

## MY MEMORIES OF DR. MARIAN KUC

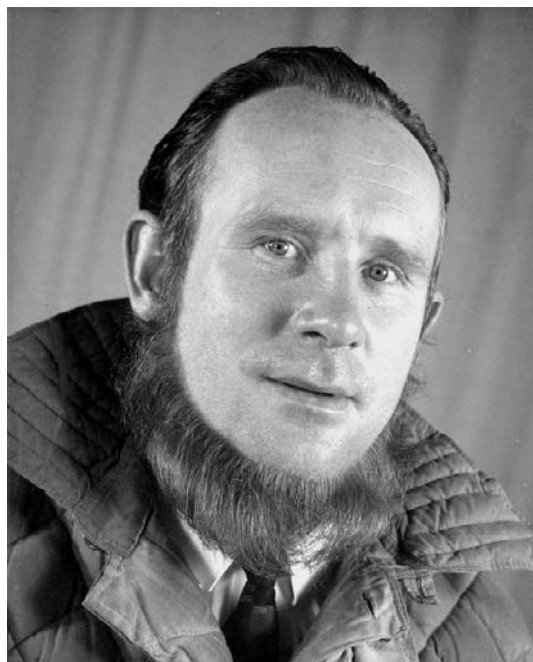
ROBERT R. IRELAND

*Robert R. Ireland, Research Associate, Smithsonian Institution, Botany Department, National Museum of Natural History, MRC-166, P.O. Box 37012, Washington, D.C., 20013-7012, U.S.A., e-mail: IrelandR@si.edu*

I first met Marian Kuc in the fall of 1966, soon after graduating from the University of Washington in Seattle and arriving for the first time in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. I did not know that Dr. Erling Persild, who was then the Chief Botanist at the National Museum of Natural Sciences (now known as the Canadian Museum of Nature), had invited him to be a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Botany Division so I was surprised to meet him for the first time after I arrived there. I found him to be a very nice and polite person who started off by calling me ‘Sir’ all the time, so I immediately told him not to be so formal and to just call me Bob.

He worked in an office on the floor above mine so we only saw each other whenever one of us decided to go for a visit to their office. We would often talk for long periods of time about various aspects of bryology and about what work was going on in bryology. He always had very kind words to say about other bryologists and I never once heard him say anything unkind about any bryologist or about the papers they were publishing. He never mentioned anything about his life in Poland or at what institution where he worked to me. Also, he was a very modest person who never talked about his private life or anything about the Polish people that he knew in Poland or the numerous ones he got to know in Ottawa.

Marian worked mainly on the mosses in various regions of the Canadian Arctic while at the Canadian Museum. He told me that he always enjoyed his work in the arctic and he had many stories to tell when he returned from each trip. He worked on many islands in the Northwest Territories, among them Axel Heiberg, Banks, Meighen



**Fig. 1.** Marian Kuc, Canada 1967.

and Melville. He always seemed very healthy to me and I never knew him to be sick any of the time that he worked at the museum.

One of the most memorable stories that he told me of his experience of working in the Canadian Arctic was a story about the muskox that he seemed to enjoy seeing there. On one occasion he came upon a small herd of muskox that he frightened and, as they always do, they formed a protective ring around their calves. Marian said he wanted some of their fur so he could send it to his mother so she could knit him a sweater. He

told me that he approached one of the muskox, which have a pair of sharp horns on their head, in order to grab some of its fur. Most of their body is covered with brown shaggy, silky fur that is three to four inches thick. He told me the native people use the fur for knitting items to wear. He also mentioned that it is one of the warmest furs known to man, being about eight times warmer than wool and lighter than cashmere. When he got within a few feet of one of the muskox in the ring he told me it charged him and knocked him to the ground. Fortunately, he told me that it only bruised him a little bit and it did not try to stomp on him as muskox are known to do. He just laughed about the incident and so did I after learning that he was not seriously hurt. Needless to say, Marian told me that he never tried that again. He did manage to find some of the muskox fur that they shed but he never told me if he found enough to send to his mother for her to knit him a sweater. Also, I never saw him wearing a muskox sweater.

After working at the museum, Marian went to work in the Division of Quaternary Research and Geomorphology and the Terrain Sciences Division at the Geological Survey of Canada (often known as the GSC). His work there involved collecting fossil bryophytes in the Canadian Arctic and he published several papers on his paleobotanical and paleoecological studies. During his time at

the GSC he still came to visit me and he would talk about his work there and how much he enjoyed his new job.

When his work at the GSC stopped, he had made a laboratory at some time in the basement of his house in the southern part of Ottawa, Ontario and he continued to publish on his bryological studies. These studies were in various parts of the Southern Hemisphere where he managed to travel using his own money that he saved to go to places like, Argentina, Chile, Peru and Uruguay. He seldom mentioned anything about his work in the South American countries to me, even though I was still working at the Canadian Museum of Nature when he made the trips and came to talk to me on various occasions. He probably told me nothing about his travels since I had never been to any of the South American places at the time when he collected his bryophytes.

Because Marian always seemed like such a healthy person, I was shocked to learn about his sudden death in the house of one of his Polish Ottawa friends. Many of his Polish friends, which I never knew existed because of his private life, were at his Memorial Ceremony in Ottawa, according to my former assistant, Linda Ley. Because he was such a good bryologist and a nice person, he will be sadly missed by everyone, like me, who were greatly honored to know him.

Received 4 June 2011