



Werner S. Weiglhofer
(1962 – 2003)

OBITUARY

WERNER SIEGFRIED WEIGLHOFFER (1962 – 2003)

Professor Werner Weiglhofer of the Department of Mathematics, University of Glasgow died on Sunday January 12, 2003, aged 40. He was struck down by an avalanche while snow-shoeing alone on the slopes of Bispen, in the Trollstigen area of Norway, about 350 kilometers northwest of Oslo. The alarm was sounded later that day when he failed to return as expected. A search and rescue team found his body the next day, the day he had been scheduled to fly back to Glasgow. He had been on a week's holiday to an area he knew very well, prior to the beginning of term.

Born on 25 August 1962 in Bruck an der Mur, Steiermark, Austria, Werner obtained a doctorate in technical sciences from the Technical University of Graz in 1986. A prestigious Australian-European Fellowship then took him to the University of Adelaide. In 1988 he joined the Department of Mathematics, University of Glasgow as a research assistant, to work on problems related to the stability of the Earth's magnetic field.

At the end of his postdoc, Werner was successful in being appointed to a Lectureship in Applied Mathematics in Glasgow. Freed from the constraints of a research project, he quickly developed as an independent researcher, returning to the field he had learned as a postgraduate student; electromagnetics of complex materials. He developed a collaboration and very close friendship with Professor Akhlesh Lakhtakia of the Pennsylvania State University. The collaboration was extraordinarily productive and Lakhtakia & Weiglhofer papers became a very prominent feature of the Department of Mathematics preprint list. Werner's growing status was recognised through promotion to Senior Lecturer, to Reader and finally to Professor of Applied Mathematics in August 2002, in recognition of his internationally leading research role in the field of electromagnetic theory of complex materials. This is an area that has potential for significant technical applications. Werner was energetic in developing the mathematical methods and theoretical apparatus that is necessary to analyse, understand and eventually exploit novel electromagnetic effects in complex materials.

Werner was extremely active in pursuing his research as well as promoting his field, and was meticulously organised in all he did. During his short career, he authored or co-authored 135 research publications in peer-reviewed international journals. His work was marked by an elegance that was spartan in style and extensive in scope. He was actively involved with conference organisation, including the very successful Bianisotropics 97, held in Glasgow. He raised money from several sources to fund the meeting and was keen that the participants gained a good impression of Glasgow and Scotland. He served on the editorial boards of the journals *Electromagnetics* and *Archiv für Elektronik und Uebertragungstechnik* and was a prolific reviewer for over 30 different international journals. He won a number of awards to support his research including an SOEID/RSE Support Research Fellowship that allowed him to focus on his research for the year 2000.

I had the sad task of visiting Werner's office to look for lecture notes to pass on to those who were to take on his duties. The notes were clearly arranged, with corresponding files easily found on his computer. An important work in progress was the editing (jointly with Lakhtakia) of a pedagogical volume *Introduction to Complex Mediums for Optics and Electromagnetics* (SPIE, 2003). Again all the paperwork was neatly filed and electronic versions completely up to date. The editing was completed by Lakhtakia and the published volume contains several tributes to Werner by those who knew him well.

While dedicated to his research, Werner was also an enthusiastic teacher. He co-authored an undergraduate textbook on ordinary differential equations, and was leading a review of the place of this important topic in the mathematics syllabus. He spent many hours devising numerous

projects in applied mathematics for his students and planned to publish a collection of these to show that mathematics is not only a thing of beauty but eminently useful too. In his memory the Department of Mathematics, University of Glasgow has set up a fund that awards an annual prize, in his name, for the best project.

His enthusiasm for publication was not limited to his scientific work. His extensive postdoctoral travels motivated several articles, including one on Glasgow, that were published by local newspapers in Bruck an der Mur and Graz. More recently he was motivated to write to local and national newspapers on a number of issues.

The pre-eminent love of Werner's life was mountains. He hiked, he skied, he snow-shoed, he photographed, read and wrote about them. The close proximity of the Highlands to Glasgow was one factor in attracting him here in 1988, and it took only four years for him to bag all the Munros (Scottish mountains over 3000ft), many of which he has since conquered several times. Latterly he was set on adding the Munro Tops and the Corbetts (Scottish mountains between 2500ft and 3000ft) to his remarkable list of achievements. He kept very detailed records and dairies of all his hikes. Most of these were made alone but there are several friends for whom he has shifted down a gear or so to accompany up a Munro. Vacation time took him to Norway, and in 1991 he discovered the peaks of Romsdal, Norway. He describes this chance encounter in his guide to the peaks, see <http://www.maths.gla.ac.uk/~wsw/romsdal/> .

He was never happier than when surrounded by snow above clouds, which is where he left his parents, his colleagues, numerous friends, students and admirers.

David R Fearn

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PUBLICATIONS

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