

FROM THE EDITOR

A RETROSPECTIVE ON THE 14TH INTERNATIONAL ^{14}C CONFERENCE

This is a public "Thank You!" from all of us in Tucson who were associated with the 14th International Radiocarbon Conference. Without your attendance and participation, our planning and efforts would have been in vain. Many of us worked long and hard, and we appreciate your compliments during and after the convention. We also received some constructive comments that will be considered at the next radiocarbon conference. Shortly after a radiocarbon conference is a good time to open a public forum on several aspects of the ways we communicate among ourselves about our research related to cosmogenic isotope research. [See *Letters to the Editor* section, this issue.]

I would like to open a discussion in the form of letters to the editor. Topics of discussion could relate to any aspect of cosmogenic isotopic research, but certain items arose at the Tucson conference that might benefit from more measured discourse. Examples include the structure of ^{14}C conferences, selection of abstracts, agenda (or process for setting agenda) of the conference business meeting, and workable solutions to the problem of retrieval of the body of ^{14}C dates now emerging globally at the annual rate of 12,000–15,000.

Let me start the discussion by outlining the assumptions the Tucson Conference Organizing Committee made about the preferences of the radiocarbon community and the guidelines we followed as we planned the Tucson conference. The International Radiocarbon Conference is the *only* forum where all investigators in the field of radiocarbon can get together. It is the only meeting where β -counting and AMS people overlap. As such, it has and it will continue to have a strong emphasis on techniques and methods, as well as applications. The Radiocarbon conference has been a tradition for nearly 40 years. Traditions should be tampered with cautiously. Representatives of most radiocarbon labs expect a chance to present one talk, and we accommodated that expectation.

Although the primary reason for the conference is scientific, it is also to provide a forum for radiocarbon scientists to get together. For scientists in many countries, attendance at such a meeting enhances funding possibilities. Further, participants' abstracts accepted at a Radiocarbon Conference is the key allowing their organizations or governments to pay their way, on a three-year recurrence interval, to a nice place where they can meet old friends and catch up on the latest developments. In our preliminary meetings, the planning committee for the Tucson conference discussed how selective we should be. We were aware that the caliber of presentations would vary, but we were also aware how difficult it would be to predict quality simply from the abstracts. Some top-notch scientists submit two-line abstracts. We adopted the stance that representatives of all laboratories should at least be given a chance to present a paper on their research. Not everyone is in the front line of research in a currently fashionable field, but that does not mean that his/her work is unimportant. How else can a small ^{14}C group with limited equipment learn about new techniques than by interacting with colleagues at a radiocarbon conference? Consequently, we concluded that we would let the attendees decide which papers to hear, rather than making that decision for them. At most times during the conference, conferees had the choice of two oral presentations, posters, or patio conversations.

To many, the poster sessions tend to be unsatisfactory. To others, they are better than oral sessions. Poster sessions are ideal for papers with detailed maps or with much specialized information. In

our case, we also assigned late papers to poster sessions. One thing we learned is that we can expect never to please everyone.

Regarding theme sessions: The Paleoastrophysics Workshop had special funding to bring in some invitees. It was well-received, but it is a highly specialized segment of the radiocarbon community. We had special sessions on “Calibration and Comparisons among Dating Techniques” and “Isotopic Indicators of Global Change”. We also had a well-attended workshop on calibration which brought together different fields. The response to the latter was diluted by the fact that some “global change” experts were not interested in a meeting concentrating on radiocarbon. The workshop on liquid scintillation counting attracted a large number of active participants and observers, and the workshop on paleoenvironments of the southeast Mediterranean introduced several newcomers to the radiocarbon community.

Regarding encouraging presentations on AMS and non-¹⁴C cosmogenic isotopes: We had mixed experiences with asking AMS people to attend. Some non-¹⁴C AMS people are not interested in attending a Radiocarbon Conference. It seems that “AMS People” are clearly a distinct and diverse group and discuss things that are of interest only to that group, such as technical details of accelerators. The proposal to combine AMS and Radiocarbon Conferences was soundly defeated at the Business Meeting. It was also defeated at the last AMS meeting in Paris in 1990 by the AMS community. Other meetings are organized around the topic of isotopes in geology, oceanography and atmospheric sciences, for example, ICOG, AGU. However, we agree that AMS should continue to be a strong component at Radiocarbon Conferences, and the attendance of “AMS People” should be encouraged. Some may choose not to attend.

Thus, the Tucson conference was, as usual, rather egalitarian and eclectic. Most colleagues seemed to agree that the meeting structure is not “broke”, so why fix it? We already have meetings that focus on specific themes within cosmogenic isotope research, with invited keynote speakers. These are clearly valuable for scientific exchange, but tend to be elitist, and someone with a novel approach may be left off the list of invited speakers. Not everyone is tuned in to global science. Some are intensely interested in the technical minutiae of some particular procedures or in unique sites.

RADIOCARBON journal policy is somewhat different for conference volumes than for regular issues. Although we still rigorously peer-review each article, we feel obligated to report what occurred at the meeting. Thus, no meeting papers are rejected based solely on subject matter. If the paper is well-written, contains new data or new interpretations, is scientifically sound and acceptable to reviewers and editors, we publish it.

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