# Aerial Photographs

An aerial photograph—or airphoto—is a picture of the Earth taken from above the ground. Airphotos are valuable tools for studying both natural features, such as forests, waterways, and soil, and human-made features, such as roads and buildings. You can see how land use and communities change over time by studying a series of airphotos taken of the same place at different times.

Here is an aerial photograph of Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York, taken in 1989.

## HOW TO 'READ' AIRPHOTOS

When you view Earth from overhead, as if from an airplane, objects look different from normal. These clues will help you recognize features in the airphoto.

**Tone: the blackness or whiteness of an object**

1. Large black areas are water.
2. The tiny white spots are roofs of houses.
3. Light cement sidewalks border dark asphalt streets.

**Texture: how coarse or smooth an area appears**

4. Grassy areas have a smooth texture.
5. Forests have a coarse texture.

**Size**

6. Highways are wider than streets.
7. Museums, factories, churches, schools, stores, and apartment buildings are larger than houses.

**Shape**

8. The circle at the end of the park is a traffic circle.

**Location**

9. The white circles in grassy areas are ball fields. Circles at the end of a road are traffic circles.

## SCALE

An aerial view close to the ground shows lots of detail. The further away from Earth a photograph is taken, the smaller the features appear on the photo. The scale of an airphoto indicates how much smaller an object in the photo is compared to its actual size. The photo on the left has a larger scale than the photo shown above. Sometimes people confuse large scale and small scale. Remember that features on large scale photos appear large, and features on small scale photos appear small.

The scale of the airphoto above is 1:24,000. This means that one centimeter on the photo is equal to 24,000 centimeters—or 240 meters—on the ground. The airphoto on the left is a section of the above photo, and is shown at a scale of 1:12,000. This larger scale photo shows features in more detail. Look carefully at the large scale airphoto. Can you find this area on the small scale airphoto above?

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