Foreword Victor K. Prest (1913-2003)


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Foreword

VICTOR K. PREST (1913-2003)

"... on September 26, 2003, Canada lost one of its most distin-
guished geologists and arguably its best-known and most influential
Quaternary geologists...", so begins the obituary of Dr. Victor K. Prest
in Quaternary Science Reviews (Dyke et al., 2004). That article pro-
vides an endearing recognition of a man, considered by many, as the
builder of Quaternary geology in Canada. It is a significant challenge
to prepare a foreword in dedication to Vic Prest without duplicating the
numerous accolades and citations already noted, and perhaps not
appropriate to try. Instead, we provide some additional insight into a
Quaternary geologist admired and respected by several generations
of colleagues, associates and students.

Most of today's Quaternary scientists in their forties and younger,
will have had little direct contact with Vic. However his influence,
through the Glacial Map of Canada, continues to be part of their
research, and remains a major reference 40 years after publication.
However, for any who spoke to Vic on the topic of their research, the
story is similar; they recount Vic's ability to recall the details of an
area mapped years ago, and to draw out scientific questions to chal-
lenge the young geologist. They also recall a down-to-earth, generous
person who made time for everyone and took a personal interest in
people he met. In short, a person who exemplified the term "mentor".

To his immediate colleagues and successors, the reflections are
similar. He was forever stimulating curiosity among others as he
mused over the meaning of the data contributing to "The Map". He
was the ultimate gatherer of information, and could continue conversations even with those who got diverted from the central
themes of Quaternary geology. His continued friendship with all those who worked with him allowed him to continuously share
and acquire scientific facts, and to bridge all generations.

For many scientists today, facing short timelines and constantly changing priorities, undertaking continental-scale compilations
seems increasingly challenging. However, the syntheses of regional mapping compilations to a continental scale were, in fact,
constructed from the contributions over time of many individuals. During the 1950's, Vic was the most senior Pleistocene geologist
when surficial geology mapping became an established study at the Geological Survey of Canada, and a dozen PhDs were hired
for regional studies. Vic's rigorous approach to his studies affected all of them through his acute interest to their observations and
conclusions with respect to extent and timing of North American ice sheets. Vic fully understood the value of regional compilations,
though this was certainly not unique to him; however, he had the priceless ability to carry syntheses to a continental scale.

Vic Prest was the first leader of the Quaternary group in the Geological Survey of Canada and was responsible for getting
the fledgling organization off the ground. He took on responsibility for the research, compiling national maps and reports, and
tracing advances and retreats of ice sheets. Arguably, however, the builder who constructed Canada's Quaternary organiza-
tion was the late John Fyles, who diversified the application of Quaternary geology based data and kept the Quaternary group
relevant and prominent in the Geological Survey.

Although the focus of the Quaternary sciences has changed in recent decades, the questions that remain to be answered
come from the legacy left by researchers such as Vic Prest, who aided in a continental vision of the Quaternary period.

In the foreword to Vol. 59, n° 2-3, we reflect, in part, on the history of Quaternary geology in Canada, on the change in focus
since Vic's first Quaternary publication in 1949 and on what it has meant to many of us to be Quaternary scientists in Canada.

Stephen A. Wolfe and Alain Plouffe
with contributions from John Clague, Bob Fulton, Doug Hodgson, Isabelle McMartin, Beth McClennaghan,
Denis St-Onge, Vern Rampton and Pierre J.H. Richard

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