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 professors 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 visitsations 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 geologists 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 it 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 hammermen 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 IGCP 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 Männard (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 peo-
ple. George, as a recent dynamic chair-
man of the CIM Geology Division was the
logical person to keep the Council mov-
ing toward its target. It was an unsuitable
time for him as he was moving into ever
more demanding positions in his com-
pany 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 sub-
ject. The rest is history: the mineral de-
posits 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 teach-
ing and research and his able assistant
Maureen embracing on a career of moth-
erness leads me to think of the begin-
nings 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 medal-
list) 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 Pro-
cedings? Thereafter, common sense
prevailed. Hutch called a meeting with
Wilis 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
"flyschte"'). The article on "The Pre-3 by
Crust" by Bill Fyle and David Bridgewater
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 per-
formance each year. So our new Editor,
Andrew Mail, 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 Death 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 safely 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 man-
date from Editor Middleton, a require-
ment that Editor Mail 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.
- Gert Eistbacher's concept of a National
  Geoscience Day, first proposed in the
  June 1976 column is sweeping the
  nation just as predicted: cautious
  Toronto is still considering the con-
  cept; 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 sympo-
  sium 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 pre-
  valent, 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 under-
stand their predicament as I, too, have
missed deadlines. Following tradition,
we shall end with:

Three Cheers To:
Brian Norford of the GSCC, Calgary office.
who has been elected Chancellor of the
University of Calgary, the first geologist
to become titular head of a major univer-
sity 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), Metallogen-
ist David Strong (38), and Conodontolo-
gist Chris Barnes (42) who, with a com-
bined 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, Mass ey,
etc.) that he stores in one corner of a
lower drawer of his laboratory bench.
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