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A Mountain of Evidence (Faith & Science Update)

John T. Baldwin
Andrews University, baldwin@andrews.edu

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John T. Baldwin

While the discussion over creation and evolution has been ongoing for centuries, the dialogue in recent years is moving increasingly into the domain of geomorphology. The rocks, it seems, are indeed crying out. However, reaching a consensus of what the geological data is telling us about Earth's history has proved elusive.

Creationists have been interested

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in the increasing acceptance and inclusion of local catastrophe in the geological paradigm. While geologists roundly oppose and ridicule the idea of a global flood, more and more they are coming to see that many of the features seen in the topology of the Earth today cannot be explained without reference to some local catastrophic event. A widely accepted example of one of these major, but local, catastrophic events that



Steamboat Rock

shaped a region of the earth's crust is the Missoula Flood.

On a field trip in 1922 near the Columbia River, between the U.S. states of Washington and Oregon, Professor J. Harlen Bretz,¹ professor of geology at the University of Chicago, came across some depositional and erosional features quite unlike anything he had studied before. There appeared to be large dry river courses and giant ripple marks that seemed to speak of the presence of a large rushing body of water at some point in the past.

For the next decade he studied these features and published articles on them. His conclusions were met with strong opposition in the scientific community as they seemed to have a faintly biblical scent to them. At this point, Bretz could not account for where this flood water had

come from that seemed to have created these geological features. This seemed to the scientists of the day to be allowing for a little too much of a divine foot in the naturalistic door. Even though the scientific research by Bretz was solid, it was rejected. However, Pardee's work in 1947² on the drainage of the Glacial Lake Missoula provided a water source for the catastrophe that Bretz saw, and in 1965 an international party of geologists accepted his theory.

A most interesting erosional remnant of this flood as it relates to this article is Steamboat Rock. Steamboat Rock is a mesa 900 feet tall. It is all that is left after the glacial waters of the Missoula Flood came rushing through. The ice dam that contained Glacial Lake Missoula broke, and an estimated 500 cubic miles of water hurtled downstream. At its peak the





Table Mountain

flood flowed about 80 mph.³ Some researchers suggest that it took only two or three days for the huge lake to drain, and in that period of time, it changed the landscape forever.

Millions of tons of material were removed during this local flood. Only the Cambrian granite of Steamboat Rock withstood the immense power of that water. Steamboat Rock stands as a testament to the overwhelming forming power of aquatic erosion. But what if Steamboat Rock points geomorphologically to a reality greater than itself? Perhaps other plateaus were formed in this way?

Table Mountain in South Africa's Cape Town region is one of the

world's most famous and beautiful plateau mountains. It rises to an impressive 3,563 feet. At its base is Malmesbury group Precambrian granite and on top of this Ordovician sandstone was deposited. The standard explanation for the geomorphology of the area is that during the carboniferous age (280 million years ago) there was a uniform covering of sandstone over the whole cape peninsula. From that point until now, erosion, faulting, uplifting, and inclusions were responsible for what is now seen.

This explanation, however, leaves some questions to be answered. Why is the plateau of Table Mountain still



almost perfectly flat after all these millennia? Why has most of the sandstone, which covered the whole peninsula, been eroded, leaving behind Table Mountain, which is composed of the same sandstone and is not capped by a harder stone? Then there is also the issue of the fluctuating sea levels around the mountain. It seems that at one point the whole range was under water, and seashells have been found in some numbers on Table Mountain.

All this raises the question: Is it possible that, just as the plateau called Steamboat Rock was formed by a regional flood, so the plateau called Table Mountain was carved

out by an even larger flood event in a matter of days? Could this have happened while huge flood waters receded and carved through the newly deposited sediment to leave behind something similar to what we now see as Table Mountain? Admittedly, this is speculation, and there are many geologists who would object, but then again the conclusions by Bretz were also rejected at first.

This is by no means proof that the biblical flood is a scientific fact. As geological evidence for topography-shaping catastrophic events mount in different parts of the world, however, perhaps it is time not only to listen but to hear what the rocks are trying to say. Perhaps the striking table plateau in Cape Town, South Africa, is a mountain of evidence pointing to such a catastrophic aquatic event?

Thanks to Jonathan Burnett for further discoveries regarding this topic and for his assistance in the writing of this column.

REFERENCES

¹ See http://users.rowan.edu/~wyrick/Scabland/history_of_missoula_floods.html. Accessed July 15, 2009.

² Victor R. Baker, "The Spokane Flood Controversy and the Martian Outflow Channels," *American Association for the Advancement of Science* 202:4374 (December 1978), pp. 1249-1256.

³ *Ibid.*