

# Pyroclasts

Ward Neale

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Volume 3, Number 1, February 1976

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/geocan03\\_01fea02](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/geocan03_01fea02)

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**Publisher(s)**

The Geological Association of Canada

**ISSN**

0315-0941 (print)

unknown (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

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**Cite this article**

Neale, W. (1976). Pyroclasts. *Geoscience Canada*, 3(1), 54–55.



## Pyroclasts

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A lifetime supply of a well-known Kaolin compound goes to an anonymous geoscientist from Eureka Sound, N.W.T. for suggesting the name for this column. Let the bombs and lapilli fall where they may.

### Fireworks In Old Quebec

Patrick McTaggart-Cowan, recently retired director of the Science Council of Canada, was in rare form at a SCITEC mini-forum on the Role of Science Societies which was held in Quebec in early November. He lashed out at several sacred cows and took a few lashes in return. A full report (by H. R. Wynne-Edwards) will appear in the SCITEC Bulletin but a few of the exchanges might arouse the interest of G.C. readers.

He stated that Canadian scientific umbrella councils will not get massive financial help from government so we should dismiss that possibility from our minds. If we wish, we can then forget all about umbrella groups and go back to our own inward-looking societies and thereby lose any chance of controlling our fate. Alternatively we can strengthen our umbrella groups and raise our own money. He pointed to the American Meteorological Society which operates on a budget of \$1 million, most of it derived from publications. He suggested that supergroups, such as Canadian Geoscience Council should wrest control of the Canadian Research Journals from NRC and rely on them for income to do the things needed by national science.

There were many angry cries against that outburst. It was pointed out that just as we have U.S. branch plant

economics, so we have U.S. branch plant science. Everyone feels they must belong to the GSA or the AGU, but they think hard before they will fork out a miserable \$18.00 per annum for the GAC or CGU. All our societies have to seek subsidization of their publications and without NRC management and subsidization there would be no Canadian research journals in most fields.

McTaggart-Cowan then went on to catalogue some current ills of Canadian science. He said that with all the other impediments they have to face, universities and industry increasingly have to overcome new governmental obstacles. The strength of university science departments is being eroded by financial starvation. Expanding government departments are hiring the good people away from universities. Once in government the scientists find themselves hamstrung by scientifically illiterate top management and in order to play the game, many senior scientists become unthinking bureaucrats. Science which used to be at the bottom of the Prime Minister's priority list is now no longer on it at all. Politicians who pride themselves on gut reactions are increasingly taking advantage of the anti-intellectual and anti-university attitudes that are spreading across the land. If no one holds up a mirror to show people what they are doing to themselves, we'll soon be back in the Dark Ages.

### Who Should Ring the Fire Alarm?

Universities which should be confronting politicians and bureaucrats and challenging public attitudes are running scared. University presidents have become accustomed to holding out the begging bowl and don't wish their employees' misbehaviour to interfere with the handouts. The Science Council has been effective in some ways but was never supposed to be representative of the scientific community. McTaggart-Cowan feels that the burden of challenge and confrontation, the defence of science must rest with the scientific societies – preferably the big amalgams like the Biological Council of Canada, the Canadian Geoscience Council and with SCITEC itself.

Discussion was vigorous and varied. Two sample comments may whet your appetite for a fuller account.

Hugh Wynne-Edwards said that in some fields of science 75 per cent of R and D is carried out in government. If so, close to 75 per cent of the scientists must be employed by Government. If they also form 75 per cent of the executives of their learned societies, it means that there are only a handful of scientists left to initiate confrontation and to speak out on public issues.

O. M. Solandt, highly respected senior statesman of Canadian science, agreed with McTaggart-Cowan that some ill-advised appointments had been made in the highest places. He felt that the wrong people in the top jobs had done much to destroy the links between science and government. As an example he said that if geologist Jim Harrison had been appointed Secretary of the Ministry of Science and Technology, as almost everyone thought he should be and would be when that ill-fated ministry was first established, the whole complexion of Canadian science would have been much healthier than it is today.

I think most or all of us would privately endorse that sentiment. It is nice to have people like McTaggart-Cowan and Solandt to say these things out loud. It is too bad there was no CGC or SCITEC to say it at the crucial time.

### Help Stamp-Out In-Groups

Cliques or in-groups are as dangerous to geoscience as they are to other branches of geopolitics. They control our every move, so be warned. Just the other day, standing at a bus stop following a geological meeting, I overheard a conversation that exposed some of their current activities: doling out NRC grants, deciding on promotions in GSC and ODM, running GAC (as usual), and giving bookends to each other at public meetings. They must be stamped out – and it must be done quickly because in-groups have a mysterious way of disappearing into the wall rock, so unless you move swiftly you might find yourself waving your hammer in thin air. For example:

I spent a few years in the U.K. in the mid 1960s where I learned that THE ESTABLISHMENT was responsible for all the many ills of British geoscience. Upon my return, I asked my boss, Jim Harrison (yes, the same guy) if we also had an establishment. He thought not but the query eventually led him and two distinguished co-authors to investigate and they published a paper with their

startling findings. It turned out that only 27 people occupied more than half the positions on the Country's 17 influential geoscience committees. Even more frightful, only eight people controlled one quarter of the positions. We actually had a geoscience Establishment in quasi-democratic Canada. This in-group of eight included Harrison himself and Ewart Blanchard, Bob Folinsbee, Walter Kupsch, Bob Legget, Don Rose, Tuzo Wilson and W. E. Van Steenburgh. The investigation was carried out in 1967, published in 1968 and plans were laid in 1969 to destroy this powerful little junta. But it was too late, the rascals had disappeared without trace and in their place was another formidable hierarchy headed by Roger Blais and (a re-cycled) Duncan Derry. Where are they now? Yes, you must move fast if you wish to stamp out our in-group. When the bookends are presented, your chance has gone. You have just missed Chris Barnes!

MS received December 3, 1975.

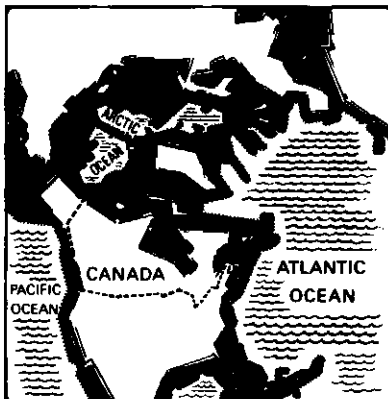


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