Triple Point

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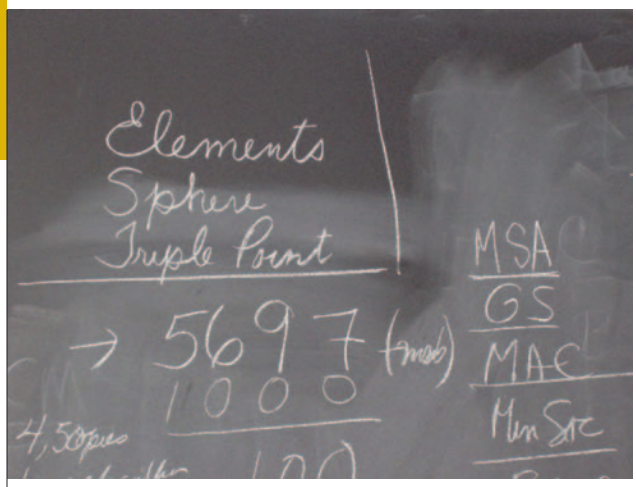

Note from the Editors: *Triple Point* came very close.

Late last spring, an email message flashed across my computer screen. The sender was Michael Carpenter, whose British distaste for overstatement has been a welcome hallmark of his presidency of MSA. I knew that a letter from Michael urging my immediate attention had to be important, and my premonition was immediately confirmed.

The editorial board of the magazine that you are reading was searching for a name. After a worldwide solicitation that netted thirty-five proposals, the board had narrowed the selection to ten. They now wanted input from councilors of the contributing societies to choose the title that would appear forever after on the masthead. And they wanted our responses straight away. I thought about the papers that I should have been writing, the pleas from my editor at *CCM* to return manuscripts that had been moldering for months, the stack of NSF proposals in need of prudent discrimination. It was the perfect escape.

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As I scrutinized the ten survivors of the bruising elimination process, I found that I could parse nine of them by decades. Some followed the functional approach of the 1950s (*MGP News*; *Geomaterials; International Magazine of Mineralogy, Geochemistry, and Petrology*). One evoked the free-association randomness of the 1960s (*Sphere*). A few reflected the casual hipness of the 1970s (*Interface*; *Polymorphs*; *Mineral Matters*); and the others summoned the retrochic of the 1980s (*Elements*; *Solidus*). Alas, this taxonomy placed none of the candidates past the reign of GHW Bush, more than a decade removed from the postmodern 21st century title that this journal deserved.

I knew that *Elements* was the odds-on favorite. Most of the mock-ups that Rod Ewing had passed around the table at MSA council meetings included *Elements* on the banner. And why not? It is so all-encompassing as to be meaningless and therefore offensive to no one. It is doubtless the right choice. But I couldn't resist the urge to grasp outside the box, comfortable (and correct) in the knowledge that whatever recommendation I made, no matter how expertly argued, I would likely be ignored. And so I voted for the choice that eluded my classification scheme, *Triple Point*.

Only the editorial board knows whether *Triple Point* was the runner-up to *Elements* or was ranked at the level of the Americans in Olympic table tennis. Rod himself suggested the name, and his rationale was clear. The thermodynamic triple point is that place in P-T space where three phases co-exist in equilibrium. Its importance to the Earth sciences is such that the aluminosilicate phase diagram is enshrined within a case in the Smithsonian Hall of Geology, Gems, and Minerals. (This exhibit, by the way, is accompanied by a video featuring a white-aproned Michael Holdaway, aka "The Geological Gourmet", transforming sillimanite to andalusite in his laboratory at SMU.)

Triple Point is a metaphor for Rod's vision of what this magazine hopes to accomplish. If it succeeds, it will act as a welcome meeting place for the three scientific communities it serves. Exciting developments will be shared through the pages of the journal, and as we retreat afterward to our respective stability fields, perhaps some vestige of our visit to this common ground will promote unanticipated transformations in the future.

Consequently, when Rod Ewing asked whether I would serve as guest editor and occasional contributor to a regular feature, my first instinct was to purloin Rod's discarded recommendation and appropriate it as the name of this column. The next step was to define its purpose. I have been a regular reader of the monthly Reference Frame in *Physics Today*, and though there is much to admire in it, the experience has convinced me of two qualities that Triple Point must embrace.

First, the greater the diversity of authorship, the livelier the content. An old chestnut says that every person has one great novel buried within. I am dubious of this claim, but I do believe that every member of our community has something important to say and can say it in about 900 words (or fewer if an image is included, as is encouraged by Pierrette). Second, unlike Reference Frame, which too often veers into alarmingly technical detail, Triple Point should be accessible to all readers of the journal. Since an objective of *Elements* is to divert impressionable undergraduates away from well-funded but mundane sub-disciplines of the Earth sciences and into the exhilarating fields of mineralogy, geochemistry, and petrology, it is vital that we offer material that will sustain the attention of students.

What kind of content will you find here? I hope that this space provides a forum for issues that are worthy of wide exposure but that find few outlets among the publications that serve us. Despite the large number of technical journals, the vehicles for informed opinion pieces on matters of geoscience are sparse. Readers should consider this column an avenue for expressing their impressions of issues ranging from geo-education to government funding to the role of our professional societies. In addition, pieces that are historical or anecdotal and of special interest to a geoscience audience are encouraged.

To get the ball rolling, my next column will address the vices and virtues of democracy. Despite strong temptation, I will omit a treatment of the issue on a national scale and constrain it to the role of democratic representation in our professional lives. While I am working on it, I hope to receive unsolicited columns from those of you who are inspired to wax on a favorite geological topic, be it solid or liquid, so long as it is natural. If you have an idea, don't hesitate to contact me beforehand to discuss it. My e-mail address will always be posted under my byline.

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