

The Ice Man of Wengen

by Jim Almendinger

Some scientists met atop a Swiss mount
For discussion of lakes and of pollen
And of gravel and ice, and things one can count
That into a peatland have fallen.

And as they discussed global transport of dust,
The climate grew just a bit hotter,
And a huge glacier groaned and fractured its
crust,
Receding in streams of meltwater.

Exposed to the sun in a subglacial crack
Lay a curled up form, calm and docile.
A scientist rushed forward and yelled to the pack:
"It looks like a huge macrofossil!"

As they looked at the form in the subglacial
groove
They saw that indeed it was human!
Astonished, they gasped as it started to move,
And it yawned, like a pink flower bloomin'!!

Upon his broad back was a lumberjack coat
Of wool that was tattered and ripped.
He coughed just a bit, and then cleared his throat
And pulled out a worn manuscript.

"I was trapped long ago in the deep snowy
white!"
He said as he blinked his eyes twice.
"But since I was there, I thought I should write
"Of the things that I saw in the ice."

"I watched moraines form from the lateral scree,
"And watched air be trapped into bubbles.
"I saw strata of bedload and other debris
"And wrote it all up, without troubles."

The scientists couldn't believe this surprise,
As they looked on this white-bearded man
Who calmly gazed out through his icy-blue eyes
And scratched his bald pate with his hand.

The scientists thought they should publish his
script,
And each wanted to add just a scrap
To make a long list of co-authors that nipped
The record long held by COHMAP.

They needed a name at the top of the page
To give credit where credit was due.
But the Ice Man with carbon of infinite age
Had scrawled just a lone "W."

The scientists thought they should give him a
name
That started, at least, with that letter.
The names "Wrong" and "Wright" were both in
the game;
In the end, they thought "Wright" would be
better.

To go with his name, they added initials.
They chose "H" and "E" to be clever.
Though the name "H.E. Wright" then appeared
quite official
They knew "H.E." meant "Hardly Ever."

But the name "Hardly Ever" was looked at
askance;
It just wasn't nice to disturb.
So they thought of a name that related to plants
And decided upon the name "Herb."

And that is the story, when all's said and done
Of the meeting upon alpine heights,
And of all of the work and of all of the fun,
And the Ice Man of Wengen, Herb Wright!!

*-- In honor of Herb's 80th birthday, which was
celebrated in Wengen, Switzerland, 1997 --
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