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Editorial note

This issue contains two articles that together constitute a blind test of the utility of rock varnish microstratigraphy as an indicator of the age of a Quaternary basalt flow in the Mohave Desert. This test should be of special interest to those who have followed the debate over whether varnish microstratigraphy provides a reliable dating tool, a debate that has reached disturbing levels of acrimony in the literature. Fred Phillips (New Mexico Tech) utilized cosmogenic ^{36}Cl dating, and Liu (Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University) utilized rock varnish microstratigraphy to obtain the ages of five different flows, two of which had been dated in previous work and three of which had never been dated. The manuscripts were submitted and reviewed with neither author aware of the results of the other. Once the manuscripts were revised and accepted, the

results were shared so each author could compare and contrast results obtained by the two methods. In four of the five cases, dates obtained by the two methods were in close agreement. Independent dates obtained by Phillips and Liu on the Cima "I" flow did not agree as well, but this may be attributed to the two authors having sampled at slightly different sites, which may have in fact been from flows of contrasting age. Results of the blind test provide convincing evidence that varnish microstratigraphy is a valid dating tool to estimate surface exposure ages.

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