# Contents

Preface to Fourth Edition ............................................................. xi
Preface to First Edition .............................................................. xii

Chapter 1  Introduction............................................................... 1
  1.1  Introduction ........................................................................ 1
  1.2  History and Perspective .................................................... 2
  1.3  Organization of the Book .................................................. 6
  Further Reading..................................................................... 9

Chapter 2  Transformation of Snow to Ice ................................. 11
  2.1  Introduction ...................................................................... 11
  2.2  Snow, Firn, and Ice .......................................................... 11
     2.2.1  Density of Ice .......................................................... 12
  2.3  Zones in a Glacier ............................................................ 13
     2.3.1  Distribution of Zones ............................................... 15
  2.4  Variation of Density with Depth in Firn .............................. 16
  2.5  Snow to Ice Transformation in a Dry-snow Zone ............... 19
     2.5.1  Processes ............................................................... 19
     2.5.2  Models of Density Profiles in Dry Firn ......................... 22
     2.5.3  Reduction of Gas Mobility ........................................ 25
  2.6  Hoar Layers .................................................................... 26
  2.7  Transformation When Meltwater Is Present ....................... 27
  Further Reading..................................................................... 28

Chapter 3  Grain-Scale Structures and Deformation of Ice .......... 29
  3.1  Introduction ...................................................................... 29
  3.2  Properties of a Single Ice Crystal ...................................... 30
     3.2.1  Structure ................................................................. 30
     3.2.2  Deformation of a Single Crystal .................................. 32
  3.3  Polycrystalline Ice: Grain-scale Forms and Processes .......... 33
     3.3.1  Orientation Fabrics: Brief Description ......................... 33
     3.3.2  Impurities and Bubbles .............................................. 33
     3.3.3  Texture and Recrystallization .................................... 35
     3.3.4  Formation of C-axis Orientation Fabrics ..................... 43
     3.3.5  Mechanisms of Polycrystalline Deformation ................. 48
  3.4  Bulk Creep Properties of Polycrystalline Ice ...................... 51
     3.4.1  Strain Rate and Incompressibility .............................. 51
     3.4.2  Deviatoric Stress ...................................................... 52
     3.4.3  Bench-top Experiments: The Three Phases of Creep .......... 52
     3.4.4  Isotropic Creep Behavior .......................................... 54
     3.4.5  Controls on Creep Parameter $A$ ................................. 64
Contents

3.4.6 Recommended Isotropic Creep Relation and Values for $A$................. 72
3.4.7 Anisotropic Creep of Ice .............................................................. 78
3.5 Elastic Deformation of Polycrystalline Ice ................................................. 88
Appendix 3.1 ...................................................................................... 88
Appendix 3.2: Data for Figure 3.16 .................................................. 89

Chapter 4 Mass Balance Processes: 1. Overview and Regimes............... 91
4.1 Introduction ................................................................................... 91
4.1.1 Notes on Terminology ................................................................. 94
4.2 Surface Mass Balance ................................................................. 96
4.2.1 Surface Accumulation Processes ............................................. 96
4.2.2 Surface Ablation Processes ..................................................... 99
4.2.3 Annual (Net) Balance and the Seasonal Cycle ......................... 100
4.2.4 Annual Glacier Balance and Average Specific Balances ............. 102
4.2.5 Variation of Surface Balance with Altitude ............................... 102
4.2.6 Generalized Relation of Surface Balance to Temperature and Precipitation ............................................................... 104
4.2.7 Relation of Glacier-wide Balance to the Area-Altitude Distribution ............................................................... 108
4.3 Mass Balance Variations of Mountain Glaciers ......................... 109
4.3.1 Interannual Fluctuations of Balance ................................ 109
4.3.2 Cumulative Balance and Delayed Adjustments .................... 111
4.3.3 Regional Variations of Mass Balance ................................ 113
4.4 Englacial Mass Balance ............................................................... 115
4.4.1 Internal Accumulation ............................................................... 115
4.4.2 Internal Ablation ................................................................. 115
4.5 Basal Mass Balance ................................................................. 116
4.5.1 Basal Accumulation ............................................................... 116
4.5.2 Basal Ablation ................................................................. 118
4.6 Mass Loss by Calving ............................................................... 121
4.6.1 The Calving Spectrum ........................................................... 122
4.6.2 Calving from Tidewater Glaciers ........................................... 123
4.6.3 Calving from Ice Shelves ....................................................... 124
4.6.4 Calving Relations for Ice Sheet Models .................................. 127
4.7 Methods for Determining Glacier Mass Balance ................................ 127
4.8 Mass Balance Regimes of the Ice Sheets ..................................... 131
4.8.1 Greenland Ice Sheet ............................................................. 131
4.8.2 Antarctic Ice Sheet ............................................................. 134
Further Reading ........................................................................ 136

Chapter 5 Mass Balance Processes: 2. Surface Ablation and Energy Budget ...... 137
5.1 Introduction ................................................................................... 137
5.1.1 Radiation .............................................................................. 138
5.1.2 Energy Budget of Earth’s Atmosphere and Surface ................ 138
5.2 Statement of the Surface Energy Budget .................................... 140
5.2.1 Driving and Responding Factors in the Energy Budget ............. 141
5.2.2 Melt and Warming Driven by Net Energy Flux ................. 141
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Components of the Net Energy Flux</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 Downward Shortwave Radiation</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2 Reflected Shortwave Radiation</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3 Longwave Radiation</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4 Field Example, Net Radiation Budget</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.5 Subsurface Conduction and Radiation</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.6 Turbulent Fluxes</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Relation of Ablation to Climate</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.1 Calculating Melt from Energy Budget Measurements</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.2 Simple Approaches to Modelling Melt</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.3 Increase of Ablation with Warming</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.4 Importance of the Frequency of Different Weather Conditions</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.5 Energy Budget Regimes</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Reading</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 6 Glacial Hydrology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Introduction</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.1 Permeability of Glacier Ice</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.2 Effective Pressure</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Features of the Hydrologic System</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1 Surface (Supraglacial) Hydrology</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2 Englacial Hydrology</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.3 Subglacial Hydrology</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.4 Runoff from Glaciers</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 The Water System within Temperate Glaciers</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1 Direction of Flow</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.2 Drainage in Conduits</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3 Drainage in Linked Cavities</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.4 Subglacial Drainage on a Soft Bed</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.5 Summary of Water Systems at the Glacier Bed</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.6 System Behavior</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Glacial Hydrological Phenomena</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.1 Jökulhlaups</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.2 Antarctic Subglacial Lakes</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Reading</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 7 Basal Slip**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.1 Measurements of Basal Velocity</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.2 Local vs. Global Control of Basal Velocity</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Hard Beds</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.1 Weertman’s Theory of Sliding</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2 Observations at the Glacier Sole</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.3 Improvements to Weertman’s Analysis</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.4 Discussion of Assumptions</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.5 Comparison of Predictions with Observations</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.6 How Water Changes Sliding Velocity on Hard Beds</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Contents

7.2.7 Sliding of Debris-laden Ice .............................................. 250  
7.2.8 Sliding at Sub-Freezing Temperatures ................................. 253  
7.2.9 Hard-bed Sliding: Summary and Outlook ............................. 254  
7.3 Deformable Beds ................................................................... 255  
7.3.1 Key Observations ............................................................ 256  
7.3.2 Till Properties and Processes ............................................. 257  
7.3.3 Constitutive Behaviors ...................................................... 264  
7.3.4 Slip Rate $u_b$ on a Deformable Bed ...................................... 269  
7.3.5 Large-scale Behavior of Soft Beds ...................................... 273  
7.3.6 Continuity of Till ............................................................ 277  
7.3.7 Additional Geological Information ..................................... 279  
7.4 Practical Relations for Basal Slip and Drag .............................. 280  
Further Reading ........................................................................ 283  

**Chapter 8 The Flow of Ice Masses** ........................................... 285  
8.1 Introduction ........................................................................... 285  
8.1.1 Ice Flux ........................................................................... 286  
8.1.2 Balance Velocities ............................................................ 288  
8.1.3 Actual Velocities ............................................................... 289  
8.1.4 How Surface Velocities Are Measured .................................. 293  
8.2 Driving and Resisting Stresses .................................................. 295  
8.2.1 Driving Stress and Basal Shear Stress ................................. 295  
8.2.2 Additional Resisting Forces and the Force Balance ............... 299  
8.2.3 Factors Controlling Resistance and Flow ............................. 301  
8.2.4 Effective Driving Force of a Vertical Cliff ............................ 307  
8.3 Vertical Profiles of Flow ......................................................... 309  
8.3.1 Parallel Flow .................................................................... 309  
8.3.2 Observed Complications in Shear Profiles ......................... 311  
8.4 Fundamental Properties of Extending and Compressing Flows .................. 315  
8.4.1 General Concepts ............................................................. 315  
8.4.2 Uniform Extension or Compression .................................... 317  
8.5 General Governing Relations .................................................. 319  
8.5.1 Local Stress-equilibrium Relations ..................................... 320  
8.5.2 General Solutions for Stress and Velocity ......................... 321  
8.5.3 Vertically Integrated Force Balance ................................... 322  
8.5.4 General Mass Conservation Relation (Equation of Continuity) .... 330  
8.5.5 Vertically Integrated Continuity Equations ......................... 331  
8.6 Effects of Valley Walls and Shear Margins ................................ 338  
8.6.1 Transverse Velocity Profile Where Basal Resistance Is Small .......... 339  
8.6.2 Combined Effects of Side and Basal Resistances ................... 340  
8.7 Variations Along a Flow Line .................................................. 346  
8.7.1 Factors Controlling Longitudinal Strain Rate ....................... 346  
8.7.2 Local-scale Variation: Longitudinal Stress-gradient Coupling ....... 347  
8.7.3 Large-Scale Variation ....................................................... 351  
8.8 Flow at Tidewater Margins ....................................................... 353  
8.8.1 Theory ............................................................................. 353  
8.8.2 Observations: Columbia Glacier ....................................... 355
Chapter 11 Reaction of Glaciers to Environmental Changes

11.1 Introduction ............................................................. 453
11.2 Reaction to Changes of Mass Balance: Scales ........................................... 454
11.2.1 Net Change of Glacier Length ........................................... 455
11.2.2 Simple Models for Response ........................................... 456
11.2.3 Simple Models for Different Zones ........................................... 461
11.3 Reaction to Changes of Mass Balance: Dynamics ........................................... 464
11.3.1 Theoretical Framework ................................................... 464
11.3.2 Ice Thickness Changes ................................................... 469
11.3.3 Relative Importance of Diffusion and Kinematic Waves ......................... 476
11.3.4 Numerical Models of Glacier Variation ........................................... 477
11.4 Reactions to Additional Forcings ................................................... 483
11.4.1 Response of Glaciers to Ice and Bed Changes ........................................... 483
11.4.2 Factors Influencing the Reaction of an Ice Sheet to the End of an Ice Age ........................................... 485
11.4.3 Ice Flow Increased by Water Input ........................................... 490
11.5 Changes at a Marine Margin ................................................... 494
11.5.1 Conceptual Framework ................................................... 495
11.5.2 The Tidewater Glacier Cycle ................................................... 500
11.5.3 Interactions of Ice Shelves and Inland Ice ........................................... 503
11.5.4 Forcing by Sea-level Rise ................................................... 508
Further Reading ............................................................. 510

Chapter 12 Glacier Surges

12.1 Introduction ............................................................. 511
12.2 Characteristics of Surging Glaciers ................................................... 513
12.2.1 Spatial Distribution and Relation to Geological Setting ......................... 513
12.2.2 Distribution in Time ................................................... 514
12.2.3 Temperature Characteristics ................................................... 515
12.2.4 Characteristics of Form and Velocity ................................................... 516
12.3 Detailed Observations of Surges ................................................... 517
12.3.1 Surges of Temperate Glaciers ................................................... 517
12.3.2 The Role of Water: Variegated Glacier ................................................... 520
12.3.3 Surges Where the Bed Is Partly Frozen ................................................... 523
12.3.4 Surges of Polythermal Tidewater Glaciers ................................................... 526
12.4 Surge Mechanisms ................................................... 528
12.4.1 General Evidence Relevant to the Mechanism ................................................... 528
12.4.2 The Mechanism for Temperate Glaciers ................................................... 532
12.4.3 Polythermal Glaciers ................................................... 536
12.5 Surging of Ice Sheets? ................................................... 537
12.6 Ice Avalanches ................................................... 538
## Contents

### Chapter 13 Ice Sheets and the Earth System ............................................. 541

13.1 Introduction .......................................................................................... 541  
13.2 Interaction of Ice Sheets with the Earth System ........................................ 542  
  13.2.1 Processes Driving Ice Sheet Change .................................................. 543  
  13.2.2 Feedback Processes ........................................................................... 548  
13.3 Growth and Decay of Quaternary Ice Sheets ........................................... 555  
  13.3.1 Relation to Milankovitch Forcings .................................................... 557  
  13.3.2 Climate Forcings at the LGM ............................................................ 561  
  13.3.3 Onset of Quaternary Cycles ............................................................. 563  
  13.3.4 Heinrich Events .................................................................................. 563  
13.4 Ice Sheet Evolution Models ....................................................................... 565  
  13.4.1 Model Components ........................................................................... 565  
  13.4.2 Model Calibration ................................................................................ 569  
  13.4.3 Simulations of Quaternary Ice Sheets ................................................. 569  
  Further Reading ............................................................................................ 574

### Chapter 14 Ice, Sea Level, and Contemporary Climate Change .................... 575

14.1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 575  
  14.1.1 Equivalent Sea Level ........................................................................... 576  
  14.1.2 Recent Climate and Sea-level Change .................................................. 577  
14.2 Global Warming and Mountain Glaciers ................................................. 578  
  14.2.1 History of Glacier Lengths ................................................................. 579  
  14.2.2 Worldwide Mass Balance of Mountain Glaciers and Small Ice Caps .... 582  
  14.2.3 Sea-level Forecasts: Mountain Glaciers and Small Ice Caps ............... 586  
14.3 The Ice Sheets and Global Warming ....................................................... 590  
  14.3.1 Greenland ......................................................................................... 590  
  14.3.2 Antarctica .......................................................................................... 595  
  14.3.3 Model Forecasts of Ice Sheet Contributions to Sea-level Change ....... 601  
  14.3.4 Simple Approaches to Forecasts for the Century Ahead ....................... 604  
14.4 Summary ............................................................................................... 607  
  14.4.1 Recent Sea-level Rise ......................................................................... 607  
  14.4.2 The Twentieth Century ....................................................................... 608  
  14.4.3 This Century ....................................................................................... 608

### Chapter 15 Ice Core Studies ..................................................................... 611

15.1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 611  
  15.1.1 Some Essential Terms and Concepts ................................................... 612  
  15.1.2 Delta Notation .................................................................................... 612  
15.2 Relation Between Depth and Age ........................................................... 614  
  15.2.1 Theoretical Relations ........................................................................... 614  
  15.2.2 Determination of Ages ........................................................................ 622  
  15.2.3 Difference of Gas and Ice Ages .......................................................... 630  
15.3 Fractionation of Gases in Polar Firn ....................................................... 630  
15.4 Total Air Content ................................................................................... 634  
15.5 Stable Isotopes of Ice ............................................................................. 636
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.5.1 Conceptual Model</td>
<td>636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.5.2 Interpretation of Records</td>
<td>644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.6 Additional Techniques of Temperature Reconstruction</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.6.1 Borehole Temperatures</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.6.2 Melt Layers</td>
<td>651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.6.3 Thermal and Gravitational Fractionation of Gases</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.7 Estimation of Past Accumulation Rates</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.8 Greenhouse Gas Records</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.8.1 Histories of Atmospheric Concentration</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.8.2 Isotopic Compositions of Greenhouse Gases</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.9 Gas Indicators of Global Parameters</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.9.1 Global Mean Ocean Temperature</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.9.2 Global Biological Productivity</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.10 Particulate and Soluble Impurities</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.10.1 Electrical Conductivity Measurement (ECM)</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.10.2 Primary Aerosols</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.10.3 Secondary Aerosols</td>
<td>664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.11 Examples of Multiparameter Records from Ice Sheets</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.11.1 Deglacial Climate Change</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.11.2 A Long Record of Climate Cycling</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.12 Low-latitude Ice Cores</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.13 Surface Exposures in Ablation Zones</td>
<td>672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Reading</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix: A Primer on Stress and Strain** ........................................... 675

**Index** .............................................................................. 683

References and other supplemental materials can be found on
The Physics of Glaciers companion website at:

Preface to Fourth Edition

Current concerns about global warming have produced widespread scientific interest in the behavior of glaciers in general and the polar ice sheets in particular. This increased interest, coming at a time of unprecedented advances in observational capabilities, has fueled a major expansion of the literature since the third edition went to press. A new edition to update the content and assess the current state of research was therefore overdue.

Reflecting the increased engagement of glacier studies with broad themes in environmental geophysics, the updated edition features new chapters on “Ice Sheets and the Earth System” and “Ice, Sea Level, and Contemporary Climate Change.” The chapter on ice core studies is significantly expanded from the previous version and much of it is new material. The content and arrangement of chapters on glaciological fundamentals broadly follow the outline of the third edition, although many discussions have been revised extensively. All the material about flow of mountain glaciers, ice sheets, ice streams, and ice shelves has been amalgamated into a single lengthy chapter entitled “Flow of Ice Masses.” Material about iceberg calving and basal melt now find their place in a chapter that reviews together all of the mass balance processes. In general the level of treatment remains unchanged, but several key topics are illuminated at a higher level of detail than in previous editions.

Many acknowledgments are due. We first must thank Shawn Marshall for conducting a first round of research and synthesis of topics presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. We gratefully acknowledge the scientists who reviewed individual chapters: Richard Alley, Bob Bindschadler, Jason Box, Roland Burgmann, Garry Clarke, Tim Creyts, Paul Duval, Andrew Fountain, Inez Fung, Hilmar Gudmundsson, Michael Hambrey, Will Harrison, Neal Iverson, Jo Jacka, Georg Kaser, Thomas Mölg, Tavi Murray, Tad Pfeffer, Eric Rignot, Jeff Severinghaus, Throstur Thorsteinsson, Françoise Vimeux, Ed Waddington, Joe Walder, Ian Willis, and Eric Wolff. Charlie Raymond deserves special thanks for commenting on the whole manuscript. Jeff Kavanaugh contributed helpful suggestions and graciously provided the cover photograph. Yosuke Adachi proofread the final manuscript. Mark Carey, glacier historian, suggested several of the chapter-head quotes. All of the reviewers offered excellent suggestions, some of which could not be accommodated for lack of space. We, of course, take full responsibility for the content and for the tough choices about what material to include.

Completion of the project would not have been possible without assistance from Delores Dillard and Darin Jensen of U.C. Berkeley’s Department of Geography. Delores worked on digitization and manuscript acquisition while Darin took on the nearly unthinkable task of drafting more than 200 figures. KC gives additional thanks to Jean Lave and Michael Johns for their wise counsel, and to the Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences at the California Institute of Technology, and especially Jess Adkins and John Eiler, who hosted a sabbatical visit at the start of this project. Finally, we express our deepest gratitude to Lyn Paterson and Pete Lombard for their many years of support and encouragement.

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February, 2010
Preface to First Edition

The aim of this book is to explain the physical principles underlying the behaviour of glaciers and ice sheets, as far as these are understood at the present time.

Glaciers have been studied scientifically for more than a century. During this period, interest in glaciers has, like the glaciers themselves, waxed and waned. Periods of activity and advance have alternated with periods of stagnation and even of retrogression when erroneous ideas have become part of conventional wisdom. The past 20 years, however, have seen a major advance in our knowledge. Theories have been developed which have explained many facts previously obscure; improved observational techniques have enabled these theories to be tested and have produced new results still to be explained.

This seems an appropriate time to review these recent developments. At present there is, to my knowledge, no book in English which does this. The present book is a modest attempt to fill the gap. To cover the whole field in a short book is impossible. I have tried to select those topics which I feel to be of most significance, but there is undoubtedly some bias towards my own particular interests.

While this book is intended primarily for those starting research in the subject, I hope that established workers in glacier studies, and in related fields, will find it useful. The treatment is at about the graduate student level. The standard varies, however, and most chapters should be intelligible to senior undergraduates.

I am much indebted to Dr. J. F. Nye for reading the whole manuscript and making many helpful suggestions. I am grateful to Drs. S. J. Jones, G. de Q. Robin and J. Weertman for reviewing individual chapters. I should also like to thank Drs. J. A. Jacobs and J. Tuzo Wilson for general comments and encouragement. The responsibility for the final form and contents of the book of course remains my own.

W. S. B. Paterson
Ottawa, Canada
March, 1968