



Don extracting a core from a fen on the continental Divide at Macmillan Pass, N.W.T./Yukon, 17 August 1978.

DON ALLYN GILL

(1934-1979)

Professor Don Gill, Department of Geography, University of Alberta, Canada was born 10 August 1934 in Kitchy, a small Swedish settlement near Kenton in northern Michigan. (Don always claimed that they didn't make them any more like they did in '34.) On Saturday 28 July 1979 while enroute to the Northwest Territories, the auto which Don was driving collided with another vehicle just outside Peace River, Alberta. Don was dead before an ambulance could arrive at the scene while the other 11 involved in the accident sustained minor injuries.

Don was the eldest of 11 children and spent his early years in close contact with the outdoors. His grandfather was locally renowned for outwitting game-law enforcers and later was asked by the state to become Michigan's first Game Warden (a prudent move since he knew all the tricks). Don was often stolen from school by his grandfather and taken hunting for several days to weeks without his parent's knowledge.

During 1950-52 he worked as a hunting and fishing guide in northern Michigan, and in 1952-53 served as a Marine Ranger with the United States Marine Corps in the Korean conflict. It was in the service that he completed

his high school education; later, while working with the Marquette City Police, he completed his undergraduate training at Northern Michigan University. He moved in 1961 to California, taught secondary school for two years and then started graduate studies at the University of California at Los Angeles. His M.Sc. thesis, "Coyote and urban man — an analysis of the relationship between coyote and man in Los Angeles", was completed in 1965 and he then started a Ph.D. programme at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

At U.B.C. Don worked with J. Ross Mackay and Vladimir Krajina, completing his programme in 1971 with a thesis entitled "Vegetation and environment in the Mackenzie River Delta, Northwest Territories — a study in subarctic ecology." From 1966 on Don was active in the north conducting field studies, teaching courses, consulting for private and governmental sources, and leading or participating in professional field trips. He made many friends and acquaintances during sojourns in Canada, much of the continental United States and Alaska, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, the British Isles, and the U.S.S.R. On numerous occasions he was asked to present papers and seminars at professional meetings, conferences and universities. However, he was not too far removed from the community to give talks to local groups, and regularly gave courses on northern ecology in communities such as Inuvik, Whitehorse, Hinton and Jasper, which lacked universities and colleges.

In 1968 he was appointed to the Department of Geography at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. Between 1973 and 1976 Don was director of the Boreal Institute for Northern Studies at the University of Alberta, an institute which is one of the few independent bodies supporting faculty and graduate student research in the north. While there he continued as an instructor at the University and in 1975 pursued a sabbatical year as a 'Visiting Scholar' at the University of Oulu, Finland. In 1977, nine years after his appointment to the University of Alberta, Don became a Professor of Geography.

In his 11-year professional career, Don published 67 papers or monographs in scientific journals and conference proceedings, 16 abstracts from professional meetings, several notes in periodicals, and numerous briefs and reports to government, industry and international scientific organizations.

Don was chairman of the research advisory committees for 18 graduate students, and a member of 15 other committees from a variety of disciplines. He was about to take a year's leave of absence to conduct major research projects on the Mackenzie River Basin for the Northwest Territorial and Federal Governments and on the Liard River Basin for the British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority.

At 188 cm (6'2") and 109 kg (240 lbs.) Don was physically imposing. Those who were fortunate enough to have worked in the field with him saw how he used his size and strength to carry him through long periods of privation, always ending with wild times for those following in his wake. He had a lust for life that seemed insatiable and he was constantly in motion. He enjoyed

lusty jokes and boisterous parties and was the mastermind behind numerous antics that, if told, would rival the tales of *Arabian Nights* and Chaucer combined. Don thrived on wild times and enjoyed each day to the fullest, but always fulfilled his professional obligations. His approach to life was one which few of us would follow or are capable of judging.

Don was a man with many sides to his character; one of the most important to him was the love he had for his two children — a son of 10 and a girl of 2. It was a pleasure for onlookers to see this powerful and often rough man's gentleness and understanding with his children.

Don owned property on the eastern border of Jasper National Park, Alberta. He had taken steps to convert an old guest ranch into a research facility and had students working in the area for a number of years on various projects. It was in compliance with his wishes that his ashes were scattered from Roche Perdrix, the mountain which overlooks his property.

Don's status as a northern ecologist/biogeographer was an inspiration to his students and gave him the international reputation he worked for and justly deserved. His dedication to a scientific understanding of the complete physical environment was admirable by any standards. He attempted to transfer much of his enthusiasm for biogeographical research to his students, hoping to instill in each of them an eagerness for independent ecological research and the rewards which it offered. It is a great loss to the science of northern ecology that he was deprived of his life while at the peak of his academic career and with a creative and productive future ahead of him.

Don Gill was "one bad-ass dude", to borrow a phrase he often used, whom many will miss.

G. P. Kershaw

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