

Oscar

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This volume presents contributions to the 'Oscar symposium, Copenhagen, November 24th, 2000' in honour of one of Denmark's state geologists at GEUS, Niels Henriksen, also known as Oscar.

Oscar devoted his entire career to Greenland geology, the wide range of which is clearly reflected in most of the present symposium contributions. Planning, organization and documentation of extensive field work in East and North Greenland became his main contributions and efforts during 33 years from 1967 to his retirement in October 2000 (apart from countless purely administrative tasks). Looking in the rear view mirror, the effort can be described as visionary, logistically sound, and based on an ability to carry through stipulated (and often ambitious) goals.

Already by the early 1950s Oscar had started working for the Geological Survey of Greenland (GGU) as a university student. At that time the survey was less than 10 years old and it was just emerging from initial administrative turbulence. Nevertheless, during these years the survey quickly developed into an effective institution, in its early years housed and nursed by the Geological Museum of the University of Copenhagen.

GGU had been working in West Greenland since 1946, but from 1955 it was decided to give priority to regional and systematic mapping, originally aimed at the publication of 1:100,000 maps, and starting in South West Greenland. Oscar worked – initially as a 'mapping student' – in the central part of the Ivigtut map sheet, where field work was completed in 1963. Oscar compiled the map, which was published as GGU's first map sheet in 1966.

In GGU's early history the official national survey had to accept that another state financed geological survey worked regionally in East Greenland. It was headed by Lauge Koch, who in a highly effective manner mapped and documented large areas north of Scoresby Sund while employing mainly Swiss geologists. In 1958 Lauge Koch obtained his last state grant and had to stop his expedition activity. Koch's goal was to map the entire East Greenland Caledonian fold belt from Scoresby Sund (72°N) to the Polar Sea in the north, and his chief geologist, John Haller, compiled the maps, including a detailed series of maps in 1:250,000 covering the area between 72°N and

75°N. Tertiary basalts cover the Caledonian fold belt from 70°N and southwards. At the same time the fold belt in the Scoresby Sund area between 70°N and 72°N had only been briefly visited by Lauge Koch's geologists.

Oscar seized the vacant opportunity. He organised a reconnaissance by boat in the Scoresby Sund fjord system in 1967, and then planned and carried out a five summer geological mapping project. The Scoresby Sund project was a break-through in several ways. The project turned the focus of GGU's regional work from the Archean/Proterozoic gneissic/granitic regions of West Greenland to East Greenland regions involving in addition younger metasediments and Mesozoic/Tertiary sediment basins. GGU's geologists had little experience with such a range of rocks, and Oscar initiated cooperation with geologists from the geological institutes of the University of Copenhagen, a cooperation, which had far-reaching consequences for Danish geology in years to come.

One tradition, which was carried on from the early years of GGU was the involvement of foreign geologists and students of geology in the work with (mainly) crystalline rocks, a strategy ensuring co-operation of different schools and approaches.

After the field work was completed in 1972 a 1:500,000 map sheet was published, which supplemented sixteen 1:100,000 map sheets covering the entire Scoresby Sund region. A large number of publications and map sheet descriptions also appeared as a result of the project.

The Scoresby Sund project tested many of Oscar's ideas concerning transport (ships, helicopters and fixed wing aircraft) as well as other aspects of expeditions, and it became only the first of a series of mapping projects involving hundreds of scientists, each project based on budgets of several million Danish kroner. One large project concerned the mapping of the North Greenland fold belt and the northernmost end of the Caledonian fold belt, and covered the entire coastal region of North Greenland. Two other projects documented the northern part of the Caledonian fold belt first mapped by Lauge Koch's geologists through a reconnaissance survey. A final mapping project in the late 1990s was focussed largely on the region covered by John Haller's 1:250,000 map sheets,

based, however, on fundamentally different interpretative and working methods.

Many hundreds of publications, five 1:500,000 map sheets and numerous detailed maps were published during the years as a direct result of Oscar's mapping projects, and his personal publication list of more than 100 papers reflects his central role as state geologist and – for many years – leader of mapping in GGU (since 1995 fused with the Geological Survey of Denmark as GEUS).

A truly impressive scientific output was made possible by Oscar's formidable ability to concentrate on the challenges of the job at hand. His secretaries over the years and colleagues can confirm that one could easily enter his working room and roam about without his noticing any disturbance. Another important quality is his ability to overview complex problems, listen to sound arguments from colleagues and then formulate logical decisions: Essential qualities in the field as well as at home base. About half of the budget for modern field projects in Greenland is used for transport, and Oscar's well prepared negotiations through the many years of experience with various suppliers of transport, has undoubtedly saved the survey significant sums of money and secured both safe and smooth operations in the field.

Fortunately Oscar is far from 'burned out'. He is still engaged in writing and reviewing papers, and occasionally consulting for GEUS. His considerable experience and knowledge of Greenland geology will be not be left untapped.

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