

Geoscience Research Centre and Data Management Centre Opening
Tuesday, October 2, 2007

Remarks by Diana Dalton, Chair
Canada- Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board

Check against delivery

Today we are here to officially open this expanded facility that contains the new Data Management Centre. This is an exciting time for us at the Board because we really believe that the petroleum potential for offshore Nova Scotia is excellent. We know that this facility will play a huge role in defining the prospectivity that is a key to our resource future.

But we need to put this in context - for it is really only the next step in what has been the history of geology as a science.

Geology until the early 1800s was really a hobby for “gentlemen”, mostly physicians and clergy. It was in this period that it evolved into a science of its own, due largely to people who were able to define the fact that this “earth science” was key to understanding the earth’s natural resources and how they could be developed.

In his book The Map that Changed the World , Simon Winchester tells the incredible story of William Smith, a persistent, stubborn and visionary Englishman, who made the world’s first geological map. He describes how this new insight of England changed the world as we see it. This one man’s map was the catalyst in the creation of what we know as the modern science of geology.

In the following 200 years, we have also seen our own “geology visionaries”. Sir William Logan, the founder of Canada’s Geological Survey, was largely responsible for commencing the study of Canada’s vast geology. This knowledge is the foundation of Canada’s emergence as a natural resource giant, with Canadian companies working all over the world exploring for minerals and petroleum.

Sir William, while he was working at a coal/copper mining business in Wales (and before he became the first head of GSC in 1842), thought the maps of Wales were too general to accurately predict where the coal was. Armed with a compass, an theodolite and a barometer, he constructed more accurate maps – so accurate in fact, that the current geological maps of Wales continue to credit him as a co-author!!

After his appointment as head of the Geological Survey of Canada, Logan and those working with him, carried out extensive field work, published official reports and created geological maps that are still used and valuable today. His work was recognized internationally and he was knighted for his contribution to this branch of science. In the book, Reading the Rocks: The Story of the Geological Survey of Canada 1842-1972 by Morris Zaslow, the author states that these early geologists “*had a significant impact on the birth of Canada... The way they presented their geological knowledge changed the perceptions of this land.*”

And it is true. The geologists and other geoscientists, whomever they work for, are really the unsung heroes of this industry. The impact and contribution they make is too often overlooked.

Without their vision, analysis, tireless searching and creative ideas, resources would go unfound and the history of our land and its impact on our present and future, would be unknown.

So why this little history lesson? Merely to say that what we are doing here today is only a continuance of the legacy established in the early days of modern geology. Instead of the compass, theodolite and barometer used by Logan, our tools are now the amazing computers and software developed by companies like Schlumberger – tools which allow us to continue discovering new possibilities, understand our environment, and continue the sustainable development of our natural resources.

It is also true to say that government investment in learning more about our geology is the reason we are a great resource country today. And it will only be by continuing and sustaining that support that we will maintain that status. We cannot forget it is geological knowledge, information and data that is a primary attribute for attracting exploration and development of our resources.

We have renamed our facility the Geoscience Research Centre because it better reflects what we do here. This is a part of our Board's vision to increase knowledge of our offshore. It is open to government, industry, academia and the public as a source of investigation and research. One of the geologists at the Board remarked to me the other day that we know more about the surface of Mars than we do about our own ocean floor! We can contribute to changing that.

The information, research, and data archived and managed here at our centre, will give us the means to seek and discover new knowledge about our place in the world and our resources. And I can say today that the legacy set by William Logan – accuracy, professionalism, enthusiasm and commitment to the science of geology and the vision that goes with it – is, and will continue to be, the standard and inspiration for the work done at this Board and at this Centre.

So we are on the same path first blazed by Smith, Logan and countless others before us - using new tools, old and new information, but still looking at our rocks, cuttings, and biostratigraphy in new and different ways. The vision realized by them continues.

I pondered how William Logan would react if he were to come back and see how geologists work today. I believe he would be excited and fascinated - but I don't think he would be surprised. For such is the vision of this science and commitment to uncovering new knowledge, he would feel at home here.

It is the old and new, the same and different that will bring new discoveries.

To quote Peter Allen's oft sung song:

“And don't throw the past away
You might need it some other rainy day
Dreams can come true
When everything old is new again!”