

Roland Ernst Beschel

(1928-1971)

A distinguished career ended suddenly on 22 January 1971, when Roland E. Beschel, Professor of Botany and Director of the Fowler Herbarium at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, and a Fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America, died at the age of 42.

As a scientist, Roland Beschel was brilliant, energetic and innovative. He was born in Salzburg, Austria, on 9 August 1928. His education was crowned with the achievement in 1950 of a D.Phil. in Botany and Physical Geography, *summa cum laude*, from the University of Innsbruck, with a "benchmark" thesis on the ecology and growth of lichens.

After teaching at Rosenburg College, Switzerland, until 1955, and later at Mount Allison University, New Brunswick, he was appointed Assistant Professor at Queen's University, Ontario, in 1959, where he attained the rank of Professor in 1969.

Professor Beschel applied his knowledge of lichens broadly to problems of dating rock surfaces, estimating precipitation, and assessing air pollution around industrial centres. His work in North America emphasized arctic problems. He performed extensive field investigations in West Greenland, Baffin Island, interior Quebec, Ellesmere and Axel Heiberg islands, the Yellowknife area, and Alaska where he was visiting lecturer on the Juneau Icefield with the Glaciological Institute of Michigan State University. During this period he visited Finland and, as a participant in the National Research Council of Canada—Academia Nauk scientific exchange program, the Soviet Union where again he engaged in active field work at a variety of localities. He also made useful published contributions to the botany of New Brunswick and the Kingston area, and

revitalized the collections of the Fowler Herbarium at Queen's, which had been dormant for a number of years prior to his appointment. His over seventy publications include many works on lichens and floristics and, in addition, on vegetation associations, permafrost and frost patterns, dendrochronology, phytogeography and the automation of herbarium procedures. He was quick to adopt computer technology, applying it as a tool to the heavy tasks of information storage and processing, from scientific correspondence and specimen data filing to the analysis of the altitudinal zonation of arctic vegetation.

Roland Beschel's activities made him widely known outside these specialized fields. He was a fine organizer who enjoyed involving those around him in his enthusiasm. Under his influence the Kingston Field Naturalists became active in botanical and phenological observation, and he was a valued committee member and former Director of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. His work for the Canadian Committee for the International Biological Programme illustrates his immense energy. He was co-chairman of the panel charged with identifying and describing natural reserve sites in the Canadian tundra, as well as a member of the corresponding panel for Ontario. In addition, he took a leading part in initiating a tundra productivity program, and he involved a number of his own graduate students in these activities. His dedication to the tasks of the IBP panels extended beyond the purely scientific work into conferences and interviews with federal, provincial and territorial administrators and the managers of industrial enterprises.

Professor Beschel was a stimulating, patient, charming and assiduous colleague. He leaves an international circle of collaborators, friends and admirers, as well as a gaping void in the arctic botanical sciences.

A. H. Macpherson