

The 15th Caribbean Geological Conference, June 29th to July 2nd 1998, Kingston, Jamaica

TREVOR A. JACKSON¹ and MANUEL A. ITURRALDE-VINENT²

¹Department of Geography and Geology, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica

²Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Obispo 61, La Habana 10100, Cuba

SOME 100 geoscientists from the Caribbean, from Europe, and from North, Central and South America attended the 15th Caribbean Geological Conference (CGC) held at the Le Meridien Jamaica Pegasus Hotel in Kingston. At the opening ceremony the main address was given by the Minister of Mining and Energy, the Honourable Robert Pickersgill, who reminded Caribbean geoscientists of their role in promoting sustainable development, highlighting the importance of rational exploitation of mineral resources, the protection of the environment and economic growth. In his welcome address, Professor Grenville Draper, Chairman of the CGC Permanent Standing Committee, emphasised the importance of communication among geoscientists as well as between geoscientists and the general public. He challenged geoscientists to take advantage of the rapidly growing area of information technology in order to achieve these goals as the world entered a new millennium. Dr. Don Robotham, PVC and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of the West Indies (UWI) congratulated the Department of Geography & Geology for organizing the conference and having it coincide with the 50th anniversary of the University of the West Indies. He was delighted with the international participation at the conference and encouraged the Department to host more conferences of this nature. Conference Chairman Dr. Trevor Jackson, also Head of the Department of Geography & Geology at the UWI, reminded the audience that when the previous conference was held in Jamaica in 1962 on the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies, Geology was a fledgling department, but it had now grown into department with a strong research base and had graduated more than 300 Caribbean geologists, many of whom now hold key positions in industry, the public sector, academia, politics and international agencies, and several of whom contribute to the Caribbean conferences.

Following the opening ceremony there were four days of technical presentations. Just over 70 oral presentations were given, including a one-day symposium

on Caribbean Ophiolites and Volcanic Arcs which marked the final meeting of IGCP Project 364. There was also a half-day poster session and another half-day for a Landslide Hazard Mapping workshop jointly organized by the British Geological Survey and the Department of Geography & Geology at the UWI. There were many stimulating and interesting papers on Caribbean geology throughout the conference. Several papers described new invertebrate and vertebrate fossils that helped improve our understanding of biodiversity, extinctions, paleoenvironments and paleoclimates. R.W. Portell and his colleagues posted evidence of a Lower Eocene North American land vertebrate—a primitive rhino—in Jamaica, indicating that Jamaica was once physically connected to North America. An important contribution by Skelton and Rojas was the correlation of the Cretaceous sections in the Greater Antilles by means of rudists ranging in age from Hauterivian to Maestrichtian.

There were other sessions at the conference which covered geological hazards, particularly landslides, Quaternary geology, petroleum geology, and metallic and industrial mineralogy. Once again Caribbean plate tectonics was a talking point at the conference in which new evidence contradicted some of the more widely accepted models. It was recommended that a special workshop should be organized to evaluate the new and existing data under the leadership of M. Iturralde-Vinent and that a new Caribbean Plate Tectonic Research Project under the umbrella of the UNESCO/IUGS-IGCP should be proposed.

Conference delegates also took part in two 2-day field trips. The first of these (Figs 1 & 2), a pre-conference field trip to eastern Jamaica, was led by T. Jackson, G. Draper and E. Robinson where rocks of Cretaceous and Tertiary age were visited. On Day 1 the geology of the southern section of the Blue Mountain Inlier was highlighted, which included the regionally metamorphosed rocks of the Mt. Hibernia and Westphalia Schists and the dismembered ophiolitic complex around Arntully and Bath. Day 2 was spent examining Lower and Upper Tertiary rocks of the Blue

Mountain Block and the Wagwater Belt. The second 2-day trip took place after the conference and was led by S. Mitchell, D. Miller and E. Robinson. On this trip participants traveled to central Jamaica where they examined the Upper Cretaceous rocks of the Central Inlier and the overlying Lower-Mid Eocene Yellow Limestone Group. The second day was devoted to karst bauxite deposits and the mining operations at Alcan Jamaica Company Limited at Kirkvine. A splinter group from this field trip revisited the Central Inlier and the rudist-bearing limestones.

Other activities at the conference included the book launching of *Jamaica Underground* by Alan Fincham and published by the University Press. This book contains a history of cave exploration in Jamaica, biospeleology, hydrology, karst geomorphology, and a catalogue of Jamaican caves with accompanying maps and sections. The launching took place on the first night of the conference and was held at the Senior Common Room at the UWI. On the penultimate night of the conference a cocktail party hosted by Minister Pickersgill offered participants the opportunity to enjoy and dance to the rhythm of reggae and soca music and to leave with fond and pleasant memories of Jamaica.

At a meeting of the Permanent Standing Committee of the CGC it was agreed that the next meeting in 2001 should be held in Costa Rica, with Barbados and Venezuela as possible alternative sites. Chairman of the Permanent Standing Committee G. Draper reported that there was now a Caribbean Geology web site (<http://www.fiu.edu/orgs/caribgeol/>) where interested geoscientists could access the latest Caribbean information.



Figure 1. Participants, on the second day of the pre-conference field trip, enjoying a refreshment break before examining the Neogene Low Layton pillow lavas (background) that crop out along the north coast. The photograph shows the western entrance of the old railway tunnel (Photo taken by E. Robinson).

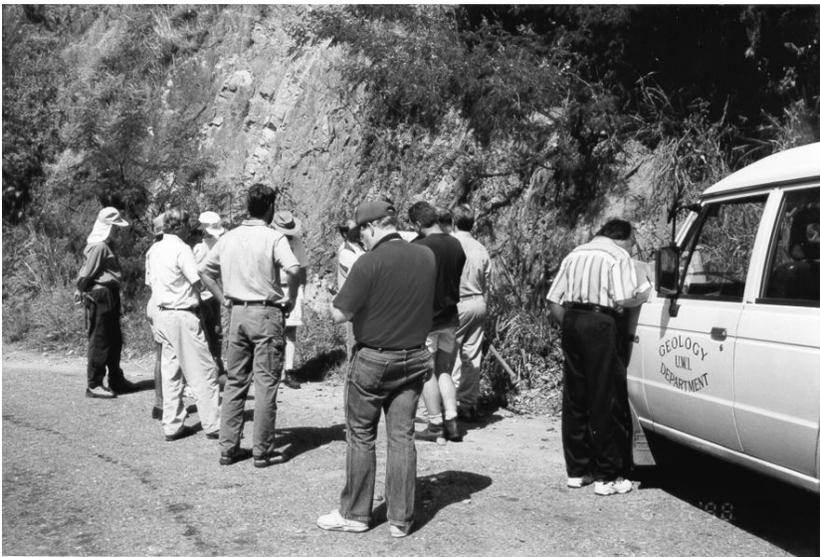


Figure 2. The final stop on the second day of the pre-conference field trip at Nutfield, located in the northern part of the Wagwater Belt, where Paleogene volcanic rocks crop out (Photo taken by E. Robinson).