

Changing of the guard at the *Journal of Paleolimnology*

John P. Smol

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As noted in an editorial published earlier this year (Smol 2007a) announcing the appointment of Mark Brenner as the new co-editor of the *Journal of Paleolimnology* (JOPL), I will be stepping down as editor of JOPL on December 31, 2007.

Several colleagues have kindly asked me how I felt about leaving JOPL after so many years. Of course, there will be many things that I will miss about the journal and my interaction with so many interesting people. However, I leave the editor's chair content that "my job has been done", at least as well as I could have done it. Looking back at my opening JOPL editorial (Smol 1988), I feel we have met and surpassed the goals set out for the journal at that time. A simple perusal of any recent volume will show that it includes a wide spectrum of excellent papers using diverse approaches from all parts of the globe. I am especially proud of JOPL's leading role in fostering the inter-disciplinary nature of paleolimnology, and thereby helping to define our discipline. I am convinced that the journal, like the field of paleolimnology itself, will continue to thrive and serve the greater scientific community. I am especially pleased that Mark Brenner has agreed to take on the

editorship—it is impossible to have more confidence in a future editor than the confidence and admiration that I have for Mark. I fully expect wonderful things for JOPL and its contributors in the future.

Paleolimnologists tend to look backwards in time. As I look at my tenure as JOPL editor, which appears to have covered most of my adult life (!), my first thought is how quickly the time has gone by. It is hard to believe that I started this job 21 years ago. In an editorial celebrating our 20 years of publication (Smol 2007b), I highlighted some of the journal's history and progress since its inception. We have seen remarkable changes over those two decades—starting with different means of communication (for example, most people were not even using email when the journal started), to differences in publishing production procedures (going from typesetting, to computer-generated figures, to submitting accepted manuscripts on computer disks, to electronic publishing, to web-based submission and editing), and of course to major changes in the field of paleolimnology itself. Most importantly, the content and visibility of the journal (in step with the science of paleolimnology) has improved by leaps and bounds over the intervening two decades. I again wish to emphasize the pivotal role played by Bill Last (co-editor from 1993 to 2006) in the journal's success. By any independent measure, including citation statistics, journal index values, or simply the very impressive data from the Springer website showing how many researchers download our papers, it is clear that JOPL is no

J. P. Smol (✉)
Paleoecological Environmental Assessment and Research
Lab (PEARL), Department of Biology, Queen's
University, 116 Barrie St., Kingston, ON,
Canada K7L 3N6
e-mail: smolj@queensu.ca

longer a small (neither in page numbers nor in readership nor in citations), parochial, or isolated journal. I am proud of the role that the journal has played in the development, expansion, and ultimate success of our science.

Without a doubt, it has been an honor to be editor, and it has been rewarding in many respects. However, if I declared that the last two decades have been nothing but pleasure, I would be lying. No doubt, especially in the journal's early days, there was much to worry about. However, especially with the arrival of co-editor Bill Last in 1993, we overcame these hurdles, and the journal is now a leading scientific publication. In fact, it seems that *JOPL*'s main challenge has become its popularity, with a flood of excellent contributions constantly putting stress on our page budgets!

I suppose an editor's job is many things, but "easy" is not the first word that comes to mind. Aside from the workload, which can be considerable, it is often a very difficult job. For example, after making final decisions on controversial or otherwise contentious papers, I have often felt that if both the authors and the reviewers thought that I was an idiot, but for totally different reasons, then I was probably doing my job well! You certainly do not become an editor hoping to win popularity contests.

In fact, being an editor reminds me of being a lineman in (North American) football—you get attention mainly by making mistakes! I suppose that air traffic controllers may have the same distinction. But just like linemen and air traffic controllers, the work of an editor is very important. Editors are the "gate keepers"—they ultimately have the final say on what gets accepted in a journal and what does not. An editor must constantly be making decisions—important decisions that can affect people's lives and the progress of a science. Final recommendations must be made, some less pleasant than others, taking into account as much expert advice as one can muster, but also realizing that, for the most part, referees' reviews are opinions. I considered that my main editorial task was to seek a reasonable compromise between authors and reviewers, with our collective goal being to make the final product (i.e., the paper) as scientifically sound and interesting as possible. I have repeatedly been buoyed by the unselfish, often thankless, but nonetheless excellent jobs that have been done by our remarkably dedicated reviewers.

Yet, to the chagrin of some referees, if no reasonable compromise could be reached, my view was that ultimately it is the authors who "hold the final pen" (well keyboard). That is why authors (and not the editors or reviewers) are the authors.

Over the years, neither Bill Last nor I could ever understand why some editors and journals proudly proclaim their supposedly high rejection rates. It has always struck me as some bizarre, macho behavior to brag about such things. Why should the rejection of papers be a source of pride? Well, it is certainly easier than working with authors to improve their papers to the highest standard possible. Perhaps similar to Canada, the country I proudly call my home, I would prefer to define our journal more by what we let in, rather than what we keep out. Once again, I do not think the journal has suffered from this philosophy—any independent measures that are available attest to *JOPL*'s success.

Although I am retiring from the editorship, I certainly have no plans of retiring from much else right now. (Well, I really don't have that much choice—I was recently told by Queen's University that I would have to work for about another 15 years to collect my pension!). Much remains to be done. As paleolimnology continues to move from strength to strength, I plan on being a very active observer and participant in our future work.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the authors, reviewers, board members, our publishing colleagues at Springer (especially Tamara



John P. Smol, pondering the future, while doing fieldwork in the Canadian High Arctic (July 2007) The shotgun is for protection from polar bears, not from upset authors

Welschot, Judith Terpos, and Tanya Muller), as well as Bill Last (with whom I had the honor of co-editing the journal from 1993 to 2006) and Mark Brenner (incoming editor) for all their support over the last 21 years.

And as we say in my hometown of Montréal, this is not goodbye but *au revoir*—“until we meet again”.

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