

Programme One:

Three Billion Years In The Making

From the hippos that once roamed through London's Trafalgar Square, to the snow-white seal pups on the Isle of May, natural history enthusiast Alan Titchmarsh travels the length and breadth of the British Isles to unravel a natural history that has been three billion years in the making.

"It's a land of extremes – we've got spectacular landscapes and wildlife and a rich and diverse history," enthuses Alan, as he explores every corner of the British Isles. His journey of discovery takes him from the frozen summit of Ben Nevis to the white sands of the temperate Isles of Scilly, and from the rain-drenched tip of western Ireland to the dry expanses of East Anglia.

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Beginning in very familiar surroundings – a garden – Alan peels back the layers of Britain's varied past. Robins once tailed wild boars who roamed Britain's extensive wildwood, turning over

the soil and supplying the birds with tasty morsels. But today the wildwood has all but disappeared, so the robins look to gardeners instead to unearth their food.

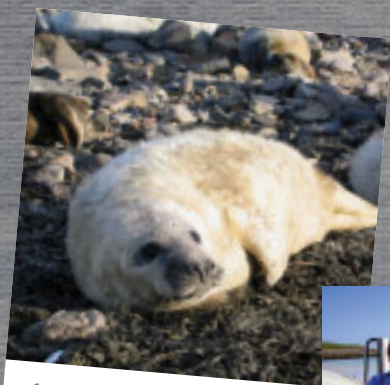
Heading back to his native Yorkshire, the presenter explains how seemingly innocent-sounding place names provide evidence of a wild legacy. A computer-generated sequence goes back in time to reveal that Wooley was once home to a great pack of wolves.

On Scotland's Isle of May, Alan discovers that the whiteness of the seal pups holds a clue to Britain's snowy heritage – their fur was camouflage during the Ice Age. Britain's diverse rock formations are also a testament to its turbulent past and Alan goes white water rafting in the glacial River Tay valley and whisky tasting in Scotland to discover more about the effects of different rocks. "As water flows down mountains and seeps through springs, it picks up ions and minerals which give the whisky different flavours," he explains.

Producers: Dan Tapster, Mary Colwell



Ben Nevis



Seal pups, Isle of May



Isles of Scilly

Programme Two:

Dinosaurs, Deserts And Volcanoes

Travelling from Jurassic Oxford to Scotland's Himalayas, Alan Titchmarsh explores the secret history of the British Isles hidden in the rocks beneath our feet. Flying *Top Gun*-style across Britain, Alan explains: "The landscapes flashing by beneath me are built on foundations laid down over billions of years. In their time, we've been blown apart by volcanic explosions; raised up into peaks as high as Mount Everest; part of a desert bigger than the Sahara; and submerged beneath great oceans. We've even had our own Jurassic Park."

The presenter reveals that Hadrian's Wall loosely traces a natural divide between Scotland and England. These two countries drifted together from their original locations, near the Equator and the South Pole, over a 120-million-year period before meeting with a bang, resulting in Britain's highest mountain range.

There are more surprises in Alan's own Yorkshire Dales. In dry stone walls he discovers fossils which reveal that, 360 million years ago, this area was once a sea. When he is lowered down into Gaping Ghyll – a cave containing a waterfall twice the height of Niagara Falls – he finds more evidence of coral reefs. "It's like a journey to the centre of the Earth," he comments.

On the Devon coast, Alan examines "concertinaed" rocks which prove that Britain was at the centre of a giant supercontinent, when all the continents of the globe collided 250 million years ago.

The limestone buildings in Oxford and the Dorset coast, meanwhile, disclose evidence of the Jurassic period, when dinosaurs roamed Britain. "Hundreds of dinosaurs have been found in our limestone rocks, making Oxford the original Jurassic Park," explains Alan.

In Ireland, the presenter investigates the last great defining event in British geological history. The 40,000 hexagonal columns which make up Giant's Causeway were created from lava. The eruption that caused them marked the birth of the Atlantic Ocean and heralded the emergence of the British Isles.

For the final 10 minutes of programmes two to seven, Alan hands over to presenters across the nations and regions for local insights into the environment in their part of the country.

Producer: Ian Gray



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