

Exposures of Mineral and Rock, by Dirk J. Wiersma, 2002. Inmerc, Wormer, The Netherlands; 160 pp., hardbound; Euro 49.50; ISBN 90.6611.4282.

I never saw a geological book like this, and I probably never will any more. It is so fascinating that a review here is appropriate, even if there is hardly any sedimentology in it. With some effort, those interested in any aspect of sedimentology might, however, find some interesting material. But, what is more important, they will find much more, just like all earth scientists will find more.

It is difficult to decide whether one should call Dirk Wiersma the author of the book. He did write the text, indeed, but this text is completely subordinate to the photographs. Yet, it is not just a photo book: one should rather consider it as an art book. Photographs as an expression of art; and art with the earth sciences as the object.

Wiersma, now retired, has had a professional geological career in the limestone industry. During his career, he developed his hobby in photography into a second profession: he graduated in photography and started using ever more advanced and sophisticated equipment. More important, however, is that he also developed his artistic capabilities. This resulted in two parallel careers, one in geology and one in artistic photography. The latter discipline probably gave him even more satisfaction than the former: he had several exhibitions, and numerous media published his photographic work.

Now a book has been published with some of his photographs. They show well how Wiersma manages to discover the beauty of the earth. And how he manages to focus on details that few earth scientists would discover by themselves. In addition, the book shows how Wiersma knows how to penetrate into his object allowing him to undergo the specific atmosphere of his surroundings (either macro or micro), while simultaneously keeping sufficient distance to have an overview allowing him to decide which location of his camera, which light and which lense will reveal the beauty best.

An artist might have been satisfied with a selection of beautiful photographs. Wiersma is too much a geologist for being satisfied so easily. He has grouped his photos in a sequence that goes roughly from large to small, with emphasis on the latter. This is reflected in the title of the chapters, which each consist of a short, bilingual (English and Dutch) text about each of the photos, followed by the photos themselves (all in colour, most of them page-sized, but some are smaller or larger). The chapter titles are (after a Preface by Harry N.A. Priem and a Prologue): Mountain, Rock, Crystal, Geode, Agate, Gem, Texture, Deformation, and Fossil.

Most of the photographs are astonishing, whether they present a hostile, moon-like landscape in Utah, or a thin section of an ammonite seen through a microscope with crossed nicols. I have seen many beautiful geological photographs, but the photos in this book have, almost without exception, an extra dimension. My favourite one is a double-page photo with the title 'Im Riesengebirge' (the Riesengebirge - Mountain of the Giants - is a mountain range in eastern Germany), which title refers to an allegorical painting (Morning in the Riesengebirge) by Caspar David Friedrich. Where the painting depicts a crucifix planted on a ridge of jagged rocks in the mountain range, the photo makes you feel like somebody walking in a rough mountain lit by sunrise, with scarps on which the remnants of old castles may be seen through local haze; a vaguely discernable crucifix on a small hill top in the centre of the photograph completes the feeling that Friedrich's painting had been fossilized already millions of years before the painting itself had been created.

It is just the atmosphere of most photographs that create the feeling of witnessing very special situations, or attending unusual happenings. That is exactly why it is truly a book of art.

But a book of art that is entirely devoted to the earth as few earth scientists will ever have looked at it. Geology is fascinating, but the book shows that it can be even more fascinating than most people have ever dreamt of.

It certainly is not a book that earth scientists should buy to fresh up - or enlarge - their knowledge. I am sure, however, that it is a book that many - if not all - earth scientists would like to have. When a bit down because field work did not yield the data hoped for, or because a badly needed report will not be finished in time due to a writers' block, or because the lectures to be given at university are no challenge anymore after so many years: then this book will bring a glimpse of sunshine. And if life is great because field work goes so well, the report is written almost without any effort, or the lectures at university are fun: then this book will tell you 'yes, I made the right decision in studying earth sciences'.

If ever you will go to a party of an earth scientist and want to bring him a present that he will truly appreciate: bring this book for him. He will remember you forever. Just like you will remember your favourite photographs from this book forever. For such an exceptional book, the price is certainly not too high.

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