USGS
science for a changing world

GEOCHEMIST

Candice Adkins

Education:
B.S. Economics
B.S. Geology
Southern Methodist University

M.S. Hydrology
University of Arizona

Years working as a geochemist: 5

Worst college job:
At SMU, I lead Peruna, our Shetland pony mascot, across the football field after every touchdown. I was the school's first female mascot handler, so I had to wear the men's oversized pants.

Q: What does a geochemist do?

A: At the U.S. Geological Survey's Idaho Water Science Center, I analyze the chemical make up of water to determine where it came from and how old it is.

Q: Why ?

A: We drink water and we use water to irrigate crops and to manufacture goods. If the groundwater is "new" we know that the aquifer is open to recharge from rain and snowmelt. If the groundwater is "old", the aquifer may be closed—when the water is gone, it's gone.

Q: How did you decide on a career in science?

A: I started as an engineering major. After my first geology class, I was hooked.

Q: Were you always good at math?

A: No. I actually struggled in math in high school. That first geology class helped me make the connection between math and what I was seeing in the environment. Even basic math can help explain why tree trunks grow differently near faults and how groundwater contaminants travel through an aquifer.

> "Ask your instructors for advice. They can help you choose a specialty, and show you career opportunities."

Q: What's the most fulfilling part of your job?

A: I was collecting a groundwater sample from a private well recently for a study related to a proposed housing development. The land owner thanked me for ensuring that his water quality and water rights would be protected. What I do is important to people and to the environment.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for women interested in a career in science?

A: You can be strong and get dirty in the field and still be feminine. Enjoy the play...the grime will wash off.