

HANS PETER TRETTIN (1927–2012)

Hans Peter Trettin died on 8 October 2012, while kayaking in the Strait of Georgia near Cortes Island, British Columbia, where he had been living in retirement. Hans Trettin spent almost his entire career as a geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada and made the Arctic Islands his bailiwick.

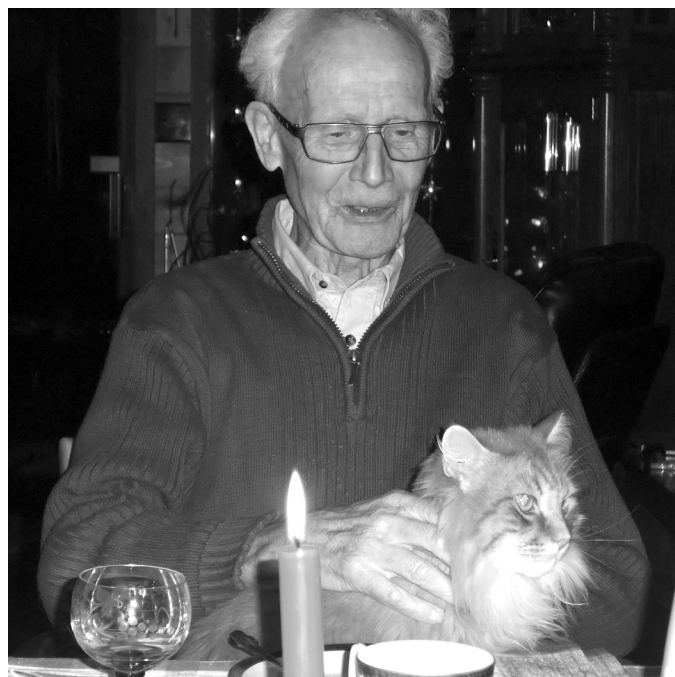
Hans was born on 11 January 1927 in Neumünster, Germany, the son of Dr. Alfred and Elisabeth Trettin, and grew up near Hamburg. In the war years 1943–44, while still in high school, Hans served as a helper in the Luftwaffe, undergoing training as an electronics technician. From 1944 on, Hans was a naval radar specialist and served on a destroyer during the last weeks of the war in Europe.

After the war, Hans entered the University of Hamburg to study literature and philosophy. It was a time when German literary writing was making a clean break from the ideological excesses of the Nazi-era literature. Hans the student was caught up in the upheaval, which had a profound and lasting effect on him. He was awarded a doctorate (DPhil) in 1952.

In 1952, armed with a student visa, Hans immigrated to Canada. He arrived by freighter in Churchill, Manitoba, late in the shipping season. One can only imagine his first impressions of Canada, only weeks after leaving war-torn Germany: docking on the shores of Hudson Bay, then travelling by train through the northern Manitoba bush to Winnipeg. Too late to register at university, Hans successfully applied for a work permit and took a variety of jobs: at a sawmill, on the railroad, and in forestry surveys in the Prince George region of British Columbia.

In 1953, Hans enrolled in Geology at the University of British Columbia, and except for two terms at McGill University, he remained there for both his undergraduate and graduate degrees. He was awarded an MSc in 1957 and a PhD in 1960. In 1960–61, he was employed by a Calgary consulting firm that had been contracted by oil companies to conduct fieldwork in the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

In 1961 Hans joined the Arctic Islands Section of the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC) in Ottawa and was assigned responsibility for the lower Paleozoic rocks of the Northern Ellesmere Fold Belt on Operation Eureka, a two-year mapping project based in central Ellesmere Island and led by Ray Thorsteinsson. That field season set the stage for a 34-year career with the GSC, in the course of which Hans Trettin became the acknowledged authority on the geology of the northernmost reaches of Canada's landmass. From 1963 to 1974, Hans directed his attention toward the Paleozoic of the Arctic Platform of northwestern Baffin Island and Foxe Basin and the Triassic tar sands on Melville Island. In 1975, he returned to the Proterozoic-Paleozoic Franklinian mobile belt and environs in northern Ellesmere and northern Axel Heiberg Islands, a rugged terrain of extraordinary complexity lying literally at the ends of the earth. The task of resolving its geology occupied



Hans Trettin, Cortes Island, December 2011 (Photo: Jurek Trzesicki).

the remainder of Hans's career, spanning some 20 years to retirement and beyond.

Not given to “arm-waving,” Hans based his tectonic interpretations on fieldwork backed up by comprehensive office and laboratory studies. A case in point was his characterization of Pearya, a geologically exotic terrane, 350 km long and up to 100 km wide, on the north coast of Ellesmere Island. Some 30 years ago, speculation had it that Pearya was not an integral part of the Franklinian belt but had been transported from afar and accreted onto it. Appraisal of this theory involved establishment of stratigraphic and structural relationships both within and outside Pearya, a task made difficult by the scarcity of fossils necessary for age control. One of Hans's approaches to the problem was lithological correlation of fossil-poor sequences, which involved many hours of painstaking petrographic and mineralogical analysis in the laboratory. Hans's work confirmed the exotic nature of Pearya and placed the concept on a sound footing.

Hans retired in 1993 but remained active as an emeritus scientist at the Calgary office of the GSC, to which he had moved from Ottawa in 1962, for another two years. Highlighting his publication record (117 contributions in total) are no fewer than nine GSC Bulletins, comprehensive reports dealing with aspects of regional geology. His last Bulletin, 401 pages long and accompanied by a stack of maps and charts, was released in 1998. Hans also authored numerous maps, reports, and open files published by the GSC, as well as papers in outside journals and conference proceedings. He was the editor of and a major contributor to Volume E of the *Geology of North America, Geology of the Inuitian Orogen and Arctic Platform of Canada and*



Hans in camp on a windy day, Admiralty Inlet, Baffin Island, 1963 (Photo: Thomas Frisch).

Greenland, published jointly by the Geological Society of America and the GSC in 1991.

Hans was honoured three times by the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists, receiving the Link Award in 1969, the R.J.W. Douglas Medal in 1986, and the Medal of Merit in 2000. In 1987, he was awarded the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada Gold Medal.

In 1995, Hans retired to a property he owned on Cortes Island in British Columbia. Never one to put his feet up, Hans set about remapping the geology of the island, a labour of love that continued almost to the end of his life. This work resulted in two GSC publications, and subsequent revisions and additions may be found on the website cortesislandgeology.weebly.com, which Hans developed in collaboration with his son-in-law.

Highly educated in both the sciences and the humanities, Hans Trettin was erudite and exceptionally well read. Simplicity and focus, which he had acquired during his literary studies in post-war Germany, characterized both his approach to geological research and his scientific writing style. Unfailingly gracious, he was always quick to compliment a colleague on a job well done. In the field, he focused entirely on the task at hand and the frugality of his personal life in the bush was legendary, yet he always retained his sense of humour. Truly, Hans was one of a kind, what the Germans call a *unikum*.

Hans was pre-deceased by his wife Marina in 2009 and is survived by daughter Anna van Ermengen and son Peter, three grandchildren, and one great-grandson.

I thank Anna van Ermengen and Ulrich Mayr for providing insights into Hans's early life.

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