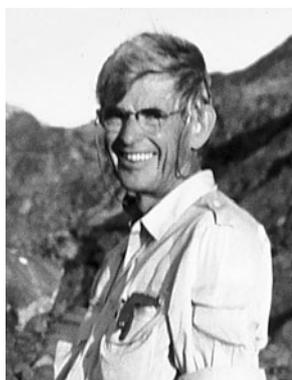


Editorial: Tjerk Peters (1936–2009)

Edwin Gnos · Urs Eggenberger · Christian de Capitani

Published online: 28 May 2010
© Swiss Geological Society 2010



Tjerk Peters during fieldwork on Masirah Island, Sultanate of Oman, 1993. (Photo: I. Mercolli)

Tjerk Peters was a prominent figure in the Swiss Earth sciences for several decades. Having an exceptionally wide range of interests, he conducted research and stayed productive in many fields including applied mineralogy, regional geology, experimental petrology, and ophiolite research. Throughout his career he had a passion for geological mapping, which he considered fundamental for progress in any Earth science discipline. He kept true to this conviction until the last days of his life. Indeed after

his retirement in 2001 he completed several geological map sheets in Oman and the Alps (Swiss Atlas sheets of St. Moritz and Bivio). On March 23rd, 2009 Tjerk Peters lost his life in a swimming accident on Masirah Island in the Sultanate of Oman.

Tjerk Peters was born in the summer of 1936 in Bandoeng, Indonesia, then a Dutch colony. Spending part of his early life in a Japanese war-camp gave him certain strong convictions: Live for the present, seize opportunities, and certainly never buy a Japanese car. When Tjerk was ten, his family moved to Groningen, Holland, where he grew up and started his academic studies. In 1957 he moved to Switzerland, obtaining his PhD under the supervision of Prof. Ernst Niggli. The topic “Die Mineralogie und Petrographie des Totalpserpentins bei Davos” was timely, being set in the advent of plate tectonics. Tjerk considered the Totalp serpentinite part of an ophiolite suite, hence a fragment of former ocean floor. That general topic would remain one of his main research themes. Based on his PhD experience, he was offered the opportunity in 1967 to explore a section of similar rocks in northern Oman (now part of the United Arab Emirates), one of the largest and best exposed fragments of ocean floor on land. He quickly became fascinated not only by the spectacular geology, but also by the hospitality of the local people. Yet practical difficulties would prevent further work for another 20 years. Subsequent to his PhD, he spent a year at Penn State (1964–1965), doing postdoctoral studies in Prof. Tuttle’s experimental laboratory. Back in Berne he wrote his habilitation thesis and started to build his own hydrothermal laboratory, the first experimental petrology lab in Switzerland. His laboratory was used mainly for studies on manganese minerals. In 1971 Tjerk Peters became associate professor (Extraordinarius) at the university of Berne, and he was promoted to full professor (Ordinarius) in 1977.

E. Gnos (✉)
Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle, Ville de Genève,
1, route de Malagnou, CP 6434, 1211 Geneva 6, Switzerland
e-mail: edwin.gnos@ville-ge.ch

U. Eggenberger
Institute of Geological Sciences, University of Bern,
Baltzerstrasse 1+3, 3012 Bern, Switzerland

C. de Capitani
Institute of Mineralogy and Petrography, University of Basel,
Bernoullistrasse 30, 4056 Basel, Switzerland

From 1986 to 2001 he was the Director of the Department and served as Dean of the Faculty of Sciences in 1992/1993. From 1987 to 2007 he also presided the “Schweizerische Studiengesellschaft für mineralische Rohstoffe”.

Tjerk Peters recognized early that fundamental mineralogical research at universities should be complemented by solving practical problems. Following this philosophy, he developed a network that provided knowledge in clay mineralogy to the brick industry and knowledge in X-ray analysis to address safety issues concerning asbestos. Around 1980, improving the fundamental mineralogical background for storing atomic waste became an urgent issue. Although collaboration with this sector of industry was at first strongly rejected by other Swiss research institutions, Tjerk Peters and his colleague Albert Matter proceeded to build up an important research group of Fluid–Rock Interaction. Leading and promoting collaborative research, this group has brought together a considerable number of specialists working on a vast variety of topics in this important field of applied research.

Finally, in 1986 the political situation in Oman allowed him to return to one of his early passions and initiate studies in the Sultanate. From then on, dozens of Swiss, Omani and other foreign MSc and PhD students obtained their degrees under the auspices of Prof. Tjerk Peters, conducting field studies in the Sultanate of Oman. Many students involved in these programs are presently in leading positions in research, administration and industry.

Tjerk Peters and his students published numerous papers in the *Schweizerische Mineralogische und Petrographische Mitteilungen* and in the *Eclogae Geologicae Helveticae*, the forerunners of the Swiss Journal of Geosciences.

With Tjerk Peters we lost not only a great geologist but also a very kind and generous man.

Edwin Gnos
Urs Eggenberger
Christian de Capitani
Former students