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Keith Brugger does collaborative research in Sweden

Summary: Keith Brugger spent three weeks at the University of Gothenburg in Gothenburg, Sweden and did collaborative research.

(April 17, 2012)-Keith Brugger, professor of geology, spent three weeks at the University of Gothenburg in Gothenburg, Sweden last year from late October to mid-November on a visiting professorship. The program was established to bring in researchers and scholars from outside Sweden to interact with their geology faculty, with the desired outcome of producing successful research collaborations.

Typically, the visiting professor is paired off with someone with whom a potential collaboration is most likely therefore Brugger was paired off with friend Professor Mark Johnson. Brugger proposed a collaborative research project with Johnson on the catastrophic drainage of Glacial Lake Grantsburg, which occurred in northeast Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin during the last ice age.

“Mark (Johnson) used to teach at Gustavus Adolphus College, and now teaches at the University of Gothenburg,” says Brugger. “Mark and I had talked about doing this research many years ago, so this was an opportunity for me to visit and talk about a potential collaboration. Mark has done, and continues to do, research on glacial history here in the Midwest. I don’t work in the Midwest, but we had talked about having me do some numerical modeling and simulations of what is called ‘catastrophic flooding’ because he thinks that Glacial Lake Grantsburg drained catastrophically when the ice dam failed.”

Brugger says that it is too early to say whether the research will be significant, though Johnson and he hope that it will be. He and Johnson are still in the process of defining their research parameters—the research goals, what samples must be collected, and the types of analyses they will use.

“The larger question, or the context of the research, is significant in that it addresses the glacial history of northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin,” says Brugger. “This in turn is useful in understanding climate, climate change, and its impact on landscape evolution.”

In addition to his research with Johnson, Brugger gave two guest lectures at the University of Gothenburg: the first dealt with his research in the Rocky Mountains on paleoclimate (climates of the past) and glaciations and the second dealt with techniques on constructing paleoclimates.

During his trip, Brugger took notice of the difference between Swedish university students and Morris students. “Many of (the Swedish students) are a little bit older, because a lot of European students take some time off before they go to college. In general, I got a very good impression of them, but you can’t compare them directly with UMM students. Their programs are such that, for example, if you’re a geology major, you just take geology courses. They focus on their major and related subjects. UMM students take a variety of courses in other fields, so it’s a bit different.”

While Brugger's work was mainly concentrated in Gothenburg, he did take the opportunity to go out into the field one day with Johnson to inspect a few of the field sites in Southern Sweden.

"I also do research in Northern Sweden, so my research involves people at the University of Stockholm as well, but this was the first opportunity I have had to visit the University of Gothenburg," said Brugger. "I'm hoping Mark is going to come over to Minnesota this summer (in order to continue our) collaborative research in northwestern Wisconsin and northeastern Minnesota."

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