

Peter A. Ziegler : 1928 - 2013

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Peter A. Ziegler

1928 – 2013

Peter Ziegler was born November 2 1928 in Winterthur near Zürich as one of the three sons of a medical doctor. All three became prominent geologists working in the petroleum industry during their careers. In 1955 Peter joined the oil industry, right after finishing his PhD work in the Jura Mountains, having been one of the first students to be promoted by the newly appointed Prof. Trümpy in Zürich. After three years of fieldwork and well sitting in Israel, Madagascar and the Algerian Sahara for American and French oil companies he started his career with Shell in Canada. He married Yvonne Bohrer in 1960. Their two sons Markus and Christian were born in Edmonton where the young family lived until 1970. During these years, Peter was mostly active in exploration, covering large parts of western and arctic Canada. Six years of exploration in the thrust belt of the Cordillera, including helicopter-supported fieldwork, were followed by stratigraphic trap hunting as subsurface-geologist in the Alberta foreland basins where Ziegler chalked-up his first gas discoveries in the down-dip reef belt.

1970 Peter Ziegler was transferred to Shell International in the Netherlands where he supervised Shell's exploration activities in the North Sea area. As the North Sea success unfolded, Shell and its partners were rewarded with numerous important oil and gas discoveries, including the giant Brent, Statfjord, and Troll fields. Peter Ziegler's responsibilities as exploration adviser expanded stepwise to all Shell companies in Europe, then South America, and ultimately worldwide. During his last Shell-years between 1984 and his retirement in 1988 he acted as a Senior Exploration Consultant and team leader in Global Geology. It is most remarkable that even before 1984, while he



was still active and responsible for exploration, he presented regional and large-scale compilations at various conferences and symposia. This prompted academia to propose to Shell to publish Ziegler's most famous Geological Atlas of Western and Central Europe in 1982 (a second edition was to be published in 1990), retracing the geological history, depositional environments and tectonics of Europe north of the Alps in greater detail than it had ever been done before. In 1986–87 the American Association of Petroleum Geologists sponsored Peter Ziegler to tour the USA and Canada as distinguished lecturer, speaking on the Evolution of the Arctic-North Atlantic and Western Tethys. The impact Peter had on colleagues in oil industry and academia likewise is unique and testifies his ability to synthesize large amounts of data and to address fundamental problems of geodynamics and basin evolution.

This was but a first step in Peter's academic

career that fully took off after his retirement from Shell at the age of 60, when he moved to Binningen near Basel, the hometown of his wife Yvonne. He joined the Geological-Paleontological Institute at Basel University where he acted as a Titular Professor in Global Geology. At the same time he continued to lecture at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Perhaps just as remarkable as his own research activity that led to well over 130 contributions in journals and books was his gift to cooperate, in many cases also to initiate and coordinate, international research projects: The International Lithosphere Program (1985–1994), EUROPROBE (1990–2002), the IGCP-369 Comparative evolution of Peri-Tethyan Rift Basins Project (1994–99), the TRANSMED Atlas Project (2000–04), and finally the transnational EUCOR-URGENT Project (1999–2008) that dealt with evolution and neotectonics of the Upper Rhine Graben. One of Peter's perhaps most outstanding achievements during this second career of his Life was that he brought together professors and young scientists with great empathy and enthusiasm in order to freely exchange ideas amongst people with very different backgrounds and nationality. One example is his engagement in EUROPROBE (1990–2002) that offered the scientists from the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe the unique opportunity to join the international scientific community after years of isolation behind the iron curtain; at the same time he opened up a large part of Europe for us westerners. A second example is the EUCOR-URGENT Project (1999–2008) that brought together scientists from 24 universities all over Europe and that trained about 40 PhD students and 20 post-docs.

Peter's outstanding scientific contributions and abilities to initiate cooperation between petroleum industry and academia led to numerous recognitions and honours. Peter Ziegler was awarded Honorary Doctor Degrees by the Moscow State University (1997) and the Technical University Delft

(2001). He is recipient of the Foumarier medal of the Belgian Geological Society, the van Waterschot van der Gracht medal of the Royal Geological and Mining Society of the Netherlands, the William Smith medal of the Geological Society of London, the Neville George medal of the Geological Society of Glasgow, the Stephan Müller medal of the European Geosciences Union, the Leopold von Buch medal of the German Geological Society and the Leonidovici Kaptsa medal of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences. From the American Association of Petroleum Geologists he received the Robert Dott sr. Memorial Award and a Special Commendation Award for his regional synthesis of the geological evolution of Europe and for being a lively catalyst of the dialogue among Earth Scientists. He was a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences, the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and the Academia Europaea. He also was an honorary member of the Geological Society of London, the European Union of Geoscientists, the Geological Society of Poland and the American Association of Petroleum Geologists.

Although Peter never became a member of SASEG he is well known to many amongst us who crossed his way during the Shell years or later on. He was well known for his critical and independent mind. Hence, it is but logical that he engaged himself into the debate on climate change during the very last two or three years of his life (see contribution by B. van Geel and P. A. Ziegler in this volume). Those who worked with him will primarily remember him as an inspiring colleague who not only opened our minds to many aspects of science but who also fostered enthusiasm in achieving a common goal. Some of us, and certainly family and close friends, not only lost a hard working but above all a warm-hearted personality. Peter passed away July 19 2013; we miss him.

Stefan Schmid