

To the Kármán line, and beyond!

An introduction to the International Geophysical Year

What was the International Geophysical Year?

The IGY was an 18-month international scientific effort that ran from July 1, 1957–December 31, 1958. The dates were chosen in part to coincide with the peak of solar cycle 19, which would aid in many of the solar and atmospheric studies.

Which nations participated in IGY?

Sixty-seven countries participated in IGY projects domestically and at outposts around the globe. Of the major world powers, China was a notable exception. The mainland People's Republic of China protested the participation of the Republic of China (Taiwan) and chose not to send delegates to the program.

Which nations issued IGY stamps?

Twenty-one nations issued stamps during the IGY (or shortly thereafter) to commemorate their participation (see map). Haiti did not participate, but issued a popular set of stamps. An additional three territories issued stamps in honor of their ruling nations: Falkland Island Dependencies, French Southern and Antarctic Territories, and Netherlands Antilles.

IGY studies encompassed eleven Earth sciences:

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Aurora and airglow | Precision mapping |
| Cosmic rays | Meteorology |
| Geomagnetism | Oceanography |
| Gravity | Seismology |
| Ionospheric physics | Solar activity |

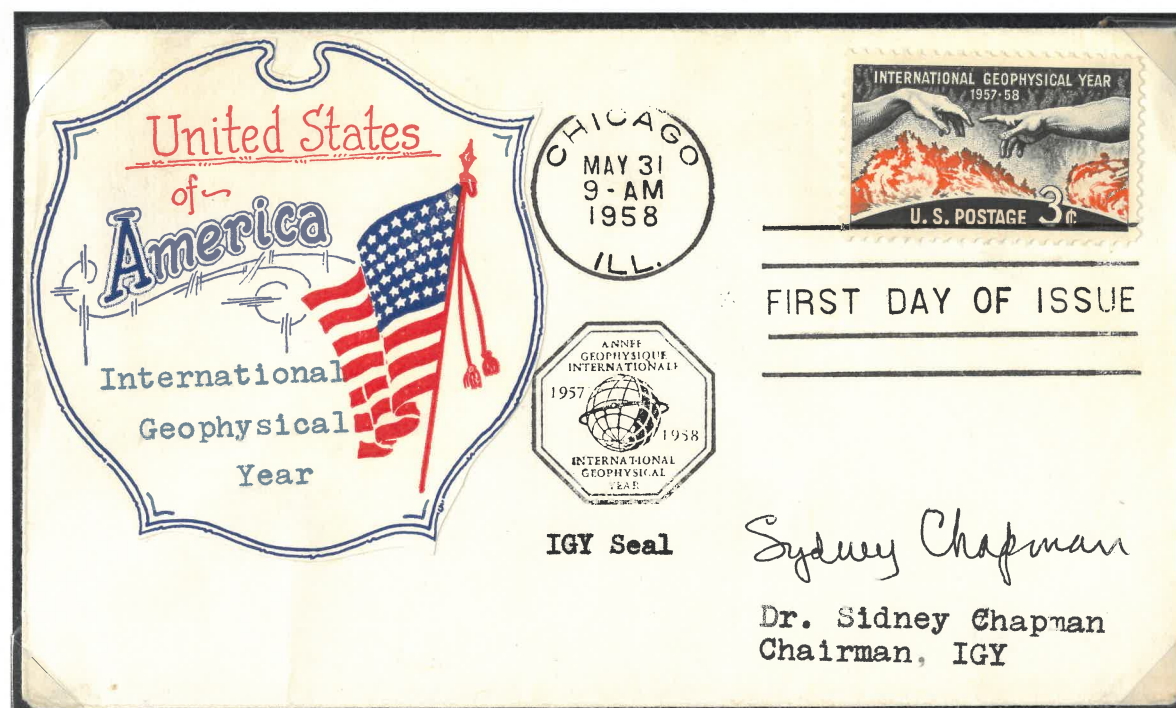
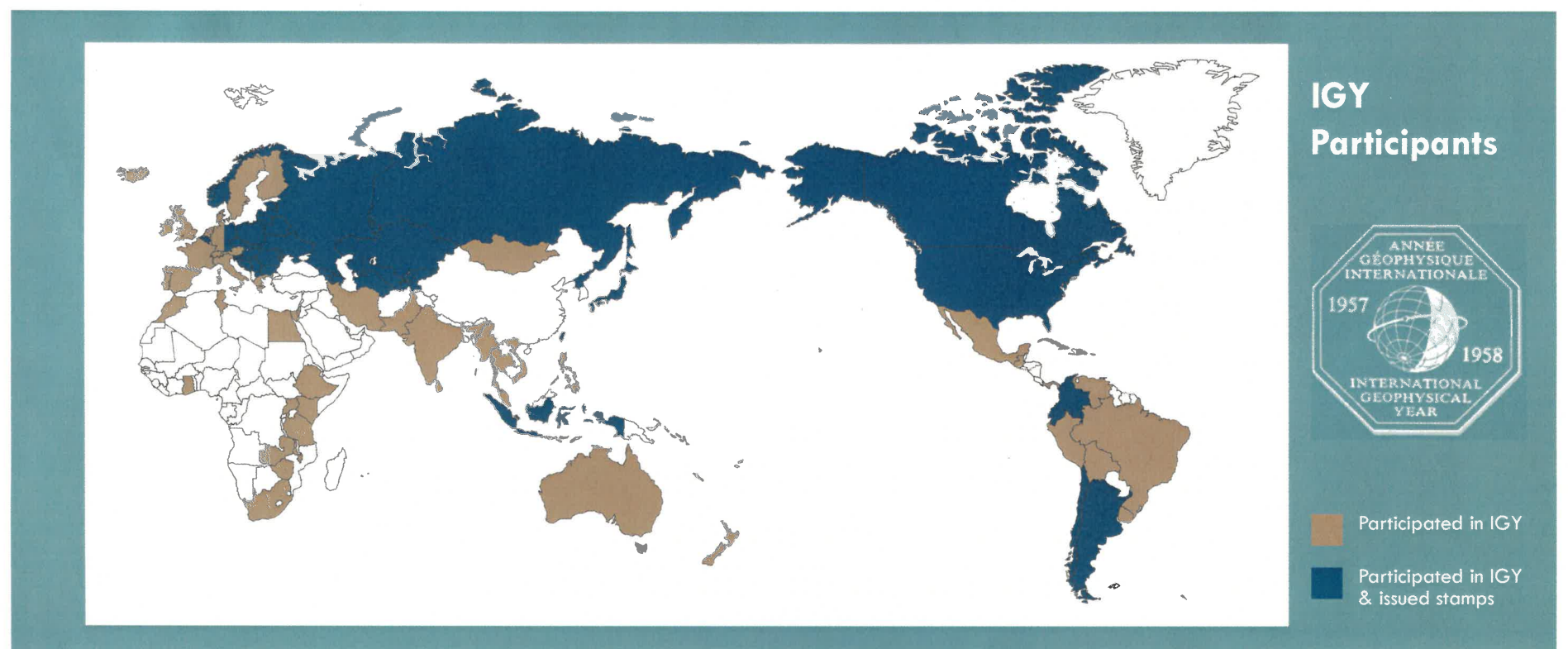
The Origins of the Space Age?

Among the most newsworthy successes of the IGY were the satellites launched by the U.S. and Soviet Union.

Sputnik 1, launched on October 4, 1957, was Earth's first successful artificial satellite. America's Project Vanguard rocket and Explorer satellite programs were also part of the IGY. So were the first missions of the Pioneer lunar and interplanetary space probes program.



Vanguard rocket

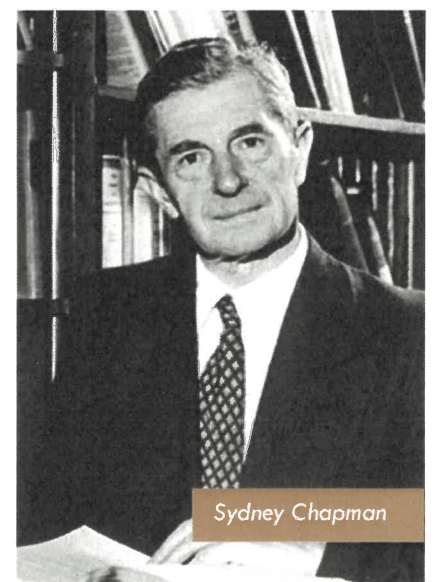


Who was Sydney Chapman?

(January 29, 1888–June 16, 1970)

Sydney Chapman was an accomplished British mathematician and geophysicist at Oxford. He was elected president of the Special Committee for the IGY (Comité Spécial de l'Année Géophysique Internationale, or CSAGI).

CSAGI would set the dates for the IGY, coordinate scientific efforts by the sixty-seven participating nations, and arrange for "the free exchange of data" captured during this period.



Sydney Chapman

First-day covers in the U.S.

Ceremony in Chicago, Illinois | May 31, 1958.

The official IGY seal, positioned below the CDS, is a double-lined octagon enclosing a lined globe ringed by a satellite and the words "Annee Geophysique Internationale / International Geophysical Year 1957–1958". It was common for this seal to be present on FDCs in the U.S. and globally.

Inspiration for the U.S. stamp

There are two key elements to this design:

- (1) Photograph of the sun taken during the first months of the IGY.
- (2) Closeup of "The Creation of Adam", a 16th century fresco painting by Michelangelo.

