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Obituary for Sigfús Jóhan Johnsen, 1940–2013

Dr. Sigfús Jóhan Johnsen, a member of the Advisory Board of “Polar Science”, recently passed away. Dr. Johnsen kindly helped “Polar Science” become visible to researchers of all disciplines in both polar regions, from the beginning of the establishment of the Journal in 2007. An obituary by a Japanese colleague follows.

Sigfús J. Johnsen was born in Iceland on April 27, 1940. He received Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees from the University of Copenhagen, and after his studies, he worked at the University of Copenhagen and the University of Iceland. In 2010, he was awarded an Honorary Doctoral Degree from the University of Iceland, and since 2010, he was an Associate Professor Emeritus at the University of Copenhagen.

Sigfús was deeply involved in studies of Greenland ice cores and the Greenland ice sheet. He was well known internationally for his pioneering work on the stable isotopes of water, and as a “drill-master” who led the development of the “Istuk” deep ice core drill. He played a fundamental role in the Greenland deep ice core drilling projects at Camp Century, Dye-3, GRIP, NorthGRIP, and most recently NEEM. Sigfús authored more than 200 scientific papers. For his outstanding scientific contributions, Sigfús received many prestigious awards, including the Seligman Crystal from the International Glaciological Society and the Hans Oeschger medal from the European Geophysical Society.

Sigfús was always available and willing to help others. A number of scientists and engineers from various nations, including from Japan, learned the art of deep ice coring under his tutelage. Without his help, the deep ice coring program at Dome Fuji, Antarctica, would have never succeeded. Sigfús loved Japan and visited Japan whenever he was invited. During his last visit in September–December 2010, he gave a lecture series at the National Institute of Polar Research, which was appreciated by glaciologists and climatologists, and particularly by the younger students and post-docs. As well as his expertise, Sigfús’ warm heart was appreciated by the many students, scientists, engineers, and

secretaries who worked with him. Japanese students, scientists, and engineers enjoyed working with Sigfús in Greenland, most recently at NEEM, and learned a great deal from him. He was truly a hero of glaciology.



Dr. Johnsen at NEEM, Greenland, in July 2010. Photo by Dr. Kenji Kawamura.

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