

Pyroclasts: A Clean Sweep For GSC

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Volume 6, numéro 3, septembre 1979

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/geocan6_3fea02

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Éditeur(s)

The Geological Association of Canada

ISSN

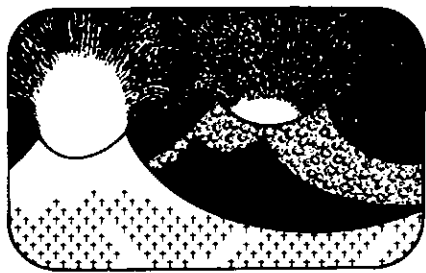
0315-0941 (imprimé)

1911-4850 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Neale, W. (1979). Pyroclasts: A Clean Sweep For GSC. *Geoscience Canada*, 6(3), 150–151.



Pyroclasts

By Ward Noale

A Clean Sweep For GSC

An oil patch acquaintance was saying just the other day that he had learned since childhood that the only Feds above criticism of mortal man were those of the RCMP and the GSC. Now that the RCMP are no longer sitting tall in the saddle, he wondered if the GSC could be also in danger of losing its divine status. He seemed to be particularly concerned about rumours that the Survey was abandoning its role in fundamental research and major contributions to the geoscience data base in order to accommodate political demands for short term judgments. No need to worry!

Committees of peers from all domains of our science recently chose GSC fundamentalists as winners of our three most prestigious national awards. It was a clean sweep in May as Charlotte Keen, marine geophysicist of the Atlantic Geoscience Centre, received the GAC's Past Presidents' Medal, Ray Thorsteinsson, Arctic boffin of the Institute of Sedimentary and Petroleum Geology, won the GAC's Logan Medal, and Tim Tozer, Triassic biostratigrapher from Ottawa headquarters, was awarded the Miller Medal of the Royal Society.

A Recipe for Choosing Medallists

Every now and then I run into someone who disparages this whole business of awarding medals and other gongs for science.

I've had thoughts pro and con on the subject over the years, particularly when I've been on an award committee or have decided to nominate a candidate. Both take up a lot of time and one can't help asking oneself what it's all in aid of. My doubts were resolved by seeing the

joy of colleagues who won various awards and, more important, by seeing the redoubled efforts they put into their disciplines after receiving such interim recognition. Most creative people are far more interested in strokes from peers than in raises, promotions and other mundane rewards.

My renewed interest in this subject comes from recent participation in a couple of award committees and on being asked (after the fact) by members of another committee why I hadn't renominated my candidate who would have been a strong contender for the prize. My conclusion is that if there is anything wrong with the award of prizes for merit and excellence the blame lies chiefly with award committees and, to a lesser extent, with the geoscience community who are often too lazy or selfish to nominate deserving colleagues.

The prime function of committees should be to ensure that all the best of the eligible scientists are considered for the awards. This can be done by reminding forgetful sponsors (like me) to up-date citations or re-nominate worthy candidates of other years. More important, the non-voting chairman of the committee should scan the field, identify worthy candidates wherever they may be, and prevail upon people to undertake the onerous task of nominating them. If non-voting, the chairman cannot be suspected of bias as she hassles the community in search of good candidates. Not having a vote, the chairman or rapporteur is saved from the subconscious temptation to skew the results when, having counted the other ballots, he casts his own vote. Other sound practices are: circulation of the ballots after counting to all voting members of the committee, and pre-balloting meetings, conference phone calls or circular letters so that committee members can discuss the merits of the various candidates. This last is most important when the award can embrace many subdisciplines and the judges may have to compare apples and oranges.

Committees should lay down clear guidelines and well published deadlines. It is rather frustrating to spend a good part of a day preparing a citation and dossier and later having your candidate declared ineligible because she holds a seat on the society's council or isn't a graduate of dear old Limestone U. or

whatever. Also, unless the committee carefully spells out the documentation required, candidates proposed by academics generally have an unfair advantage as their sponsors are accustomed to applying for grants and influencing committees. Academics generally present neat, laudatory citations, well-ordered c.v.s, complete bibliographies and irresistible testimonial letters from well-known authorities. People proposed by government or industrial scientists tend to be supported by rather turgid, less compelling data.

The geosciences are flourishing as never before in this country so that there must be 10 to 20 deserving candidates for every medal and award that is available. No awards committee should feel that it is doing its job properly unless it is looking at about that number of contenders. Of course we need sponsors for these top flight geoscientists and my recent experience shows that few people will spend the afternoon or even the entire day that may be necessary to prepare a citation and to round up support data and co-sponsors.

Postpone your mine-finding activities or your CJES manuscript until tomorrow and propose a deserving colleague for a gong today. Even if you don't end up with a medal winner, you will have helped your candidate by letting several influential people across the country know that he or she is doing a first-rate job. And if you don't think that is a worthwhile day's work you really don't belong in the trade.

Involvement Through Rotation

The Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences rotates its hard-working, volunteer Associate Editors at two and three year intervals. However, even after they leave this select group of masochists, their interest in the Journal persists unabated. They send us their very best papers and continue to rank among our most conscientious and willing referees.

I have often wondered why other institutions don't make more use of rotating volunteers. University geoscience departments have this capability through the appointment of adjunct professors. For example, I am just completing a three year term in such an honorary capacity at the University of Calgary and have greatly enjoyed the contact with students and faculty and some of the academic privileges in-

cluded with the title "I now feel a loyalty and commitment to U. of C. Geology and Geophysics and shall continue to give a handful of lectures (if asked) and, more important, to correct misinformed views about the Department and the University when in conversation with people downtown or colleagues in government. Few universities (except possibly Dalhousie) seem to have used such rotating adjunct professorships on a significant scale although it seems to be an excellent way to involve and enlighten a segment of the community concerning the goals, aims and operation of one's department. John Wheeler has talked of initiating similar adjunct research scientist positions at GSC. Is there any reason why provincial government departments and industrial groups can't also follow this trend? It costs nothing yet could pay great dividends in goodwill and service.

A Little Bit of Magic

Two recent memorable instructional experiences owed their success to the same ingredient.

I sat for the second time through a series of lectures by John Dewey, visiting professor at University of Calgary. The first time was 10 years ago in Newfoundland. The subject was the same - plate tectonics (hardly as new now as then); the audience was the same - undergrads, grads, industrial and government scientists and a few people from other disciplines; the response was the same - 100 per cent attendance throughout and a group of "graduates" who still are discussing excitedly the implications of the lectures months after they ended. Line drawings on the blackboard were superb in the inimitable Dewey style but, apart from that, the organization of the lectures wasn't particularly good and some of the slides were actually poor. What then was the secret of this memorable series?

In late May I went on an urban geology junket with Earl Christiansen, engineering geology consultant and editor of the best-selling atlas "Physical Environment of Saskatoon". I've always regarded Saskatoon as a most pleasant city but hardly a geologists' paradise - dull, drab unconsolidated Quaternary sediments completely covering the equally dull, drab Tertiary and Cretaceous sediments (sorry, Glen Caldwell). However, after wandering along the banks of the South

Saskatchewan River with Earl, I learned how to differentiate the tills, found out something of the evidence for Glacial Lake Saskatchewan and the history of deglaciation (see Can. Jour. Earth Science, v. 16, n.4), saw a chemical plant which wouldn't be causing its present pollution problem if it was intelligently sited a mere half mile from its present location, and became fascinated with the mechanics of river bank slides. I concluded my tour convinced that Saskatoon Quaternary rated with Newfoundland plate tectonics as one of the two jewels of geoscience.

What do Earl Christiansen and John Dewey have in common? - a vigorous, contagious, unashamed enthusiasm for their branches of geoscience. You can't remain long in the company of either without some of it rubbing off on you. Many of us need more of it.

Congratulations To:

- The Canadian Geoscience Council for choosing to hold its 1979 annual meeting in Calgary so that it can participate in National Geoscience Weekend (Logan Day to you easterners), September 29-30.
- Roger Blais (Montreal), Glen Caldwell (Saskatoon), Alexis Dreimanis (London), Branko Ladajny (Montreal) and Lorne Gold (NRC, Ottawa) who were all elected Fellows of the Royal Society of Canada in May. This is the largest group of earth scientists/engineers ever to make the local Royal in a single bash.
- Digby McLaren and Ted Irving who were two of the five Canadians to be elected Fellows of THE ROYAL (society of London). Further evidence that the geosciences are cresting in this great nation.
- John Wheeler upon his elevation to the bench. A GAC past president, John has voluntarily relinquished his duties as Deputy Director General of GSC to become a senior working scientist. His first mammoth undertaking will be to organize the next edition of Geology and Economic Minerals of Canada.

- John Smith, Deputy Minister of Mines of Nova Scotia, who invited a university professor and a G.S.C. employee to sit on the board to choose the provincial Chief Geologist. A great start in breaking down barriers between our various estates.
- To Bob Ledoux, J.Y. Chagnon, Bob Lamarche, Marc Andre Bérubé and all others who helped stage one of those good old time GAC/MAC meetings that we have not experienced for some years. Small (ca 700), friendly, well-organized, lots of good symposia and good papers, and an abundance of relaxed luncheons, banquets and receptions. This was the type of information exchange process that made GAC great - now that we have returned to it let us stick with it.

MS received June 7, 1979

Announcement

Trace Element Geochemistry Symposium GAC-MAC Meeting, Halifax, N.S. May 1980

The emphasis of this symposium will be on the use of trace element data to help solve geological problems. Authors wishing to contribute should contact Denis M. Shaw, Department of Geology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4M1.
by November 30th 1979
