



Glossary of Geology, 5th ed., edited by Klaus K. E. Neuendorf, James P. Mehl, Jr., and Julia A. Jackson, 2005, American Geological Institute, Alexandria, Virginia, hardback, 779 pages, USD 99.95; Member Society Price, including SEPM, USD 79.95, ISBN 0-922152-76-4.

It's 2008, and I'm *always* connected to the internet. I can access information on any conceivable topic simply by typing it into a search engine. I can read the full text of tens of thousands of peer-reviewed articles through GeoRef and my library's subscription to online databases. I don't remember the last time I opened an actual dictionary or encyclopedia made of paper. So, do I really need an ~800 page, 6 pound, hardcover *Glossary of Geology* taking up space on a bookshelf already crowded with leftover undergraduate textbooks that I haven't referenced in years?

The answer is a resounding "Yes"! The fifth edition of AGI's *Glossary of Geology* is one of the most comprehensive geological dictionaries ever published. Try Googling words like Georgeeriksenite or syn-thanatope and coming up with anything, much less a definition relevant to earth science, from a reliable source. This is the primary advantage of the *Glossary*—its authority and completeness lie in the participation and review of over 100 professional geoscientists, in all subdisciplines of geology, and in the more than 2400 supporting references. In the age of Wikipedia, having an all-inclusive, reputable source of information is a necessity, now more than ever. Those who are too lazy to pull it off the shelf can still rejoice, however; a purchase of the *Glossary* comes with a 6-month complimentary subscription to the even more up-to-date *Glossary Online*.

Since its inception in 1972, AGI's *Glossary of Geology* has increased by 7000 its total number of entries. More than 3600 definitions have been added since the fourth edition in 1997, and over 13,000 entries have been updated. Although every new edition of the *Glossary* drops a number of obsolete terms, many archaic and little-used words can still be found in the current printing. This is actually an advantage to the reader—the least-used words are likely to be the ones that are also the least understood. The *Glossary* incorporates over 5300 mineral names (including chemical formulas), acronyms, colloquial, local, and regional terms, anatomic terms used in paleontology, terms related to petroleum and mining, and *almost* any other word or phrase you can think of that relates in some way to geology. *Almost* because there is a notable omission; many terms that have gained wide acceptance in the field of ichnology have been left out. Words like softground, hyporelief, and xenoglyph are familiar to most trace-fossil workers but are strangely excluded. Also

absent are Seilacher's behavioral classification terms (Repichnia, Dominichnia) that now appear frequently in most introductory ichnology texts. With ichnology's increasing importance as a subdiscipline of both sedimentary geology and paleontology, usage of these terms will likely only expand in the future.

Although the specialized terminology of trace fossils may need augmenting, other disciplines appear to be well represented, and missing words are the exception rather than the norm. Definitions are also very thorough—the definition of facies, for example, differentiates among the eight different meanings of the word.

An issue inherent in all dictionaries is the lack of illustrations; in order to be all-inclusive, editors do not leave much room for visual representations. Many terms that require a lengthy description could be explained succinctly in a single figure. This is where the technological advancements made possible by the internet have the power to render hard copies of publications obsolete. If the print version of the *Glossary* were fully illustrated, it would need its own library. Online, however, space is not an issue, and an illustrated, online index of the terms contained in the *Glossary* would set a new standard for general geology references. Unfortunately, such a thing does not yet exist. The *Encyclopedia of Geology* (<http://www.encyclopediaofgeology.com>), published in 2004, is a good start, but contains a mere 350 entries. Perhaps the *Glossary* should consider moving in this direction in the future.

Despite these limitations, the *Glossary of Geology* is still relevant in its current form. Having an easily accessible, physical reference not dependent on electronics or internet connectivity is still an advantage. The scope of the *Glossary* makes it equally useful to the novice who is looking to get past sometimes impenetrable geologic jargon, as well as to the professional whose interdisciplinary research may require an understanding of fields outside of his or her specialty. It should be on the bookshelf of every professional geoscientist and geologically minded layperson alike.

John W. Counts
Department of Geology
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045 USA
jwcounts@gmail.com