



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA

EAS MONTHLY

SEPT 2025

[Departmental Newsletter]

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, MURRAY GINGRAS

Tall Tales that Teach

In academia, we rely on observation, rigorous data collection, and sober analysis. Yet many of us can trace our first spark of interest in science back to something less rigorous—a story. These were often tall tales, told by a teacher, a field mentor, or even a fellow student. A geologist spotting an Ediacaran fossil bed from 700 m away, because ‘he could just tell’, a professor claiming to have outrun a grizzly bear, or the exaggerated accounts of field work where every boulder seemed to hide a fossil. These are geological examples, but every field has them!



S. George Pemberton on a diving ‘cruise’ in the Strait of Canso in the 1970s. The straight separates Cape Breton Island from the Nova Scotia mainland connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Northumberland Strait and Gulf of St. Lawrence.

From 1995 to 1999, I had the privilege of being supervised by S. George Pemberton in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. Everyone who knew George knew he was a storyteller. At lunch with his graduate students, and in every lecture, George could be counted on to share a story. The students quickly learned that asking the right question could nudge a lecture entirely off-course and inspire a 15-minute story. But his digressions were never without purpose. George told stories in a way that blended humour, experience, and wisdom. They entertained, but they also carried object lessons about scholarship, persistence, and how to survive life in the ivory tower.

One of George’s favourites was set in the mid-1970s, when he and a colleague (Bob Frey) were working in the Ogeechee River Estuary near Savannah, Georgia. Whenever he lectured on storms and hurricanes, George would describe how he and Bob tied themselves to large trees near the shoreline so they could watch a hurricane’s waves and storm surge firsthand. It was his way of dramatizing “catastrophic uniformitarianism”—showing that some (many?) events preserved in the rock record were rare, powerful, and transformative. Having a first-hand account made the idea of catastrophic uniformitarianism seem more possible.

Fast-forward to 2008, when I was working in the same estuary with students (now alumni Sarah Gunn and Jesse Schoengut). At one point Jesse asked our boat captain—who had known George and Bob back in the 1970s—what year it was when they tied themselves to trees to watch a hurricane come ashore.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, MURRAY GINGRAS CONT’D...

The captain gave a wry smile and replied that there hadn’t been a hurricane there since the 1870s. At that moment, we knew we’d been had. But that didn’t diminish the story’s impact. By then, the tale had already done its work: it had captured imaginations, made abstract concepts feel real, and left us with a lesson that stuck.

Tall tales like George’s have enduring pedagogical value. They animate ideas that might otherwise seem dry or remote, and they remind us that learning is not just about data and theory, but also about narrative, memory, and inspiration. Storytelling is one of the oldest teaching tools we have, and when used with heart and humour, it continues to sharpen scholarship and spark vision.



As I step into the role of EAS Chair and newsletter contributor, I want to acknowledge Stephen Johnston, who has carried these duties with dedication and good cheer. Stephen, like George, is a gifted storyteller. His tale of mosquitos—and his advice to “just let them bite you”—transformed my own view of patience, life in the field and to not sweat the little irritants. I’ll let you ask him about that one yourself, but suffice it to say, I am grateful to follow in Stephen’s footsteps.

Intermediate First Aid - Level C CPR & AED

In this **two-day FULL IN-PERSON** learning course, students will learn to recognize and provide interventions for life-threatening emergencies until medical aid arrives. Topics include: shock and unconsciousness, severe bleeding, head & spinal injuries, major medical conditions, AED training and certification, head and spinal injuries, and fractures of the upper and lower limbs. This course includes Level C CPR training and certification (Adult, Child, Infant, and 2-rescuer resuscitation), and AED training and certification.

Cost: 125.00+GST

Scheduled Dates: Sept 8th & 9th in ESB 2-18 | Sept 24th & 25th in BSB CW410

(Pre-register [here](#))

Recertification option not available for the two day in person course offering. If you are interested in completing a one day recertification, please fill out the recertification details in the pre-registration form above. If there is enough interest, a booking for recertification can be arranged based on need. Recertification requires a valid and current first aid certificate at the time of the scheduled training.

Please email scsafety@ualberta.ca with any questions.



Where: CCIS 6-179

When: 9:30-11:00am on Sept 17th

RSVP [here](#) used to estimate coffee/tea amounts)

Emergency Preparedness

September is the time of year that your building might expect the annual alarmed-based evacuation drill. This is a great opportunity to review your emergency evacuation plans with your individual groups prior to the drill. Keep your eyes peeled at the muster points for our group of volunteer door marshals who will assist with an 'all clear' message dissemination on drill day. If you do not have a plan, make a copy of the [Science Evacuation SOP](#) and customise with your group.

Science Safety Break

The Science Health Safety and Environment Committee will be kicking off the Fall 2025 Semester with a coffee break event. Stop by to have a coffee/tea and chat, participate in a safety related activity, bring any questions or concerns you might have, and leave with a safety resource!



EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (EDI) COMMITTEE



Disability Cultures & Access

The University recently released resources about [Disability Cultures and Access](#), including the new [Hub](#).

Webinar: EDI in NSERC Discovery Grants

Researchers are invited to attend upcoming webinars about Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity in NSERC discovery grants. Register [here](#) for the session on September 10th. Please see the [CNAS ACB+II calendar](#) for more information about later sessions.

WELLNESS COMMITTEE

Welcome Back Event

When: Sept 16th from 5-7pm
Where: Tory 3-36

Come celebrate the new academic year with fellow students, faculty, and staff. Food provided.
If possible, please bring your own plate, and feel free to bring a board game!

2nd year students and up



WELLNESS COMMITTEE CONT'D...

Welcome Walk

Join us for a lunchtime walk around campus on September 11th. We will be meeting in front of the main office (ESB 1-26) at 12:05pm



Weekly Yoga

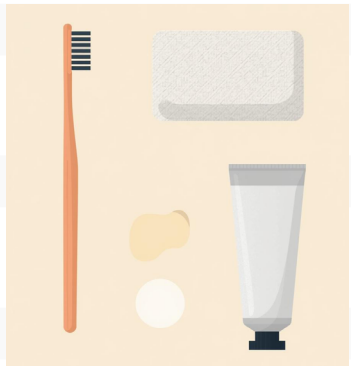
Did you know that EAS provides a lunchtime self-guided yoga practice each week?

Where: ESB 2-18
When: Wednesdays from 12:05-12:50pm

Mats provided, no experience required, and no special clothing needed. Contact Sarah Woodland, at swoodlan@ualberta.ca for more information.

Personal Hygiene Lockers

Lockers 301 and 321 on the 3rd floor of ESB contain personal hygiene items, such as toothbrushes/toothpaste, dental floss, deodorant, soap, and more. These items have been generously donated by EAS staff and faculty, and are intended to be used by graduate students. Locker combinations can be found on the EAS Intranet site, or by scanning the QR code located on the locker door. Please take what you need!



Grad Pantry

The Grad Pantry provides food staples for graduate students in need. The pantry is generously stocked by our EAS staff and faculty, and includes items such as canned goods, dry foods, produce, meat, and more.
The Grad Pantry is located in the Grad Lounge (ESB 3-01A).



APEGA Rock & Fossil Clinic: Call for Volunteers

Looking to share your passion for geosciences with young people? Not a geoscientist and want to meet new people and make an event a huge success? Like free food/shirts? The Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta (APEGA) is partnering with organizations across the province on their annual [Rock and Fossil Clinic](#), held Saturday October 4th. The Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences is hosting its own activities and those organized by the Alberta Geological Survey and the Edmonton Geological Society.

There are many [volunteer opportunities](#), ranging from rock or fossil identifiers and museum guides, to volunteer sign-in and support, to name a few. Please take a look at the volunteer opportunities and use [this form](#) to join the team that will make this a spectacular event. Please share this message with other UAlberta colleagues and students who may be interested in volunteering. Forms are due by the end of the day Friday September 19th. Early form submission is greatly appreciated.

Feel free to email Gavin Bradley (gbradley@ualberta.ca) if you have any questions that aren't answered above, or in the forms!



Department Administration How-tos

Guide to your Researcher Home Page

The Researcher Home Page is a self-serve online grant management tool that allows researchers to:

- Request new research projects
- Submit requests for online approvals
- Request [amendments](#) to current projects, including:
 - o Changes to project end dates
 - o Changes in award amounts
 - o Changes in principal investigator/project holder
 - o Change in department
 - o Changes to project funder (adding/removing sponsor)
- Request outgoing subgrants to co-investigators at other institutions
- Easily monitor the progress of new research proposal and amendment requests through the various stages of RAS processing (completion of each stage is displayed in a Grants Life Cycle diagram)
- View advice notices and other proposal/project attachments
- Easily track project spending and commitments
- Request authorization of temporary over-expenditures
- Run financial reports that can be saved as PDFs for their records

You may find the following links helpful:

- [Guide to Researcher Home Page](#)
- [How to Request a New Application/Proposal/Project via Online Approvals](#)

Stay tuned for more administrative how-tos in next month's issue!



Have you met...

[Sanaa Mughal]

What do you do in the department?

I am a PhD student in the Konhauser Research Group, working on the evolution, taphonomy, and paleoecology of the Proterozoic biosphere, using the organic-walled microfossil record. I use a combination of computational, field, and lab-based techniques specifically to understand how, where, and why microfossils preserve, and when they do, what they can tell us about to coevolution of the earliest life on Earth. Day to day you will find me at my desk, intermittently checking on the fate of my green algae, or sifting through kerogen for 1.8-billion-year-old eukaryotes.

If you were enrolling in one course, program or degree right now, what would it be?

Definitely animation! A lost dream of mine was to work at Pixar one day. I grew up watching documentaries of behind the scenes, and the creativity and dedication at each stage of the process is so cool, inspiring, and motivating.

What advice would you give your 18-year-old self?

Keep going, have faith in yourself, don't hold back on opportunities. Stay active. Go to that dinner, party, hang out. Your room will still be there when you get back.

What's one thing you can't live without?

My phone (stay with me now)! It's super important to me to stay connected with my friends and family back home (and now around the world), especially since this is the furthest and longest time I've spent away from the UK. It's also quite literally a portable minicomputer: I love being able to go from seeing what my friends are up to, to checking out the latest research in a matter of seconds.

What's something that makes you happy to come to work?

I feel very privileged that I get to come in everyday and do research that I love. Even in the hardest times, I couldn't imagine doing anything else.

Do you have any upcoming projects or initiatives you are looking forward to at work?

I'm really looking forward to doing some field work in Thunder Bay this autumn. The city is underlain by the iconic Gunflint Chert, host to one of the oldest and most diverse microfossil assemblages, and currently under-prospected Rove Formation shales. I'll be collecting new samples from both to compare their ecology and preservation. Both formations give incredible insight into the nascent eukaryotic world. This will be my first PhD related field work which is exciting, as up until now, I've never visited the places my research samples are from.

Contact Sasha Wilson (sawilson@ualberta.ca) to suggest an EAS member to be profiled, or if would like to be profiled yourself!

ATLAS Morning Coffee

Join us in the Grad Lounge (ESB 3-01A) on Mondays at 9:30am for coffee, tea and treats. Come socialize with grad students, staff, and profs! [Volunteer](#) to bring in a baked good to share with your colleagues. Bring your own mug! Organized by [ATLAS](#) and supported by the Wellness Committee.



ATLAS Welcome Social

Join ATLAS as we host a welcome social for all graduate students in the Department of EAS, both old and new. The event will be hosted at Dewey's on campus starting at 4:00 pm, and there will be food and prizes. Meet fellow grad students, and by attending the event, you will be entered into the door prize draw! See you there!

ATLAS WELCOME SOCIAL

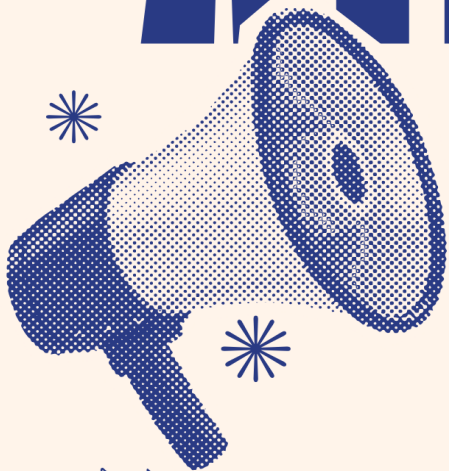
Dewey's | Sept. 5th | 4:00 PM

Stop by and enter the draw for a door prize!

Psst... it might be merch



ATLAS ELECTION



- Join the executive committee and:
- Boost your CV
 - Meet new people in the EAS
 - Help make the 2025/2026 school year one to remember!

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: **SEPT. 8TH**

ELECTION STARTS: **SEPT. 15TH**



ATLAS Elections

The time has come to select the people who will represent graduate students in the department for the next year. Whether you want to organize a symposium, create a beautiful calendar, or represent your subsection in the department, there is a role for you in ATLAS! Check out our [elections page](#) for more information on positions and important dates.

GOLD PANNING

Location

Emily Murphy Park

Sept 14, 2025

1 – 4 pm

Demo at 1:15 pm

Equipment

Gold panning supplies provided

BBO

Hotdogs, veggie dogs,
snacks provided

- Meet us in the west end of the park, nearest the overpass
- Wear clothes and shoes you don't mind getting wet and dirty
- Bring water, sunscreen, a shovel

Hosted by:

**Alberta Gold Prospectors Association
&
Edmonton Geological Society**

Call for Submissions

If you would like to submit an event or information to be included in next month's issue, please email s.hemrick@ualberta.ca by 12pm (noon) on **September 29, 2025**.



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