
On the rocks with geoscience outreach

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Understanding the world of geoscience begins with rocks and deposits. We believe that successful geoscience outreach activities involve some way of connecting with rocks. In many cases the connection is made through interpretive walks in provincial parks, Crown land, wilderness areas and along streets in Nova Scotia towns and cities. The challenge is to create an environment that allows your audience opportunities for active and experiential learning. Walks can be sponsored through museums, government programs such as the *Parks are for People* program, special events like the Nova Scotia Mineral and Gem Show, municipalities and the Atlantic Geoscience Society. In each of these examples, interpretive walks may have all ages of people, language differences, a variety of educational backgrounds and different learning styles. The geological materials may be bedrock, surficial deposits and building stones. These variables present challenges for effective communication. So how do you communicate with such diverse audiences? We assert that effective outreach communications always have a commonality of certain techniques. The most important attributes for your audience will be your friendliness and enthusiasm. If you don't have these, your message may not have much chance of being 'heard.' The starting point is a good introduction about you, the purpose of the walk and the rocks followed by the beginning of geological explanations that build the experience of understanding geological concepts. Making simple comparisons such as the connection between rocks and landscapes helps people visualize the affect of rocks. Children will help break down many barriers to communication. Ask them questions and help them with answers. Build on the answers. Now you are ready to ask very general, open-ended questions to the entire audience. Compliment good answers and thoughtful insights. With the build-up of the audience's confidence, you can now begin to develop more complicated themes such as deformation of rocks or the inner workings of magma chambers. Watch your audience; their body language indicates how they are learning. Invite them to use their senses to gain an understanding of the rocks. Whenever possible, we have made use of coloured illustrations. These have the effect of allowing visual learners to understand our point by seeing as well as hearing us. At this point in the walk you are usually able to develop more complicated concepts. On various walks, we have discussed the deformation of rocks in fault zones, terrane and plate movements, fluvial deposition, development of landscapes and the origin of granite. Our audiences have

enjoyed learning. They have taken away several very important messages such as geoscientists are important to society; understanding earth systems and processes helps us predict what may happen to parts of the earth and geoscientists help find the needed mineral wealth on which our society depends. We urge you to try your own walking tours. They're fun and they provide a needed involvement for people. You will be helping with global education about the Earth and its processes because the more we know about the Earth, the better we understand it and the more we can sustain it.