

Progress Report on Smithers Exploration Group’s Rock Room and Getting Creative During COVID (Northwestern British Columbia)

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Introduction

Smithers Exploration Group (SEG) was founded in the early 1970s and has enjoyed 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 been an active part of Smithers, the northwestern region of British Columbia (BC) and 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 many of these projects.

When SEG presented their Geoscience BC (GBC) progress report in November 2019, no one could have foreseen the changes that would affect the world in 2020. With most of SEG’s funding from GBC earmarked for educational programs and conference presentations related to improvements to the SEG Rock Room and updating of its extensive rock collection, COVID-19 forced SEG to get creative and present some alternatives to the original project deliverables. An exciting—albeit masked—spring and summer followed, with focus on taking the hands-on aspects digital and in-person teaching virtual.

Project Updates

Completion of Collection

An enormous collection received from the BC Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation office in Prince George (described in Ledwon and Ogryzlo, 2020) has been sorted and catalogued, with many rocks being used for future teaching collections. Retiring geologists have continued to send their rock collections (Figure 1) to Smithers,

and SEG has been grateful to receive some stunning samples. The catalogue has been digitized and is available through the SEG website at <http://smithersexplorationgroup.com/rock-room/>.

Partnering with Below BC

3-D Photography Project and Online Interactive Map

SEG’s work in 2019 with the non-profit society ‘Below BC’, another recipient of Geoscience BC funding, came to fruition at Roundup 2020 with the launch of a joint interactive map and website. In July 2020, Below BC visited Smithers to continue photographing the collection, this time focusing on rock samples to support the additional education posters that were produced for future prospecting



Figure 1. One example of rock samples submitted to the SEG collection. Many of these rocks will be used as teaching samples in the future. Always fun to unpack though!

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and outreach programs. SEG's entire rock collection is now digitally catalogued, the catalogue hosted on Below BC servers and searchable on their interactive web map (<https://bbcga.com/bc-interactive-map/>). SEG also redirected some funding to support Below BC and their Gigapan technology to add SEG's Hazelton Arc field trip to the educational website (Figure 2; https://bbcga.com/hazelton_geotour/). With additional time and funding, SEG hopes to eventually have all of the rocks available via the map, for 360° viewing.

Training for Regional Rockhounds

As in-person gatherings were cancelled, SEG had to develop other training options. In conjunction with Below BC and the Centre for Training Excellence in Mining (CTEM), SEG put together numerous webpages on the Below BC site in anticipation of moving the prospector course, the rockhounding course and potential university-level geology lab courses to online formats. This is one of the most exciting things to be involved with this year, after many years of advocating for online access to geology training for students and professionals alike.

Presentations

SEG Rock Talk Workshop

Rock Talk 2020, held February 19 and 20, was a success, with numerous geologists from across BC and the Yukon attending the two-day event (Figure 3). Presentations were top notch and current, with a variety of talks focusing on early- to late-stage exploration. The rock collection was once again front and centre, allowing participants a chance to see and handle samples from the deposits being discussed upstairs.

The educational posters that were created for the 2019 Rock Talk have been digitized and printed. They were so well received and useful, for geologists and the general public alike, that SEG has invested additional funding in creating more posters. These will be used to teach future prospecting courses and be incorporated into the Below BC educational interactive website, where they will be combined with the digital photographs of the Rock Room collection.

Poster and Regional Table Presentations at AME Roundup

With the support of SEG, Peter Ogryzlo presented an exciting new poster display (Figure 4) at the 2020 Association for Mineral Exploration (AME) Roundup conference in Vancouver in January. A regional table display (Figure 4), a booth at BC Night, and rock specimens showcased at various other booths on the Trade Show floor rounded out SEG's presence at the event.



Figure 2. J. Moffat of Below BC using Gigapan technology to photograph Brian Boru volcanics, part of SEG's geological field trip.



Figure 3. Rock Talk 2020 participants enjoying a variety of talks.



Figure 4. SEG's new regional table display at Roundup 2020.

Acknowledgments

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Reference

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, URL <http://www.geosciencebc.com/i/pdf/SummaryofActivities2019/Minerals/Project%202018-012_Minerals_SOA2019.pdf> December 2020].

