

Janina Micko, MSci Geology with an International Year

What are you currently doing and who are you working for? Can you give a brief description of what you did from graduation up to now?

I moved to Vancouver in January 2006 and began my PhD studies on a project titled: "The geology, geochemistry, and genesis of the Galore Creek Cu-Au porphyry district, northwestern British Columbia". During this time I spent several field seasons in the gorgeous mountains of NW British Columbia, where I also worked as an exploration geologist for the companies (NovaGold and Teck) that own the deposit.

Having completed my PhD I started a postdoc position with one of the top porphyry experts in the world in October 2010, and had the opportunity to see and work on some of the giant ore deposits of the world. I also had the luck to become supervisor to a number of wonderful Ph.D. students (surprisingly all from Canada) who had me almost convinced that I wanted to remain in academia forever. However, after two years of working hand in hand with outstanding researchers and major companies in Australia such as Newcrest, my Canadian partner I made the tough decision to return to Vancouver for good in October 2012.

Can you give a short outline of the course you studied at the University of Birmingham and how it benefited you?

The Geology programme at Birmingham is outstanding as it provides a broad range of different courses in all disciplines. I am not sure if current undergraduates understand the value of a such a well rounded education, as it isn't the norm, but in time they will. The frequent field trips and the 6 week mapping project in particular were a big plus! Professor Alan Thomas once said in a lecture that "the independent mapping exercise is what makes the difference between a student and a geologist", and he was right! It changed everything as it taught us not only to actively apply the theoretical knowledge gathered, but also forced us to deal with logistics, management of people and resources, etc. Most graduate geologists don't get that sort of experience until they work in industry and are thrown into a real life situation where failure means loss of money and reputation. I am truly grateful to have had the chance to participate.

Another big bonus was the offer of a "Universitas 21 scholarship". It was certainly worth working hard in year one and two, as we were rewarded with an international exchange year. I personally chose to spend the year at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, a decision that influenced my future career permanently.

The positive aspect of the MSci course is that students have the opportunity to choose or even create their own thesis projects based on their specific interests (and possibly future orientations as geologists). Having been completely captured by ore deposits and in particular Cu-Au porphyries, I was allowed to conduct a thesis on Manto-type Cu deposits from Chile. Unfortunately, I didn't get to go Chile; nevertheless, I was immensely grateful that the department had made the effort to support my personal interests and future ambitions.

I believe that the combination of the well rounded programme, the exposure to a foreign university system, the MSci project and most importantly the continuous support by the wonderful staff in the School, were what enabled me to become the geologist and in many ways the person I wanted to be.

What made you to decide to study at the University of Birmingham rather than in your home country?

My boyfriend at the time had decided to study at Bristol uni, which made me first think about the possibility to study abroad. Geology programmes in Germany are pretty good, but I knew that these days the language of success in geology is English. So I decided to scope out what the UK had to offer by attending a number of open days throughout the country. My father and I drove from city to city and eventually ended up in Birmingham. It was a beautiful spring day, the campus looked just glorious with all the flowers and then we met Professor Andy Chambers who was charm itself. He showed us all the important sights and explained patiently all details of the school and program. My Dad and I were so impressed, particularly by Professor Chambers, that I decided: this is it!

How did you find your first year in Birmingham?

Exciting! I was such a naive, innocent girl and really came out of my shell that year. This is mostly due to the wonderful and life-long friends I made, but also the lifestyle and the extracurricular activities offered at Birmingham. Everything is possible there! I even played ice hockey with my friends for a year. Needless to say that came as a bonus to my life back in Canada.

In regards to teaching, the courses and first field trips were an eye opener to how flexible and rich geology is as a discipline. I was hooked from day one and that is due to the way the courses were taught and presented.

How did going to University benefit you?

As I mentioned above the education at Birmingham most certainly provided me with a robust technical skill-set which allowed me to continue on in almost any geological niche. This is rare and I greatly respect the department for it.

In regards to life at the uni, it has given me the opportunity to become a confident and (hopefully) well-rounded young adult capable of dealing with what is out there - anywhere! It has also allowed me to develop aspirations I would have never considered achievable before. Overall, it was a life changing experience.

How about campus life? Can you describe how it was to study here at Edgbaston Campus rather than in a City Centre location?

I am a big fan of campus life! The chance to live and work with your peers, having the library, all the sports facilities and, of course, the guild and pubs nearby was brilliant. Birmingham campus also resembles a green oasis in a otherwise bustling city. The infrastructure around campus is great and provides easy access to the city and elsewhere. In fact, I frequently took advantage of the trains and made Warwick Castle and its rose garden my learning facility when preparing for exams.

How did you find living in Birmingham? Was it how you expected it to be? Have you found the student community here supportive?

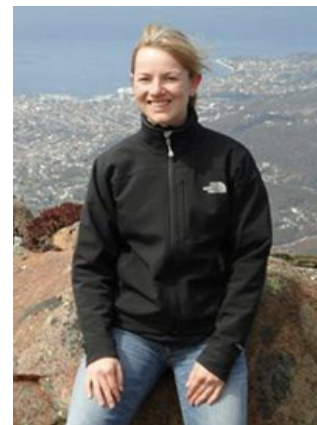
The easy answer is great overall, but there were minor caveats. My time as an undergraduate at Birmingham was one of the best times of my life. I really felt that I fitted in, despite having been an international student. The only difficult aspect of life in Birmingham I and many others needed to get used to were the price of living and the condition of the houses in Selly Oak; however the latter may have changed now. Birmingham can be an expensive city and one of the first lessons to learn living away from home is to keep a financial balance. Once achieved, student life in Birmingham is simply enjoyable, especially since campus activities are really quite affordable.

Did you join any student societies or take part in any events?

Yes, I was a proud member of the Lapworth Geological Society and took part and helped out with the organization of several formal balls. These were certainly a wonderful annual highlight and greatly appreciated by the students.

Any tips or words of wisdom that you would like to pass on to other students thinking of coming to study here?

Geology is a discipline that never stands still! It's active, ever evolving and allows you to be part of a world community that works together to provide resources for the future not just in small communities, but on a global scale. Geology involves everything that makes life worth living: travel, history, politics, even arts and much much



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more. It is a great subject and the University of Birmingham can give you the education to become part of this worldwide community and to make a difference.

What are your aspirations for the future?

My aspirations are still to continue learning and to share the knowledge acquired. At this time I aim to return to industry and help guide modern, environmentally responsible and safe exploration of worldwide precious metal resources.

Also, I would love to visit the department one day again and speak to students directly of the opportunities in both industry and academia. However, I have no idea if this aim can be realized in the near future.

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