

Pyroclasts: A Return to the Prefaces of the Past

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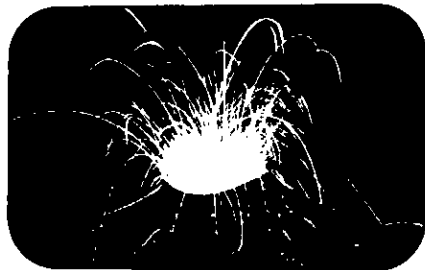
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Features



Pyroclasts

Ward Neale

A Return to the Prefaces of the Past

Lynn Machan's account of the Earth Science Editors' meeting, found elsewhere in this issue, stresses the need to target one's audience and quotes a Kansas Survey editor as stating that any time you attempt to reach two or more different audiences in a single publication, you usually end up in trouble. All very true up to a point.

However, there is probably one special audience, at least, who deserves an intelligible explanation of even the most specialized of government reports: the taxpayers. In the good old days they used to receive readable accounts from chaps such as William Logan, Esq., who addressed his GSC reports of progress to people such as His Excellency, Sir Edward Walker Head, Bart., One of Her Majesty's Most Honorable Privy Council and Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief, etc., and etc., and etc. In the reports, Logan summarized his own labours and those of his stout-hearted men, Alexander Murray, T. Sterry Hunt, James Richardson and Elk Billings, in words that were understandable to the good Captain-General and his honourable aides and, hence to the general public.

Those days have long since passed. Most provincial surveys now present their highly technical reports to a very specialized readership without even a "by your leave" to those who subsidize the studies on which the reports are based. The GSC still has prefaces to its Bulletin and Memoir series. Unfortunately they are all short and crisp and say exactly the same thing, viz. "Such detailed studies form the foundation upon which is based the precise dating and correlation of rocks which make up the geological framework of Canada . . . (they) contribute toward the inventory of energy resources . . .". Unfortunately, these prefaces all ring of civil service, ass-covering baffle-gab to the lay reader who probably hasn't any idea of what a geological framework might be.

This brings to mind the GSC Bulletin by Wayne Brideaux entitled "Taxonomy of Upper Jurassic-Lower Cretaceous Microplankton from the Richardson Mountains". It was singled out for particular criticism in a series of columns attacking government publication policy in the *Globe and Mail*. The columnist, Geoffrey Stevens, asked "How much money is Ottawa wasting by publishing books, reports and periodicals that no one will read". He had been misinformed as to the total sales of this Bulletin and he had been misled by the title and the skimpy preface into believing it was a rarified piece of descriptive science that was of little use to God or Man. Geologists generally were angry about the attack, knowing that Brideaux's was a good and useful piece of work. Some were even amused, knowing that on the strength of this and a few other similar reports, an oil company had already hired Wayne Brideaux away from the Survey. Some were perplexed, knowing that Stevens was usually a careful and fair reporter, both in his column and as a guest commentator on radio shows. As a perplexed editor, I wondered if Stevens might have reacted differently if William Logan had written a decent preface to this otherwise first-rate report. It would have been a

long preface because it would start by telling what microplankton were and also something of the science of palynology and its potential for interpreting the environment. Then it would zero in on why the author was collecting his specimens from the 150 million year old rocks on the east flank of the Richardsons and carefully zoning this well-exposed sequence. The strata exposed in the Richardsons are laterally continuous with the oil- and gas-bearing strata deep below the surface of the highly favourable Mackenzie Delta region. If William Logan was around he would have made damned sure that the Governor-in-Council and all citizens entitled to the vote got the message. They would realize that this report provided a tool for the petroleum geologists who examine well-cuttings and who correlate from well to well in order to locate promising targets.

With such a Logan-like preface, would columnist Stevens have held this report up to ridicule? I don't think so and neither does author Brideaux. Therein lies my parting bit of advice to government editors: Back to Logan A.S.A.P.

Petroleum Geology from Coast to Coast
GAC's sister society, the CSPG, is determined to make its influence felt far beyond the Calgary city limits. I was fortunate to be present at the first meeting of its National Liaison Committee which included activists such as the east coast's Graham Williams, the west coast's Bob Thompson and people from in between such as Rand Harrison, Norm Wardlaw and Lawrence Vigrass.

The CSPG has been trying to enhance its image across the country for several years, beginning with notable thrusts during Jack McMillan's 1977 reign. News of its activities appear in *Geolog* and its annual student field trip and its prizes at student meetings have made it well known on campuses across the country as have the cross-country tours of its top speakers of the year. Activities have increased during the 1981 presidency of Fred Calverley who strongly feels that the

rich and highly organized CSPG has an obligation to disseminate word of advances in petroleum geoscience across the country. Fred, and president-elect Neil Hutton, do not look upon this as a recruiting campaign for members but as the national obligation of a successful society whose major activities have hitherto been confined to a single city - for very obvious reasons. Where possible, they hope to work with established national and local societies to produce a variety of joint programs.

Some of the suggestions that the Liaison Committee made to the Executive Committee of CSPG were:

- Regional input to the Executive Committee, e.g. by having areal representatives designated ex officio members of that committee.
- Establishment of formal relationships with local and national societies, e.g., CSPG and GAC could each appoint a representative of the other to their editorial committees. The Atlantic Geoscience Society has already appointed the local CSPG representative as its official liaison person.
- Some meetings should be held outside Calgary, preferably in conjunction with another society which is already established at the chosen site (e.g. GAC Section in St. John's, Nfld., or the CIM group in Ottawa).
- A quarterly CSPG information bulletin should be widely circulated across the country - preferably through existing newsletters (e.g. *Geolog*).
- Improvement of the District Speakers Program by giving longer notice of their availability, having them talk at times and in places where they will reach maximum audiences and suggesting that they conduct career seminars for interested groups of university students.
- Travelling displays of cores and other exhibits, usually mounted by individual companies, could be advertised and co-ordinated by CSPG.
- Short courses, again often put on by individual companies, could be advertised and co-ordinated by CSPG.
- Field trip guides and road maps should be supported by CSPG on an even larger scale than heretofore.
- The CSPG should act as a clearing house to bring postgraduate students in touch with projects that industry would be willing to sponsor.

Most or all of the CSPG areal representatives are also GAC members of long standing. Their intent is to bring the two societies together to improve profes-

sional programs across the country. You should be seeing evidence of it long before you read this but if you are not, and if you have good ideas on how to bring such cooperation about, contact any of those mentioned in the first paragraph or Noel James in St. John's, Eric Mountjoy in Montreal, Don Sherwin in Ottawa, Andrew Miall in Toronto or Bill Last in Winnipeg.

The GSA Shifts Gears

The Geological Society of America which has been coasting downhill for a long time is gearing for a rapid ascent in the year ahead. Its serious troubles began some time ago when it converted its prestigious Bulletin to microfiche and its prestigious stable of authors (more so than subscribers) began to boycott it. But it had other troubles which extended back further: endowed with riches by a generous patron long ago, it had built up an enormous, self-perpetuating salaried staff and a sumptuous, country-club like headquarters in sunny Boulder, Colorado. Poor investments, a levelling of membership (at about 12,000) and a decision to make subscriptions to publications optional all spelled increasing trouble.

Publication Study began to cut through this morasse of troubles about a year ago. The membership was polled, printing and processing costs were investigated and marketing and financing were examined. Recommendations that came out of the studies have already been implemented: (1) No more microfiche; (2) Volunteer "outside" editors for the Bulletin, Geology, Map Series and the Memoir Series (our own Glen Caldwell in this case); (3) All members get all publications; (4) An aggressive campaign to secure advertising for the Bulletin and Geology; (5) Instigation of voluntary page charges; (6) A Publications Committee with teeth - all four editors will be among its members; (7) Acceptance of bank credit cards to pay for memberships and publications.

These innovations have already reversed the downhill slide - at last report, first-rate manuscripts were deluging the editor of the revived Bulletin, erosion by resignations had come to a halt and advertising revenues were beginning to flow in. Retiring president Howard Gould can look back with satisfaction on a year of activity and change. Incoming president, Digby, J. McLaren can look forward to a year when the venerable Society becomes completely rejuvenated.

Messages For Cajuns

The GAC has never been unfortunate enough to have received a large donation of any kind so it limps along in makeshift quarters with an underpaid, salaried staff of three to service its 3000 members. Nonetheless, there are important messages to be drawn from the GSA experience.

First is the publication situation. There are pressures at each of our annual meetings to drop or make optional some or all of our publications. The GSA found that by doing this, and reducing press-runs, those who continued to take publications were faced with higher charges. Those who decided not to take publications soon lost all interest in the Society. The answer is to improve the quality of publications but not to drop them.

Second, the salaried staff at GSA, even now that it is reduced to 30 is still proportionately much larger than the 3 who handle the chore work of our very active organization. Over the years we have relied on enormous contributions of hours from volunteer people such as Chris Barnes and, later, Alan Morgan to keep our shop running. Our councillors and committees have paid their own way or asked their employers to pay their way to meetings. Even those who have their fares paid by their employers are making sacrifices for, if they are sponsored to a GAC Council meeting, it is unlikely that they will get to that conference in Arkansas or the seminar in La Jolla. Attempts to pay honoraria and travel expenses have been brought forward from time to time and always shot down except for very special cases. It is one of the few ways that most Canadian employers can be coerced into making a contribution to geoscience.

Seeing something of the enormous drain on GSA's treasury by the travels of its many committees and knowing something of the cost of its large bureaucracy makes one appreciate the low-key way in which GAC has been able to do so many things so well - on the cheap.

Congratulations

- To Ray Price who, after two months as Senior Research Scientist with the GSC in Ottawa, took over the helm as Director General. There are so many fast shifts at the top in GSC that *Geoscience Canada* cannot keep abreast of them. Readers are advised to keep informed by telephone until the situation in high places stabilizes.

- To Robert Bates, author of the Geologic Column in *Geotimes* who was awarded the AESE Outstanding Editorial or Publishing Contribution Award at a recent meeting of the Association of Earth Science Editors. Bob's many Canadian readers will rejoice in this overdue award to a provocative and witty columnist so I was not surprised to notice tears on the cheeks of Bob McNutt and Maureen Dickson Czerneda, our own *Geoscience Canada* editors. It turned out that they were particularly moved by a Wendell Cochran tribute to Bates - "he has never missed a single deadline with his column". In contrast, Editor McNutt pointed out that Pyroclasts had never yet been turned in on time.

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Mount Allison University is situated on the isthmus joining Nova Scotia to Mainland New Brunswick in the town of Sackville (pop. 6,000). With a current enrollment of almost 1600 students, the university offers a full range of programs in Arts, Science, Education and Professional Schools. Candidates should send application, resumé, and the names and addresses of three referees as soon as possible to: Dr. Laing Ferguson, Head, Department of Geology, Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B. E0A 3C0. Canadian immigration regulations require that Canadian citizen and landed immigrants be given first preference.

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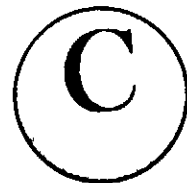
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