

## Editorial

Gerard V. Middleton

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## Editorial

This issue completes the first five volumes of *Geoscience Canada*, and brings to an end my term as editor. The new editor, appointed by the Geological Association of Canada, is Robert H. McNutt (also of McMaster University).

Editing *Geoscience Canada* has been a fascinating experience: we tried to produce a magazine that would complement the GAC's better established publications (*Geolog* and *CJES*) and that would fill a need felt by the geoscience community in Canada. *Geolog* gives us news of personalities and events. *The Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences* gives us documented reports from the research frontier. *Geoscience Canada* has tried to give us some perspective on our science: what do we know, or *think* we know now (review articles)? What is the latest word from the research frontier, and which way is the frontier moving (conference reports)? How do other people see the state of our science today and do we agree with them (book reviews)? What does the earth science community have to say about its own concerns and those of Canadian society at large?

Paradoxically, the very quantity and diversity of material now being published about the earth sciences is the major factor that has created a need for a magazine like *Geoscience Canada*. As research reports fatten the primary journals, and symposia proceedings, monographs and textbooks accumulate on the shelves of our offices and libraries, we long for someone who will explain to us, in a few well chosen words, what it all means. Our heartfelt thanks go out to the authors who have set aside for a while their search for new facts and deeper insights, and have taken the trouble to explain to the larger community of earth scientists just what is going on in their own part of it. No doubt the task often brings its own reward: the effort to explain something in simple language generally leads to a clearer understanding of it in our own minds (hence also the link between research and teaching). And my own special thanks to those who

have contributed regular columns: only an editor truly knows the blessing of finding an author who understands the craft of writing and the reality of deadlines.

These are critical times for scientific publishing in general, and for scholarly journals in Canada in particular. There is widespread unease about publishing policies and rapidly increasing costs. Some radical solutions are about to be given a trial, most notably the production of the *Bulletin* in microform by the Geological Society of America. At the request of NRC, a special committee of the Royal Society has been engaged for more than a year in a broad-ranging study of the scientific quality, production and financing of scientific journals in Canada. It has been suggested to the committee that it explore the consequences of NRC turning over the production of its Canadian Journals to the various scientific societies.

Without making a special effort of the mind, it is hard to remember just how radically earth science publishing has changed in Canada during the last 15 years. Before 1963, the only internationally recognized publications dealing with the earth sciences in Canada were the publications of the Federal and Provincial Geological and Mines Departments and Museums. In 1963, the *Journal* of the Alberta Society of Petroleum Geologists became the *Bulletin of Canadian Petroleum Geology*, and in 1964, NRC began publication of the *Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences*. GAC had begun publication of its *Special Papers* as early as 1956, but the volumes did not begin to appear regularly before the mid 1960s. The CSPG did not begin its *Memoir* series until 1973.

The establishment of major publication media both reflected and encouraged the increasing maturity of the earth science community in Canada. Before *CJES* and *BPCPG*, it was hard to know what geological research was going on in Canada: the best source of information was the annual publication "Current Research in the Geological Sciences in

Canada", produced by the GSC. This useful compilation still appears (still produced by the GSC, though now sponsored by the Canadian Geoscience Council) but the best way to get a sense of what is happening in Canadian geological and geophysical research is to browse through the last few issues of *CJES*.

What of the future? It seems essential to maintain the strength and vitality of existing journals, and especially that of *CJES*, which is the only journal that covers the full range of the earth sciences in Canada. It is admittedly an organizational anomaly, explicable only in terms of the historical development of science in Canada, that *CJES* is published by NRC, and not by the major Canadian earth science societies (or even by the GSC). But producing a major journal requires considerable resources, both financial and human. *CJES* has profited both from the financial resources of NRC and from its strong tradition of excellence in scientific research. If there is to be a transfer of the responsibility for publishing *CJES* it must be for good reason and it must be made only after very careful planning.

Journals maintain their excellence only by retaining the confidence of authors and the support of their readers. Harsh standards of refereeing can achieve nothing if authors are sending their best MSS elsewhere. From an author's point of view, *CJES* has much to recommend it: it has an established tradition, efficient editorial policies and high quality printing. It cuts across disciplinary boundaries, is widely distributed in libraries throughout the world, and – most important of all – it reaches directly a large proportion of the potential readership in Canada. Support from the geoscience community, both authors and readers, is all the more essential now that there is some doubt about the exact future of *CJES*. Even at the recently increased cost, it is still a great bargain.

Gerard V. Middleton