns were disrupted, creating hundreds of ponds and lakes across the state. The map at left shows the pattern of glacial sediments in the Thomaston quadrangle.

The most recent "Ice Age" in Maine began about 30,000 years ago, when an ice sheet spread southward over New England (Stone and Borns, 1986). During its peak, the ice was several thousand feet thick and covered the highest mountains in the state. The weight of this huge glacier actually caused the land surface to sink hundreds of feet. Rock debris frozen into the base of the glacier abraded the bedrock surface over which the ice flowed. The grooves and fine scratches (striations) resulting from this scraping process are often seen on freshly exposed bedrock, and they are important indicators of the direction of ice movement. Erosion and sediment deposition by the ice sheet combined to give a streamlined shape to many hills, with their long dimension parallel to the direction of ice flow. Some of these hills (drumlins) are composed of dense glacial sediment (till) plastered under great pressure beneath the ice.

A warming climate forced the ice sheet to start receding as early as 21,000 calendar years ago, soon after it reached its southernmost position on Long Island (Ridge, 2004). The edge of the glacier withdrew from the continental shelf east of Long Island and reached the present position of the Maine coast by about 16,000 years ago (Borns and others, 2004). Even though the weight of the ice was removed from the land surface, the Earth's crust did not immediately spring back to its normal level. As a result, the sea flooded much of southern Maine as the glacier retreated to the northwest. Ocean waters extended far up the Kennebec and Penobscot valleys, reaching present elevations of up to 420 feet in the central part of the state.

Great quantities of sediment washed out of the melting ice and into the sea, which was in contact with the receding glacier margin. Sand and gravel accumulated as deltas and submarine fans where streams discharged along the ice front, while the finer silt and clay dispersed across the ocean floor. The shells of clams, mussels, and other invertebrates are found in the glacial-marine clay that blankets lowland areas of southern Maine. Ages of these fossils tell us that ocean waters covered parts of Maine until about 13,000 years ago. The land rebounded as the weight of the ice sheet was removed, forcing the sea to retreat.

Meltwater streams deposited sand and gravel in tunnels within the ice. These deposits remained as ridges (eskers) when the surrounding ice disappeared. Maine's esker systems can be traced for up to 100 miles, and are among the longest in the country.

Other sand and gravel deposits formed as mounds (kames) and terraces adjacent to melting ice, or as outwash in valleys in front of the glacier. Many of these water-laid deposits are well layered, in contrast to the chaotic mixture of boulders and sediment of all sizes (till) that was released from dirty ice without subsequent reworking. Ridges consisting of till or washed sediments (moraines) were constructed along the ice margin in places where the glacier was still actively flowing and conveying rock debris to its terminus. Moraine ridges are abundant in the zone of former marine submergence, where they are useful indicators of the pattern of ice retreat.

The last remnants of glacial ice probably were gone from Maine by 12,000 years ago. Large sand dunes accumulated in late-glacial time as winds picked up outwash sand and blew it onto the east sides of river valleys, such as the Androscoggin and Saco valleys. The modern stream network became established soon after deglaciation, and organic deposits began to form in peat bogs, marshes, and swamps. Tundra vegetation bordering the ice sheet was replaced by changing forest communities as the climate warmed (Davis and Jacobson, 1985). Geologic processes are by no means dormant today, however, since rivers and wave action modify the land, and worldwide sea level is gradually rising against Maine's coast.

References Cited

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Figure 1. Striations (accented by pencil rubbing) on glacially abraded and brightly polished quartz vein east of Alford Lake in Hope. The striations trend generally southward (175-194°) at this site. The red pencil points in the direction of former ice flow.

Figure 2. Oblique cross section of glacial moraine ridge next to Davis Road in Union. The moraine continues WSW into the woods. It is composed of gravelly till released from melting ice at the glacier margin.

Figure 3. Close-up view of the moraine sediments seen in Figure 2. Boulders scattered across the ground surface often indicate the presence of till, as seen in this road cut.

Figure 4. View looking southwest at cross section of a moraine in Warren. The glacier margin was situated just to the right (NW) of the pit exposure seen here. This moraine consists mostly of sand and gravel that washed out of the glacier. The coarsest gravel was deposited immediately adjacent to the ice margin, which stood in shallow marine waters (about 100 ft deep).

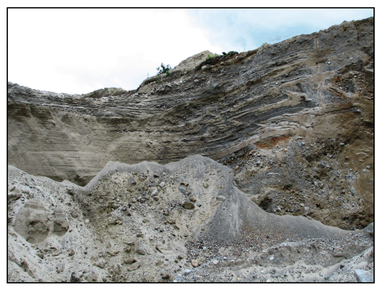

Figure 5. Close-up view of southeast side of pit face shown in Figure 4. The sand and gravel beds in upper-right part of photo have been deformed by thrust faults, probably from shoving by glacial ice when the moraine was formed. The undisturbed, finer-grained sandy sediments to the left were deposited into the sea in front of the glacier.

Figure 6. Glacial-marine delta (map unit Pmdmm) northwest of Meadow Mountain in Union. The delta consists of sand and gravel carried a short distance by a glacial meltwater stream and deposited into the ocean. The stream cut a channel into the hillside, located on the town line just east of the delta. Photo shows the western (seaward) part of the delta. The flat delta top (not seen here) indicates a former sea-level about 280 ft higher than today.

Figure 7. Foreset beds in the delta shown in Figure 6. These gravelly sand layers were deposited on the front of the delta as it built out into the sea.

Figure 8. Many low areas in the quadrangle are underlain by clay, silt, and fine sand deposited on the sea floor during the period of marine submergence that immediately followed glacial retreat. This muddy sediment is called the Presumpscot Formation. Exposures of the clay are not readily seen in the map area (the one shown here is actually in nearby Waldoboro) and are most likely to be found in stream banks or road and borrow pit excavations. The embedded pebble in the upper part of the photo probably dropped to the ocean bottom from a floating iceberg.

Ha — **Stream alluvium** - Sand, gravel, and silt deposited on flood plains of modern streams. May include some wetland deposits.

Qa — **Stream alluvium** - Sand, gravel, and/or silt deposited in the valley northwest of Hosmer Pond and in a small valley east of Alford Lake. Much of this unit probably formed in late-glacial or early postglacial time. It may include outwash deposited by glacial streams issuing from meltwater channels farther up the valleys.

Qst — **Stream terrace** - Sand and gravel deposited by Quiggle Brook at elevations higher than the present flood plain.

Hw — **Wetland deposits** - Peat, muck, silt, and clay in poorly drained areas. Map unit may also include some alluvial sediments along stream valleys.

Pmn — **Marine nearshore deposits** - Sandy to gravelly sediments formed in late-glacial time when marine processes reworked glacial deposits during regression of the sea.

Pp — **Presumpscot Formation** - Glaciomarine silt, clay, and sand deposited on the late-glacial sea floor. This map unit overlies the irregular surface of glacial till in a complex manner, so it is likely to include areas of till exposed at the ground surface.

Pmd — **Glaciomarine delta** - Sand and gravel deposited into the sea and built up to the ocean surface. Formed at the glacier margin during recession of the most recent (late Wisconsinan) ice sheet. Elevation of boundary between topset and foreset beds (T/F contact) in each delta indicates the position of sea level when the delta was deposited.

- Pmdmm - Meadow Mountain delta. T/F contact elevation estimated at 275 ft (83.8 m).
- Pmdwr - West Rockport delta. T/F contact not exposed
- Pmdpm - Pleasant Mountain delta. T/F contact not exposed.
- Pmdbb - Bisbee Brook delta. T/F contact not exposed.

Pmf — **Glaciomarine fan** - Sand and gravel deposited in a submarine environment at the glacier margin during recession of the late Wisconsinan ice sheet.

Pem — **End moraine** - Ridge formed along the margin of the late Wisconsinan glacial ice sheet during a brief pause in its retreat. Composed of till and/or sand and gravel.

Pt — **Till** - Loose to very compact, poorly sorted, massive to weakly stratified mixture of sand, silt, and gravel-size rock debris deposited by glacial ice. Boulders are commonly scattered across the ground surface. This map unit locally includes lenses of water-laid sand and gravel, as well as patches of overlying Presumpscot Formation (Pp). The latter are most likely to occur in areas below about 220 ft in elevation.

Bedrock outcrops/thin-drift areas - Ruled pattern indicates areas where bedrock outcrops are common and/or surficial sediments are generally less than 10 ft thick. Mapped from air photos and ground observations. Actual thin-drift areas probably are more extensive than shown. Dots mark locations of individual outcrops.

af — **Artificial fill** - Variable mixtures of earth, rock, and/or man-made materials used as fill for roads and railroads. Usually shown only where large enough to affect the contour pattern on the topographic map.

Contact - Boundary between map units. Many contacts are approximately located and therefore indicated by dashed lines.

Moraine ridge - Line shows crest of moraine ridge deposited along the retreating margin of the most recent glacial ice sheet. These moraines are composed mostly of till but may also include sand and gravel. Dashed where identity is uncertain, including possible moraines mapped from air photos.

Meltwater channel - Channel eroded by glacial meltwater stream. Arrow shows inferred direction of water flow.

Glacial striation locality - Arrow shows ice-flow direction(s) inferred from striations on bedrock. Dot marks point of observation. Number is azimuth (in degrees) of flow direction. At one site where two sets of striations are present and relative ages could be determined, the flagged arrow indicates the older flow direction.

Glacially streamlined hill - Symbol shows trend of long axis, which is parallel to former glacial ice-flow direction.

Dip of cross-bedding - Arrow shows average dip direction of cross-bedding in fluvial or deltaic deposits, which indicates direction of stream flow or delta progradation. Point of observation at dot.

Area of many large boulders, where observed. May be more extensive than shown.

USES OF SURFICIAL GEOLOGY MAPS

A surficial geology map shows all the loose materials such as till (commonly called hardpan), sand and gravel, or clay, which overlie solid ledge (bedrock). Bedrock outcrops and areas of abundant bedrock outcrops are shown on the map, but varieties of the bedrock are not distinguished (refer to bedrock geology map). Most of the surficial materials are deposits formed by glacial and deglacial processes during the last stage of continental glaciation, which began about 25,000 years ago. The remainder of the surficial deposits are the products of postglacial geologic processes, such as river floodplains, or are attributed to human activity, such as fill or other land-modifying features.

The map shows the areal distribution of the different types of glacial features, deposits, and landforms as described in the map explanation. Features such as striations and moraines can be used to reconstruct the movement and position of the glacier and its margin, especially as the ice sheet melted. Other ancient features include shorelines and deposits of glacial lakes or the glacial sea, now long gone from the state. This glacial geologic history of the quadrangle is useful to the larger understanding of past earth climate, and how our region of the world underwent recent geologically significant climatic and environmental changes. We may then be able to use this knowledge in anticipation of future similar changes for long-term planning efforts, such as coastal development or waste disposal.

Surficial geology maps are often best used in conjunction with related maps such as surficial materials maps or significant sand and gravel aquifer maps for anyone wanting to know what lies beneath the land surface. For example, these maps may aid in the search for water supplies, or economically important deposits such as sand and gravel for aggregate or clay for bricks or pottery. Environmental issues such as the location of a suitable landfill site or the possible spread of contaminants are directly related to surficial geology. Construction projects such as locating new roads, excavating foundations, or siting new homes may be better planned with a good knowledge of the surficial geology of the site. Refer to the list of related publications below.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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