The 100th issue of the *Journal of Paleolimnology*: Reflections and future challenges

This, the 100th issue of *Journal of Paleolimnology* (*JOPL*), presents the opportunity to reflect briefly on the past fifteen years of the journal and to highlight some of the trends and changes that have occurred and are continuing to develop in *JOPL* publishing. Because the *Journal of Paleolimnology* is the only scientific journal dedicated to the dissemination of scientific investigations dealing with the paleoenvironmental record of lakes and rivers, many of the changes that have taken place in the journal mirror trends that are evident in the broad science of paleolimnology itself.

The journal began publishing as a quarterly in 1988 in response to “the explosive surge of interest and activity” that paleolimnology was then experiencing (Smol 1988). Nothing has changed! We are still riding a crest of the paleolimnological wave. Our manuscript submissions have continued a steady march upward, necessitating periodic increases in the frequency of publication of the journal: from four issues per year during 1988-89, to six per year from 1990-96, and now eight per year since 1997. In addition to this increased publication frequency was a series of separate increases in total annual page budgets: ~325 pages per year during 1988-89; 550 pages per year 1990-93; 660 pages per year 1994-96; 900 pages per year 1997-2000; and over 960 pages per year beginning in 2001. Furthermore, and perhaps to the chagrin of our far-sighted readers, modest changes in font size and page format have resulted in about 25% more words fitting on a typical printed page of *JOPL*.

These increases in frequency of publication and page budgets have not occurred without the inevitable downside -- increased subscription costs. However, since 1997, these increasing *JOPL* subscription costs have been largely offset for individual paleolimnologists by the availability of a significantly reduced “society” subscription rate and, more recently, the widespread availability of online subscriptions. Indeed, today, users of nearly all university libraries in Canada and many in the United States, Europe and elsewhere have unlimited access to the online version of *JOPL*.

It is not our intent here to provide a complete statistical analysis of the past 100 issues of the journal, but several long-term averages and trends are worthy of note. We have placed graphs of many of these trends on the *JOPL* web page at: [http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~mlast/paleolim/numbers.html](http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~mlast/paleolim/numbers.html)

The *Journal of Paleolimnology* currently publishes eight issues per year in two volumes of four issues each. Each issue contains an average of 120 pages and normally includes about seven to ten scientific papers, together with book reviews and announcements. While the average number of papers per issue and per year has increased over the past fifteen years, because of the increases in publication frequency and page budgets noted above, the average length of paper published in *JOPL* has remained relatively constant. A typical paper comprises about fourteen pages (~9600 words), and includes about half a dozen figures, several tables, and about forty references.

*JOPL*, like most scientific journals, is dependent almost entirely on its contributors for maintaining quality of science and breadth of coverage in our discipline. Nearly 1500 contributors from over fifty countries have established the *Journal of Paleolimnology* as a truly international journal. Likewise, we remain very pleased with the topical coverage of the contents of *JOPL*, with the papers almost evenly split between mainly biological topics and
physical/geochemical aspects of lake records. A very encouraging observation is that it is
becoming increasingly difficult to categorize papers in terms of topics. This is a clear reflection
of the increasing multidisciplinary approach that is required in most paleolimnological studies.

In most publication years, the lakes being reported on have been dominated
geographically by Europe and North America, a realistic reflection of where most
paleolimnologists have been working over the past few decades. However, we continue to
encourage submissions from researchers working on lakes in Australia, China and other parts of
Asia, Africa, South and Middle America. Likewise, although it is probably a fair statement that
most of the world’s paleolimnologists are examining either extant lakes or Quaternary
stratigraphic sequences, we must strive to include more pre-Quaternary topics. Recent
compilations (e.g., White and Riggs (2001), Gierlowski-Kordesch and Kelts (2000), (1994))
confirm that pre-Quaternary paleolimnology is alive and well; an effort must be made to attract
more Tertiary, Mesozoic, and Paleozoic (and Precambrian!) contributions.

A survey of the papers published in JOPL over the last 15 years is an interesting and
likely accurate reflection of the major research topics that have dominated our field since the
1980s. Papers on lake acidification were common in the first few years of the journal. This was
followed by studies dealing with other lake management issues, such as eutrophication.
Paleolimnological assessments of long-term climatic change have steadily increased in
prominence in the journal. We are proud that most of the new applications used in
paleolimnology had made their debut here. Moreover, publications in JOPL have followed, and
in many cases led, the statistical developments made in environmental change research over the
last 15 years. A scan of recent citations confirms that many environmental statisticians are
taking note of our papers.

A popular and recurrent theme for coffee room discussions is the “turnaround time” (i.e.,
the time from acceptance of a paper to publication) for scientific publishing. Currently, once a
manuscript has been formally accepted by a JOPL editor, the author can expect to see his or her
paper published within about six months, certainly a very acceptable turnaround time for any
scientific publication, and one of the most competitive lead times for an international specialty
scientific journal. However, turnaround time does fluctuate over the long-term and that important
statistic is carefully monitored by the JOPL editors and publisher. For example, a trend toward
increasing lead times for JOPL during the mid-1990’s resulted in the creation of a new
monograph series, Developments in Paleoenvironmental Research, which was very effective in
relieving some of the pressure on JOPL page budgets, particularly for theme issues and special
collections of topic-related manuscripts. Similarly, pressure on page budgets led to the initiation
of a Rapid Communications category of manuscript submission. Rapid Communications began in
1998 in order to provide a mechanism by which short but very important, timely, and high
impact papers could be rapidly reviewed and published (within about three months of
submission). Other special features of JOPL include the Deevey-Frey Reviews. These are invited
reviews on topics of broad interest.

Beginning in 1996, the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) included the Journal of
Paleolimnology in their annual Journal Citation Reports. As most readers realize, ISI data are
notoriously difficult to interpret but are becoming a ‘fact of life’ at many academic and
government libraries. While we continue to have reservations about how these statistics are used,
it is, nonetheless, clear that *JOPL* is doing very well, and continues to show positive trends in all the ISI indicators. In terms of the much-vaunted Impact Factor, *JOPL* is now in the upper quarter of all of the relevant categories of journals: 3rd out of 12 limnology journals that ISI monitors; 32nd out of 129 environmental science journals; and 30th out of 120 geoscience (interdisciplinary) journals. Likewise, among all 200 science journals published by Kluwer that are indexed by ISI, *JOPL* also ranks high: 39th overall; 4th highest in the environmental science group; 3rd highest in the geosciences category; 2nd highest among Kluwer’s ecology titles; and the highest ranking Kluwer journal in the limnology category.

*JOPL*'s Cited Half-life (number of years that account for 50% of the total citations received by the cited journal in the particular year) approaches the maximum half-life possible for a journal of *JOPL*’s age. This means that papers in *JOPL* are heavily cited, even if they are old (i.e., two years older than the survey year).

Regular submitted manuscripts have been and will continue to be the mainstay of the *Journal of Paleolimnology*. However, *JOPL* also offers the potential to publish special theme issues. Twenty-two such special issues have been published to date. In general, these theme issues have been enormously successful, with many requiring second and even third print runs. Most of the special issues have ISI citation values well above the journal’s long-term average citation trend. Two important aspects must be emphasized with respect to the special and ‘guest-edited’ theme issues. Firstly, papers in these issues do not in any way take precedence over regular papers, but rather only enter the publication queue after all the submissions comprising the issue have been accepted. This inevitably results in a somewhat longer lead time for the papers within the special issues, as authors must wait for the last contribution to be submitted and accepted. Secondly, the special issues comprise rigorously reviewed, full and complete scientific works. Various categories of interim scientific reporting, such as progress reports or extended abstracts, are not accepted as part of *JOPL* special issues.

Long-time readers of the journal will certainly realize that the list of names on the inside front cover is far from static. For those not directly associated with the management of the journal, the members of the Board of Advisors and Associate Editors may seem to change in an almost random manner. In fact, this ‘changing of the guard’ is given considerable thought and discussion by the Editors-in-Chief, the current members of the Board, and the publisher. A regular rotation of Board and Associate Editors ensures infusion of new ideas, fresh enthusiasm and, importantly, coverage of emerging topics and geographically hot areas. Members of the editorial team of *JOPL* work hard! Every paper that is published in *JOPL* is read by not only the Editors-in-Chief and external reviewers, but also typically by at least one member of the editorial board. Thus, the forty-eight scientists from sixteen countries who have volunteered their time to serve on the Board over the past fifteen years have reflected the diverse and multidisciplinary nature of paleolimnology, as well as the international perspective of the journal. As always, we owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to our reviewers, whose tireless and often anonymous efforts greatly improve the quality of our articles.

It is perhaps deceptively easy to look back at the last 100 issues of *JOPL* and be content with our collective efforts. Without a doubt, we feel there is much to be pleased about with *JOPL*’s first 15 years of publication. We believe that, in many ways, *JOPL* has fulfilled some of its initial goals, as outlined in the journal’s opening editorial (Smol 1988). For
example, when challenged with the question “Why start a new journal?” the response given in 1988 was that it was “… hoped this forum will provide a common vehicle for bringing together the diverse concepts, ideas, and techniques that make up paleolimnology”. We believe the journal has achieved this goal. Paleolimnology has steadily been coalescing into a potent and very respected science, and JOPL has played an important role in this development. But there is little time to reminisce, as much work is left to do! New scientific problems are constantly being posed, and the resolution of many of these problems will require long-term perspectives that paleolimnological approaches can provide. Our challenge for the future is to continue developing and implementing new approaches and techniques that can address these myriad issues. As has been shown repeatedly in the past, paleolimnologists are capable of meeting these challenges. It is our hope that the Journal of Paleolimnology will continue to be sufficiently flexible and robust to respond to the changing needs and aspirations of our users. The continued input and support from all paleolimnologists will be critical to meet these goals. As always, our heartfelt thanks go to all our authors, reviewers, board members, publishers, and to our readers, who have helped make this journal a success over the last 15 years.

References


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