

# A Brief Summary of the Career of H.E. Wright, Jr.

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Science Museum of Minnesota*

# Acknowledgements

- Brigitta Ammann
  - Many photos and stories
- John and Hilary Birks
  - Compilation of Herb's biographical details and publications
  - Again, many photos and stories
- *Plus photos and stories from many, many old friends*



# *Curriculum Vitae -- Herbology 101*

- Education

- 1939: BA, Harvard
- 1941: MA, Harvard
- 1943: PhD, Harvard (advisor, Kirk Bryan)

- Positions

- 1942-45: WW II
- 1946-47: Brown University
- 1947-present: University of Minnesota

- Awards

- National Academy of Sciences; Guggenheim Fellowship; Regents Professor of Geology, Ecology, and Botany; honorary doctorates (Trinity, Lund, Minn.); awards from geological and archaeological societies; and so forth.

*A dry and unsatisfying summary...*

# *Chronostratigraphic approach*

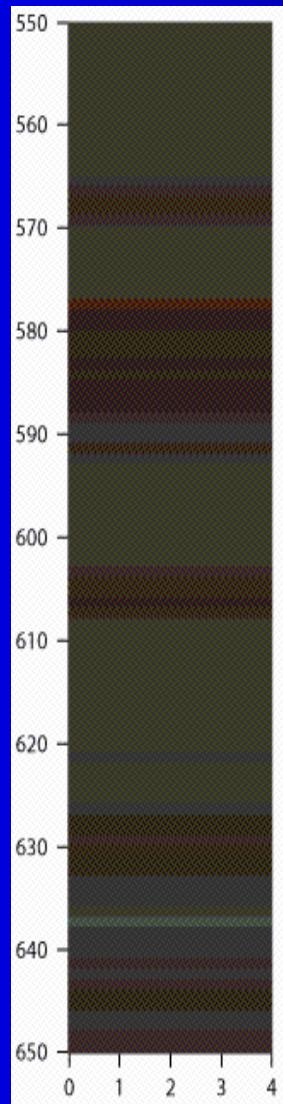
*Archaeological Nomenclature:*

***Post-Classic, or  
Neo-Herbarian***

***Classic Herbarian***

***Paleo-Herbarian***

***Proto-Herbarian***



*Geological Nomenclature:*

- Upper Herboreal
  - 1990s to 2015
- Middle Herboreal
  - 1970s and 1980s
- Lower Herboreal
  - 1950s and 1960s
- Pre-Herboreal
  - 1917-1950

# Pre-Herboreal, 1917-1950

1931 (14 yrs old)

- Childhood years
  - b. 13 September 1917 in Malden, MA
  - H.E. Wright, Jr.
    - “*Hardly Ever*”
  - Earned money with a paper route
- College years
  - 1935-43 at Harvard
  - Met Rhea at Radcliffe
- World War II
  - 1942-45: Bomber pilot
  - June 1943: Earned wings; earned PhD; got married
  - First encounter with peat when engine failure forced an emergency landing of his B-17 in Northern Ireland, where he skidded off the runway.



Rhea and Herb, Palm Beach, August 1943

# *Pre-Herboreal, 1917-1950*

- Education

- 1935-43 at Harvard: BA, MS, and PhD in Geology

- Mentor -- Kirk Bryan

- Arid-region geomorphologist
- But also interested in European paleoclimate, Milankovitch theory, vegetation change as inferred from palynology, and the interface between archaeology and environmental history
- Had grad students exercise their German by translating papers
- Held weekly seminars in his home
- Luna Leopold was also a student of Bryan's

- Early Academia

- 1946 -- Brown University
- 1946 -- Coastal Lebanon -- Ksar Akil paleolithic rock shelter
- 1947 -- arrived at Univ. of Minnesota

# *Lower Herboreal, 1950s and 1960s*

- Near East studies

- 1951+ -- Bob Braidwood (Univ. of Chicago) expeditions to Kurdistan regions of Iraq and (after 1957) Iran
- 1954: Herb drove from London to Iraq, with Rhea and 3 boys
- Cores from Lake Zeribar, Iran
- Joined by **Bob Megard** on some of these expeditions
- *<sup>14</sup>C dating in its infancy -- from Libby, a colleague of Braidwood's at Univ. of Chicago*
- *Herb recognized potential for carbon dating lake sediments*

- Early European influences

- Began travels to Europe to meet with German and Austrian geomorphologists
- And, to meet with specialists in vegetation change and palynology
  - *Godwin at Cambridge, Iversen and Andersen at Copenhagen, and Firbas in Gottingen*

# *Lower Herboreal, 1950s and 1960s*

- Palynological florescence at Minnesota
  - 1958: Magnus Fries (Sweden) visited and helped establish palynology lab
    - *Cushing, Maher, McAndrews, Bright -- each spent semesters abroad*
  - 1959: Limnological Research Station established
  - 1960s: Further interaction with European visitors
    - *Jelgersma, van Zeist, Janssen, Wasyluk/Wasylkova, Grugers, Watts, Florin, West, Haworth*
- Applications to Minnesota glacial geology and vegetation history
  - Chronology of ice lobe advances
  - Process interpretation of glacial landforms
  - Post-glacial vegetation change demonstrating migration of prairie/forest border
  - Laid the foundation for decades of work to follow
  - Theses produced:
    - *Cushing, Maher, McAndrews, Bright, Baker, Winter, Potter, Rampton, Griffin, Shay*

# *Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s*

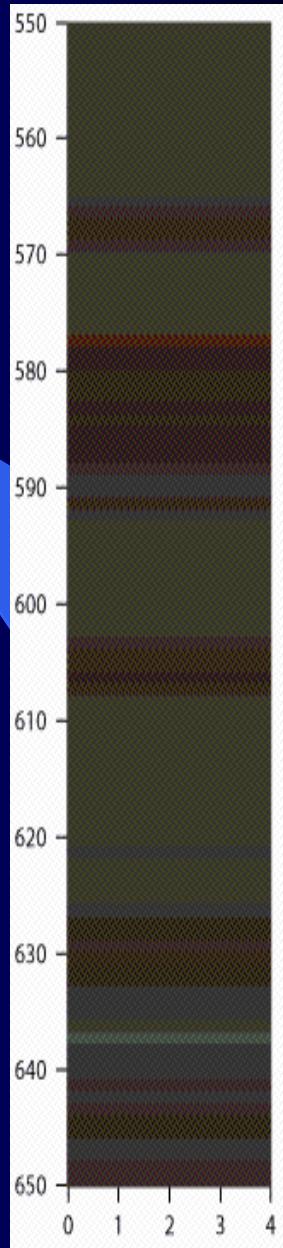
- Glacial geology and paleoecology -- Yukon & Minnesota
  - Klutlan Glacier, St. Elias Mts in the Yukon
    - *Birks, Bradbury, Whiteside, Driscoll, Watson, Jacobson*
  - Minnesota work, continued
    - *Chernicoff, Goldstein, Moores, Delcourt, Grimm, Eyster-Smith, J. King, J.C. Almendinger*
- Labrador paleoecology and paleolimnology
  - Theses:
    - *Engstrom, Foster, Lamb, G. King*
- Global climate change -- **the COHMAP years**
  - Co-PIs -- *Cushing, Kutzbach, Webb*
  - Syntheses studies of paleoecology, paleolimnology, and paleohydrology
  - **Introduction to use of GCMs to model paleoclimate**
  - **Rigorous attempt to compare data to model output**
  - Too many names and connections to mention
- More European visitors
  - *J. & H. Birks, Janssens, Battarbee, Bjorck*
- “Retirement”
  - About 1988
  - Loss of wife Rhea and son Rex

# *Upper HerboREAL, 1990s and 2000s*

- LRC directorship changes
  - Kelts, 1990-99
  - Ito, thereafter to present
- More visitors
  - *Valero, Schwalb, Cumming, Zicheng Yu*
- Glacial geology and paleoecology further afield
  - South America with *Seltzer and Fritz*
  - Ireland with *Glaser*
  - East Africa with *Verschuren*
  - Alaska with *Engstrom & Fritz*
  - Sweden with *Foster*
  - Georgian Caucuses and Siberian Altai with *Ammann*
  - Bulgaria with *Stefanova*
- *Many more places and colleagues than I can recount. See Brigitta's account "Travelling with Herb" on Birks's e-book website.*

# *Chronostratigraphic nutshell*

- **Upper Herboreal -- 1990s to 2015**
  - Further afield: South America, Africa, Alaska, Sweden, Ireland, east Europe, Siberian Altai
  - More visitors -- Europe & Asia
  - LRC directorship changes
- **Middle Herboreal -- 1970s and 1980s**
  - "Retirement"
  - COHMAP
  - Labrador
  - Glacial Geology & Paleoecology -- Minnesota, Yukon
  - More visitors -- Europe
- **Lower Herboreal -- 1950s and 1960s**
  - Applications to MN glacial geology & paleoecology
  - Palynological florescence at Minnesota (with European visitors)
  - Early European influences
  - Near East -- origins of agriculture
- **Pre-Herboreal -- 1917 to 1950**
  - Early academia; arrival to Minnesota
  - World War II
  - Harvard -- mentored by Kirk Bryan
  - Childhood years



# A Short Tribute to Those Who Cannot Be With Us

*Herb's wife*  
**Rhea Hahn  
Wright**



*Herb's sons*

# Peter and Rex Wright

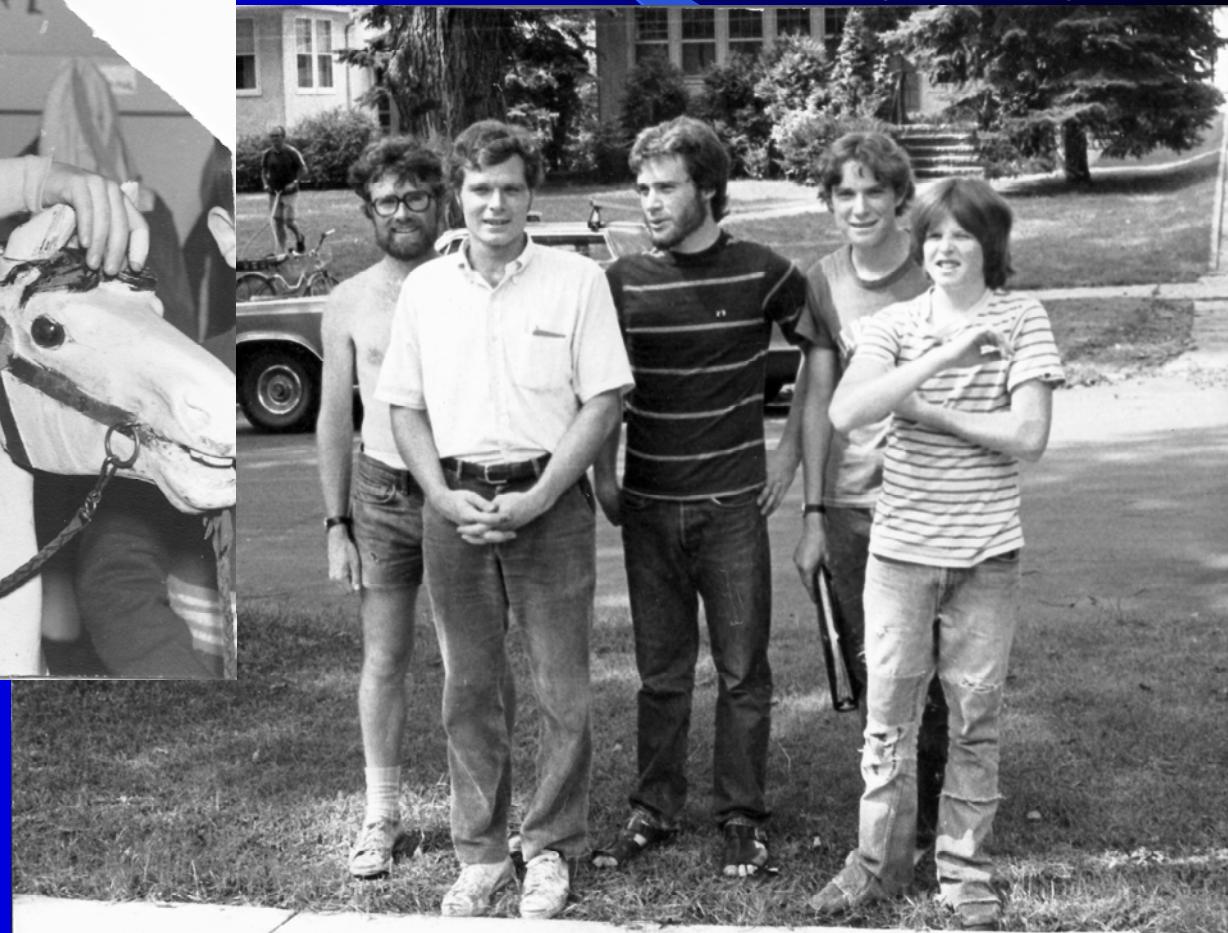
**Peter**

Dick



Dick John

Rex Andy Jeffrey



# Magnus Fries



# Kazimierz Wasyluk

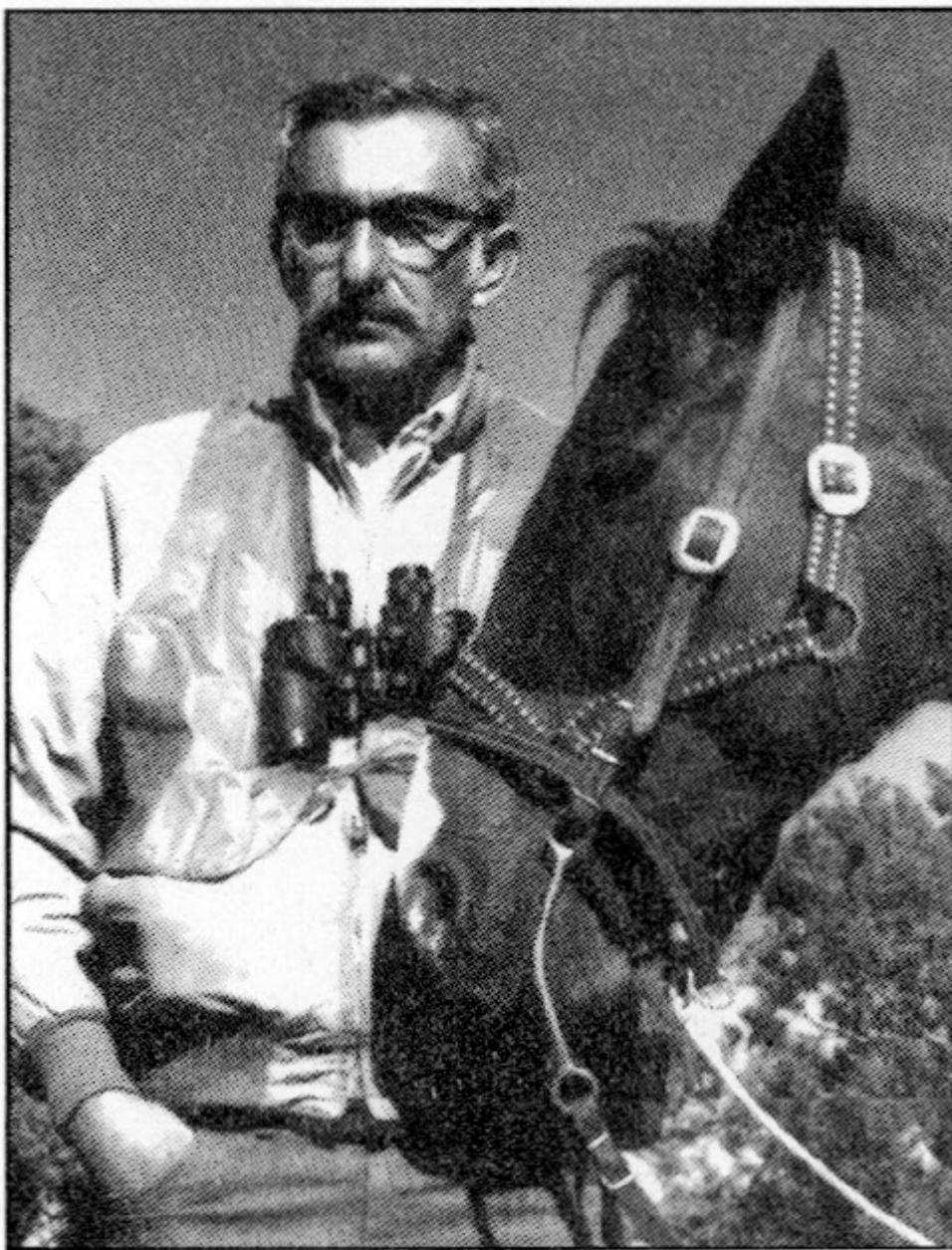
(1925-2000)

*Krystyna Wasylkova  
(still with us)*



# Bob Bright

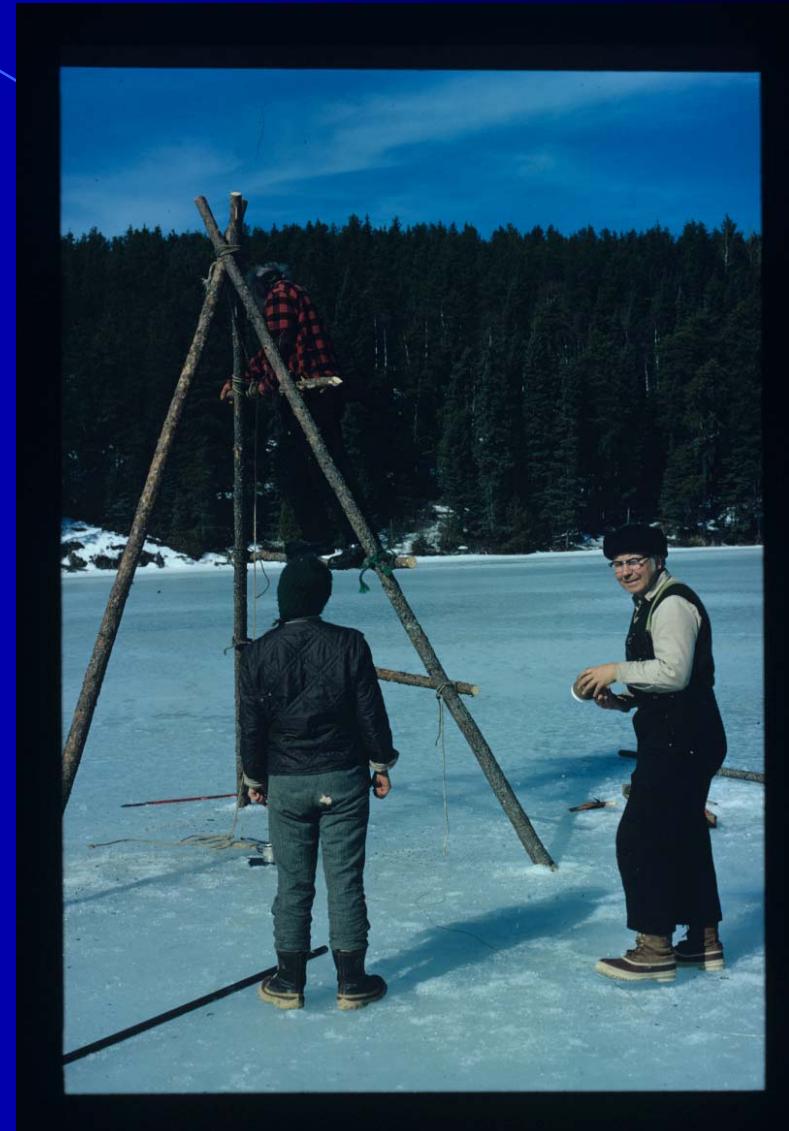
(1927-1995)



# Bud Heinselman



1979



1973

# J. Platt Bradbury



# John Kingston

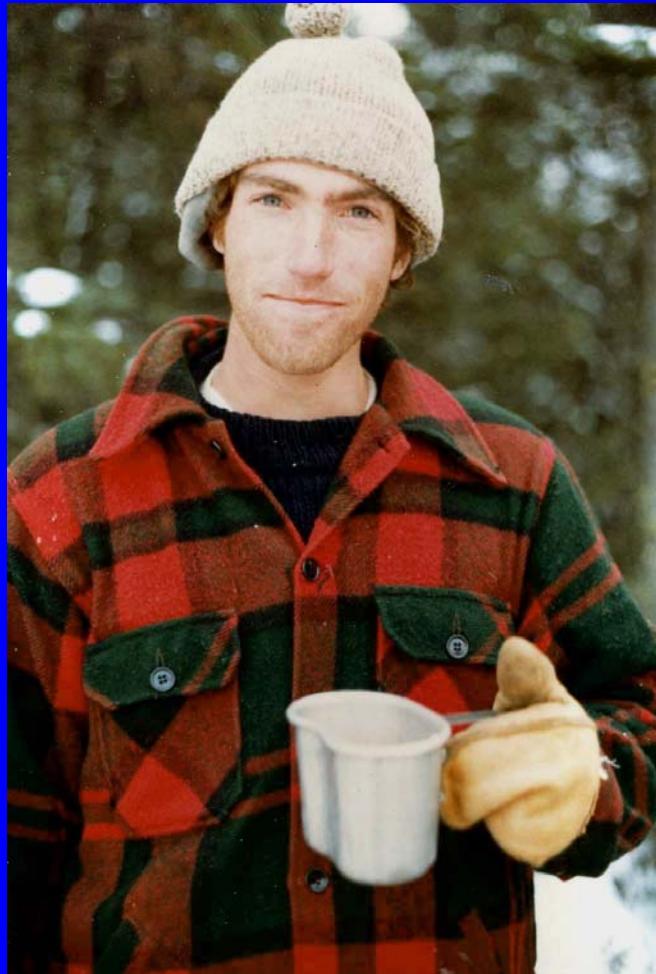


1990



1990

# Geoff Seltzer

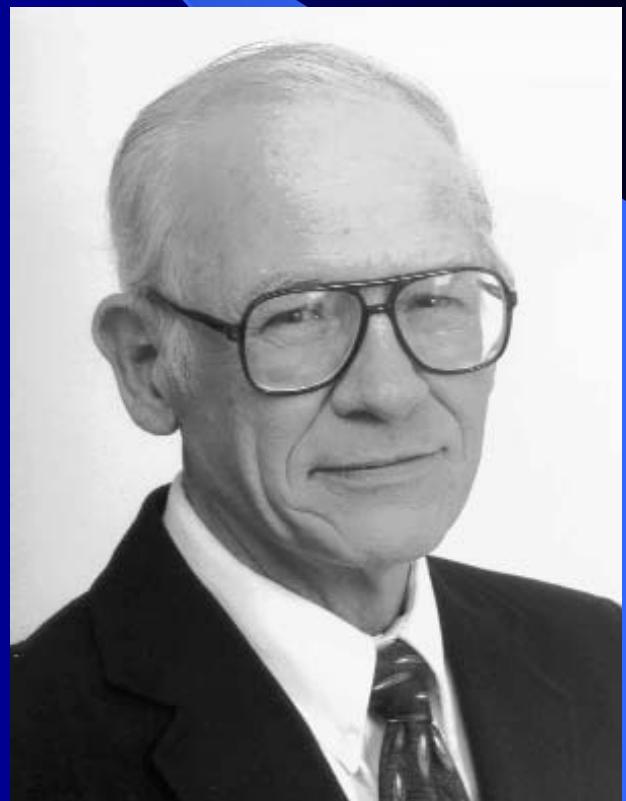


1982, Lost River



1988, Glacier Bay

# Tom Winter



# Roel Janssen

-- Photos courtesy of John Birks



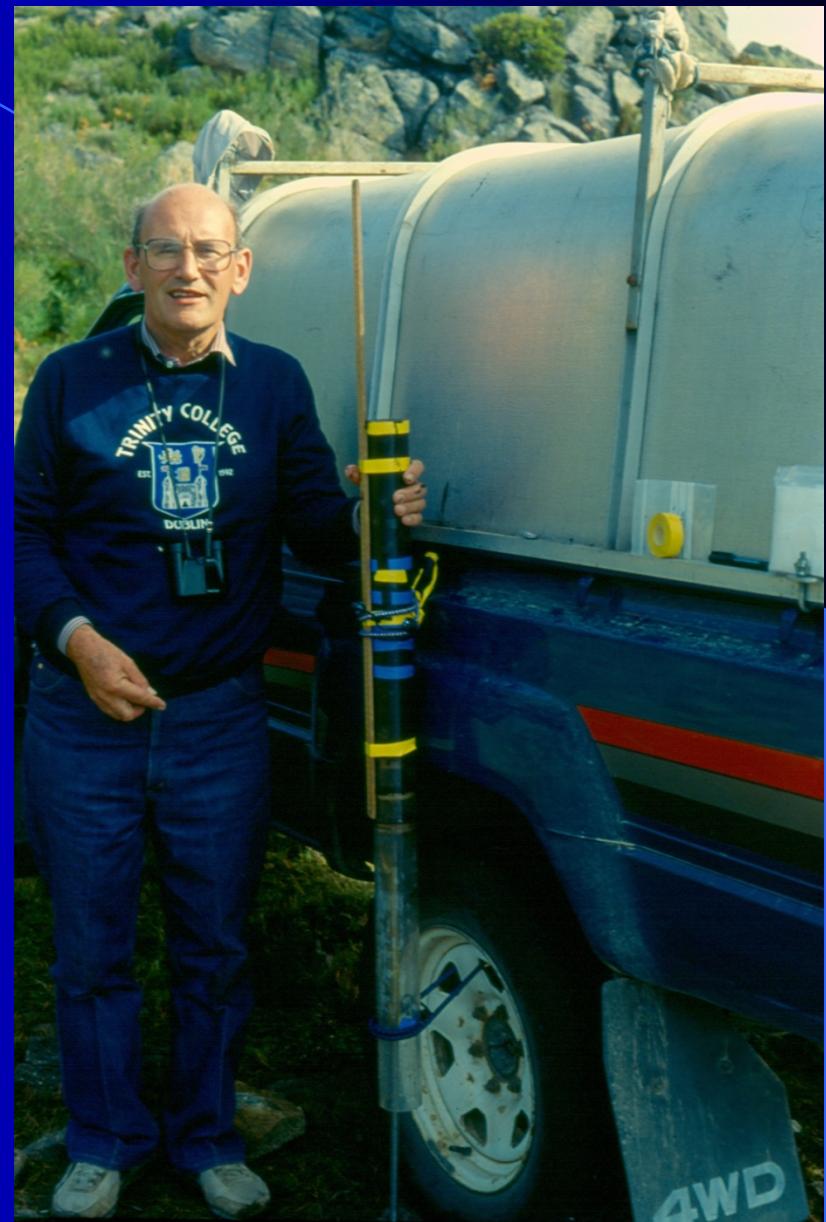
~1970



# Bill Watts



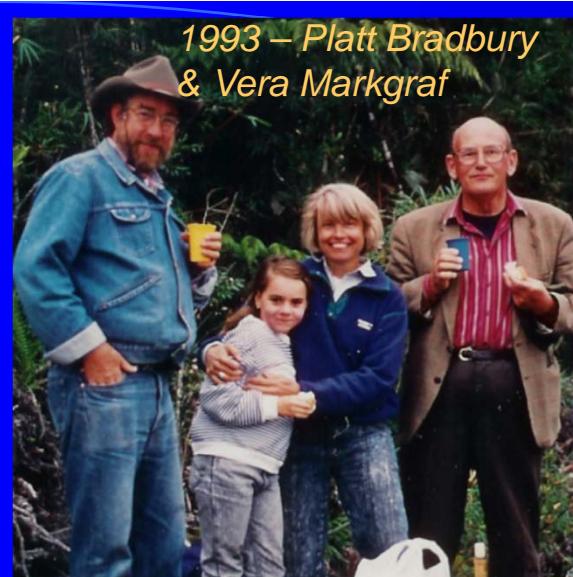
1980 – Cathy Whitlock



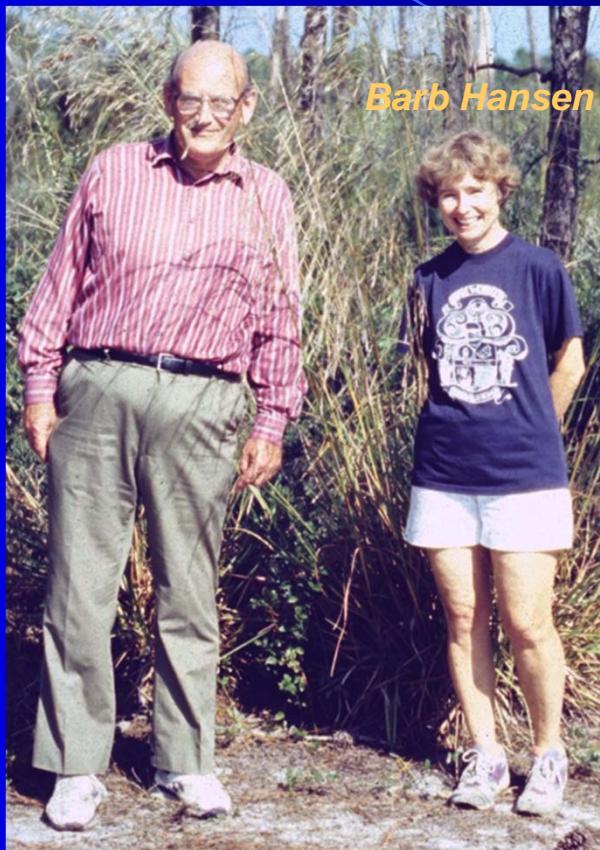
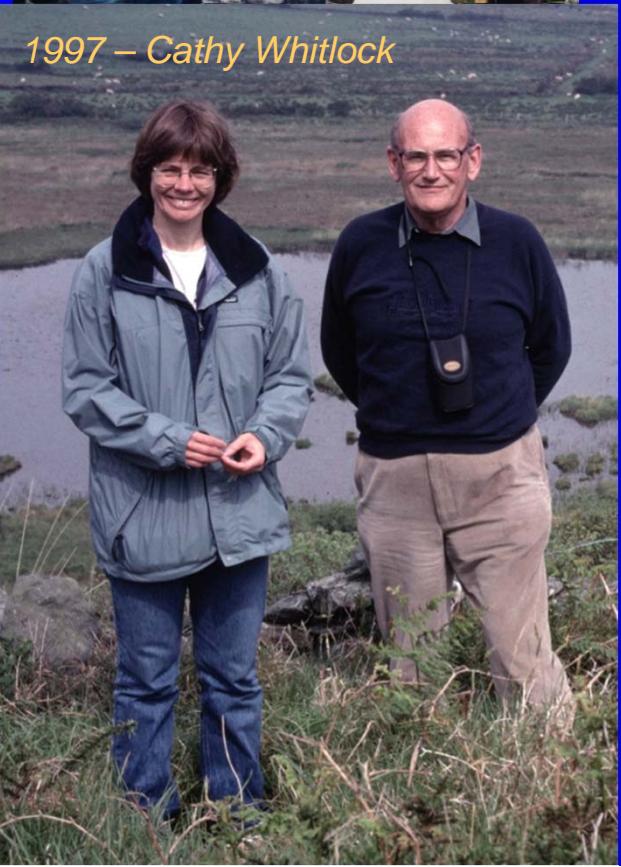
1991 – Fraser Mitchell

1993 – Platt Bradbury  
& Vera Markgraf

# Bill Watts & friends



1997 – Cathy Whitlock



-- Photo: 1994 Eric Grimm

1992 -- Eric Grimm



# A Few Photos of Herb

*in stratigraphic order*

*(Photo credits -- George Jacobson, Sheri Fritz, Paul Glaser,  
Svante Björck, Emi Ito and Dept. of Geology, JEA -- and  
many others I'm sure I've forgotten)*

- **1942-45 Army Air Corps**

- Two combat tours
- Pilot, Command Pilot, and Group Operations Officer (as a Major)
- 95th Bombardment Group, stationed in England



*-- from "A Century of Geology: 1872-1972,  
at the University of Minnesota"*

- **95th  
Bombardment  
Group**

- B-17 Flying  
Fortresses
- Bombing runs
  - over Germany
  - during D-Day
  - at Battle of the  
Bulge
  - Food & supply  
drops over the  
Netherlands  
(Arnhem)



## *Lower Herboreal, 1950s and 1960s*

INQUA meeting in Poland 1961, on the excursion "Baltic Sea to Tatra Mts"  
*(when Herb first met Bjorn Berglund – although this is not he – leading to  
many future collaborations with Lund University)*



*Lower Herboreal, 1950s and 1960s*

Rosebud site, 1962 -- Dick Baker

Ed Cushing

Jock McAndrews

HEW

Bill Watts



## *Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s*



1971 Cloquet, MN

## Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s



1972 Kawishiwi River, MN

## Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s



1973 Lake of the Clouds

# Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s



1974 Chuska Mts



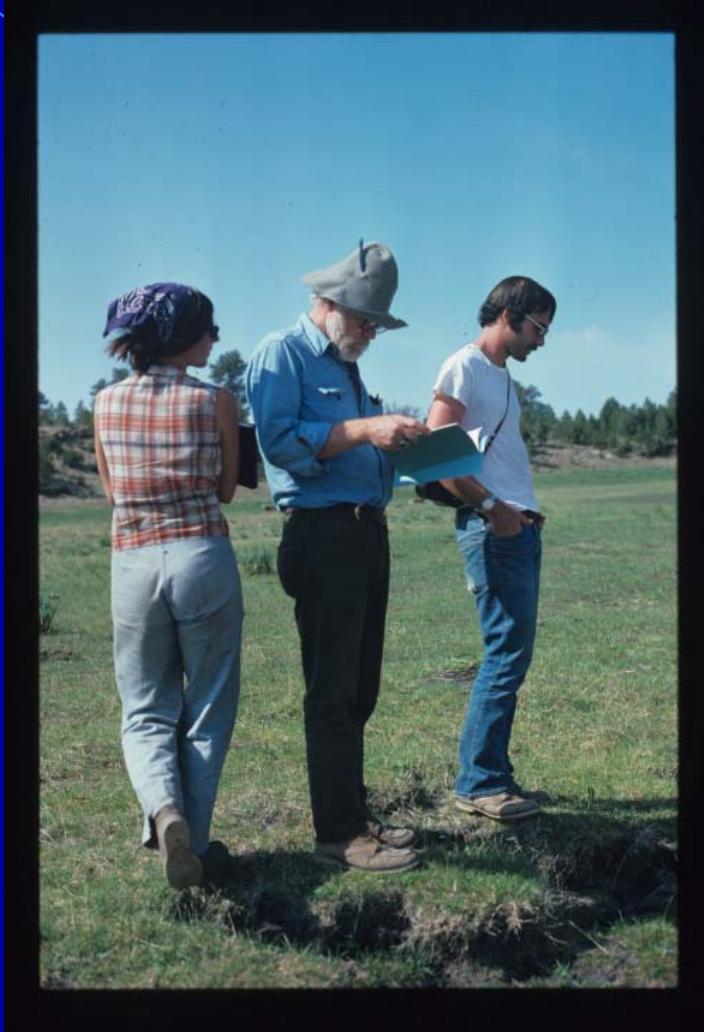
Bob  
Rogers

Nancy  
Sather

Pat  
Swain

Ed  
Cushing

Mike  
Scanlon



# *Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s*



1975 Little Sioux  
reunion

*Herb, Bud, and  
Dick Wright  
(reddish pants)*



# *Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s*

## 1978 Herb in his tidy office



-- Photo: Nancy Eyster-Smith

Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s

1981 Battle  
Ground Lake, WA  
-- *Cathy Whitlock*



The Herb Garden  
Gnome



*Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s*

1982 Lost River, MN



Amy  
Loiselle

Geoff  
Seltzer

Jim  
Almendinger

George  
King

Dave  
Foster

Don  
Siegel

## *Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s*



*Don  
Siegel*

*Dave  
Foster*

1982 Lost River, MN



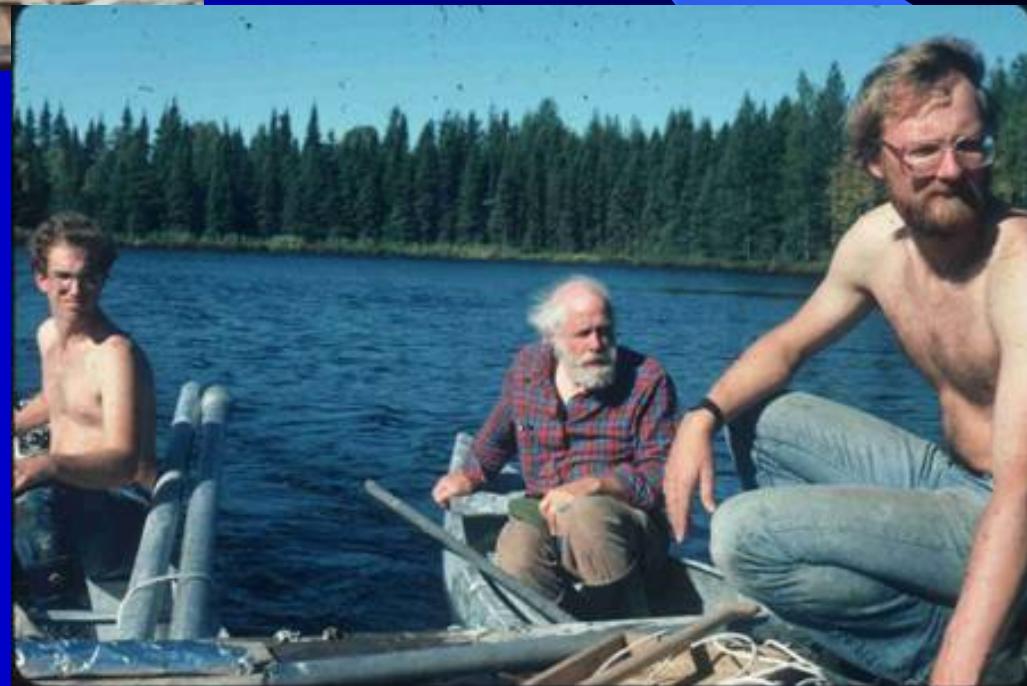
# *Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s*



1980s Crystal Lake, ON

1980s Northern MN

*With Geoff Seltzer  
and George King*



Svante Björck

## *Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s*

Herb promoted to Dr h.c.  
at Lund University 1987,  
here together with  
colleagues from four  
European countries.

-- Bjorn Berglund



## *Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s*



1987 Bangor, County Erris, Ireland

*Trip with Paul Glaser*

# Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s

Svante's sauna



Photo: Eric Grimm

1988, 1990  
Sweden

Hammarmossen bog



## Middle Herboreal, 1970s and 1980s



Late 1980s Devils Lake, North Dakota

## *Upper Herboreal, 1990s and 2000s*



1991 Kotiranta

## *Upper Herboreal, 1990s and 2000s*



**"With deep respect for building a scientific bridge between our continents I express my sincere thanks to Herb for inspiration and friendship during more than a half century."**

*Björn E. Berglund*

*Upper Herboreal,  
1990s and 2000s*

## AMQUA 1994 (Minneapolis)

*Full of colleagues  
spanning the Lower  
and Middle Herboreal  
intervals, with a few  
from the early Upper  
Herboreal interval*



*Upper Herboreal, 1990s and 2000s*



**Canoeing with Andy in BWCA**  
*-- Brigitta Ammann*

## *Upper Herboreal, 1990s and 2000s*



2003 Lou Maher Retirement

-- Dave Mickelson



# *Upper Herboreal, 1990s and 2000s*



*George Jacobson*

*Ed Cushing*

*HEW*

*Eric Grimm*

**2006 Cedar Creek (Ed Cushing's retirement excursion)**

# *Upper Herboreal, 1990s and 2000s*

2007 Switzerland



*Brigitta  
Amman*

*Jim  
Almendinger*

*Björn  
Berglund*

*HEW*

*Dan  
Engstrom*

## *Parting Thoughts -- Enduring Traits of H.E. Wright, Jr.*

- Herb was a quiet man
  - Actions speak louder than (spoken) words
- Writing is action
  - The written word speaks loudest of all
- Small actions every day matter
  - Herb often arose early to write, even if only a few paragraphs
- Writing is thinking
  - If you haven't written it, you haven't thought it
- Encouragement of students and colleagues
  - He completed the work of many students and yet gave them principal credit
- Ingenuity in the field trumps preparedness
  - Yet he was grateful for his well-prepared colleagues

# *Parting Thoughts -- Enduring Traits of H.E. Wright, Jr.*

- Above all, Herb persevered
  - If Shackleton's family motto were “By endurance we conquer”
  - Then Herb's motto would be:
  - ***“By perseverance we set forth and publish”***
- He survived --
  - WWII combat, fieldwork in the Middle East, heat stroke in Minnesota bogs, starvation in Labrador, bivouacs in the Andes, and many other hot, dry, cold, and wet adventures
  - ***He remained the tough old pilot to the end.***

Punta Arenas (Brigitta Ammann)

