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David A. Crowder

Bestselling author of Building a
Web Site For Dummies

Add geographic
data to your
business decision-
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About the Author

David A. Crowder has authored or coauthored more than 25 books, including the bestsellers *Building a Web Site For Dummies* and *Cliffs Notes Getting on the Internet*. His two most recent books were both listed as essential for all library collections by the magazine *Library Journal*.

Professor Crowder is equally at home with high technology or with working his way through the backcountry on horseback or in a dugout canoe. When he is not writing, he spends his time with his wife Angela, wandering through villages in the Andes or frolicking in the Caribbean surf.

Dedication

This one's for Angie, *la luz de mi vida*.

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Engineering and Architectural Achievements

Introduction

Want to stroll down the Champs Elysees in Paris? Feel like taking a personal look at the Great Wall of China? Or perhaps you'd like to explore the island of Tahiti on your lunch break? Thanks to Google Earth, you can.

With Google Earth, you can forget the Frequent Flyer miles. All you have to do is plop down in front of your monitor to see the world up close the easy way. No lousy airline food, no baggage claim, no customs line — just plain fun!

And I'm not just talking about some plain old maps here. Google has gone to the trouble to bring you the latest in high-tech GIS (Geographical Information Systems) — and has done it right. Although the program can easily compete with most of the high-end GIS software around today, Google Earth isn't just for the *cognoscenti*: It's for the masses.

About This Book

Yes, there is such a thing as love at first sight. I fell in love with Google Earth about 30 seconds after I installed it. I found but one thing lacking. As several other Google Earth users once lamented, there was no such thing as *Google Earth For Dummies*.

Well, now there is. This is the book that I wish I had had on my desk during my early explorations with this fabulous program. It's designed from the ground up to provide you with all that you need to know to get the most from Google Earth from the very start.

In this book, you'll see not just how to spin a digital globe on your screen but also how to dig into all the wonderful features that Google Earth has to offer. That means that you can find — in a single resource — everything from how to search for pizza parlors to understanding how latitude and longitude work.

How to Use This Book

Put it on top of your desk. Keep it there. That'll save you a bunch of walking to the bookshelf. Trust me — after you start playing (or working) with Google Earth, you'll want to do more. And more. And more.

If you use this book the way a typical reader does, you'll want to hit the Table of Contents and the index to find whatever it is you want to know about. But this isn't just a reference book. It's designed to show you how to get the most enjoyment and practical use out of the program, and it's chock-full of examples that (trust me) will enhance your Google Earth experience, so feel free to just flip from place to place and see what you find.

Foolish Assumptions

I assume that you have at least some vague idea that the world is composed of a lot of oceans and a bunch of land masses. Other than this simple beginning, you need no special geographic knowledge — Google Earth will take care of the rest for you.

Beyond that, this book assumes that you know at least the basics of how to operate your computer. For example, if I tell you that you need to make a menu selection, I assume that you know that a menu is that list of words at the top of the screen, like File, Edit, and so forth, and that you know how to move your mouse pointer over those words and click them to reveal further options. If not, you might first want to check out a copy of *Windows XP Just the Steps For Dummies* or *Windows Vista Just the Steps For Dummies* (Wiley), both by Nancy Muir. If you don't have Google Earth loaded yet, not to worry: See how in Chapter 1.

Conventions Used in This Book

A lot of folks have labored for many years to make the *For Dummies* series as user-friendly as possible, and we're all as thankful as can be that they've done that.

(I've authored several *For Dummies* books, but I don't just write them — I rely on them, too, just like you do.)

When you find a listing that says to choose something like File⇒Save from the menu, that means to first click the word File on the menu and then choose Save from the resultant drop-down menu. (If you're running Windows Vista, File has been replaced by the Office Button, at the top left of the window.)

Code listings, which you'll find in the chapter on KML (the native language of Google Earth's files), look like this:

```
<Placemark>
  <name>
    ...
  </name>
  <description>
    ...
  </description>
</Placemark>
```

The ellipsis (...) shows that further information needs to be supplied.

When I need to show how to do that, I use an italic placeholder, like in this example:

```
<name>
  Name goes here.
</name>
```

When you see those words in italics (and they should always be obvious in any event), simply replace the placeholder with your own text, perhaps something like this:

```
<name>  
Grandpa's farm  
</name>
```

Whenever you see the URL for one of the top sites you can use to enhance your Google Earth experience, it appears in a special typeface within the paragraph, like this: www.dummies.com. Or it might appear on a separate line, like this:

www.dummies.com

How This Book Is Organized

This book is divided into six parts, each of which has various chapters in it. Each of the chapters is further subdivided into logical segments that cover various activities that you will probably want to pursue to increase your knowledge of Google Earth. Here's an overview.

Part I: Getting to Know Google Earth

Part I introduces you to how the Google Earth program works and how you can use its search and location features to find just about anything in the world. It then goes on to explore the program's basic visual features as well as its most exciting tools, like Tilt and Zoom.

Part II: Personalizing Google Earth

This part covers how to modify Google Earth's options and modify the program's screen display to suit you. This part also digs into how to use the built-in *layers*, which show where everything from school districts to hospitals is located. Then it goes on to deal with *placemarks*, which are the Google Earth geographical equivalent to Web browser bookmarks.

Part III: Becoming a Cybertourist

Part III shows how to jump into the world of satellite tourism, looking at routes from one place to another from a bird's-eye viewpoint. It then goes on to show you how to participate in the Google Earth Community, which is the huge group of fellow users who are there to share and help.

Part IV: Advanced Features

Well, you knew it couldn't all be simple. Google Earth does have some more complex features, and this part explains how they work and how you can tap into them for your own uses.

These four chapters delve into how you can import external data — ranging from image overlays to the output from your GPS device — into Google Earth. You can also read here how to use the companion program Google SketchUp to add custom 3-D models to your world. Finally, see how to get under the hood and understand the basics of *KML* — the markup language that is at the heart of Google Earth.

Part V: The Part of Tens

Part V tosses in 30 extra little items that will make your Google Earth experience into all that it can be. From sources for external map images to Web sites that can give you all the location info you could ever want to a few other programs you'll want to install, this is the icing on the cake.

Part VI: Appendixes

Part VI includes a glossary of the technical terms that you might need to look up, along with details on just what is included in the Layers pane and a guide to a bunch of interesting places you'll want to visit.

Icons Used in This Book

You'll find several special graphics (icons) in the margins of various chapters. Each of these is there for a reason, so you need to keep watch for them.



Hey, just between you and me, here's the best way to handle this situation.



Watch your step, or things could get very ugly.



Just in case anybody reading this wants the egghead's view, here it is.



These note something special to keep in mind.

Where to Go from Here

I advise you to dive in and explore! That's the operative word for Google Earth, of course, but it's also the best way to take this book. Dig into everything, flip through the chapters, stop at some random location, and then

just do whatever you find there. You'll be glad you did, as every part of the book introduces you to some new and wonderful feature of Google Earth.