

Pyroclasts: Our Own Geoscience Day

Ward Neale

Volume 5, numéro 2, juin 1978

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/geocan5_2fea03

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Geological Association of Canada

ISSN

0315-0941 (imprimé)

1911-4850 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Neale, W. (1978). Pyroclasts: Our Own Geoscience Day. *Geoscience Canada*, 5(2), 84–86.

out in new directions. With no new blood entering the system, it is the responsibility of those with classes in geology to prevent further deterioration of the geology program.

With our present concern with the environment and energy, geology teachers and professors should attempt to influence school administrations, school boards and the public to be supportive to geoscience education in the secondary schools and the secondary school teachers should cooperate closely with elementary science teachers in their area. High school geology teachers should encourage the use of earth science as enrichment for Physics, Biology and Chemistry. In this way, may we be able to continue the geoscience program in the high schools during the difficult times ahead. Although there may not be a great need for geology teachers, there will still be a need for well-trained earth scientists to help solve the ever-increasing problems of our world.

MS received February 17, 1978



Pyroclasts

Ward Neale

October 1st— Our Own Geoscience Day

Geri Eisbacher has come up with the brightest idea since plate tectonics. He suggests a national day devoted to our science, a day when we foregather in various parts of the country in order to hike, to look at a few outcrops, or to picnic in a natural setting. This could be followed by informal toasts to founders of our national geoscience or just relaxed chats about new developments in local or national geology.

Geri brought back the idea from Peru where he holidays every fall in order to satiate his passion for avalanches, archeology and those misleading green rocks above pseudo-subduction zones. Here are some excerpts from his letter: "Peruvian geologists get together every year on September 19 to celebrate the birthday of Eduardo Lizon, their Father of Geology. This *dia de la geologia* is observed all the way from the oil rigs of the selva to the parks of Lima. Usually it takes the form of a very relaxed field trip followed by a pachamanca (Inca-style picnic) . . . I think we should declare William Logan's birthday either Logan Day or the Canadian Day of Geology, and celebrate it across the country in a dignified way, e.g., with field trips culminating in picnics upon a nearby favourite outcrop".

Logan's birthday unfortunately comes at the wrong time of the year for most of us except the Vancouverites - it is April 20. However, the first Sunday in October would be a good choice as most of us are then back from the field and have comfortably renewed acquaintanceship with families and friends. Many local groups have field trips sometime in the fall and at least one of these already

comes close to the type of event Geri has in mind - namely the Winnipeg GAC Section's annual "family picnic on an outcrop". With slight readjustments of dates, many of us could impart national significance to our *ad hoc* fall junkets. Other groups and individuals could fill a great gap in their calendar.

Naturally there will be many variations to national geoscience Founder Day celebrations across this great nation: a parade around the Signal Hill nature trail in St. John's followed by an Alexander Murray Passion Play in Cabot Tower; a lobster boil at Peggy's Cove with a solemn dissertation on Reverend Honeyman's sex life by the Hon. Bill Gillis; a sermon on the Mount (Royal?) by the Jeans; Lajoie and Drap au, a white tablecloth and champagne in Gatineau Park as Logan's successor Digby McLaren entertains his USA and USSR counterparts; and God only knows what will happen in Alberta, the land of "blowouts", but if it really has to be dignified the blue-eyed Arabs will probably settle for blank cartridges in their six guns!

There could be much beneficial fallout from Logan Day celebrations, e.g., involvement of our families and interaction with people throughout the community who have interests in geoscience. Most important, however, would be the opportunity to reflect a little on the contributions geoscientists have made to this country over the past century and a half and to gain some proud sense of the deep and widespread roots from which we are growing.

The Eisbacher proposal should stir us all into action by October 1st, 1978. It would be a good idea for the Canadian Geoscience Council through its member societies to establish a firm date and for all local groups to keep each other informed of plans through the pages of *Geolog* until we can wish each other "many happy returns of Founders Day".

Where do all our Graduates go?

The next annual report of the Geoscience Council is chiefly devoted to Soil Science in Canada which should be very informative to most readers who are as ill-informed as I am on the topic. The report, available in mid-summer (as GSC Paper 78-6), also contains many other gems. One of them is statistical

data on Canadian geoscience departments which has all sorts of surprises in store for you. Some samples: we have graduated about 700 B.Sc. students per year for the past several years; very few leave the country for employment elsewhere (despite rumours to the contrary), and almost none goes abroad for graduate studies (just the opposite from my student days). Also, the number of faculty members hasn't increased in the last four years. This last means that the average faculty member is getting older, is being promoted to higher rank and is costing more. This in turn could mean a much higher cost per capita to train students. On the cheerful side, however, there is a continuing strong increase in the number of non-majors who are taking introductory courses in geology and, hence, keeping our aged professors busy. The Committee of Chairmen of Earth Science Departments of Canada deserves much credit for putting together this first in-depth report on statistics of university geoscience. It has a ring of truth about it which was always lacking in those weird Statistics Canada figures.

Geosciences in the Provinces

Also to be included in GSC Paper 78-6 is a GAC brief on 'Geosciences in the Provinces' prepared by David Strangway and Roger Macqueen. It points out some of the main geoscience problems that face the nation such as energy, waste disposal, metallic mineral exploration, industrial minerals and terrane use. Suggestions are offered for a greater input by the provinces towards solutions of these problems both by using their own manpower and by fully utilizing other services available to them in their own domain. The brief was apparently well received by the politicians and senior mandarins at the Provincial Mines Ministers Conference in Quebec last September. However, if anything is to come of it, the push will ultimately have to come from the groups of geoscientists employed by the provinces.

Nickel Belt in News Again

The University of Calgary's student affairs committee has come up with the idea of an annual ceremony resembling the Engineer's iron ring rites in which our annual 700 graduates from Canadian universities will be inducted into the mysteries of the Earth. The idea has been received enthusiastically by western universities and they are now trying to sell the idea in the conservative east. One suggestion for an iron ring substitute is a simple nickel ring (presumably to help unemployment around Laurentian U.) with a modest quartz granule mounted upon it. Geology clubs are invited to seek more information on this professional status symbol from John Cosgrove of the Rundle Club at U. of C.

Look Before You Leap

The advantages of interchanges between government, industry and universities need no re-telling. Cross-fertilization and the sweeping away of cerebral cobwebs are just two of the obvious ones. One of the major obstacles to job hopping was the lack of portable pension plans but this seemed to be partly remedied when the Federal Government entered into reciprocal agreements with most universities, some provincial government agencies and various crown companies.

However, if you plan to switch jobs one of these years, don't be misled by this word "reciprocal". Listen to my sad case, weep for me, and then tread carefully and don't sign anything until you know what it is going to cost you.

I left government in 1968 with over 14 years of paid-up superannuation which I transferred to Memorial University. About a year later I received a cheque for \$529.00 from the government which represented my own share of the difference between its 6% per cent and Memorial's 6 per cent plan. I contributed to Memorial's pension plan for nearly 8½ years and as my salary was well in excess of anything I was likely to earn with government, my actual cash contributions were probably higher than if I had stayed with government despite the rate difference. When I returned to government in 1976, one of the attractions was the reciprocal pension plan. I read the cheerful account of it in a university booklet, made some anxious routine inquiries of my future employers and received assurance that I wouldn't

require a medical. I realized I might have to return my \$529.00 or something like it to compensate for the different contribution rates (the government rate had recently increased to 7½%). After 16 months on the job and almost continual inquiries, I was suddenly confronted with the fact that my 22½ years of pension were now equated with 15 years of pension under the current government plan. I had joined Memorial in 1968 with 14 years to my credit, in the fall of 1976 I had 15 years to my credit. What, then, does reciprocity mean? It means that I am entitled to buy back my missing years, but they have to be the earliest years (in my case 1954-61) at a rate set by the government plus interest for the intervening years. So, even though I've probably paid more into the system than I should have if I'd spent my entire 22½ years with government, I suddenly find myself unexpectedly and rather severely penalized.

How can you avoid this? First, get hold of a government pension booklet which, unfortunately, isn't automatically sent to you by the personnel people who hire you. There are enough ominous statements in it to frighten you. If your university booklet doesn't contain the same subtle warning about reciprocity, raise hell with your administrators. Your next step is to ask for a close estimate in writing of the cost of your pension transfer. If you can get this, you might decide either to leave your current pension where it is as a paid-up annuity or to raise the minimum salary you would require from the government. If you can't get such an estimate, start thinking hard before you sign on the dotted line.

That's all the free advice for now. More, much more is available but there is a charge for it as I'm starting to save for my old age. (For more on pensions, see Letters.)

Let's End with a Catastrophe

Many of us smirked when the first brochure advertising *Catastrophist Geology* crossed our desks a few years ago - it seemed as if it would be just another 'nut' magazine. Now I find that I read it regularly and that it is changing my mind about uniformitarianism and other basic concepts firmly fixed within me back in my own *Geology 100* days. A typical paper is associate editor Peter Gretener's 'Continuous versus Discontinuous and Self-perpetuating versus

Self-terminating Processes' which contemplates the rare event in geology. Peter classifies discontinuities on the basis of their frequencies into regular, common, recurrent, occasional and rare in a stimulating philosophical discourse that is being increasingly quoted in "straight" papers on sedimentology and structural geology. A typical news item differs from the bland accounts in standard journals - thus M.I.T.'s new earth science building is described as an "embarrassing monument to the study of the Earth" representing "scientific materialism . . . tragically visible". The Journal is published twice a year by Johan B. Kloosterman, Caixa Postal 41.003, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.

MS received March 2, 1978;
Revised MS March 13, 1978