

Jon Cushing Boothroyd (1938 – 2015)

Dr. Jon C. Boothroyd, professor emeritus in the Geosciences Department at the University of Rhode Island and state geologist of Rhode Island, died on October 15, 2015. He was 77.



Jon was born in Littleton, NH. He attended the University of New Hampshire where he received his bachelor's degree in economics in 1962. He eventually earned his Master's degree in geology from the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 1972 and a Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina Columbia in 1974. Jon joined the faculty at the University of Rhode Island in 1975 fresh off of his graduate work on the Malaspina Glacier in Alaska, which provided a useful modern analogue for explaining many of the glacial features observed today in the glaciated northeast. Jon considered himself a field geologist who specialized in coastal and glacial environments.

For many years, Jon was the go-to guy for beaches and beach processes in Rhode Island. Upon his arrival in the department, Jon immediately instituted a beach-profiling program. The idea was to understand and model cycles of beach erosion and deposition. That profiling program is still running to this day, and constitutes a unique longitudinal database recording cyclical beach sedimentary processes. As a result of this program and other studies along the eastern seaboard, he developed an important model of beach evolution. Given this expertise, it was almost inevitable that later in his career he became actively involved with the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, ultimately applying the results of his and his students' beach research to write the regulations for beach use and conservation.

Jon deeply involved students in his research projects. He had many Master's students and when University regulations finally permitted him to offer a Ph.D. program, he rapidly acquired several of those as well. Ultimately, he trained multiple generations of environmental geologists, managers, and academics, many of whom are working today in New England. As a teacher, Jon ran now-legendary field trips to coal deposits of Kentucky and Pennsylvania, to the macrotidal regimes in the Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia, and to the sandy beaches and dunes of Cape Hatteras in North Carolina. His plain-spoken, incisive, precise way of expressing himself was a model of clarity. He seemed to have infinite patience and despite explaining geologic processes to non-geologists for years, he never tired of talking about the 100-year storm and the role of tide gauges and taking people out on coastal walks. It is certain that Jon was the best-known geologist in Rhode Island.

Jon was appointed state geologist in 1996, a position he held until his death and he established the formal name Rhode Island Geological Survey. He was a fellow of the Geological Society of America, a contributor to the annual New England Intercollegiate Field Conference, and active in Friends of the Pleistocene. Jon was a loyal and contributing member of the Narrow River Preservation Association where he was a board member for over 20 years, the Rhode Island Natural History Survey, the Friends of Canonchet Farm, and other environmental groups.

Shortly before his death he was selected as a recipient to the University of Rhode Island Hall Of Fame.



Jon in Iceland during the summer of 1973, packing gear to make flow measurements. Photo by A.C. Hine.