

2013



GSA Medals & Awards

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2013 MEDALS & AWARDS

INTERNATIONAL SECTION DISTINGUISHED CAREER AWARD

Presented to
B. Clark Burchfiel



B. Clark Burchfiel
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Citation by An Yin

Geology is a global science and thus requires a global perspective through international collaboration. This is an enormous task that few geologists can accomplish. Clark Burchfiel is one of such rare Earth scientists whose research has covered many regions on this globe, from the Andes to the Himalaya and from the North American Cordillera to the European Alps. Clark's field-based approach has set up a style of research that has guided a generation of young geologists. His insightful syntheses on the tectonic evolution of the North and South American Cordillera, the India-Asia collision zone in Asia, and the Alpine-Mediterranean orogenic system in Europe are ground-breaking and must-reads. Clark Burchfiel is a towering figure in the international Earth Science communities, as a distinguished scientific leader, a marvelous teacher, and, most importantly, a friend of many Earth scientists across continents. This award is extremely fitting, as few have contributed more than Clark Burchfiel to the understanding of continental tectonics through international collaborations. It is my distinct privilege and a great honor to present this Career Contribution Award from the GSA International Section to Clark Burchfiel.

Response by Clark Burchfiel

Geology is global, a statement that does not need to be made to those in the International Division, or I hope to all geologist. All the reasons for conducting research geological investigations internationally are obvious to all: no one country contains examples of geology that contributes to understanding all the processes that shaped the planet through geological time. However, there are many other reasons for working globally, not the least of which is being exposed to different concepts and development of geological thought by extraordinary foreign geologists. We often forget or fail to recognize the great contributions made by geologists writing in foreign languages or lost in time due to the extraordinary explosion in the recent publication volume. Working abroad exposes us to these contributions and brings home how provincial we can be sometimes. Equally important are the wonderful geologists, or I should say people, that we have the opportunity to work with internationally. I count my blessings for all the foreign geologists I have had the pleasure to work with and call my friends. There are too many to name. We all can recall the special times of being exposed to new environments, culture, food and drink. I remember so many special times sitting around in the evening discussing the day's work and exploring our different ways of viewing geology and life in general.

One aspect of International work I would like to mention, the expense and long-term nature of foreign study and research. It has become increasingly more difficult to obtain funding on a long-term basis for international research. Because of the logistics, foreign research often can require increased funding and logistical support to complete major research projects. We can't just drive easily to recheck work in the field when necessary, and often the field areas are difficult to get to and require a major logistical and organizational effort. Looking back, besides several decades working in the western United States, during summers or on leave in foreign countries I have spent 25 years in Scandinavia, 33 years in China, and 45 years in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. This does not count the years I spent on short-term projects in many other areas. I know this adds up more than 100 years, but of course most of the time these research projects were worked on during the same year and many of the projects involved students and colleagues. Funding agencies hopefully understand the long-term nature of foreign projects, but it is becoming increasing more difficult to support them. Global studies by American geologists are essential to keep our science strong and vibrant. I hope that geologists will continue to search the globe for unique opportunities to advance our understanding of the processes that shaped our planet.