

Beauty in the Rocks: The Photography of David M. Baird

E.R. Ward Neale

Volume 33, Number 4, December 2006

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/geocan33_4rv02

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Geological Association of Canada

ISSN

0315-0941 (print)

1911-4850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Neale, E. W. (2006). Review of [Beauty in the Rocks:: The Photography of David M. Baird]. *Geoscience Canada*, 33(4), 191–192.

I have only one complaint to offer about the book and that is the landscape format (20.5 x 33 cm). I admit it works well for the presentation of illustrations, but the soft cover binding makes this a difficult book to hold. The first time I read the book I wanted to slouch in a chair, put my feet up and enjoy the story. No matter how I tried I just could not hold the book and turn pages without it falling out of my hands. It is a small matter, but then again for me it is the kind of book that deserves a relaxed read, with time to ponder the connections to my own experiences. Otherwise the book is nicely produced with quality illustrations and offered at a very good price.

For those with an interest in geoscience history in Canada this is a good introduction to a part of that history. If you have never seen the Canadian Museum of Civilization read this book and then go visit. A deeper understanding of the museum's origin gained from this book will make it all the more interesting.

Beauty in the Rocks The Photography of David M. Baird

By David M. Baird

TouchWood Editions

ISBN 10: 1-894898-37-0 (Hardcover)

ISBN 13: 978-1-894898-37-9

144 pages \$44.95

Reviewed by E.R. Ward Neale

5108 Carney Rd. NW, Calgary AB T2L 1G2

David Baird is known to this reviewer and other geoscientists for his work as a geologist, historian, educator and photographer extraordinaire. But he is also known to a much wider segment of the public through his creativity as founding Director of the National Museum of Science and, later, as founding Director of the Royal Tyrrell Museum. In 2004, the latter mounted an exhibition of Baird's black-and-white photographs amassed over his years of world travel. Images from that exhibition along with others from his collection form the basis of this remarkable book.

The essence of "Beauty in the Rocks" is perhaps best captured by the first two lines of a lovely poem in the introductory section:

"Walk softly, lest in your haste
You miss a thousand things of
beauty"

The author explains what you can miss in a prose format: "...natural patterns and textures are all around us. Satisfaction may come from the grandeur of a mountain scene....Delight may come from the symmetry of microcrystals in a snowflake or in a tiny cavity in a rock. In some places, the elements are being formed as we watch. In others, what we see tell us of events and processes in times past..."

This is the ideal coffee table picture book. Pages are not numbered and the lucid explanations of the pictures are not marred by technical jar-

gon. The photographs are grouped in "chapters" with catchy, self-explanatory titles. Thus, "Fashioned by Time" includes photos of glacial erratics in Norway, weathered granite in South Africa, chunks of basaltic lava in the Galapagos Islands rounded by Pacific surf, almost spherical boulders on a Cape Breton Island beach, and wind-blown sand grains in an ancient Newfoundland limestone. Other "chapters" are entitled: Field of View; Free-Flowing Forms; StillLife (fossils of course!); Cracks and Tracks; Geometry in Nature (e.g. columnar joints of Giant's Causeway); Beauty Revealed (roadcuts or erosion revealing ancient patterns); From Mountain Top to Sea; Waves and Ripples; Silent Sentinels (e.g. sea stacks and hoodoos).

The final "chapter", Off the Road, is probably my favourite because it includes several exquisite photos of back country Rocky Mountain scenes that I have come to know in my retirement years. As well, it includes Arctic mountains and a Chilean stratovolcano. Lone, distant figures in two of these scenes emphasize the insignificance of humans in the vast grandeur of nature.

The explanations of the pictures are frequently accompanied by interesting and/or amusing comments on circumstances at the time of photography. Thus, as he attempted to capture a diamond pattern made by waves on a Hawaiian beach "...the stream of passersby....seemed constantly intrigued by the crouching photographer with his nose and camera almost on the wet sand." A road cut in jointed slates at the intersection of the T.C.H. and the Banff-Jasper Highway caused "...tourists on the busy road to slow down to see what on Earth that man was fussing about on a mere rock outcrop. I was meanwhile thinking that beauty is where you find it." On another occasion, accompanying a warden on patrol in back country near Jasper, our hero was assigned a "gentle horse". Unfortunately, the animal was fright-

ened by its own noisy flatulence which led to a wild and windy ride! Most dramatic was the circumstance under which the mountains of the South Fiord Dome were captured. Flying over the frozen Arctic Sea in an Otter, a blown gasket required a rapid, powerless glide to reach safety on a flat bouldery strip of shoreline on Axel Heiberg Island. There, our dauntless photographer went about his business while the pilot summoned help.

Many geoscientists, including your reviewer, have participated in field trips with David Baird. Most of us admit that our very best pictures of rocks were achieved by surreptitiously pointing our cameras over his shoulder when he had carefully selected the right angle to catch the shadows on a mountain range or on a row of ripple marks. Our printed products were good but never as good as the Master's. Why? ...because David Baird develops and prints his negatives using the technique of "dodging" to highlight texture and details and so produce the aesthetically pleasing results that have enchanted thousands. "Beauty in the Rocks" is a must for your coffee table and an ideal gift for nature-loving friends and colleagues (e.g. soon-to-be geoscientist retirees!).

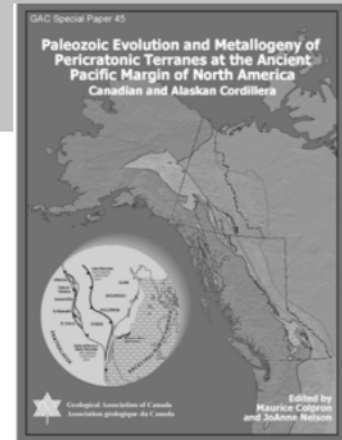
New Publications From the Geological Association of Canada



Paleozoic Evolution and Metallogeny of Pericratonic Terranes at the Ancient Pacific Margin of N. A.

M. Colpron, J. Nelson, 2006,
528 p. + CD, ISBN: 1-897095-22-8

This volume presents the results of a five year cooperative geoscience program, the Ancient Pacific Margin National Mapping Program. The eighteen papers in it address the pericratonic terranes, including the Kootenay, Yukon-Tanana and Slide Mountain/Seventy-mile terranes. New and previously published data are compiled in digital format on CD-ROM, along with published detailed geological maps.



Impact Structures in Canada



Impact Structures in Canada
R.A. Grieve, 2006, 219 p.,
ISBN: 1-897095-11-2

This book compiles, synthesizes and distils the knowledge base from published and unpublished data and information from the extensive program of study of Canadian impact structures, the program's partners and from other researchers. It represents a time-slice of integrated knowledge on Canadian impact structures, as it stands today.

Check out these and other great books online at:
www.gac.ca/bookstore