

FIELD WORK

Elementary course. The field work carried on at McGill is, in my opinion, altogether inadequate. The elementary class goes out for five Saturday mornings, which is all we can, and probably all we should, give them. There is little opportunity, on account of the weather, to provide field work for them in the Spring, in spite of the fact that at that time the value of field work would be multiplied a hundredfold. Lacking that opportunity, however, we must consider that the elementary students are as well provided with outdoor experience as possible.

Higher courses. With, here and there, a brave exception, it is no falsehood to state that students in courses beyond the elementary course have had no opportunity for directed or original field work during the college year. To be sure, we have co-operated with the Mining Department in assisting the third year miners, but that is outside our department. I thoroughly believe that every course in the department, except one or two such as Optical Mineralogy, should have some field work as an integral part of it. On three occasions I have taken my class in Paleontology on an all day trip to New York, and to various localities hereabouts. Last October, I required two whole days field work in Stratigraphy. In every case obvious advantages accrued. I intend to continue this practice, and would rather expand the field work than contract it. Objections to field work during term time do not come from the students, in spite of the moderate expense involved, but from the staff, both of our department and of others. We frequently do not think we have the time to devote to a day's field work. We forget that for a whole day, six, eight, or ten hours, we are with our students instead of the one formal lecture period. From the point of view of the desirability of such students, there can be no question of the desirability of such work, and therefore all other departmental considerations should be made subservient. Objections also come from other departments whose arrangements are slightly thrown out of gear by the absence of so many students at once. Such objections are really neither more nor less selfish than our own objections on the basis of lack of time. The reason that field work will tend to make courses in the Geological Department more popular is an unworthy one, but a moment's reflection will show that popular courses, as long as they are not snags, owe their popularity to inherent advantages which students are sometimes quicker to sense than the staff.

Throughout my experience here I have felt very strongly on this point. I deplore the lack of field work for its own sake, but I also deplore the helplessness of advanced students when they first reach the field, their inability to apply textbook knowledge. The ability to think in terms of the outcrop can be built up through a student's undergraduate course to a degree, which, though short of perfection, will enable us to consider our graduates well rounded out -- which condition, I feel, is far from attainable today.