

The J. M. Edmonds Cup

awarded for the best field notebook



A bit about field notebooks

A good field notebook serves many potential purposes.

1. It is a valuable record of what you have seen, heard, discussed, and thought about in the field. Think of it as a formalised journal or diary.
2. It may contain the data which will lead to an oral presentation or a report.
3. It may be something you and your relatives will find interesting years in the future.

A field notebook should enhance and not interfere with your understanding of a location. Don't write down everything a field trip leader says without thinking about it or asking questions. You are not a digital recorder; filter the information so that it makes sense to you.

Neatness and organisation are essential. Efficiency and consistency are important; use standard abbreviations (e.g. standardised symbols). An annotated sketch may be more valuable than 100s of words.

Before going into the field

1. Write your name with indelible ink on the front and back of your notebook. Write your name, address, email address and phone number(s) near the front.
2. Write a title on the inside and an abbreviated title on the outside (e.g. Fairlight, 2012).
3. Paginate the entire notebook; start a table of contents near the front. Leave plenty of space as you work your way through the book so that you can add later thoughts or notes.
4. Depending on the situation, enter appropriate emergency information near the front or back: e.g. who to contact and how, allergies that you may have, search and rescue phone number, hospital address, phone number of embassy.
5. Consider gluing or taping into the notebook (near the back and/or front) one or more of the following: maps, lists of flora and fauna, geologic time scale, stratigraphic column, checklists of data to be recorded.
6. How is your notebook going to be organised? One way is to put observations and sketches on the right, and interpretations and questions on the left.

What you need to record each time

1. Sketch a location map incorporating the following information. General location: country, county, mountain range, coast, island, national park, or nearest settlement. The location should be described accurately enough so that you could return. It might include a street address, national grid reference, post code, latitude and longitude or UTM co-ordinates, elevation, aspect, which side of stream, how far and in what direction from a specific landmark.

2. Weather: temperature, precipitation, wind velocity and direction (winds are named from whence they come), humidity, cloud cover, and visibility. This information may be pertinent to soils or vegetation, or may help you remember the day and/or location. If the weather varies much during the day, note the changes.
3. Mention the soils and vegetation. They may be important clues to the geology (e.g. particular plants prefer calcareous soils). Plant distribution is greatly influenced by bedrock types, landforms, surficial deposits, and soils. Particular plants have specific requirements for moisture (soil porosity and permeability) and trace elements (mineralogy). Burrowing animals may prefer one surficial material to another. Remember the distribution and activity of the flora and the fauna are very much influenced by aspect and by drainage.
4. Use annotated sketches, diagrams, maps, or cross-sections. Remember, a sketch can be much better than, or can reduce the length of, an outline or narrative. You don't have to be an incredible artist and your sketches will improve with practice. Think about what could make your sketch an effective recording method: labels, scale, and orientation (e.g. north arrow or direction of view).
5. Multiple working hypotheses, questions, tentative interpretations and conclusions (e.g. the geologic or anthropogenic history as determined at this specific site).
6. Notes about photographs taken. What is it? What is the scale? What direction are you facing? What is the National Grid Reference, UTM or latitude and longitude?

In the evening...

1. Review your field notes. Is there anything that might be important that you remember now but did not note in the field?
2. Consider re-entering data into a spread sheet for analysis and/or electronic storage/transmission.
3. Summarise the day's observations, hypotheses, and conclusions.
4. Do you need to revisit any of the sites?
5. If there is field work the next day, plan for it. Be prepared.

The Field Notebook Competition

What the judges are looking for:

Preliminary pages

- Name and address.
- Allow several blank pages on which to insert contents and any other general notes (on format, useful information, and timetable)

Daily entries

- Date of field visit.
- Locality or localities visited.
- Notes on weather or any other information that helps you to recall the day in the field.
- Location information (directions and/or grid reference and/or a sketch map).
- Sketches, including: maps, cross-sections, diagrams of cliff faces, individual features (e.g. fossils or sedimentary structures), summary graphic logs, diagrams showing interpretation ideas, detailed graphic logs. Sketches are a good shorthand way of conveying geological information and are a key part of many field notebooks. Ensure that you decide on the purpose on the sketch before you start and allow plenty of room for it in your notebook.
- Written information: this should include data, ideas, interpretation(s) and questions. The interpretations should be both those you have postulated and those discussed as a group (please delineate).

Rules of the competition

1. Entries from amateur geologists only.
2. Closing date for the competition is November 1, 2012. Please do not submit before October 25 2012.
3. The field notebook entered should have a minimum of three localities visited between January 1, 2012 and October 31, 2012 inclusive.
4. Oxford Geology Group cannot accept responsibility for entries lost or damaged in the post.
5. A signed entry form must be securely attached in the back of the notebook.
6. Oxford Geology Group reserves the right to publish extracts from notebooks (including photographs and sketches) in its publications, online and in promotional material. However, copyright remains with the author and a credit will be provided.
7. We regret that entries cannot be returned unless accompanied by an s.a.e. and appropriate packing; alternatively they can they be collected after the Christmas Party.
8. Judging will take place in November and the J. M. Edmonds Cup will be presented at the Annual General Meeting.
9. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.