

NEWS AND NOTES

D.N. Wadia's Geology of India

We reproduce reflections of Ted Nield, Editor, '*Geoscientist*' the Magazine of the Geological Society of London, paying tributes to D.N. Wadia on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the publication – 'Geology of India'

'D.N. Wadia exemplifies the sort of world-bestriving hero that could perhaps only have existed in the dream-time of Earth sciences; men like Alex du Toit (1878-1948) who between 1903 and 1920 mapped in detail over 50,000 square miles between the Cape and Natal, of which 43,000 square miles were published as maps. Du Toit did it from a donkey-wagon (his mobile home while in the veldt) from which he would venture daily on a push-bike. Moreover, he would carry with him a plane table – which he would use to make the base-map onto which to map the geology. So, in reality, he mapped that enormous area twice. What is more, if present-day geologists going over the same ground find a conflict between their observations and his, it isn't usually they who turn out to be correct.

People like Wadia and du Toit did what they did without satellite images, GPS, motor vehicles, air conditioning, mobile phones or air transport. They enjoyed little or no logistical support either. It is easy to see why they might have envied us our comforting and labour-saving gadgets, but why is it that we envy them?

Freedom. As pioneers they had little or no literature to mug up. Nobody else was doing what they were doing. They tended to be given enormous jobs when they were in their mid to late twenties, and were – by and large – left to get on with them. No manager looked over their shoulders, asking where their next paper was coming from, or when the next sheet would be finished. No bean-counter totted up citations or did cost/benefit analyses of research output to satisfy the latest government fad. It was just them, and the rocks.

Life cannot be that way now. Every age has its peculiar freedoms and oppressions; and the two are intimately linked. The more we, in our age, rely on technical fixes and motorized transport, the more everything costs, and the more we rely on the work of others. Similarly, not being pioneers means we can no longer stay at the forefront of everything ourselves, whereas Wadia could write about tectonics with one hand and vertebrate paleontology with the other.

The more we rely on others, the more we must defer to them. The more we cost, the more we must answer to paymasters. The freedom enjoyed by our heroic forebears was bought, at least in parts, at an enormous cost in time and inconvenience. How many of us today would be prepared to pay it, even if we could? Ultimately, what we envy in the likes of Wadia and du Toit is a self-reliance that history and pensions conspire to render us too small, dependent and frightened to deserve'.

Seldom do we come across such appreciation of the mighty minds of old and their glorious service to the cause of geological studies in India. – *BPR*.