

Memorial to William Watt Hutchison

1935–1987

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William Watt “Bill” Hutchison died July 3, 1987, in the Ottawa General Hospital, at the age of 52. He was a victim of cancer. At the time of his death, he was President of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) and Assistant Deputy Minister for the Geological Survey of Canada. The material in this memorial is drawn from information supplied by the IUGS and comments from his friend Vera Lafferty, who is the Director General of the Environmental Protection Branch, Canada Oil and Gas Lands Administration.

Hutchison was proud of his Scottish heritage. His father instilled in him a work ethic and organizational ability that served him well his entire life. His brother Arthur was a geologist and inspired in Bill a love of the mountains and rocks of Scotland.

Hutchison pursued his undergraduate studies at Aberdeen University, where he married Brigitte Segard. They left Scotland for Canada, where Hutchison received his Doctorate in geology at the University of Toronto in 1962. He worked in private industry for a short time, then joined the Geological Survey of Canada. There he developed new methods of handling and presenting complex data in connection with mapping of the Coast Range Plutonic Complex of British Columbia. His flair for data management led to his appointment in 1974 as head of the Survey’s Data Systems Group in Ottawa. His love for Canada’s west coast remained with him the rest of his life. Occasionally he confided to friends his dream of “returning to the bench” someday, referring to the rocks of British Columbia’s coastal mainland.

From 1976 to 1980, Hutchison served as Secretary General of IUGS, a term marked by conspicuous success. Vera Lafferty says of his term, “Bill managed to turn around an enormous, prestigious organization, shaking it free of its staidness and tradition, breathing into it new life, new blood, new concepts. He enhanced its scientific program, improved communications, expanded its membership.” Under his leadership, IUGS began publishing *Episodes*, now a leading publication in international geoscience. Recognizing the honor brought to their country by Hutchison’s efforts, the Royal Society of Canada conferred upon him the Bancroft Award in 1980.

During those years with IUGS, Hutchison also provided leadership for the Geological Association of Canada (President), the Canadian Geological Foundation (Director), and the Canadian Geoscience Council (Foreign Secretary). During the 1970s, he was active in the Geological Society of America, in addition to his other duties. He and his colleagues gave freely of their time and expertise during a period in which many changes were being made in GSA’s publications programs.

In 1981 he was appointed the 15th Director General of the Geological Survey of Canada and later that year as Assistant Deputy Minister for Earth Sciences in Canada. In 1982, he was elected President of CODATA, (the IUGS Committee on Data for Sciences and Technology). He also chaired the IUGS Advisory Board for Research Development from 1982 through 1984. At the International Geological Congress held in Moscow in August 1984, Hutchison was unanimously elected to a five-year term as President of IUGS. At the time of his death, in addition to his duties as



IUGS President and Assistant Deputy Minister at Energy, Mines and Resources, Hutchison represented Canada on the Circum-Pacific Council for Energy and Mineral Resources, and on the Executive Committee for the International Ocean Drilling Program. He was also chairman of the Geoscience Program under the Canada/USSR Arctic Science Agreement.

Hutchison's boundless enthusiasm and ability to recognize talent in people were two qualities that made his leadership effective. Vera Lafferty has said "He was incredibly loyal to the people around him, and as a result he earned their loyalty in return." He was personally responsible for drawing many top scientists to the Survey. He asked for their advice, acted upon it, and gave full credit to them for having supplied it. His optimism and enthusiasm, says Lafferty, earned him a reputation for leaping into problems armed with solutions. "His staff would sometimes pray for legitimate crises, knowing full well that Bill's enthusiasm for the fray' could lead him to create a crisis if there wasn't one handy."

Of all his activities and accomplishments, Hutchison was most fond of his term as Secretary General of IUGS. Shortly before his death, he expressed his wish for IUGS to establish a foundation, under IUGS auspices, dedicated to the development of young geologists around the world. The Hutchison Young Scientist Foundation was created to assist meritorious geologists in participating in IUGS-sponsored meetings and conferences. Lafferty says Hutchison "liked the idea of his name being associated forever with those things that had given him so much satisfaction in life—international work, geology, and the creativity of young minds." Contributions to this fund may be addressed, in trust, to Scott and Ayles, Barristers and Solicitors, attention Mr. Laird J. Rasmussen, 170 Laurier West, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5V5, Canada.

Hutchison is survived by his wife Brigitte, daughters Celine and Tania, companion Daniele Seguin, sisters Anne Hutchison (in Aberdeen, Scotland) and Margaret Chater (in Aberystwyth, Wales), and nephew Arthur Chater (in London, England).

"In losing Bill Hutchison, the Canadian and international scientific communities have lost a public-spirited talent and a dedicated soldier," Vera Lafferty said. "But Bill has left behind a very rich legacy, and it is now up to us to work together and make it an enduring one."

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