



MOUNT HOREB MAIL

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Rocks roll from Milwaukee to Mount Horeb

By Gary Schuetz

It's not a rock concert.
It's a rock library.

More than 2.5 million feet worth of drill hole cuttings, more than 600,000 feet of drill core and more than 51,000 hand samples, all collected from across the state of Wisconsin, will be cataloged, stored and studied on the west side of Mount Horeb at 211 Blue Mounds Street.

"In one building is a collection that represents the geology of the state of Wisconsin," Jamie Robertson, Director of the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, said. "These things are a reference collection. They are our library. But instead of books, we have earth materials."

The samples that make up the library are collected from both the surface and from underground. The underground samples are either cores or cuttings.

"Cores are cylinders of rock that come from drilling into the earth and extracting solid samples," Robertson said. "Cuttings are pieces of rock that are generated when the intent is not to get a sample, but rather just to put a hole in the ground."

The surface samples are called hand specimens and Robertson described them as fist sized samples of rocks that have been collected from "outcrops, highway exposures, pit and quarries, wherever you can get at the rock."

The collections were previously stored in a warehouse in downtown Milwaukee under what Robertson called "less than ideal conditions."

"This is a big change from Milwaukee and we are really excited about this move" Robertson said. "With the Grumpy Troll and Schuberts and the bike trail, it is really an inviting area to move into."

"This place is a palace compared to Milwaukee," said Tom Adams, assistant to the director. "With the lighting that works and the clean open space, this place is just great."

The Milwaukee building is slated for renovation into commercial space, academic space and student housing, so the rocks had to go.

"As the university system became aware of the long term value of these collections, they realized that it made sense to help us find a facility that was more adequate for us to use and more accessible," Robertson said.

The accessibility of the collection has become a larger issue over the past few years. Many different groups are working with the Survey to research groundwater issues for a variety of projects, including municipal wells.

"We have the cuttings from all of the municipal water wells in the Mount Horeb area," Robertson said. "I know there is talk about putting in a new high capacity well. I would be surprised if the drillers didn't make our collections one of their first stops to examine what was intersected and what the aquifers looked like on the other wells. My hope would be that one of the immediate impacts of our collection on Mount Horeb would be that the driller of the newest water well would be better informed by referencing our collections."

The collection will not be a public facility like a typical library. But the

Survey does get requests from the general public.

"A person might walk into our Madison office and ask for information on where they can find water and how deep it might be on a piece of property," Robertson said. "Our staff would use the collection to answer that question."

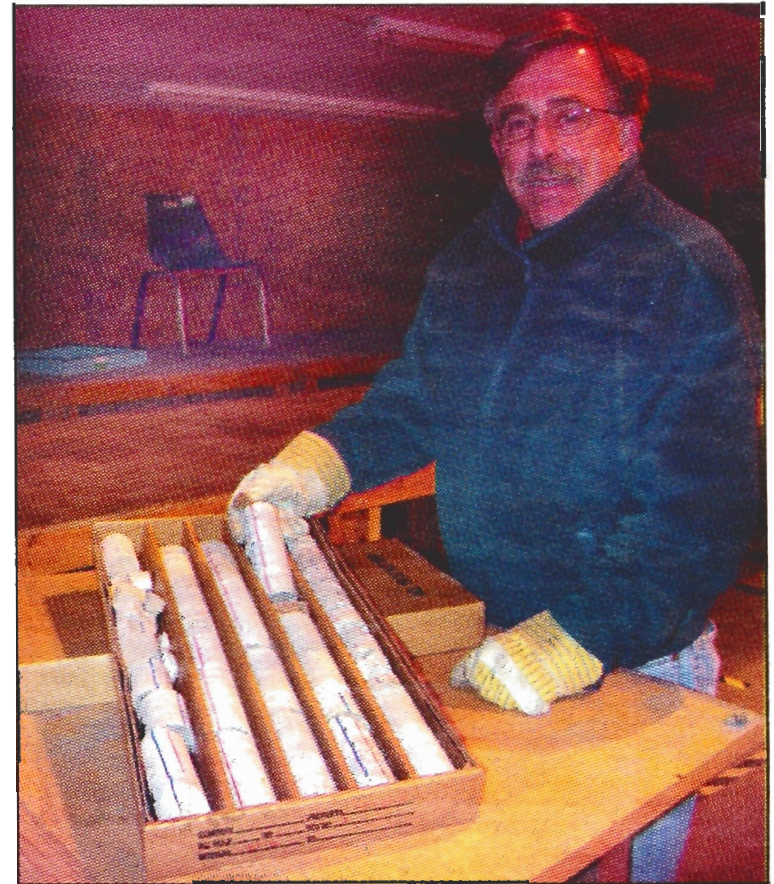
The Survey works with groups that have an interest in the geology of the state, including earth science teachers, well drillers and the Department of Natural Resources.

"We don't have enough staff or enough time to go and give a talk to every fifth grade class in the state," Robertson said. "But if we can get the teachers better informed, then we have magnified what we can do. We make a list of things that we think are relevant and try to participate in the field trips. They know that we are a resource."

With more than 100 years of samples, data and research available, the Survey has ended up with a large collection. The survey was created in 1897 and given the mission to catalog the geology of the state.

"The basic mandate was to figure out what was out there," said Robertson. "We collect the samples and bring them back for further study. The samples support all of

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Jamie Robertson, Director of the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, displays one of more than 60,000 boxes of drill core that will be stored in their Mount Horeb facility. The core sample is dolomite from Outagamie County and was probably retrieved during the investigation of an aquifer for a municipal well, Robertson said.

Geology Survey

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our publications – our maps, our geologic reports, our field trip guides, and they let us answer service requests more intelligently. And they help us understand the geologic history of Wisconsin.”

In addition to earth materials, the Survey has accumulated field notebooks, old maps, air photos and geo-chemical analyses that are related to the specimens in their collection.

Just like the rocks, the documents can be reexamined for new and overlooked information as the need arises.

“In the last ten years, we have found ourselves using this library more and more,” Robertson said. “We were primarily answering groundwater questions that have to do with quality and quantity. We found ourselves needing to interrogate the collections more and more.”

With the distance to Milwaukee becoming more prohibitive, the Survey began to search for a new building and the Mount Horeb location fit the bill.

“We were fortunate to find a place here in Mount Horeb that met our needs, that was available and that we could afford,” Robertson said. “The move is a tremendous logistical challenge. There will be 57 semi loads of material. I expect that it will take us the better part of a few months to get it all in here and on shelves and organized.”

“We’ve moved in seven loads,” Adams said. “There are 50 left to go.”

While new samples will continue to arrive, Robertson does not anticipate receiving any large

donations in the future.

In the past, major donors included water well drillers, private consulting firms, mineral exploration companies and the Department of Transportation. The Survey is constantly sorting through their samples to avoid duplication from all of the different sources.

“Geologists have this pack rat mentality where they want to save every sample they take and we know that is not viable,” Robertson said. “We have tried to be very selective and reasonable.”

Robertson said that the new building has space for growth for the Survey – for the collection, not for staff.

“There won’t be anybody here permanently,” Robertson said. “There won’t be anybody whose office is here. Our immediate plans

are mostly for our own staff to come out here and work during the day. The numbers will be really inflated while we are doing the move. I imagine three or four people here on a typical day using the samples.”

The Survey did appear before the town board to quell some early fears.

“We explained who we are and what we were going to be doing in the space,” Robertson said.

“There were some questions, but overall I think that we were received pretty well. Rocks are very good, very quiet neighbors.”

