

In Memoriam

Gordon Jacoby Jr.

1934–2014



Farewell to a Tattooed, Bourbon Drinking, Grudge Holding, Tree-coring, Brilliant Buddhist Badass of a Scientist

Dr. Gordon Jacoby died on Oct 1, 2014. He spent a lifetime contributing to the field of dendrochronology and his accomplishments are great (see: <http://www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu/articles/view/3204>). They include leading Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory's Tree-Ring Laboratory from 1975–2001, reconstructing Colorado River streamflow (1976), and sampling across the northern latitudes to reconstruct northern hemisphere temperatures (1989, *etc.*). Said Ed Cook, "I expected to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the TRL next year with Gordon. That of course cannot happen now, but his legacy of scientific accomplishments will endure." To many, Gordon was more than his scientific legacy. He indelibly touched the lives of those he worked closest with. A group gathered at the Tree-Ring Lab to drink bourbon in his honor and share stories after his passing. These stories capture a part of Gordon that few saw. Sure, he was driven and tenacious, but he was a hell of a lot of fun in the field. Here are a few vignettes:

Rosanne D'Arrigo: I, Gordon, and Linda Ulan were in the field in northern Labrador. The bugs were unbelievably bad, and Linda and I decided to skip dinner and ran into our tent for the rest of the evening and night. Gordon would not be pushed aside by a few bugs, and instead went with a sandwich to sit on a rock over the water reading a book. It was impossible for him to read since as soon as he turned each page about 500 bugs would cover it completely, but he would just calmly swat them away, continue reading, and take another bite of his bug sandwich...

Greg Wiles: Relentless sampling and a calming optimism. Yakutat Glacier, Alaska, Gordon and I were paddling inflatable kayaks through an iceberg choked glacial lake in search of buried forests. We only could find a few logs and spent the remaining rainy days doggedly coring transects of young spruce trees, our only tree-ring option. There was likely a story in the trees, as Gordon insisted, but more promising projects later took precedence. On the return paddle, we became trapped among the huge bergs for many hours. Gordon kept us calm as he rightly saw our only option was to wait for the ice to shift and our path to clear. On our

return to shore at dusk he had a welcome bottle cached in a tree to calm us further.

Dorothy Peteet: One very striking remembrance I have of Gordon is from the burn unit of a hospital. Gordon had managed to burn his arms and legs while trying to rid his Wingdale, NY, yard of extra debris in mid-to-late summer. The hospital unit was super-clean...we had to wear suits, masks, and slippers. Various screams confounded my ideas that pain medication was available for anything. Finally we reached Gordon, who stoically was recovering, and insisted – no question – that he would be ready for the Amazon River archaeological expedition that October.

Neil Pederson: Gordon could be surprisingly tolerant and adaptable. The first time Gordon heard a cartoonish song parodying an American norm streaming out of my office, he grimaced in a way that likely reflected the contortions his gut had he eaten a sour vegetable. Once I explained why the song amused me, he eventually would smile and only partially scrunch his face. While cleaning increment borers, he was aghast when I asked if I could put Gatorade in some sacred bourbon. But, he allowed it. Only years later did I learn that this drink, the Lukunskaya Sour, became a regular field drink.

Brendan Buckley: My first trip with Gordon was to Gualala in California, to work on the San Andreas Fault. Now, I am a pretty talkative fellow, and I could see clearly that I was annoying hell out of him for the first few days. Gordon was decidedly NOT a morning person in any way, and it was not possible to engage him in conversation until after he had his leisurely breakfast (he obsessively chewed 30 times for each mouthful), and after a few other “constitutional” matters were completed. For a few days I was convinced that the man hated me and it was most uncomfortable until the day he broke out the bottle of bourbon. I was more than willing to drink with

him, and this seemed to please him. Subsequently we bonded over working our tails off cutting coast redwood stumps and hauling them out of the forest back to the rented minivan that we trashed. After those first few tense days, I remember laughing an awful lot, while at the same time busting our butts in the field.

Nicole Davi: Wrangell St. Elias, Alaska; After several days of collecting samples, Gordon, Greg, Ryan and I had accidentally sent most of our food along with many of our cross-sections back to civilization with our bush pilot, and had to last another two days in the park before our plane could return to pick us up. Gordon embraced our misfortune, first disappearing into the forest to gather white spruce bark, which he'd heard made a decent soup (not true). On the second day, after we successfully shot a rabbit, Gordon again disappeared into the bush only to emerge a few minutes later, his clothes and arms a bit bloodied, grin on his face, with a skinned and perfectly dressed rabbit, ready to be roasted for dinner.

Gordon was the quintessential loner, and we all believed he would stay that way until the end. Desperado by the Eagles was his favorite song and he felt it was biographical. But five years ago, he finally met the love of his life, Rusty Lotti, and we had never seen him happier or more fulfilled. Knowing this lessens, if only a little, the blow of losing this true friend, amazing scientist, and great mentor. For all of his toughness (he was a Marine, after all) he had a very kind and generous heart. It saddens us to know we will never again share a glass of single-barrel with our old friend.

—Contributed by *Nicole Davi, Neil Pederson, Rosanne D'Arrigo, Brendan Buckley, Greg Wiles, Dorothy Peteet*