

FROM THE EDITOR

40 AND STILL GOING STRONG

The radiocarbon dating method recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. Technically, the event occurred at the University of California Conference Center, at Lake Arrowhead in June of 1990; RE Taylor, organizer<sup>1</sup>. However, a more impalpable, and more consequential marking of the 40th anniversary is occurring. We are experiencing a general changeover of radiocarbon laboratory directorships from the first generation to the next. This is a widespread and pervasive milestone in the radiocarbon dating community with important consequences to all of us. The Lake Arrowhead meeting was historically reflective and intellectually stimulating. The more I travel and visit radiocarbon labs, the more I realize that most labs have interesting stories about their development. Some quirky turn of fate has often played a pivotal role in a lab's development. An additional element was usually an individual with vision, drive and ability. Many of these individuals to whom the field owes so much have just retired or are on the brink of retirement.

The meeting at Lake Arrowhead was more than a paean to the founding fathers of the field. Many of those who charted the original courses were there, and they recounted history, highlighted major developments and important contributions, and suggested future compass directions. Also present were the pacesetters of the future. The history of science reveals waxing and waning of research areas. A new discovery or technique comes along, many people refine it, apply it or use it until it runs its course or is supplanted by a better idea. Carbon rod emission spectroscopy is an example.

Entering its fifth decade, radiocarbon dating is clearly not experiencing a hardening of the arteries. Quite the contrary, developments and applications have never proceeded at a faster pace than now. This is partly owing to the emergence of AMS radiocarbon dating as a practical method, and its rapid evolution. However,  $\beta$ -counting  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating shows no signs of burning out. As in organic evolution, the survivors are the adapters. The field of radiocarbon dating is not just adapting, it is revitalized and thriving in the new environment with the new leaders. Maybe life *does* begin (again) at 40.

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<sup>1</sup>Proceedings to be published jointly by *Radiocarbon* and the University of Arizona Press.