

VON HUMBOLDT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GEOMAGNETIC OBSERVATORIES

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Alexander von Humboldt was a major figure in the worldwide establishment of magnetic observatories. His influence was felt in the early geomagnetic programmes of European nations, for example in Germany, Britain and its then colonies, as well as in Russia and beyond. In this paper we will review von Humboldt's role in the 'Gottingen Magnetic Union' and in the 'Magnetic Crusade' and we will examine his relationship with such figures as Edward Sabine in Britain and with Carl Friedrich Gauss and Wilhelm Weber in Germany. We will review the sequence of historical events that led to the establishment of magnetic observatories and their operating procedures in the mid 1800s. We will also reflect on the concurrent scientific and technical developments at the time and the wider cultural aspects of the 1800s that contributed to the development of the science of Geomagnetism. Ultimately, von Humboldt's vision was of a global network of magnetic observatories. Much of what was established in the mid 1800s, through his encouragement, can be seen to persist through to the modern day.

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