

Challenger at Sea: A Ship that Revolutionized Earth Science

By **Kenneth J. Hsü**, Published by Princeton University Press. 1992. ISBN: 0-691-08735-0. 417 pages.

Review by **Christopher G. Kendall**

This book represents Ken Hsü's personal view of the everyday activities aboard the Glomar Challenger, the people who formed the crew and of the scientists seconded to the vessel. The book provides a record of deep sea drilling expeditions for geologists, students, and historians of geology. Beginning students, in particular, should find that this is a readable and enjoyable reference that provides a historical perspective of the hows and whys of the deep sea drilling program.

Hsü explains that he did not write this book for the general reader and didn't arrange it in a particular orderly fashion, taking off on many planned sidetracks. In fact, it clearly is not written for the layman, but for the educated geologist with some background in sedimentology and possibly paleontology. Hsü wrote as a participant trying to involve the reader with the excitement of discovery and the result is an enjoyable read.

It describes how the drilling program was initiated and developed from the early days when Harry Hess was trying to persuade the U. S. Congress to invest millions of dollars to drill to the Moho some ten kilometers below the ocean.

This history begins with a discussion of Harry's interest in guyots and touches on many aspects of the geology of oceans, while at the same time providing sketches of the various protagonists whose theories and hypotheses were to be and have been tested through the drilling program. The topics that Hsü covers are extremely current. They include continental drift, magnetic striping, the use of oxygen isotopes to track the history of the Ice Age, the Mesinian Crisis, and the recognition of shallow supratidal evaporites at the bottom of the Mediterranean, and an understanding of the Black Sea sediments.

The book is well written and includes personal conversations that Hsü had with many of the scientists involved in the drilling program - many of whom are still alive today. It's interesting to read about these scientists with Hsü's perspective of their contribution and their personality. Hsü offers an opinion on many of these people; and by and large, he presents them as they are. Of course, Hsü has a personal perspective of most of the meetings he had with these scientists and I'm sure that not all of his memories will match those of the people that he talked with. The book offers extremely valuable contributions to the history of geology and to the human spirit in general. I liked the book. I enjoyed reading it, especially while lying in bed just before going to sleep. Of course, nothing is perfect and I congratulate myself on finding the upside down photograph of a trench from the Abu Dhabi sabkha, no doubt the work of a vengeful editorial gnome resident somewhere in Zurich trying to confuse the Confucian reader. After all, no Persian carpet maker worth their salt makes a mat without one deliberate mistake. Is this book for you? Of course, it is! A book to please, tickle our imagination, and annoy us into being more creative.