Memorial to Montis Ruhl Klepper
1915–1978

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Montis Ruhl Klepper—"Monty" to his family, friends, and colleagues—died of cancer at age sixty-three in Reston, Virginia, on November 5, 1978. He fought the disease for a number of years with quiet dignity and stoicism, all the while maintaining such a positive attitude and vigorous level of work that most of his associates never suspected that he was terminally stricken until the final debilitating months. True to his character, he spent his last summer in the field, and one of his last requests was for paper and pencil to work on a manuscript.

Monty Klepper was born September 3, 1915, in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, and took his undergraduate training at Lock Haven Teachers College and Pennsylvania State College, from which he received his B.S. degree in geology in 1938. He then did graduate work in geology at Yale University from 1938 to 1941, when he began a long and productive career as a member of the U.S. Geological Survey. During and shortly after the World War II years, Monty made important contributions to the United States Strategic Minerals program, conducting investigations on tungsten, mica, beryllium, tantalum, uranium, and other mineral resources which took him to many regions of the eastern and western United States and to Brazil, Japan, and Korea. Most of these studies resulted in important but unpublished administrative reports, and the work broadened his geologic horizons.

In 1947 Monty began work that was to become his lifelong scientific love affair—the geology of southwestern Montana. His first studies were a geologic reconnaissance of Beaverhead and Madison Counties for the Montana State geologic map and resulted in a classic report that is still widely used and cited. He then led the western Montana phosphate project to its successful conclusion and in 1949 began the systematic study of the regional geology and ore deposits of the Boulder batholith and vicinity. His pioneering study of the geology of the southern Elkhorn Mountains, southwestern Montana, is the definitive work in geology from Yale in 1950. His doctoral dissertation work was expanded and subsequently published in 1957 as U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 292, which provided the fundamental framework for many later geologic and topical studies of the Boulder batholith and related ore deposits.

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s Monty was the leader and driving force behind the Boulder batholith project, which in its heyday involved as many as sixteen geologists and numerous field assistants, many of whom he helped groom into top-notch geoscientists in the Geological Survey and other research organizations. During this period of intensive work in and around the Boulder batholith, Monty's talents as a no-nonsense persuasive scientific leader became widely recognized, and he was called upon on several occasions for special assignments and, ultimately, high-level administrative positions within the Geologic Division of the Geological Survey. In 1953–1954, he led a project to appraise the magnitude of
potential resources of uranium, and in 1957–1961 he served as Assistant Chief Geologist and later as Associate Chief Geologist.

After a three-year reprieve on his cherished Boulder batholith research, Monty’s proven administrative talents were again in demand. After temporarily serving as the Chief of the Branch of Military Geology in 1964, he again was asked to serve as Associate Chief Geologist, this time for a six-year term (1964–1970). His administrative skills were then exported abroad. In 1970–1972, Monty was the Senior Geologic Consultant and Chief of the Technical Assistance Mission to the Geological Survey of Indonesia under the auspices of the AID program of the U.S. Department of State. His leadership and experience were instrumental in restructuring and revitalizing the Geological Survey of Indonesia. Upon his return to the United States in mid-1972, Monty became an Assistant Director of the U.S. Geological Survey, first for the Eastern Region and then for Energy and Minerals, in which capacity he nurtured and guided the new energy-related programs (geothermal, coal, uranium/thorium, oil and gas, oil shale), initiated in response to the “energy crunch” highlighted by the 1973 oil embargo.

During his long, productive, and distinguished career as a scientist and administrator of research programs, he was active in many professional societies, including the Geological Society of America, Society of Economic Geologists, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Institute of Mining Engineers, Geochemical Society, and the Geological Society of Washington. He served as the president of the Geological Society of Washington in 1969, in which year he also edited the Alan M. Bateman Volume for the Society of Economic Geologists. He was a popular invited lecturer, and many geoscience students and colleagues heard him waxing eloquently in his deep, resonant voice, generally describing the results of his Boulder batholith research in colorful as well as lucid terms. In 1978 Monty Klepper received from the Department of the Interior the Distinguished Service Award, the highest honor of the Department, in recognition of his laudatory career as a scientist, administrator, and public servant.

Although Monty Klepper made invaluable contributions in his administrative positions to the Geological Survey, the general earth-science community, and the nation, he always remained first and foremost a practicing geologist who, even during his demanding administrative stints carried on summer field work in Montana and “bootlegged” work on Boulder batholith maps and manuscripts. He inspired and encouraged his colleagues in the Boulder batholith project work by his enthusiasm, tireless energy, noncomplaining disposition, wit, inquiring mind, constructive criticism, and patience with junior associates (among whom I was fortunate to be one). We never ceased to be amazed by his keen and rapid insights into, and grasp of, knotty problems; his photographic memory for names, places, roads and trails, and outcrops; his unerring sense of direction in the field; his unusual but apparently energy-packed field lunches; and his sometimes fanciful, on occasion salty, but always colorful turn of phrase. Monty is among the very small handful of geologists who have had geologic features named in their honor. In recognition of Monty’s important discovery of a new fault in the Butte District, Montana, the geologists of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company named it the “Klepper Fault.”

Monty’s presence will be missed by all those working in problems of batholith emplacement and related mineralization, igneous petrology, and tectonic evolution of western Montana. Those of us who were closely associated with him in research or administration will remember him always with respect and admiration. Monty is survived by his wife and field companion, Fern, his son Stewart, and his brother Judson. Not only do we share with them the sadness of Monty’s untimely death but also the lasting memories of his vibrant life.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF M. R. KLEPPER


—— Emplacement of the Boulder batholith: Address to Rocky Mountain Minerals Conference, American Institute of Mining Engineers, Butte, Montana, September 1962 (tape-recorded and mimeographed for distribution).


