

ERNST HÅKAN KRANCK
(1898-1989)

Ernst Håkan Kranck, professor of geology at McGill University from 1948 to 1969, who died in late May 1989 at the age of 90, was a man whose achievements outran his public recognition because of his innate modesty. The "bubble reputation" never bothered him. He was born in 1898 in Birkala, Finland, son of an architect, E. Albin Kranck, and Alexandra Lisitzin. He was awarded the doctoral degree in 1933 by the University of Helsinki. After several academic appointments he became the chief geologist of the Vuoksenniska Company in Finland (1940-45) and from 1945-48 was professor in the Department of Geology at the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland, specializing in geomorphology and petrology. McGill University invited him to come to Canada as visiting professor in 1948, and McGill managed to hold on to him until his retirement in 1969. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1962.

Håkan Kranck's record of field expeditions is impressive. His first was as a 19-year-old student member of an expedition to Urjanchai on the boundary between Siberia and Mongolia (now called the Tannu-Tuva Republic). That was in 1917, and the expedition became as much a study of the Russian 1917 revolution as of the geology of the region. In 1979 he published an account of that trip, entitled *Den Stora Urjanchai-Expeditionen 1917*, which deserves, even for its humour alone, to be translated into English. About a visit to the Academy of Science Museum of Geology in Petrograd (Leningrad), he wrote: "An enduring memory of the building was my first meeting with the oriental cockroach (*Periplaneta orientalis*) represented by an impressive 4-cm long specimen. . . . The funny thing is that the next time I met this creature was at the entrance to the geological library at McGill University in Montreal, half a century later. The species clearly has a certain attraction to academic surroundings."

Next came field work in Lapland to investigate iron ores. "Food was scarce (in the postwar world), but we had a good time and hiked across the greater part of Lapland. This was the first of a great number of journeys in Lapland." (I quote from his own notes.)

His Canadian field work began in 1925, a geological mapping at Steep Rock Lake, Ontario. In 1928-29 he was working in Patagonia, on an expedition sponsored by the Geographical Society of Finland, out of which came an unpublished diary with many of his excellent pen-and-ink drawings for which he became well known. In 1934 he was on field work in Scotland. In 1937 he was a member of the Tanner Finnish Expedition to Labrador and was again in Labrador in 1939. On the 1939 expedition Kranck used his own motor launch *Markland*, which he brought from Helsinki aboard a freighter. The boat was launched from the freighter in the Strait of Belle Isle and he entered Labrador to the astonishment of local harbour officials, who found him peacefully anchored in Battle Harbour early one foggy morning, flying the Finnish flag and making breakfast (described in *With Motor and Hammer along the Labrador Coast* — in Swedish; this also should be translated). After many field trips to Lapland and Finland between 1941 and 1944, and similar work in Switzerland (1945-46), he came back to northern Canada in 1947 to work along the east coast



of Hudson Bay in freight canoes, on a grant from the Arctic Institute of North America.

Soon after coming to McGill he led a coastal expedition to Labrador using the *Merry Gale*, belonging to a graduate student (Fothergill), a boat he described as "not exceedingly seaworthy," and in 1950 he joined the Pat Baird expedition to Baffin Bay (Penny Highlands). He was in Labrador again in 1951, northern Newfoundland in 1953, and back to Labrador in 1954. In 1959 he joined George Jacobsen in work on Axel Heiberg Island, at the newly established McGill research station financed by Jacobsen; and, finally, he went to Baffin Island again in 1972. He was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet.

Commenting on his early work at McGill and the growth of the Geology Department with small but expert staff, over 50 undergraduates and a large group of graduate students, he wrote: "Somehow it worked. . . . The main assets of a university are good students. . . . Professors are useful mainly as advisors." During this very active life, Håkan Kranck produced three books and numerous scientific papers; he also made many friends, most of whom he outlived.

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