

Pyroclasts: A Surfeit of Field Trips

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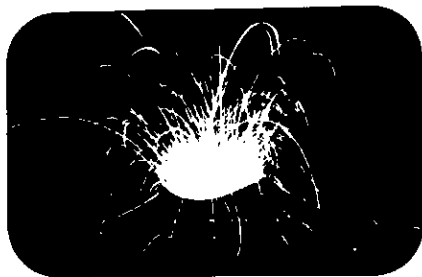
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Features



Pyroclasts

Ward Neale

A Surfeit of Field Trips

There was a time, not so long ago even on the Gregorian calendar, when the average Canadian field geologist did not stray far from his (few hers in those days!) field area. Provincial and federal survey supervisors looked with suspicion on those who asked permission to drop in on a colleague's field camp when en route to or from one's own field area. A very few university profs with mining exploration interests, Jim Gill was one, or academically-oriented explorationists, such as Duncan Derry, together with the irrepressible Tuzo Wilson, constituted most of our mega-thinking talent of the era. The rest of us concentrated on postage-stamp mapping of the problems delineated by an earlier generation of mega-thinkers such as Logan and Dawson. I recall that it was difficult for Geological Survey scientists to get a few days off to attend the New England Intercollegiate Field Conference - even though they proposed to do so at their own expense.

The switch came with the relative affluence of the 1960's catalyzed by the influx of professors from British universities with their tradition of visiting each other's outcrops (only a stone's throw apart on that little island), and by visitations from wide ranging American professors. I think particularly of Yale's John Rodgers in the latter group. With his steel trap

mind and incredible memory of minute detail, he was able to describe to field officers similar problems and possible solutions arrived at in the same or another orogen. He, in turn, would quickly unearth data of special interest to himself thanks to carefully tailored tours by the local experts. Subconsciously, a whole generation of Canadian Appalachian geologists changed their views on field tripping under the influence of Rodgers' visits twenty years ago.

In the 1960s, Canadians not only participated in international programs but devised national programs, such as the Southern Cordilleran Structure Project, which fostered cooperation between all three domains of Canadian geoscientists. British geologists, e.g. John Sutton and Wally Pitcher, who, when I first met them in 1963, had criticized Canadian field geologists for their confinement to quadrangles, must have been pleasantly surprised by the field trips of the 1972 International Geological Congress. That was our high-water mark: readable field guide books to cover the nation, data input from government, industry and the universities, and, in many cases, clear expositions of the most recent conceptual breakthroughs.

Can an activity so logical and enlightening be carried too far? A few brief encounters on the fringes of IGCP field trips in the Atlantic region this summer cause me to ponder this point. My impression was that many of the participants were chiefly along to see a new part of the world and to meet a much more convivial group of fellow tourists than they would encounter on your usual Sunshine tour. Better still, a company, a university department or a government grant picks up the tab. Also, many of the leaders and guides on these field trips are becoming jaded. Leading progressively less interesting groups of people year after year over the same old outcrops takes its toll. One said that it was becoming so routine that the only incentive to feign excitement would be a fat fee such as some petroleum companies pay

to the hired hammers who steer them through the mountain passes. Another, who claimed to have led four trips this summer, bemoaned the fact that he was never left with any time to map his own area and it was long since he had learned anything new from these show-and-tell sessions over old familiar ground. He claimed that we were tending to repeat our IGC success of 1972 like playing an old record instead of making time to cut new discs.

I recall that the GSC's late Lud Weeks and late Cliff Lord stated, when they finally gave their Appalachian workers permission to exchange field visits on a carefully limited scale, "It seems like a good idea but don't let it go too far or we'll never get any mapping done." In retrospect, I am beginning to appreciate their point.

In Memory of a Good Guy

I recall discussing this pronouncement over twenty years ago with the late Hugh Lilly and George Mannard (who has recently left our midst) as we sat on tree stumps outside our tents near Springdale, Newfoundland. Both had a keen interest in the larger geological picture, which is why we were together on that occasion, but George disagreed with me and tended to side with the Weeks/Lord viewpoint, maintaining that we must not lose sight of our immediate goals by being carried away with the curiosity and camaraderie of a profession that was also a lifetime hobby for many of us. That spirit of tolerant but hard-headed realism marked George as a leader when he later returned to university for postgraduate studies and it engendered much respect when he re-entered the mineral exploration domain.

Together with many others, I called upon him to share some of the status and respect he had acquired with the larger community through the Canadian Geoscience Council. Just when it seemed that the Council had achieved Duncan Derry's and Roger Blais' goals of bringing the geoscience community together,

it was faced with a serious breakaway threat from the mineral exploration people. George, as a recent dynamic chairman of the CIM Geology Division was the logical person to keep the Council moving toward its target. It was an unsuitable time for him as he was moving into ever more demanding positions in his company and backing away from outside commitments. Arm twisting was of no avail but, in a period of solitary reflection, he convinced himself that the goal was worthy and agreed to address his talents to it. An interview with Norah Allman published in the *Northern Miner* at the beginning of his term as President revealed all his previous doubts and present hopes for the Council and the unity of Canadian geoscience and served to sort out readers' thoughts on the subject. The rest is history: the mineral deposits scientists are now among the strongest in support of CGC and we all owe George Mannard a debt which we can no longer pay.

Some Other Memories

Bob McNutt leaving the editorship in order to devote even more time to teaching and research and his able assistant Maureen embarking on a career of motherhood leads me to think of the beginnings of this highly successful quarterly review journal.

It all started in Gerry Middleton's fertile mind. The irascible, rebellious Middleton of the late 60's and early 70's (now a staid, sober, conservative Logan medalist) constantly wrote crank letters to GAC Council threatening to bring about mass insurrection if they didn't revise publication policy and eliminate the annual Proceedings which served as competition to the *Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences*. We invited Gerry to Council meetings and I recall that, after the first one, several of us (including Bill Hutchison) felt that the answer was a strengthened Proceedings. Do you remember the attractive orange covers and the world-shaking Newfoundland papers in the last few issues of the Proceedings? Thereafter, common sense prevailed: Hutch called a meeting with Willis Ambrose, Stu Jenness and Claude Bishop of the CJES and they welcomed GAC participation in its operation. The Proceedings was discontinued. Then, to fill an open niche in national geoscience publication, Gerry had a long incubated proposal of a journal that would carry review articles, book and meeting reviews, GAC business proceedings, and a variety of commentaries.

Geoscience Canada was a success from the very beginning, and editorial flaws were few and excusable (e.g. mis-

spelling of unfamiliar foreign words like "flyssche"). The article on "The Pre-3 b.y. Crust" by Bill Fyfe and David Bridgwater in one of the earliest issues was probably cited more than any other Canadian paper of that year. The series on Facies Models attracted international attention and plaudits from public platforms. The magazine has built on these successes and has continued to be informative and innovative which is why the committee of peers which awards NSERC sustaining grants comments favourably on its performance each year. So our new Editor, Andrew Miall, who leaves everything he tackles just a little better than he found it, will meet his greatest challenge when he takes over Geoscience Canada and strives to improve upon perfection. One advantage is that he will not have to deal with the incurable procrastinator who has written the Pyroclasts column.

A Dearth of Ideas

I've never actually met a deadline for Pyroclasts since Gerry Middleton asked me to write a regular column "something like Bob Bates but entirely different". If I was a week late with Gerry, he would cut me off and my topical comments would be sadly out of date when they finally arrived in your mail box. But, Bob McNutt has been much more tolerant and he and Maureen have even shoe-horned the column in at proof stage. So, the fact that Pyroclasts hasn't appeared in the last two issues means that I have completely dried up and have nothing to write about. Worse, I didn't search around to find someone who did have something to write - this was part of the original mandate from Editor Middleton, a requirement that Editor Miall should consider if he continues Pyroclasts or something similar.

That said, it is pleasant to sit back and survey all the triumphs this column has had in its seven-year history, for example:

- Almost every Precambrian geologist in the G.S.C. is petitioning management to be transferred to Thunder Bay since the many advantages of this location were clearly and unarguably outlined in this column four years ago.
- Geri Eisbacher's concept of a National Geoscience Day, first proposed in the June 1978 column is sweeping the nation just as predicted: cautious Toronto is still considering the concept; headstrong Vancouver may, one year, try it again.
- Constant nagging over the past seven years about the poor quality of slides used in most geoscience talks has not fallen on deaf ears. In a recent symposium talk the speaker, one of the worst offenders, inserted a special slide

upside down and back to front "for the benefit of Ward Neale". Also, in a recent article, Roger McQueen notes that poor slides are as prevalent as ever - but, presumably, no more prevalent, so quality didn't deteriorate in response to the Pyroclast warning as many predicted.

- The continual and assertive, optimistic predictions of a continually growing market for geoscientists and the end of cyclical employment out of phase with enrolments was at least as accurate as the similar 1970 Blais *et al.* prediction (made just before the 1971 recession). With a string of successes like this to my credit, there is no point in brooding over the odd failure as I put the cap on my ball point and say goodbye to the thousands of well wishers who really meant to write and phone in. I understand their predicament as I, too, have missed deadlines. Following tradition, we shall end with:

Three Cheers To:

Brian Norford of the GSC, Calgary office, who has been elected Chancellor of the University of Calgary, the first geologist to become titular head of a major university in this country. Brian has served the University for many years as a Senator and more recently as a member of the Board of Governors. Chancellors of Alberta universities are busy people. Each has a permanent office staff, a Senate to chair and a mandate to monitor the activities of the University and to represent the public interest. Who better than Brian in such a role, presiding with dignity and wit over convocations, swathed in his golden Emperor robes?

Tectonist *Paul Hoffman* (41), Metallogenist *David Strong* (38), and Conodontologist *Chris Barnes* (42) who, with a combined age of 121 represent the youngest trio of geoscientists ever elected on a single occasion to fellowship in the august Royal Society of Canada. Fitting that in its Centennial Year the Society would choose such strong candidates from our science. Chris also received the Bancroft Award of the Society for his skill in communication beyond the realm of his profession.

Ray Thorsteinsson, GSC veteran of the Arctic, who received the R.J.W. Douglas Medal of the CSPG to add to all the other medals (Logan, Miller, Polar, Massey, etc.) that he stores in one corner of a lower drawer of his laboratory bench.

Charlie R. Stelck, University of Alberta's veteran paleontologist and master teacher who was awarded the Logan Medal, and *Noel James*, Memorial's carbonate specialist, who received the Past-President's Medal at the G.A.C. meetings in Winnipeg. They have in common the admiration of the Oil Patch which looks on Charlie as a revered father figure and Noel as a favourite son.

Peter I. Russell who received the GAC Service Award (pity they couldn't call it the Distinguished Service Award) who designs and draws the attractive, amusing, thought-provoking logos that head most Geoscience Canada articles, including Pyroclasts. Congratulate Peter next time you see him wearing his special gold and blue Association tie.

Graham Williams who has retired as Editor of *Geolog*. Like Gerry Middleton and Bob McNutt, he had the courage (and wisdom) to step aside at the very peak of his success; and to *Godfrey Nowlan*, the new editor of *Geolog*, who, like Andy Miall, is bold enough to step into some very large shoes.

Au Revoir.

MS received September 9, 1982.

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