

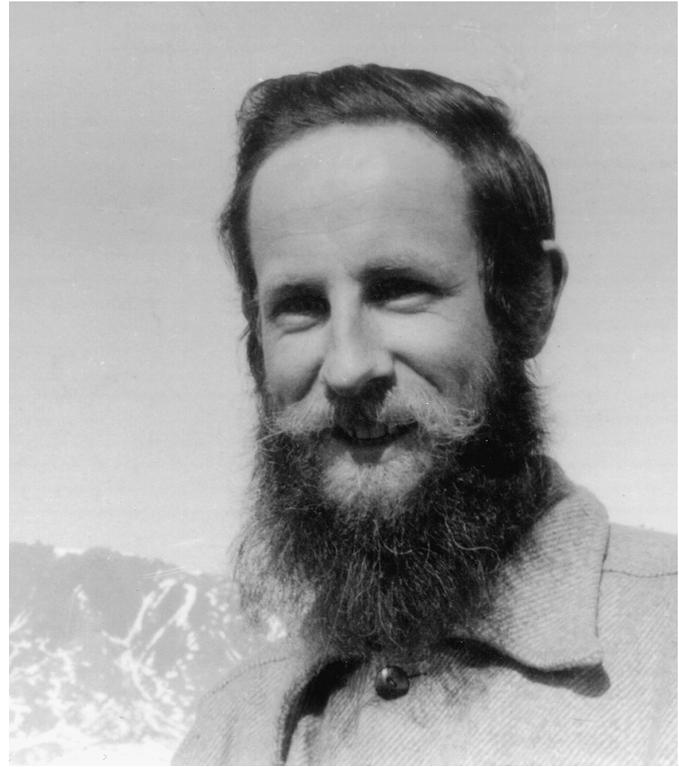
JOHN POWELL (1933–2005)

John Powell died on August 4, 2005. He had the rare distinction of being one of four men who wintered at Lake Hazen in the interior of northern Ellesmere Island in 1957–58. The party took weather observations as part of Operation Hazen, Canada's major contribution to the International Geophysical Year. Shortly after the summer party left the camp in August 1957, the radio there quit. Later the stove and heater in the hut malfunctioned. The winter party experienced 121 days in complete isolation, cut off from the world in a hut with a plywood door, with temperatures below -40°C . Ian Jackson's book *Does Anyone Read Lake Hazen?* (2002) tells the story of what others might see as a terrible ordeal. The winter party took everything in its stride. A publisher rejected Jackson's manuscript because it was "too cheerful." When we landed at Lake Hazen in the spring of 1958, we found John and his three companions—Ian Jackson, Dingle Smith, and Dick Harington—in good health and excellent spirits.

Born in Hampton, Middlesex, England, on February 17, 1933, John spent his schooldays there and in North Devon and Norfolk. His parents belonged to the Royal Horticultural Society, inspiring his lifelong interest in plant geography; he won prizes in school for collecting plants. Conscripted into the British Army in October 1951, John served for 18 months in Egypt with the Ordnance Corps. Demobilized in 1953, he entered University College, London, where he majored in plant geography, graduating in 1956 with a Bachelor of Science (Special). His fieldwork took him to Belgium, the Netherlands, West Germany, and Norway. John then headed for Canada, spending two months on his uncle's farm in Manitoba. In the mid-1950s, the Geography Department at McGill University, under Ken Hare, attracted footloose British students in search of new pastures and advanced degrees. John moved to Montreal, where he shared an apartment with Ian Jackson and took up an offer to join Operation Hazen. As he put it, "I had been raised, some might say brainwashed, on Scott and Shackleton...polar exploration was an opportunity to be seized if it presented itself."

In the summer of 1958, with Jim Soper of the University of Toronto, John botanized around Lake Hazen. They photographed, collected, and dried a hundred different plants from its basin. John made a welcome visit to the glacier camp to help with the work there, and roamed the scree slopes and nearby *nunataks*, identifying 35 plants in what looks like a barren wilderness. He made a valiant attempt to grow vegetables on a test patch near the base camp, planting beans, peas, carrots, radishes, lettuce, parsley, mustard, and cress just after the temperature rose above freezing. The radishes, lettuce, and cress emerged from the soil, but despite John's diligent watering, they gave up the struggle and withered away.

John returned to the Lake Hazen area in the summer of 1959, with Geoff Hattersley-Smith and Brian Sagar, living



John Powell. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Margaret Powell.

in a tent at the snout of the Gilman Glacier and continuing his research. In the fall of that year, he received his Master of Science degree from McGill University with a thesis entitled "The Climatic Conditions Affecting the Vegetation of the Lake Hazen Area, Ellesmere Island, NWT." An edited version appeared as a McGill/Defence Research Board report in 1961.

John combined his interest in vegetation and climate as a biometeorologist with the Forest Biology Laboratory of the federal Department of Agriculture in Calgary, which he joined in 1959. Three years later, John took educational leave, married Margaret, and began studies at the University of British Columbia, where he completed his PhD in 1969. The Calgary lab closed in 1970, and John moved to Edmonton to continue his work in hydrometeorology, clear-cutting, forest-fire management, climatic change, and other topics at the Northern Forestry Research Centre. He retired in 1991 after authoring 190 scientific papers and reports.

A colleague described John as "one of the most active members of the natural history world in Alberta." John served as president of the Calgary Bird Club (1968–70), Secretary of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (1971–72), its president (1972–74), and a director for 20 years. While president of the Calgary Bird Club (now the Calgary Field Naturalists' Society), John helped to convince the city to create the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary. In 1981, he

received the sixth Loran L. Goulden award for his work as a naturalist, conservationist, and scientist.

John had a passion for philately and shared it with many young people. He began collecting stamps at the age of five and eventually belonged to 25 philatelic societies. John co-authored *The Revenue Stamps of Iraq* and put together a collection of envelopes sent from Operation Hazen. He served for five years as president of the Edmonton Stamp Club and for many years as a director of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada and as its chief judge.

Everyone who knew John developed a deep affection for this quiet, gentle, self-effacing man. Friends described him as a “modest, kind man... who always got the job done well and was very dependable.” He had the knack for generating consensus and getting things done. One tribute to him noted:

A diligent, methodical and dependable person, John can be counted upon to make a positive contribution to a meeting through his organizational ability, knowledge and study of background material, skill at debate,

understanding of rules of order, and overall perception of matters of importance. He is still going strong, when, near the end of a lengthy meeting, the attention of most Directors has worn thin.

John had a ready grin, an unassuming manner, and the enduring curiosity of a dedicated scientist and a committed conservationist. He is survived by his wife, Margaret, daughters Elizabeth, Ruth, and Helen, and seven grandchildren.

REFERENCE

JACKSON, I. 2002. Does anyone read Lake Hazen? Edmonton, Alberta: CCI Press.

*Jim Lotz
5680 Inglis Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
B3H 1K3*