

Lachlan Cranswick has mysteriously disappeared

As we write this in February, it has been more than one month since Lachlan Cranswick was listed as a missing person by the police of Deep River, Ontario, Canada. Sadly, we have to consider the possibility that he may never come back. On February 4th the *Ottawa Citizen* carried an article about his mysterious disappearance. See <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/news/Scientist+disappearance+baffles+investigators/2520106/story.html>.

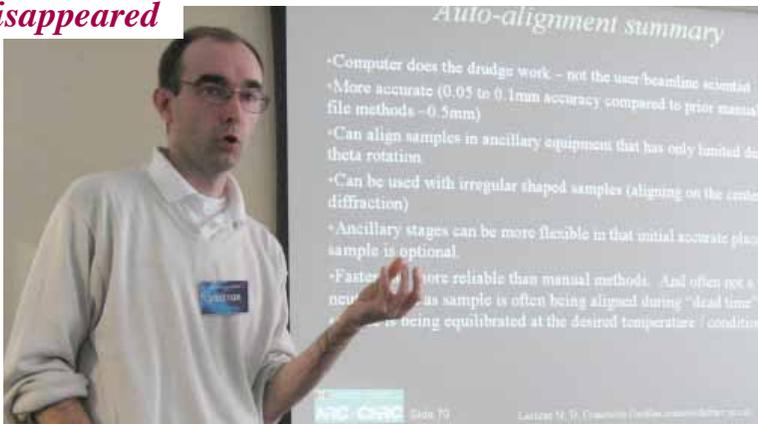
Lachlan M.D. Cranswick has been extraordinarily active in distributing both powder and single crystal computer programs as well as in crystallographic methods. He organized all kinds of events including satellite workshops at international congresses and several round robins about the Rietveld method, Structure Determination by Powder Diffraction (SDPD), and Search/Match. He was one of the original founders of the SDPD and Rietveld mailing lists and of various newsgroups on the internet such as sci.techniques.xtallography. He chaired the Commission on Crystallographic Computing for the IUCr and is a member and webmaster for the Canadian National Committee for Crystallography. He edited many *Newsletters* produced by IUCr Commissions (crystallographic computing; powder diffraction; teaching commissions, etc). The CCP14 (from 1998 to 2003; see www.ccp14.ac.uk/) gave him an opportunity to apply his talents by cataloguing the most efficient computer programs. Although not himself a developer of programs, he constantly cajoled developers to make improvements in their algorithms, and to write better explanations of their software in newsletters. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of Lachlan emails about these topics are out there in e-space. His concern about the difficulties of doing science in developing countries prompted him to distribute his *NEXUS* CD to countries such as Cuba where internet access is difficult or impossible. That regularly updated CD contains a huge list of open



Lachlan at the top of the Eiffel Tower in 1998 from <http://sdpd.univ-lemans.fr/Lachlan/Lachlan-1998-1.jpg>

software and documentation about crystallography.

Two excerpts from his publications reveal Lachlan's professional concerns. The first is from a paper about the future of crystallography, *Z. Kristallogr.* **217**, 2002, pp 293-4: "Research institutes and departments that are not willing to reinvest in expert staff, as well as invest in the time and effort it takes to develop scientific leadership in supporting fields such as crystallography, may suffer a precipitous decline in their abilities to perform leading-edge research." The second is from *Acta Cryst.* **A64**, 2008, pp 65-87: "Unless a sufficient body of people continues to dismantle and re-build programs, the knowledge encoded in the old programs



A recent photo of Lachlan supplied by Ian Swainson.

will become as inaccessible as the knowledge of how to build the Great Pyramid at Giza." Lachlan has co-authored or authored at least 53 papers listed in the Web of Science. One in particular: *Superconductivity in LaFe_{(1-x)Co_xAsO}*, *Phys. Rev.* **B78**, 2008, 104505, has already attracted a large number of citations. He has written chapters in several recent books about powder diffraction. At the time of his disappearance he was only 41 years old - and at the beginning of a promising career.

Apart from science, many other subjects interested Lachlan: philosophy, history, literature and poetry, to name a few. His personal website, developed when he was in Melbourne: <http://lachlan.bluehaze.com.au/> is a mixture of humor and seriousness. Quality of life was always important to him; he preferred moving to Chalk River, Canada, with its spectacular natural beauty, to another job opportunity at Berkeley. The photo



Deep River Silver Spoons C trail during autumn, is from his website. It was posted in December, 2009. An avid dinghy sailor on the Ottawa River in the summer, Lachlan also enjoyed walking and cross-country skiing in the winter. He is known to locals as the Vice-President of the Deep River Curling and Squash Club. Lachlan has worked for the NRC's Canadian Neutron Beam Centre for seven years. "His collaborators from universities across Canada praise his effectiveness in supporting their research," said Daniel Banks, a spokesman for the centre. "He was a driving force in developing our scientific tools to the leading edge."

Those of us who know him well miss him as a good friend. Indeed the entire community of crystallographers, anticipating that they will find less information on the web about tools they use to solve problems, must also miss him. Please forgive us our fantasy, but rather than imagining a darker scenario we much prefer to believe that Lachlan was captured by aliens wanting to improve the level of crystallography on their planet.

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