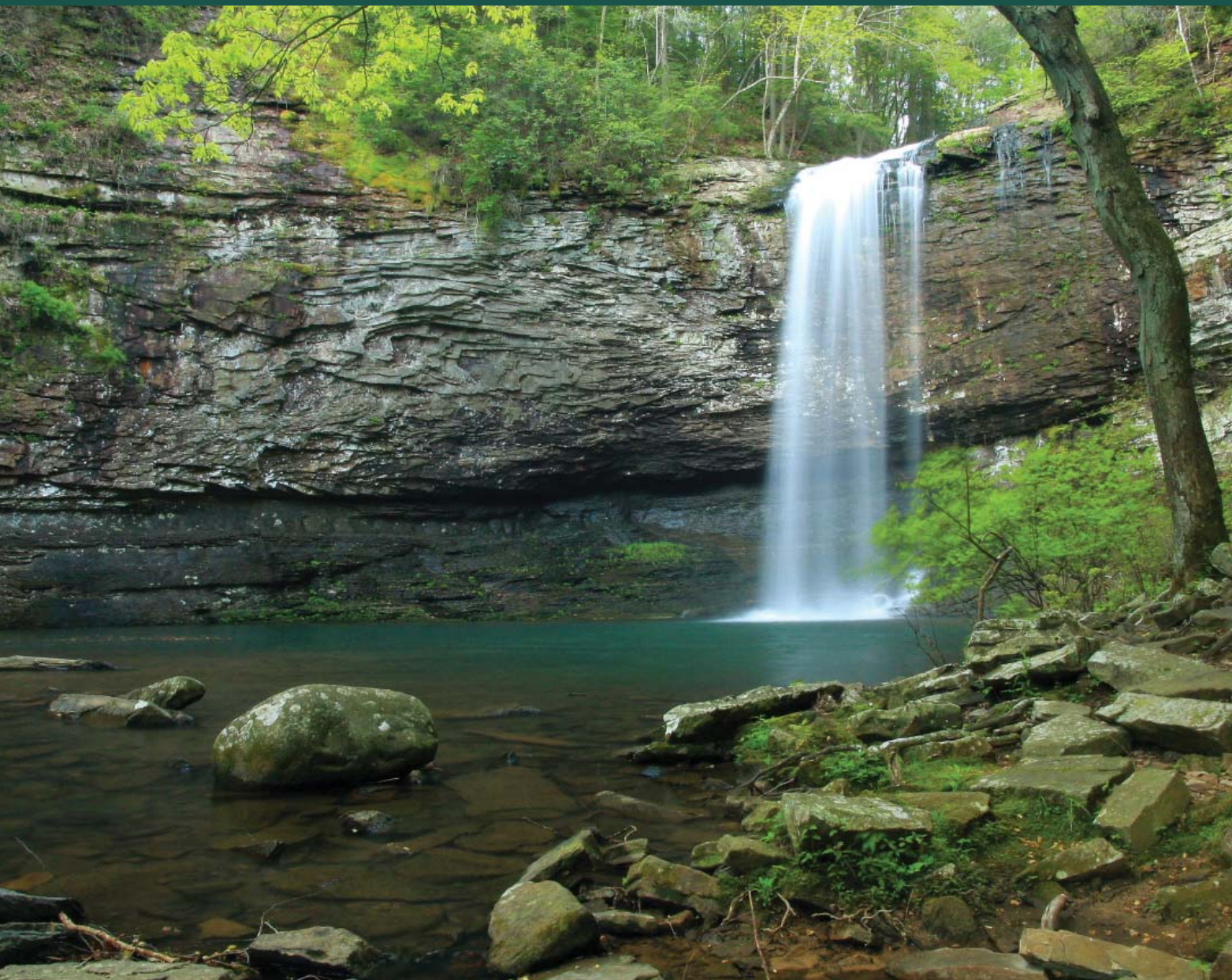


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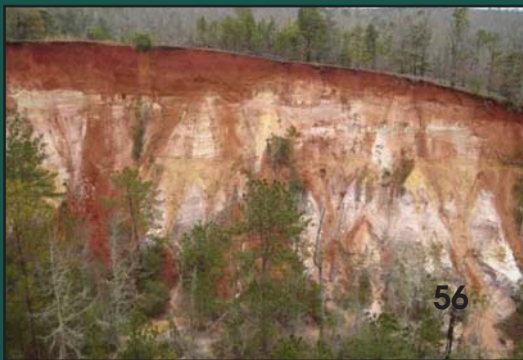
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Inside This Issue



6



56



58

FEATURES

- The Marcellus Shale: Energy Development and Enhancement by Hydraulic Fracturing
AIPG Conference 3
- Eyewitness to the Haitian Earthquake of January 12, 2010
James K. Adamson, MEM-1532 4
- North American Geology in the 21st Century: Today and Tomorrow, Call for Abstracts
AIPG 47th Annual Meeting and AGWT 10th Florida ASR Conference 6
- Peer Reviewed Article:** Artificial Recharge in the Southwestern US: The Problem of Emerging Chemical Contaminants
Frank Butterworth, Kenneth Janecek, and Edward Wolfe 7
- Thank You for 25 Years 14
- AIPG Energy Statements (Part 1 of 2) 16
- Sunsetting the Global Climate Change Committee
John C. Lorenz, AAPG President 28
- Earthquake Swarm Continues in Yellowstone
News Release 42
- Uranium Mining Ore Reserve Estimation: Procedure and Pitfalls
George T. FitzGerald, Jr., CPG-06582 48
- Geoscience Currents
American Geological Institute 59

ON THE COVER -Upper Falls along Daniel Creek at Cloudland Canyon State Park in Rising Fawn, Georgia. Photo by Kelly B. Adams.

Eyewitness to the Haitian Earthquake of January 12, 2010

James K. Adamson, MEM-1532

I will always remember where I was at 4:53 pm on Tuesday January 12th; I was on a small boat that we hired to transport us to remote villages along the southeast coast of the island of La Gonave in the Republic of Haiti. I was on assignment working for Concern Worldwide. I later learned we were about 20 miles from the epicenter of one of the most devastating earthquakes in history. I was in Haiti on assignment with a co-worker assisting in the design of water systems for rural and severely impoverished coastal populations. We felt nothing on the boat when the quake hit but were notified dramatically as we arrived moments later at a small coastal village on the island. The next coming days were to unfold beyond anything I have ever experienced or will ever experience.

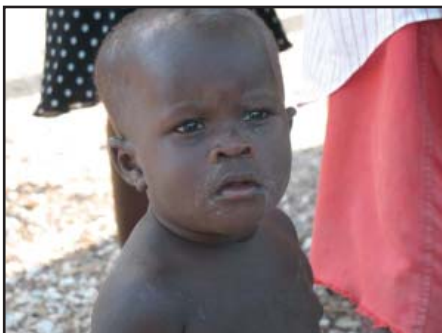
Back on land, I felt a large aftershock and only then realized how large the main quake must have been, especially if the epicenter were near Port au Prince or a major city center; it is no secret that Haiti was ill equipped to handle such an event. Radio feeds from Port au Prince started to paint a picture of the damage and we scrambled to communicate with our family to let them know that we were ok. It wasn't until the next morning that we were able to send an email, and I later learned the night to be an agonizing one for my wife and family. It was also an agonizing one for the ten million people in Haiti, some dying, some frantically trying to rescue survivors as the rest of the country helplessly slept outside in



fear of the aftershocks and in anxiety about the fate of their families and loved ones. After a night filled with aftershocks and unsteady rest, we arose in the morning to find the entire island village in agony; screams of mourning filled the air as people learned of deaths in their families. Our team members from Port au Prince told us of family that had died and the countless others they hadn't heard from. As a geologist, I believed I knew which fault system contributed to the event and I tried my best to educate people on what had occurred, and what may be expected of the aftershocks. My messages with well worn maps, hand gestures and patchy Creole attracted a large crowd of curious villagers who were only looking for something to distract them from their preceding thoughts.

Thursday the seas calmed down and our team was able to board a boat back into Port au Prince. We had to get our Haitian team members back so they could search for their loved ones and we had to check on several friends in Port au Prince. Nothing could have prepared us for what we were about to witness and experience. Only three days earlier, I was in Port au Prince and it was as bustling, prosperous and as safe as I had ever seen it. Now as we traveled south into the city it quickly became apparent that it was decimated beyond recognition and was now a place of sadness, survival and desperation. The entire city seemed to be a pile of concrete rubble, dusty stale air and dead bodies. The city smelled like

pure death and it was nearly unbearable to breath, locals had white toothpaste under their noses, some had leaves jammed into their nostrils. The streets, courtyards and open areas were filled with somber people both injured and physically well. They were all waiting for help, for something to happen. It was the only time in my life I wished that I were a doctor. Distinctive and powerful prayers in Creole echoed through alleyways and streets. The expressions on everyone's face were an unexplainable mix of fear and sadness, but strength and faith shined through. Slow tears rolled down the faces of all and everybody. I will never forget and always be inspired by the residents of Port au Prince that day. What was most astonishing was that it was two days after the earthquake and we did not seem to see one organized relief effort. We at first thought that most of the rescue efforts had already occurred but that was not at all the case, they had yet to begin. With no communication network and our contacts in Port au Prince missing, we left Port au Prince to head north into Pignon to start coordinating a relief effort from the head office of Haiti Outreach, a small NGO that is very active across the country. Two water trucks were immediately mobilized to Port au Prince to make 24/7 water deliveries to the city. Logistics were then handled to transport a Washington, D.C. based Trauma team to the country through the Dominican Republic and further coordination efforts were



EYEWITNESS TO THE HAITIAN EARTHQUAKE



initiated with UNICEF, the Haitian Government and Concern Worldwide. Haiti Outreach mobilized their drilling equipment to begin water relief efforts by drilling new wells and repairing ones damaged by the earthquake. It was evident in my short time with Haiti Outreach after the earthquake that the smaller organizations have played a critical part in the relief effort and will continue to play a direct role in the rebuilding efforts.

My co-worker and I were evacuated out of the country on Saturday, January 16th, but leaving Haiti was the hardest thing I have done in my life. Upon returning to the USA, I was once again reassured as to why I am married. The support of my wife was unexplainable and she tearily supported my return to Haiti to help in the relief efforts. Stuart Dykstra and I from V3 Companies immediately joined a relief effort to focus on water supply for Port au Prince and all of the surrounding damaged areas and are in the process of returning as I scramble to draft this article.

The directly affected population of the earthquake lives off an average wage of \$3 per day (before the earthquake); most of the people have saved money their entire lives to build homes and businesses, building brick by brick as they were able. The capital region of Haiti is in peril; every government building is severely damaged or completely destroyed. The country of 10 million people is centralized through Port au Prince, and the entire country relies on Port au Prince for commerce, fuel, imported food and aid dollars. The country has no means to recover without the international community; Haiti heavily relied on aid even before the earthquake. The much needed focus and attention on the Port au Prince area will hopefully not disguise the help that the rest of the country still needs.

I write this article of my experience to bring awareness. The Haitian people are extremely inspiring and they are all victims of this catastrophe. I learned more from them in one day than I have in all of my education and career. The future of Haiti depends on the interna-

tional response involving the Haitian people and immense support after the relief effort and after the media coverage dissolves. It is also critically important to encourage international investment into the country after the relief efforts subside. Haiti has suffered greatly and it is my hope that the rebuilding effort is the beginning of reestablishing Haiti as the "Pearl of the Caribbean".

James Adamson, MEM-1532, is a senior geologist with V3 Companies, Ltd. He has been working on water supply projects across the entire country of Haiti since 2006.

