

Progress Report on the Smithers Exploration Group's Rock Room (Northwestern British Columbia)

A. Ledwon, Smithers Exploration Group, Smithers, British Columbia, rockroom@smithersexplorationgroup.com

C. Ogryzlo, Smithers Exploration Group, Smithers, British Columbia

Ledwon, A. and Ogryzlo, C. (2020): Progress report on the Smithers Exploration Group's Rock Room (northwestern British Columbia); in Geoscience BC Summary of Activities 2019: Minerals, Geoscience BC, Report 2020-01, p. 155–158.

Introduction

When the Smithers Exploration Group (SEG) was founded back in the early 1970s, no one could have foreseen its successful growth and community involvement over the decades. From co-creating the School of Exploration and Mining with Northwest Community College (now Coast Mountain College) to organizing a myriad of public education projects, SEG has played an active role in the community of Smithers, northwestern British Columbia (BC), and in BC as a whole through its advocacy for the mining and exploration industry. During this time, SEG had amassed an extensive rock collection that, through a grant and some very hard work, was sorted into what is now the SEG Rock Room. Located in Smithers, the collection has attracted much attention at recent conferences, and has become the focus of many hopes and plans for the future. Thanks to a Geoscience BC grant, SEG has been able to move forward with several of these projects in 2019.

Project Updates

Completion of Collection

A large donation (four pallet loads) of samples from the BC Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources in Prince George is allowing SEG to fill in some specific gaps in the collection. Shipments from private collections have also arrived, mainly from geologists who explored the region during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s for the provincial and federal governments. A temporary storage and sorting area (Figure 1) has been set up near the main Rock Room as local and visiting geologists work together to pick out the best samples to be used both in the collection and for future teaching programs.

Rock Room Improvements

The main improvement to the Rock Room in 2019 has been the changeover to daylight bulbs. Being able to study and

photograph hand samples under natural lights helps keep colour analyses accurate and assists in preventing eye strain. Also, SEG updated and posted its emergency response plan and upgraded the first-aid materials in the office.

Presentations to KEG and MEG

In April of 2019, SEG presented an introduction to the Rock Room at the annual conference of the Kamloops Exploration Group (KEG) in Kamloops, BC. Audience members responded enthusiastically to the potential of the Rock Room and many questions ensued, particularly on how ge-



Figure 1. Storage and sorting area for rock donations from the BC Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources and private collectors. Many of these rocks will be used as teaching samples as they arrived with little but a name, and sometimes not even that.

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ologists and prospectors could share and/or donate parts of their own collections. Access to the Rock Room was also of key interest, as was the potential to view the collection samples digitally.

The Smithers Exploration Group has reached out to the Vancouver Mining Exploration Group (MEG) in hopes of presenting a talk toward the end of 2019.

Training for Regional Rockhounds

Teaching rocks have become a common theme in the Rock Room as donations have arrived from across the province. Ideally, SEG wants to ensure as many of these samples end up in use as possible; as such, plans are underway to create both an introductory course (late fall 2019) for amateur rockhounds and an advanced prospecting course (late spring 2020) for those with experience in the industry. Local geologists will make up most of the pool of instructors and visiting geologists have helped develop regional field trips that will supplement the classroom work.

AME Roundup Poster and Prospectors' Tent Presentations

Applications for a table in the Prospectors' Tent and a poster for the annual Roundup conference of the Association for Mineral Exploration (AME; Figure 2) have been submitted. At that event, SEG hopes to have a selection of relevant hand samples available to match the showcases of individual prospectors. Additionally, SEG will display educational posters and other materials to encourage the use of the Rock Room.

SEG Rock Talk Workshop

In February 2020, SEG will host its annual Rock Talk in Smithers, BC. A full-day educational workshop is planned



Figure 2. Local and visiting geologists planning field trips and posters for the Association for Mineral Exploration Roundup. From left to right: P. Ogrzyzlo, T. Richards and T. L'Orsa.

for the day prior to the conference and will revolve around a hands-on presentation in the Rock Room.

3D Photography Project and Online Interactive Map

The Smithers Exploration Group is excited to be working with another Geoscience BC grant recipient, the Below BC Geological Association (Below BC; Figure 3). Over 400 samples from the Rock Room have been photographed and added to Below BC's online three-dimensional (3D) catalogue. Over the next few months, an interactive digital map will be created, also in conjunction with Below BC, allowing the public access to photos, locations and other information on most items in the collection.

Educational Poster Development

During the preparations for Rock Talk 2019 (Figure 4), several draft educational posters were created and used in conjunction with numerous hand samples from the rock collection. These posters were digitized and are in the process of being printed for use in future educational programs, outreach activities and workshops. Participants greatly enjoyed the three-dimensional, hands-on aspect of the informational posters, accompanied as they were with actual associated rock specimens.



Figure 3. Below BC photographers J. Moffat and A. Whistler discussing rocks in the Smithers Exploration Group office with T. Richards (far right) and D. MacIntyre (back to camera).

Acknowledgments

The Smithers Exploration Group would like to thank J. Nelson, H. Tremblay, H. Smit and T. Richards for their ongoing support and championing of the Rock Room project. Many others have been instrumental in bringing the Rock Room to its current state and SEG thanks them all.



Figure 4. Rock Talk 2019 participants exploring hand samples and associated educational posters.

