

ROBERT GORDON BLACKADAR (1928–2017)

Few Southerners seasonally active in the North immerse themselves in the local language and culture to the degree that Bob Blackadar did. In less than 10 years after his first summer as a geologist in the Arctic Islands, Bob became fluent in Inuktitut. He traveled extensively with the Inuit in the 1950s, often using traditional means, such as dog sledges, pack dogs, and small boats. Clearly captivated by the Arctic, Bob continued working there until the mid-1960s and maintained ties with northern folk and communities for many more years. Although Bob's death in June 2017 came more than 50 years after his last Arctic field season, his name will forever be linked with the Arctic.

Robert Gordon Blackadar was born on 18 March 1928 in Ottawa, the son of E. Gordon and Myrtle (Norman) Blackadar. He attended Lisgar Collegiate in Ottawa, then went to Trinity College, University of Toronto, where he obtained an Honours BA in Science in 1950. He continued his studies in Geology and Geophysics at the University of Toronto and was awarded an MA in 1951 and a PhD in 1954. His dissertation dealt with the Logan diabase sills of the Thunder Bay–Lake Nipigon area of Ontario and was supervised by W.W. Moorhouse.

Bob was to spend his entire career with the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC), but he began his association with the GSC as a camp cook in the Yukon. In the spring of 1947, Hugh S. Bostock, doyen of Yukon field geologists and a neighbour of the Blackadars in Ottawa, was about to leave for the field but had not been able to engage a cook for the summer (Bostock, 1979). After ascertaining that Bob had not yet found a summer job, he told him the job of bush cook was his if he could learn to make bread, hot cakes, and desserts within the next four days. Bob accepted the challenge and was hired. He returned to the Yukon as cook on Hugh Bostock's field party in 1948.

Bob first worked for the GSC as a geological field assistant in the Arctic in the summer of 1951, but he did not join the permanent staff until 1953. His first field assignment was to join Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith of the Defence Research Board, who was initiating a study of the ice shelves off the northern coast of Ellesmere Island. Bob was charged with conducting a reconnaissance of the geology, which was known only from scattered observations made by British and American explorers since the 1870s. Bob and Hattersley-Smith worked out of what was then a weather station at Alert and were logistically supported by the United States Air Force from Thule air base in Greenland. From April to June, they used two dog sledges driven by two Inughuit from Greenland. Their first sortie took them along the coast as far west as Markham Fiord. Bob was among the first Canadians to set foot on Canada's northernmost land, Cape Columbia, preceded only by a few Newfoundlander crew members of Robert E. Peary's expedition ship, the *Roosevelt*, in the early 20th century and possibly by Thule culture Inuit.



Bob Blackadar in 1983.

Two further sledge journeys were made closer to Alert before the Greenlanders returned by air to Thule with their sledges and dogs at the end of June. Bob and Hattersley-Smith then set off on a backpacking trip to the United States Range southwest of Alert, during which they covered nearly 500 km. In late July, they attempted to walk to Lake Hazen but were turned back by bad weather. They left Alert for Thule on 16 August. According to Hattersley-Smith (1974:29), “Blackadar's geological reconnaissance was the main achievement of the 1953 season.”

In 1954, Bob, assisted by R.R.H. Lemon, investigated the Precambrian stratigraphy of the Admiralty Inlet area, northwestern Baffin Island. This work (Lemon and Blackadar, 1963) greatly expanded knowledge of the geological setting of previously discovered lead-zinc showings near Arctic Bay and led to the opening of the first mine in the Canadian Arctic, at Nanisivik, in 1976. The mine site included a small town, airport, and dock and was linked to the Arctic Bay settlement by a road 32 km long. Zinc and subordinate lead and silver were profitably produced there until 2002, when low metal prices forced closure of the mine.

Bob was the last surviving member of the scientific staff, numbering 11 geologists and paleontologists, of the GSC's Operation Franklin, a helicopter-supported survey of the Arctic Islands exclusive of Baffin Island, during which about 260 000 km² of geologically unknown terrain was reconnoitered in 1955. The project was envisaged and led by Y.O. Fortier, but Bob was heavily involved in the



Bob unloading a Beaver aircraft near Arctic Bay, northern Baffin Island, June 1963 (Photo: Thomas Frisch).

planning from an early stage and largely responsible for the logistics, in addition to conducting geological work with dog sledges and on foot.

Fieldwork by Bob in the period 1956 to 1961 was confined to southern coastal areas of Baffin Island, between Fury and Hecla Strait and Hudson Strait, where he made extensive use of dog sledges in spring and Inuit-manned boats in summer. He recorded daily life and activity with a home movie camera and doubtless perfected his Inuktitut.

The field seasons of 1962 and 1963 were occupied by helicopter-supported regional surveys led by Bob. The first, Operation Prince of Wales, covered Boothia Peninsula north of Spence Bay (now Taloyoak) and Somerset, Prince of Wales, and King William Islands. Bob and F.C. Taylor shared responsibility for the Precambrian rocks; R.L. Christie and B.G. Craig dealt with the Paleozoic and surficial geology, respectively. In 1963 Operation Admiralty covered Baffin Island west of 80° W, with Bob responsible for the Precambrian, H.P. Trettin for the Paleozoic, and B.G. Craig for the surficial geology.

Bob's field career ended in 1965 with Operation Amadjuak, which, under his leadership, completed the reconnaissance mapping of southern Baffin Island south of 66° N. Collaborating with Bob were F.C. Taylor on bedrock and W. Blake, Jr., on surficial geology.

In 1966 Bob joined the GSC's Geoscience Information Division, where he served as chief scientific editor until 1979. During his tenure, he prepared three editions of the *Guide to Authors: A Guide for the Preparation of Geological Maps and Reports*, used by generations of GSC scientists since the 1950s. Other publications that Bob wrote or was heavily involved in were also of significant historical interest, such as *Focus on Canadian Landscapes* (Blackadar and Vincent, 1973), a compendium of photographs from the GSC collection (some dating back to the 1870s) illustrating landforms and physiographic regions of Canada; *On the Frontier* (Blackadar, 1982), a photographic record of GSC activities from the late 19th century on; and two editions, in 1976 and 1986, of a concise, illustrated history of the GSC.

Bob became director of the Geoscience Information Division in 1979 and remained in that post until his retirement in 1989. He continued to live in Ottawa, eventually moving to a seniors' residence, where he died peacefully in the early afternoon of 12 June 2017. He was 89 years old.

Bob Blackadar was quiet, reserved, almost shy, but always approachable. He combined courtesy with a keen sense of humour. Bob enjoyed time with friends and family and loved a party. Among his many interests, books and music figured prominently. Very well read, he had a profound knowledge of history, not just of the North but of Canada in general, and great enthusiasm for his family history. He wrote simply but effectively, exemplified by the very readable *The Geological Survey of Canada — Past and Present* (Blackadar, 1986).

Bob is survived by his cousins in Ontario and in the United States.

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