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GSA TODAY

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GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA
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Generosity Moves Mountains: How GSA Donors Are Shaping Geoscience for Generations

Geoscientists have rare perspectives on time. The field encourages deep reflection about change, permanence, and how beauty emerges from both cataclysm and endurance.

Of course, geoscientists are also driven to delve beyond surface beauty. Rather than merely encountering the terrains and waterways that surround us, they seek to understand the forces that led to their creation—how the past shapes the present, how geoscience processes drive vast transformations over time, and what this means for the future. Many geologists want to leave legacies that empower the next generation of geoscience students, professionals, and enthusiasts to continue this work.

This month, the GSA Foundation highlights some GSA community members who made such commitments. They established new endowments in 2025 and 2026 aligned with their geoscience passions and designed with an eye to the future. These awards will have a deep impact over time. Year after year, they will spur new findings, recognize outstanding geoscientists, and support the next generation of investigators.

After a long career as a scholar and administrator, most recently at Texas A&M University, Dr. John "Jack" Vitek created the John D. Vitek Periglacial and Alpine Geomorphology Award in early 2026. This fund finances graduate student research or field activities of periglacial and alpine geomorphology within the Quaternary Geology and Geomorphology Division (QG&G).

He says, "I gave to GSA and the GSA Foundation because I trust them. I've worked at different universities over the years, and I didn't want to give to a college where I wasn't sure how my gift would be used. With GSA, I know my research interests will be furthered and that students will be supported in doing the kind of work I care about. The people in charge of QG&G will change, but they all share the same values. The bottom line is, they're there for students—helping them learn how to develop and defend a finished project. Students need resources like this to further their research and potentially expand it beyond what they originally envisioned. This award will give students an opportunity they might not find anywhere else."

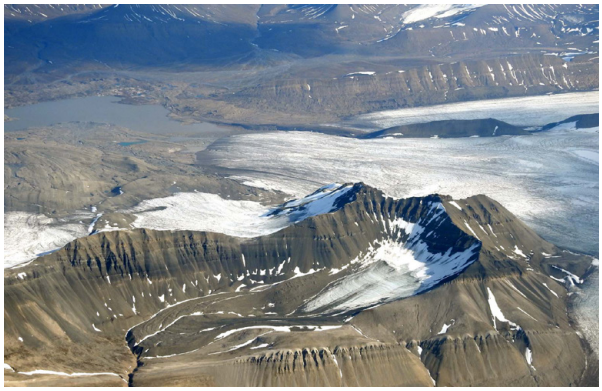


Figure 1. Norway's Svalbard Coast, taken and provided by Jack Vitek.

Dr. Ben van der Pluijm, Professor Emeritus at the University of Michigan and GSA Foundation Treasurer, created the Ben van der Pluijm Graduate Student Research Grant Award in late 2025 to further graduate student research in the fields of structural geology and tectonics.

Ben says, "I received a GSA research grant in 1981 for my first field summer working on the structure of New World Island in the Newfoundland Appalachians. That early encouragement made a lasting impression on my subsequent professional career, during which I mentored about 40 students, most of whom received their own GSA graduate research grants. In that spirit, I initiated the Ben van der Pluijm Graduate Student Research Fund to continue giving back to subsequent generations."



Figure 2. Ben van der Pluijm in Patagonia.

As long as there are geoscientists—exploring far-flung terrains, analyzing results, and letting the world know how the world works—we will strive to ensure that GSA is there for them. We raise funds to support research, share discoveries, honor excellence, and sustain an inclusive, dedicated GSA community.

All donations make a difference.

Scan the QR code to donate now, or contact GSA Foundation Executive Director Sean O'Brien, PhD, at sean.obrien@gsa-foundation.org to discuss how you can plan an enduring geoscience legacy. Thank you for being part of this tradition.

SCAN ME

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