

Emilie Jäger : early days in Washington

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Vorwort des Redaktors

Die meisten Artikel dieser und einige weitere der nächsten Nummer der «Schweizerischen Mineralogischen und Petrographischen Mitteilungen» sind Frau Prof. Emilie Jäger gewidmet. Die Autoren dieser Beiträge würdigen damit ganz persönlich die Kollegin und Lehrerin und ihre ausserordentlichen Verdienste um die isotopengeochemische Forschung im allgemeinen und um die geochronologische Bearbeitung der Alpen im besonderen. Mit dieser Widmung verbunden sind alle guten Wünsche für einen aktiven Ruhestand, der es Emilie Jäger erlauben möge, unbelastet von den täglichen Lehrstuhlverpflichtungen ihren bevorzugten Interessen nachzugehen.

Most contributions in this, and a few more in the next issue of the «Swiss Bulletin of Mineralogy and Petrology» have been personally dedicated to Professor Dr. Emilie Jäger. The authors of these contributions, colleagues and students of Emilie Jäger, are honouring her extraordinary contribution to isotope geochemistry in general and to the geochronology of the Alps in particular. These dedications are accompanied by the hope that Emilie Jäger will continue to pursue her scientific interests all the more actively now that she is free of the daily burden of the geochronology chair at Berne.

Emilie Jäger: Early Days in Washington

by G.R. Tilton

My first contacts with Emilie Jäger came about in a rather unusual manner. Philip Abelson, then Director of the Geophysical Laboratory, had just returned from an European trip. He announced to the "Carnegie Age Group" (Aldrich, Davis, Wetherill and myself) that in the course of his trip he had visited the laboratory of a woman in Bern who was in the process of setting up a geochronology laboratory. He then informed us that he was very impressed with her abilities, and had accordingly invited her to spend a year at the Carnegie Institution as a guest investigator. That news was not met with great enthusiasm within the group. We thought that we should have been allowed to make our own evaluations of her abilities. When I learned that she would be applying Rb–Sr dating to Alpine rocks, I privately doubted that, with the existing techniques of that time, she would be able to find samples that were sufficiently radiogenic to permit useful age measurements in most cases, and that attempts to date late Tertiary metamorphism would be hopeless. The result was that when she arrived in Washington in 1958 her reception was not an especially warm one. That reaction was soon to change, however.

As Emi went to work in the laboratory, we saw that she was indeed a very competent analyst, as Abelson had indicated. In addition we found her to be an industrious and productive worker. She readily mastered the techniques for Rb–Sr and K–Ar measurements, which led to the 1959 publication with Henry Faul showing that it was possible with the Rb–Sr method as well as with the K–Ar method to successfully date Alpine biotites spanning an age range of 17 to 290 Ma. I remember that the 17 Ma date aroused considerable discussion from the audience when she presented her results before the

Geological Society of Washington a few months before she returned to Bern. There was much speculation as to whether this was a special case, or whether we could expect similar success with other rocks. Her subsequent work in Bern was to yield many additional successful age measurements on such young biotites, showing that my earlier reservations about dating late Tertiary metamorphism by the Rb–Sr method were clearly misplaced!

While at the Carnegie Institution she also established communication with Sydney Clark, which ultimately led to their pioneering publication of the use of heat flow and biotite age data to work out Central Alpine denudation rates.

As we now know, after leaving Washington Emi established geochronology facilities in Bern and gained international attention. She would have done so wherever and however she had completed her early training in the field. However I am pleased to think that I may have played a small role in helping her to get off to a running start in mastery of the mysteries of geochronology. I'm certain that my former Carnegie colleagues share this feeling as well.