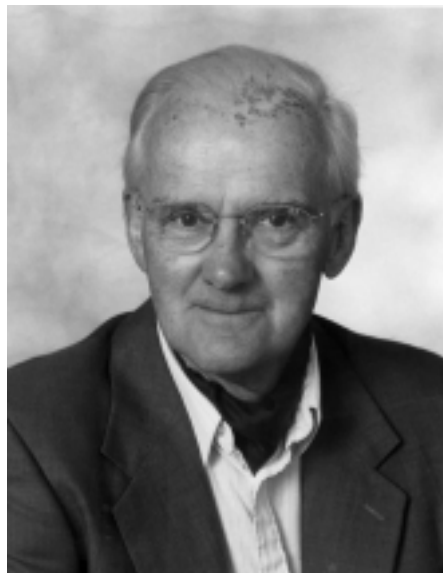


## THE 1999 W. A. JOHNSTON MEDALLIST, JAMES C. RITCHIE



The Johnston Medal honours Canadian geologist William Albert Johnston and is awarded by CANQUA in recognition of career excellence in Quaternary research. I am delighted to nominate James C. Ritchie, who is fittingly the first Canadian paleoecologist to receive this medal.

Born in Scotland and now retired in Somerset, England, Jim spent his entire professional career in Canada. Having already written about the details of his career in the introduction to a festschrift volume in his honour (*Review of Paleobotany and Palynology*, 1993, Vol. 79), allow me this shorter, stream-of-consciousness version: a Ph.D in botany from Sheffield in 1955 for taxonomic work on hybridization of blueberries, postdoctoral studies at the Jardin botanique de Montréal and then the University of Manitoba, followed shortly by his first academic appointment at the University of Manitoba where he became immersed in boreal ecology, quite literally when his canoe broke up in the rapids of the Caribou River in northern Manitoba, emerging 4 weeks later and 28 pounds leaner and hungrier for phytosociological studies of the boreal forest, eventually wondering about the development of boreal forests, took up pollen analysis, first contributing significantly to the newly emerging subject of pollen-vegetation relationships through the analysis of surface samples, then detailed studies of the postglacial vegetation history of western Canada, a move to Dalhousie University soon followed by another to the University of Toronto where he spent

the greatest part of his career, an enormously fruitful and exciting period focused on vegetation and climate of eastern Beringia, his career culminating in North Africa where he studied beautifully multi-coloured laminated lake sediments from hyper-arid regions where today you couldn't squeeze enough moisture out of the soil to quench the thirst of a fly.

No Canadian paleoecologist has achieved as great an international standing in Quaternary research as Jim Ritchie. The fundamental reason for his original contributions lies in the fact that he was educated as a botanist so that he brought a biological perspective to the interpretation of pollen data. He thus emphasized the dynamism of changing plant communities, which was all too often forgotten or ignored by researchers with a purely geological background for whom pollen diagrams were primarily stratigraphic tools for establishing chronologies or blocking in major vegetation changes. The second and perhaps most important reason for his success stems from his break away from pollen analysis as "I came, I saw, I cored" – the stamp-collecting approach – to an insistence in his own and others' work on posing a question at the outset of a project.

Jim has published over 80 scientific papers. Remarkably, he is the sole or senior author on all but 17 of his refereed papers and the sole author on more than a third of them. The quality of his papers is reflected in the fact that they appeared in the best general journals, such as *Science* and *Nature*, the best Quaternary journals, such as *Quaternary Research*, and the best ecology journals, such as *Ecology* and *Journal of Ecology*. Jim is equally proud of his two books, which are outstanding syntheses of an enormous melange of data into masterpieces of coherency. His second book, *Postglacial Vegetation of Canada*, won the prestigious Cooper Prize from the Ecological Society of America for a distinguished contribution to geocology, and remains widely cited.

To mention just a few of the honours that Jim Ritchie has garnered, he was awarded a DSc. from the University of Aberdeen, is a founding member and former president of the Canadian Botanical Association and won its George Lawson Medal for lifetime contributions to Canadian botany in 1985, sat on the editorial boards of the *Canadian Journal of Botany* and *Géographie physique et Quaternaire*, was elected a Fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America in 1972 and its Governor and Vice-Chairman in 1976, served on numerous national grant selection committees and commissions and on a number of INQUA committees, was a Killam Research Scholar, became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1989, and is a Professor Emeritus of the University of Toronto.

Jim never had a large stable of students. His students and postdocs had enormous resources and were limited only by their imaginations. He was an ideal supervisor, leaving students to their own devices and, without ever looking over their shoulders, somehow knowing what they were up to, providing guidance and encouragement at just the right moment. All of us were treated as colleagues, not students, were imbued with a passion for research, and provided the wherewithal to fulfill our ambitions. His unspoken motto is "Work hard and play hard". I can remember when I was a fresh Ph.D student on fieldwork with Jim in the MacKenzie River area. We were staying in the Red-5-12, a small (as the numbers suggest) cabin at the Inuvik Scientific Research Lab. After a night of imbibing, I was awoken by Jim at 6:00 a.m., amid a sea of dented pots and