

It's a Laing story: the life and times of an icon

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One of the most momentous events in the geological lore of Nova Scotia during the last fifty years has been the recognition of the Fossil Cliffs of Joggins as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A major contributor to this achievement was Laing Ferguson, whose role as an innovative thinker in geology is being recognized by the dedication of a special session at the 2015 Colloquium of the Atlantic Geoscience Society (AGS). The groundwork for Laing's career was laid at Edinburgh University, where he graduated with a B.Sc., honours geology in 1958, and a Ph.D. in paleontology in 1960. Following graduation, Laing and his wife, Joyce, moved to Edmonton, Alberta, in 1960, before settling in Sackville in 1962, where he became an associate professor of geology at Mount Allison University. In his early years at Mount Allison, Laing became intrigued by the Joggins section and especially its plant fossils. A dramatic find during his exploration of Joggins was the trail of the giant *Arthropleura*, an arthropod that could be up to two metres long. Laing included an illustration of this monster in his popular geology book, *The Fossil Cliffs of Joggins*. The book was a milestone for several reasons, but mainly because it could be read by anyone with an interest in geology. This passion for outreach coincided with his role as chief instigator in the production of the Atlantic Geoscience Society's *Geological Highway Map of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island*, published in 1985. Laing served on AGS Council for many years, being President in 1982. He was the first recipient of its Distinguished Service Award in 1989, given in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the Society. This award was subsequently renamed the Laing Ferguson Distinguished Service Award given in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the Society. The Lifetime Membership Award was inaugurated in 1999 by AGS, especially to honour Laing. To date, there are only two other recipients. Outside geology, Laing has led an exemplary life, being President of Amnesty International Canada from 1976 to 1978. For many years he was at the forefront of efforts to free political prisoners and in the fight against repressive regimes. Laing was a great geological teacher and researcher, who was also a gifted humanitarian. The world needs more people of his ilk.