



NEWSLETTER No 9.

Summer 2002

Get in Touch

Anyone wishing to communicate with the committee to suggest activities, volunteer help, provide a donation, trace old friends, pay subs, notify change of address or for any other reason should write to:

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THE 2002 ABERDEEN GEOLOGICAL ALUMNI QUIZ NIGHT

For the HRH Quiz Challenge Trophy

The first question of the 2002 Aberdeen Geological Alumni (AGA) Quiz was a real stonker: "What is the shortest sentence in the bible?" Much head scratching and genuflecting ensued, followed by some quietly murmured, if inappropriate, blasphemous phrases. However, the correct answer was: "Jesus Wept". This was a sentiment that was heartfelt and made our team's answer of: "Go forth and multiply" seem positively wordy.



The annual AGA Quiz was devised by former Aberdeen University Geology graduates; Roger Hinton and Gordon Holm being the main culprits. The object of the evening being to raise funds to help geology undergraduates purchase equipment for field mapping. This year a total of 32 teams vied for the HRH Quiz Challenge Trophy and the event raised a total of £908.. As a result of the compulsory field mapping and other outer team projects, geology students have a hard time to take on temporary jobs to gain the extra cash for such equipment. This the magnanimous AGA idea to financially assist the current geology undergraduates has proven a great way to give something back to the department from which the graduates gained their qualifications.

This year a total of 32 teams of between three and five people took part in the AGA quiz. Composition of the teams was highly variable between the sexes, industry, academia and students. The names selected by the teams were also very varied, with such epithets as "Conquistadores" (from Conoco) and "Les Gros Mots" (TotalFinaElf) – knowing that from an editorial viewpoint, the more risqué names have been omitted here. Each team paid £3 entry per person and a raffle was held for prizes donated largely by oil industry organisations. The total amount raised for the geology department was £908.

The AGA quiz was held in the refectory at Crombie Hall and yes, true to geological form, the bar remained open till the end. The quiz consisted of several specialised topic rounds including: Music, Geography, General Knowledge, a Scottish section and Cinema Stars. However there were two rounds for geological questions plus a tray of rock hard specimens to identify. For many of the older geological industry fraternity present, there rounds were not only "strain a brain" time, it was at times excruciatingly embarrassing as to how much one had forgotten (yours truly included!). Nevertheless, the marking scheme, where each team marked another team's answers, did provide some very amusing

moments, accompanied by comments from: “What clown thought that one up?” to “How in the hell did they know that one?”.

To provide extra interest in participation, the AGA organised (and NO the association had nothing to do with kitchen appliances, its not another “AGA saga”) award prizes for several categories, as well as the overall top scorers. In relation to these suffering acute embarrassment their relief comes in a prize for the “stupidest” answer. This year’s winner, optimistically named “The Answering Machine” also gained the lowest score award, but their answer to the question: “Which is the first bridge in the Oxford and Cambridge boat race” was “The Forth Bridge” which brought on howls of derisive laughter. One very personal result was the fact that our team’s best round result was on “Food and Drink”. Just shows you how priorities change after graduation (or not?).

The AGA organisers deserve a great vote of thanks for their work in providing an evening that was mentally challenging but full of fun. The quiz totalisers ended up with two teams having the same top score. So a play off question had to be posed. The Corelab team were swifter on the “buzzer” than the Geology Lecturers and deserved their first place award. The trophy for the first place team is sponsored by HRH.

In addition to the Quiz night, AGA also holds a wine tasting evening as well as a Ceilidh during the year. So do come along, and enjoy yourselves and lend your support to the geologists of the future.

For more information see the AGA website at www.abdn.ac.uk/geology/aga

Stuart Harker
Total Fina Elf, Aberdeen

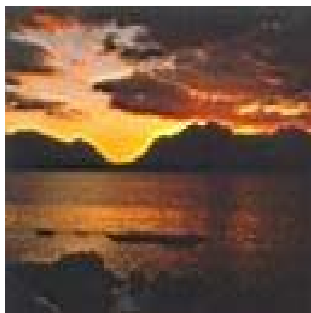
Its life Jim but not as we know it - Astrobiology Research in the Department

Astrobiology is a multidisciplinary science directed towards exploration for life on other planets, but with a very broad scope including the investigation of extreme terrestrial environments, methodology for remote analysis, identification of surface environments on Mars and elsewhere, and chemical modelling of environments that can support life. Astrobiology as a science has taken off dramatically in the last few years, with establishment of a NASA virtual Astrobiology Centre (to which a UK Astrobiology Network is affiliated), the start of two international journals in 2001 and 2002, several international conferences, and new teaching programmes (including the Open University).

Research in astrobiology in the Geofluids Group in GPG is a natural extension of our work using fluid inclusions in petroleum geology. The search for life on Mars involves looking for traces of organic material in a large volume of rock, which has obvious parallels with hydrocarbon exploration. One approach that we use in oil fields is to seek hydrocarbon-bearing fluid inclusions that are a signpost to oil migration. With very high analytical sensitivity it should also be possible to measure traces of organics in aqueous fluid inclusions, i.e. as minerals grow at the surface they trap inclusions of water from the host environment, which should include biomolecules representing any ambient life. On the Martian surface, which is generally devoid of water, inclusions in minerals will provide ancient samples of Martian water from a time when water was more prevalent. Looking for biomolecules in such water on Mars would be a good trick to pull off, but this approach may be just as valuable in extracting biomolecules from the terrestrial geological record.

Aspects of research within this general concept include studies of terrestrial analogue materials, artificial growth of organic-spiked crystals for experimentation, and adaptation of analytical techniques. It is important to appreciate that this is not a research area divorced from the rest of our activity: the extra demands of space-related research including improvement of analytical resolution, robustness of analytical tools, and the need to find novel ways of doing things have a benefit for all research, and in the case of detecting organic molecules there will be direct rewards for hydrocarbon exploration.

John Parnell
Reader Department of Geology & Petroleum Geology



Ballachulish Field Trip April 2002 – The View from Kentallen

Ballachulish Fieldtrip, April 2002

The annual Ballachulish fieldtrip for 3rd years returned this year, after its break to Salou, Spain last year because of Foot and Mouth. The trip more commonly known by students as 'Ballac-hellish' because of the weather was eagerly awaited!

At 9 o'clock one bright Saturday morning a convoy of 3 minibuses and 1 van carried 40 students and 4 staff members (Alan Crane, Clive Rice, Jeremy Preston and Kathryn Czapnik) to our base camp at Kentallen, South of Ballachulish, for the next 12 days. That afternoon, after settling in, we took it upon ourselves to do some hydrogeology, - studying the rocks of Loch Leven as we took the plunge into 4°C seawater - the staff needless to say did not join in this event.

The next day, was spent studying the metamorphic rocks on the other side of the bay and getting a generally overview for the regional structures. Following this introduction we spent 6 days mapping the Ardsheal peninsula in tropical conditions. We not only worked on our tans, we also covered meta-sediimentary logs, stereonet, fracture and structural mapping, metamorphic minerals and litho logical identification. At the end of the individual mapping, we all felt a lot more confident about our geological ability. Apart from a few ticks we left the mapping area unscathed. The rest of our time in the field was spent studying; ore minerals, igneous complexes and the effects of large scale thrusting. The trip culminated in a meal in the hotel on the last night, where we had a chance to relax and enjoy our last night on a great fieldtrip.

We would like to thank the staff who came with us and made the trip both enjoyable and educational, the department for organising the trip and finally the AGA for the provision of compass clinometers. Thanks to all of you it will never again be known as 'Ballac-hellish'.

Stuart Kennedy – AGA Student Rep.

FIELD STONES AND TUNNELS

As a professor of petroleum geology, in fact Production Geoscience, it may come as a surprise to find my name associated with subjects such as field stones and tunnels. During the latter part of April, BBC Scotland's "Out of doors" programme approached me for an explanation for why so many stones and pebbles sat on the surface of fields rather than sinking into the less dense soil. Well, standing in a field near Kingswells with BBCs Mark Stephen (who knows there may be a

football stadium there soon?) I fingered soil and squeezed stones and hopefully explained in layman's terms how water and ice swelled soil and pushed stones to the surface. Hardly rocket science and definitely not petroleum geoscience!

Sitting in a minor traffic jam during our return to Aberdeen our conversation turned to traffic. Well, having lived ten years in Norway I have some fairly good experiences of how tunnels are used to circumvent surface traffic problems and relieve inner city congestion.

Further, my pal Albert Rodger (Dean of Science & Engineering) is a tunnelling expert and we had a research proposal to investigate geotechnical aspects of tunnelling in Aberdeen. So what happens? - I blurt out my idea that a tunnel under Aberdeen is an alternative to building a by-pass. Mark liked the idea and a few days later another BBC Scotland piece for "Out of doors" was recorded on tunnels. As so often one thing leads to another and my tunnels and I became a BBC Scotland TV interview and a Press and Journal

article all in the course of a weekend.

So where is this leading? In my opinion if academics cannot be identified as doing things of relevance to their immediate community the unfortunate "ivory tower" syndrome becomes reinforced. Academics have to be seen as active in the local and national community. Ok our petroleum research has obvious links to the people of Aberdeen but I'd argue that far more of the local population are more interested in, and aware of problems related to, issues like traffic congestion, air pollution, litter, etc. It would

of course be academic suicide to base an entire research programme on local problems and issues but it is often the case that the science and technology that develops is transferable elsewhere and of generic significance. This is not navel contemplation but realising the importance of an umbilical.

Staff in Geology & Petroleum Geology have recognised the usefulness of media exposure and I look forward to several of us featuring in various formats in the future. And isn't this like the role that the AGA has developed, all part of raising the profile of

geoscience in the local (and beyond) community. Just as we need to keep geolumni aware and involved in what we do, we need to ensure that the local community are aware of our existence and importance, at least usefulness, to them. So if you come across an issue that has an earth science angle, or have a idea that may contribute to an existing activity, don't think twice about contacting your local academic. We'll be pleased to hear from you.

*Andrew Hurst
Professor of Geology
University of Aberdeen*

The Granite City Geology Ball - Tickets sell out again

This years Granite City Geology Ball was held on the 16th March and saw a return to the Hilton Treetops, with the same organisers as the previous year at the tiller. The event saw good support from the geological community of Aberdeen, with considerable numbers of students and staff of the University and representatives of industry and the general geological community attending. The event saw the usual champagne reception and four-course meal, which was provided and served excellently by the staff of the hotel. The raffle this year was drawn by Dr. Bryan Cronin and myself, with thanks going to the providers of the excellent raffle prizes, which included countless bottles of whisky, wine and antique maps. All of these excellent prizes helped raise an outstanding £1630 for the RNLI. As for the rest of the evening, well Referendum (the band) certainly took centre stage providing excellent ceilidh and soul music, which kept the night going to the wee hours of the morning. A big thanks must go to all, who helped with the night especially Bryan Cronin, HRH for sponsoring the band and of course everyone for attending! The evening enabled over £3000 to be presented to the Aberdeen Geological Alumni, which will be used to help the geologists of the future at the University of Aberdeen.

*Bruce Chalton
Phd University of Aberdeen*



THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Dear committee members,

As class representative for the third year students of the Aberdeen University Geology Department, I would like to thank all your members who have made a contribution to the Alumni Fund. Your generous donations have allowed, amongst other things, the purchase of



hand-lenses and compass-dlinometers for every student. These proved invaluable recently on fieldwork carried out in Ballachulish and previously Helmsdale and of course last years trip to Salou, Spain. Of course the real test our skills will be our mapping dissertations to be carried out this summer, and thanks to the Alumni we all have the basic instruments we need. With the financial pressures of being a student heavier than ever, I would encourage continued support in the future. With your assistance we can further enhance the departments reputation for excellence both by the quality of teaching provided and the skills acquired by the students. Once again I would like to thank all members on behalf of the students.

Yours sincerely,

*Stuart Gamble
Third year Class Rep.*

OTHER NEWS

What a Difference an "M" Makes!

AGA has continued to enjoy enjoying a successful series of events this year. It has to be said, however, that the AGM did not figure among these in terms of attendance ratings!

Simply changing "AGA" to "AGM" appears to have a profound effect. Even the chance to win a bottle of Bruichladdich was insufficient to lure members, staff or even students along to the Annual General Meeting on 31st October!

Clearly AGM's are a bit of a turn-off the world over. But for those of you still reading this, here is a summary. The Chairman briefly reviewed events of 2000-2001 and thanked the sponsors (HRH, Geomem, ExxonMobil & RML) plus the many raffle prize donators for their support. George Downie reported that the finances were healthy. Compasses and hand lenses had once again been bought for the 3rd Year and a series of field-work prizes had been initiated. Rachel Charnock confirmed that membership was still hovering around 100, it is hoped that we can improve on that. All those who had volunteered for the committee were elected, Gordon Holm won the whisky (what, again?), wine & nibbles were served. Everyone survived the meeting

– so we hope others will be encouraged to come along to the next one!

If anyone has discovered the secret of getting folks to an AGM please let us know. The Chairman is unlikely to part with another bottle of malt!

Events since the last Newsletter

Included the 3rd Year Challenge, the November Ceilidh, the Quiz Evening, and the GCB. News of the last two reported elsewhere in this Newsletter.

EXXON MOBIL 3rd Year Challenge

The 3rd Year Challenge, mentioned in the last Newsletter, was held on 24th October. The event marked AGA's first direct assistance within the Department. The business game was facilitated by ExxonMobil recruitment adviser Lynda Wilson; AGA members acted as monitors for the teams; staff were present as observers. Teams of six competed to define a corporate identity, discover clues and negotiate with the other teams for answers that would lead them to treasure. No team actually made it to the final treasure – maybe they were enjoying the process too much! The evening was, however, voted a great success and is to



"Ill tell you where the treasure is if we can swap hats"

become a regular part of the 3rd Year Course. The 2002 challenge evening will be on the 23rd October. We hope that more of our members will come forward to help make this evening a continuing success.

Ceilidh –Now confirmed as regular event

Almost 150 attended the November Ceilidh in Elphinstone Hall. Turnout for this event is increasing as word gets around! Iron Broo provided a great selection of music and called the dances. Everyone was up and burlin', fueled by the 'Varsity caterers stovies – voted the best in Aberdeen! Thanks again to all who came along and to all who provided raffle prizes. The next event is already booked for **16th November 2002** – don't say you haven't been warned.



MEMBERSHIP – JOIN ONLINE NOW

If you have paid your membership by cheque, please consider renewing with a direct debit. It is much more convenient! You can download a mandate form from the AGA website. Joining instructions information on events & photos can also be found on the website at:- www.abdn.ac.uk/geology/aga

We are still on the lookout for alumni who might have lost touch with the Department. We ask that our current members consider where their classmates have ended up and send us a note so we can try chase them up! Contact Rachel Charnock at the Alumni Office if you have any news (r.chnock@abdn.ac.uk). Thanks

WEST COAST FIELD TRIP TO RUN NEXT YEAR

A Field Trip to the West Coast had been proposed for this summer.
Though We received a good deal of interest, most folks could not make the planned date.
It is intended to postpone the trip and run it next year.
look out for futher details in the autumn.

DEPARTMENTAL NEWS

New MSc in Hydrocarbon Enterprise

A brand new MSc for the University of Aberdeen, starting in September 2001, and housed in the Department of Geology and Petroleum Geology. Sponsored by the Larry Kinch Foundation and with new course director Dr Bryan Cronin, this new MSc will prove to be one of the most exciting cross-faculty taught business and technology courses in the world. This new MSc is a world's first in catering to a wide range of individuals, from National Oil Companies and Energy Ministries, Oil Companies, students with Geoscience, Law, Engineering and Economics backgrounds, or anybody who wants world class accelerated learning in all aspects of the Oil Industry. Because of the broad base of the MSc, the students will be exposed to and familiarise themselves with all areas of International Oil and Gas Exploration and Production. Course units are delivered by University staff, all with extensive industry experience, as well as a range of external professionals involved in leading edge business and technology areas of the global oil and gas industry. These professionals frequently use the presentation material for training courses given to industry. Under direction, this broad team, representing

all sectors of the Oil Industry, will produce a world-class course that draws directly on the city that surrounds our University, a city that is one of the main world oil capitals.

Students on the full-time course will leave with an MSc, but will also have an offshore safety certificate and a recognised certificate in a technical course in one of a choice of languages. They will also have been exposed to some of the most recent technologies, have worked in the current literature, and met and discussed issues with individuals with a wealth of experience in Oil.

The MSc is available initially for full-time study, and will later be offered as smaller units leading to Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma qualifications, as well as individual Continuing Professional Development units.

Studentships are available for eligible applicants.

GPG Undergraduate Courses Accredited

The department's submission of its 3 "mainstream" degree programmes, submitted last year for professional accreditation, has been successful. It was passed by the Accreditation Panel of the **Geological Society of London** on 24th May. These are:

BSc (Hons) Geology and Petroleum Geology.

BSc (Hons) Geoscience.

BSc (Hons) Geography and Geoscience.

The purpose of accreditation is to "identify degree courses that provide a sound education and training for a geoscience career". It provides graduates with a fast route to fellowship of the Geological Society and to the award of Chartered Geologist status.

*If you have a suggestion for future AGA events, would like to make a donation or would like to become a sponsor, please contact one of the committee members.
roger.hinton@abdn.demon.co.uk*



Ceilidh



16th November

IRON-BROO

Callers, Stovies, Raffle, Bar.

Ticket Entry:
Members £10
Students £10
Non-Members £12



Elphinstone Hall
Old Aberdeen
8.00 'till 1.00am

Contact:
Roger Hinton - 323314
roger.hinton@aberdn.demon.co.uk
or any AGA Committee Member



WINE TASTING



WITH PROFESSIONAL WINE EDUCATOR
CAROL WHITEHEAD

A. U. GEOLOGY DEPARTMENT

MESTON BUILDING

WED. 9TH OCT. 2002

7.30PM

(SHARP!)

TICKETS

MEMBERS & STUDENTS £7.50

NON-MEMBERS £8.50

CONTACT GORDON.HOLM@TFEEUK.CO.UK

OR ANY AGA COMMITTEE MEMBER