

Pyroclasts: A Salute to Digby

Ward Neale

Volume 8, Number 1, March 1981

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/geocan8_1fea02

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Geological Association of Canada

ISSN

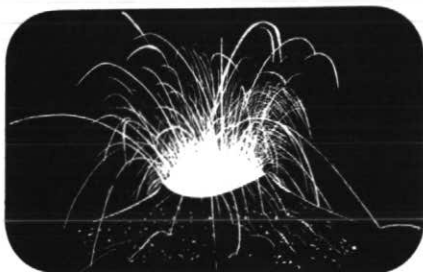
0315-0941 (print)

1911-4850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Neale, W. (1981). Pyroclasts: A Salute to Digby. *Geoscience Canada*, 8(1), 36–37.



Pyroclasts

By Ward Neale

A Salute to Digby

Within a few days of writing this, a successor will be named to Digby J. McLaren, fourteenth Director (General) of the Geological Survey of Canada, who has opted for early retirement after seven years at the helm of Canada's oldest scientific establishment.

His career resembled Sir William Logan's in that it commenced with biostratigraphic studies in regions of hydrocarbon potential. It resembled Logan's and that of another predecessor, Jim Harrison, in its high visibility on the national and international scenes. One week would find him on a Dome drilling ship in the Arctic, the next in Paris or Zurich at meetings of the International Union of Geological Sciences or in a developing country extolling the advantages of the International Geological Correlation Program. He probably had to spend more time than most or all of his predecessors in attempting to preserve the Survey as a scientific institution committed to gathering, interpreting and publishing data on the geology and natural resources of the country. An organization like the Survey is hard to explain to a bureaucracy increasingly dominated by accountants, instant experts and jargon-neers for whom long-term projects are measured in days and who link major unconformities with provincial boundaries and enhanced recovery techniques with rehabilitation centres. His defence against these Phillistines became so adept and automatic that he sometimes surprised old friends from outside government by an initial verbal overkill when they made even the slightest adverse comment about anything or anyone connected with his beloved G.S.C. Despite this, most realize that the greatest of his many accomplishments was the manner in which he opened up the Survey to outside scrutiny and constructive comment, and the sense of community he fostered in national geoscience.

Digby and his deputy, John Wheeler, played prominent roles in many of our geoscience societies, served on visiting committees to universities and encouraged their colleagues to build similar bridges to industrial and academic counterparts. When our national geoscience societies, at the urging of Duncan Derry and Roger Blais, formed a coordinating Council in 1972, they were unable to provide sufficient funds to ensure its continued operations in the national interest. Support came from the Survey in the form of a completely financed meeting once a year in Ottawa and a substantial sustaining grant. In return for this, the Council advised Survey management on the state of national geoscience. An outcome of this relationship was an invitation to the Canadian Geoscience Council to name a committee to examine all operations and functions of GSC and to report in confidence to senior officials of EMR and, in a general way, to the public. This committee, composed of some of the best known geoscientists in the country, found that many of their recommendations were implemented even before their first publication, the Weir Report, was in print. The committee, with a rotating membership, has a mandate to continue its investigations. Other federal agencies have expressed hushed, cautious admiration of this open door approach to the outside world although none have been bold enough to follow it. A few of the more progressive provincial surveys, encouraged by the success of the Survey experiment, are now accepting the Geoscience Council's invitation to name similar visiting committees to peer through their cobwebs. The crowning glory of the McLaren Era in Survey history was its openness to and its communication with the world beyond government. Long may this spirit prevail.

Farewell to the CGC and to Ted Appleyard

For the first time ever I shall not be present at the gala event of the geoscience calendar - the Canadian Geoscience Council's Ottawa meeting where the annual report is discussed and modified before final approval for publication and where the councillors advise their hosts, senior EMR and GSC officials, on the shortcomings of national geoscience. It isn't always a wholly pleasant meeting for, if you happen to be defending the report or any unpopular proposal, you can be cruelly shredded in public. The wind-up party at Tom and Bev Bolton's always more than compensated for two days of buffets, however, and everyone left in the Christmas spirit convinced that geoscientists and their spouses were

indeed the true evaporites of the Earth.

Having been present at the first formative meetings of CGC, I had hoped by one devious means or another to establish a record for longevity having outlasted such doughty pioneers as Ron Graham, Mike Hriskevich, Hugh Wynne-Edwards, and Dick Slavin. However, Ted Appleyard outdistanced me with ease and without having to hang on by his toenails. The community owes a great deal to Ted who has served as the unsung, unsalaried executive director of Council ever since he was appointed to this post by Roger Blais at the inaugural meeting. He not only handled day-to-day affairs, and provided continuity in long-term projects, but he also prepared remarkably complete minutes of many long-winded meetings. The minutes were carefully edited and shaped so that many poorly expressed ideas came out in typescript as the profound judgements on leading issues of the day that they actually were. These minutes and their appendices should eventually be published in toto - they tell the story of the growth of Canadian geoscience from small warring provincial factions to a state of maturity and national unity. They might also serve as Ted's memoirs because he stepped down from his CGC post in December - after the Bolton party, of course!

At Last - A Report on the Universities

My last link with the Council was involvement (with Jack Armstrong and many others) in its study of geology and geophysics in the universities. This proved to be a fascinating enterprise for all the participants. After an initial reluctance, all except one of 40 departments cooperated fully in providing facts, figures and opinions about their operations. There were many surprises to those of us outside of academia, for example:

- Some departments which were scarcely heard of at the time of the Blais *et al.* study in 1968 are now among the largest in terms of enrolment and the most active in terms of research.
- The cyclical enrolments that plagued geology in the past actually haven't existed since 1965. Unfortunately, many academic administrators are unaware of this fact and treat geology budgets and manpower requirements accordingly.
- Canadian university geoscience research is held in very high regard by leading scientists abroad, less so by academics at home, and very much less so by our mining, petroleum and government scientists.

- The prestige associated with research in recent years has tended to submerge other legitimate departmental activities. Lip service is paid to teaching and public service but promotions in most departments depends chiefly on published research.
- One mining exploration company, Rio Canex, has initiated an imaginative program of support for applied research in the universities with a dollar value roughly equal to the entire contribution from the petroleum industry (ca. \$0.25 x 10⁶).

Bearer Does Not Read or Write. This phrase was amusing when noted on the passport of a colleague's infant son 30 years ago. It would be less so on the sheepskin of a new graduate in geology but it probably belongs on many of them. The most common complaint of mineral and petroleum exploration people and government scientists pertains to the inability of recent graduates to write simple reports or even decent letters. Strangely enough, the engineers, whose cultural proclivities are suspect on many campuses, are rated as much better communicators than arts and science graduates. It seems that geological (and other) engineers have mandatory courses in report writing and public speaking whereas arts and science geologists are not required to write or speak again once they complete their first-year survey of English literature (with the help of a handy paperback from the "college outline" series). There is a loud, clear message from scores of employers that deserves immediate action - namely that competent instruction in scientific writing is just as important as that second course in metamorphic petrology or microprobe analysis.

Anticipated Reactions to a Classic. Publication of this study has been delayed first by a slowdown and then by a strike of federal translators. The translation was further hampered by the difficulty of making literal translations of the difficult quotations from Robbie Burns and others which are liberally sprinkled throughout the report. When it finally comes out look for the French rendition of "O wad some power the giftie gie me . . ."

Latest word is that the CGC University report will be available at your bookstands before this article reaches you, but then I seem to have stated this in an earlier column. When it does finally reach those in the universities who can read, what will their reaction be? Jack Armstrong and I are sure that we shall receive many kind words and compliments - after

all, we are very nice about the good things we found in the universities and we only recognize the bad things by ignoring them.

Bits and pieces of the manuscript have reached many members of the academic community under the counter. A letter from one of them cheers us as we await the other bouquets about to descend upon us. I quote from parts of it:

... I think I still detect a lingering hope on your part that the report will be well received. I have little doubt that all you will hear (except for a few polite remarks from geopoliticians) is criticism, probably of the most parochial kind. We shall read the report strictly in the way that people read the social news in the papers - to see if we are mentioned, and if so to check that it is either in the most favourable light possible, or in a way which we can use to bolster ourselves in some arguments with our deans and presidents . . .

... Several people are quoted as deploring the amount of time that Canadian academics spend on consulting . . . This surprises me as my impression is that the days of professors disappearing for the summer to work for companies (or government) are long gone . . . If a factual survey of consulting was not actually made, should these assertions, unsupported by real data, be included in a serious report? . . .

... The fact that Toronto, Waterloo and Western come out of the report so well, makes one suspicious that X, Y, and Z had a good deal to do with its preparation . . .

... I am surprised that you did not resort to some more objective ways of assessing status. For example, how many Canadians are among the most frequently cited geologists listed in Science Citations Index? What fields do they represent? Of course, such information takes a little digging, but it is not really so difficult to get. Without some hard data, Chapter 7 becomes just another *Pyroclast* . . .

Knowing the letter writer's high regard for *Pyroclasts*, we accept this as yet another paean of praise despite its slightly ambiguous wording. The Geoscience Council is hoping to open up the letter section of this journal to similar tributes to the CGC University Report so start writing now - preferably restricting yourself to hard facts rather than idle opinions.

Three-Tier Coronas to

- **Hugh R. Wynne-Edwards**, ex-professor and ex-mandarin who has now made it to vice-president (research) for Alcan International. Hugh still keeps his hand in on the geoscience scene and was a recent Keynote speaker at the CSPG's Energy Audit of the 80s and will also lead off the Western Universities Student Conference in Edmonton this February.
- **Hugh Hendry** and his associates at Saskatchewan who not only once again ran the finest Logan Day event in the country but also designed an eye-catching lapel badge with the label "Geology is Hot Stuff".
- **Judy Erola**, Federal Minister of Mines, who visited the hostile Calgary environment in November without a bodyguard. In a land where almost everyone wears badges stating, "I love Masters, Grey and the Seven Sisters", Judy sported a pirated copy of the Saskatchewan Logan Day badge on the street and during a T.V. interview.

MS received December 9, 1980.

**Geological Association of Canada
Association Géologique du Canada**

Western and Arctic Canadian Biostratigraphy

**Percival Sydney Warren Memorial
Volume**

Edited by C.R. Stelck and
B.D.E. Chatterton
Geological Association of Canada
Special Paper 18

This book, which includes 16 papers from a symposium of the same name, contains papers of biostratigraphic interest ranging in age from the Ordovician through to the Tertiary.

ISBN 0-919216-12-9

Order from:
Geological Association of Canada
Business and Economic Service Ltd.
111 Peter Street, Suite 509
Toronto, Ontario M5V 2H1

**GAC Members \$18.50,
Non-Members \$22.00**
(Postage and handling included)
