

Image description: a pile of Geological Survey of Victoria maps

The second hallway of Deep Time Real Time is a passage that culminates in a moving image of an ever-unfolding tunnel, so it's a relief to find a down-lit pile of maps only a few steps in. They're stacked loosely on a pair of rectangular basalt slabs; one has clean, squared edges and the other looks a little chipped and pockmarked. The slabs are held off the ground by cut wooden beams which are made to seem impossibly soft by the heavy stone above them and the polished concrete below.

But back to the maps. They're unevenly shaped and sized; most are about a metre across, and many appear yellowed, frayed, slightly torn. A number of wider posters are on the top of the pile, overhanging the others like beagle's ears.

The map on top is a map of Kinglake by the Geological Survey of Victoria. It identifies itself as a first edition, 1977, and it says 'Australia' in the corner, with a scale of 1:63,360 – which I recognise to be a scale at which one inch of paper represents one mile.

It's immediately obvious that the shading of this map is diagrammatic – there's a large magenta and pink patch over the middle, a comicbook steak cutlet highlighting an area annotated as 'Mount Disappointment' and 'Dry Hills'. It even drops a couple of splotches to one side. When I lean over the map to read it, my shadow blocks the light that makes it readable. There are fine dots and fine lines, thicker ones too, layered textures, swaying fillets of coffee brown, ridges or strips of pale salmon pink, strips of pale sky blue. Faults and geological boundaries (implied) and contours and creeks; roads too. Printed serif type announces places like Yea, Murrundindi, Bilian, Woodbourne, Flowerdale, Deril, Clonbinane, Wallanwallan, and the key along the righthand side of the poster confirms that this map covers the area northeast of Naarm. There are jagged, branched sproutings of green that look like science-fiction moss or poison, but the map key reassures me that they are instead sedimentary rocks: alluvial or paludal, sand, silt, clay, minor gravel, black mud. The Hume Highway curves in across the top-left corner like an uncredited extra.

In the bottom right corner of the map, it identifies itself as a first edition, 1977, alongside the seal of the Geological Survey of Victoria. Kinglake, part 7923 in zone 55.

Beneath the map, there's a cross section which shows surface deposits of younger igneous rock embedded in deep troughs of older Devonian and Silurian sediments: siltstone, sandstone, quartz and mica. Blackman Creek, Reedy Creek, Syncline, Flowerdale Syncline, Digger Creek, Carver Creek, Break O'Day Syncline.