

VICTOR DOLMAGE (1887–1980)

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The life and work of Dr. Victor Dolmage truly qualify him to be remembered as a pioneer in the geotechnical field. He was the pre-eminent geological engineer in British Columbia (BC) on major civil engineering works from the 1940s through the 1970s.

Victor Dolmage obtained a BA at the University of Manitoba in 1912 and a PhD in geology and mining engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1917. He was then a permanent member of the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC) from 1918 to 1929. From 1922 through 1928, he was chief of the BC Division of the GSC. During this period, he was in charge of field parties that mapped large sections of BC.

In 1929, he began practice as a consulting geologist in Vancouver, receiving the considerable sum of 35 dollars of fee income in his first year of practice. To supplement his income during the 1930s, he taught structural geology and economic geology part-time at the University of British Columbia. Most of his consulting work in this period was in the field of economic geology related to mining projects. A minor portion was involved with investigations of dam sites.

An unprecedented number of civil engineering projects occurred in BC from the 1940s through the 1970s. Victor Dolmage's broad knowledge of the wide range of soils and rock formations in BC was an essential element to the success of many of these projects. Space limitations permit mention of only a few of these.

- Damsites, power tunnel and underground powerhouse of the Kemano power project for Alcan
- Damsites for the Wahleach, Daisy Lake, Terzaghi, Bennett, Mica and Revelstoke projects for BC Hydro and its predecessor companies
- Supervision of the unique project of removal of Ripple Rock at Seymour Narrows in the navigation channel between the Mainland and Vancouver Island
- Long power tunnels for the Bridge River, Cheakamus, and Jordan river projects
- Damsites for the Cleveland and Seymour Falls dams for the Greater Vancouver Water District
- Pulp and paper mill sites at Port Alberni, Nanaimo and Campbell River
- Tunnels for the CNR and the Greater Vancouver Sewerage district and others
- Soil and rock slope stability problems, both above tidewater and submarine, as well as avalanche problems.

On many of these projects, he collaborated with Karl Terzaghi.

Victor Dolmage participated actively throughout his long life in professional and technical societies, serving on the Executive Committees of many. A few of the more notable were the Royal Society of Canada, the International Society of Rock Mechanics, the Iron Ring Camp of British Columbia, the Association of Professional Engineers of British Columbia, the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy and the Association of Consulting Engineers of Canada.

His warm personality, technical competence and sound judgement earned the confidence and admiration of all who worked with him, both clients and colleagues. I knew him as a colleague, as a mentor and as a close friend, as did many other engineers in BC who were younger than him. His contributions to his profession and to BC are particularly worthy of remembrance. They were recognized at the technical session on Waste rock and Covers at the 1997 Golden Jubilee Conference of the Canadian Geotechnical Society.