



## **EARTH SCIENCES HISTORY GROUP**

**(A Specialist Group of the Geological Society of Australia Inc.)**

*Email Bulletin No. 45*

*September 6 2014*

### **New ESHG Committee**

At the ESHG Business meeting at the AESC in Newcastle in July, the former committee based in Western Australia handed the reins to a new Queensland-based committee. The Queensland Committee has had its inaugural meeting and appointed the various tasks, and the various steps of transferring bank account signatories are in progress.

The new committee is:

Chair — Ian Withnall

Secretary — John Jell

Treasurer — Paul Blake

Newsletter Editor — John Draper

Assistant Editor — Cec Murray

WA representative — John Blockley

NSW representative — David Branagan

Victorian representative — Roger Pierson

Tasmanian representative — Carol Bacon

SA representative — Jim Jago

### **Change of name for the ESHG Newsletter?**

Following discussion at the previous Business Meeting at the IGC in 2012, the suggestion was made that the ESHG Newsletter should change its name to Journal and be published as refereed or partly refereed journal. The matter was investigated by the Editor (Peter Muhling), and his detailed report was tabled at the 2014 Business Meeting and is available on request. The report discusses the alternative possibility of publishing in Australian Journal of Earth Sciences, the results of discussions with the editors of 'The Globe' and the 'Journal of Australasian Mining History', and provides an evaluation of the current Newsletter in terms of the submission of suitable articles, the irregular date of publication, the workload that it places on the Editor (a position held voluntarily).

Comments that the full-time Editor of the Journal of the Australasian Mining History struggled with contributions were noted, and the general consensus around the table was that the publication should maintain its current status. It was pointed out at the meeting that the name is confusing (considering that this regularly emailed Bulletin could more appropriately be referred to as a 'newsletter', and that 'Bulletin' might have been a more appropriate term for the ESHG Newsletter). Therefore it was suggested that the new committee might continue to investigate a simple change of name from Newsletter to a more suitable term. The committee is therefore open to suggestions for a suitable name.

### **AESC**

A special session on Geological Heritage, Geotourism and Earth Sciences History was conducted at the AESC organised by Angus Robinson. The sessions were well attended and provided a range of presentations on these closely related topics. In addition, a Panel Session chaired by Angus Robinson discussed 'Geotourism - The Potential for Employment Opportunities for Geoscientists'. The Geotourism Subcommittee has suggested that some of these papers may be suitable for inclusion in a future issue of the ESHG Newsletter.

At the medal presentation evening at the AESC, the Tom Vallance medal was awarded *in absentia* to David Oldroyd, Honorary Professor, University of New South Wales, for his outstanding contributions over many years to the evolution of geological ideas.

## INHIGEO Annual Conference

The most recent activity of INHIGEO has been its annual conference, held 6-10 July in the Asilomar Conference Grounds near Monterey, California under the present president of INHIGEO, Ken Taylor from Oklahoma. Quite a few Australians attended: Carol Bacon, Greg Clota, Wolf Mayer, David Branagan and Barry Cooper. It was very successful with more than 80 registrants. There were seven sessions of papers, each dedicated to an Honorary Senior Member of INHIGEO. Session six was dedicated to our own David Oldroyd.

Thanks go to Carol Bacon and David Branagan for providing these comments. The meeting was well-organised, with a good spread of members and visitors from most parts of the globe, and the standard of presentation was very high. Attendees enjoyed a mid-conference excursion to nearby Point Lobos, where the spectacular coastal scenery was underpinned by some interesting geology. Excursionists could examine firsthand the porphyritic granodiorite of Monterey overlain by an ancient deposit of gravel, sand and mud. Huge orthoclase feldspars glittered in the granodiorite, while at the base of steep coves outcrops of conglomerates stood witness to the torrents of mud, sand and gravel that one swept through the quiet depths of an ancient submarine canyon. A museum in an old whaler's cottage on top of the point housed an interesting array of historical paraphernalia, including a lump of coal from a deposit which was once mined nearby.

A week long excursion through the Sierra Nevada was held after the conference for 31 attendees, who were whisked off to view the amazing glacial scenery of the Yosemite region with explanations of the multiple phases of glaciation. Standing in a meadow looking up at the face of El Capitan is a sight to be remembered. The combination of bare rocky faces, meadows and forest was most intriguing—the meadows form where the groundwater table is too high for a forest to flourish. While hordes of holiday makers splashed around in the Merced River that ran through the park, water users elsewhere were far from care free. A huge network of irrigation canals was built to take water from northern California and deliver it further south. Now there is not enough water to go around, especially as people want to grow rice and other water hungry crops, so there is real concern as to the future use and allocation of water.

There was plenty of geology to see and lively discussions were had on the bus. There was no boozing though—no beers at lunch for the Australians or anyone else as we visited some quite high countryside, up to 4300m at White Mountains, high enough for symptoms of altitude sickness to appear. We were all advised to drink lots of water! It was noticeably hard to breathe at the top of Mammoth Mountain. We were conveyed there by ski lift—just as well or I doubt many would have climbed to the top for the wonderful view. In summer the ski trails are used by cyclists who take their bicycles in the gondolas.



The famous Californian gold rushes of 1848-1870 also played havoc with the Sacramento and San Joaquin river systems as the favoured method of mining was hydraulic sluicing. Huge quantities of sand and gravel were washed downstream, choking channels, spewing out over farmland and causing flooding; it is no wonder that controls were introduced in 1870. At Grass Valley some of the buildings that were standing at the time of the gold rushes have been given a new lease of life as a shop or a house, albeit with a plaque describing its former use. One such building is the home of the famous courtesan, Lola Montez, once consort of King Ludwig 1 of Bavaria who ended her days on the goldfields.

Next Year, INHIGEO will convene at the China University of Geosciences Beijing, China. Barry encourages any ESHG member to attend, and he has supplied a copy of the First Circular which includes an Expression of Interest Form, which will be forwarded with this Bulletin. It is not yet on the INHIGEO website.

The general conference theme will be “Geology and the development of economy and society”. The symposia topics include:

1. History of mineral enterprises
2. Biographies of geologists
3. Conservation of geological relics
4. General contribution to the history of geology

The associated field trips will be as follows:

Mid-meeting excursions (1 day)

- Shouyun National Mine Park, northeastern Beijing.
- Peking Man Site Museum, southern Beijing.

Post-meeting field trip (3~4 days)

East China: Mount Tai, Temple of Confucius, and several geothermal areas and mining areas.

## **Outgoing Chairman's Report (tabled at the Business meeting, 9 July 2014)**

### ***ADMINISTRATION***

Since the last meeting in 2012 the Group continued to be administered by a Western Australian-based committee comprising Peter Dunn (Chair), Peter Downes (Vice-chair), Mike Freeman (Treasurer), Peter Muhling (Editor), John Blockley (Secretary) and Angela Riganti (Committee Member) while David Branagan and Bernie Joyce represented New South Wales and Victoria respectively. The committee met 17 times during the period. At present, the Group has 105 financial members.

Following a decision of the 2012 Business Meeting, discussions were held with members of the Queensland Division of the GSA with the aim of moving administration of the ESHG to that State in 2014. One of the purposes of this meeting is to elect a new Queensland-based committee.

### ***NEWSLETTERS***

Newsletter 43 was distributed in May 2013. It contained expanded abstracts from the 34th International Geological Congress, details of the award of the first Tom Vallance Medal and an account of the INHIGEO excursion run by David Branagan. There were also articles on the Reverend Nicolay; Professor Tate; Professor Emile den Tex; the 25th IGC Hamersley Basin excursion; a list of recent publications by ESHG members; and results of the Group's Business Meeting held in 2012.

Newsletter 44 is at the printers and should be distributed to members in the next week or two (since distributed—ed.). It describes the background and achievements of David Oldroyd, Honorary Professor at the University of New South Wales, who is the recipient of the Tom Vallance Medal for his outstanding contributions over many years to the evolution of geological ideas. It also presents parts of an autobiography of Dr (Doc) Norm Fisher with insights into the creation of the former Bureau of Mineral Resources (now Geoscience Australia). Themes from Western Australia are prominent with articles on early mineral collections, Christmas cards as well as photos from the early years of the Geological Survey and historical snapshots of the Mt Newman iron ore and the Sons of Gwalia gold mines. In addition, David Branagan takes us on a whimsical personal tour of some vanished scientific societies. I congratulate Peter Muhling for his efforts as Editor after taking over that role from Jean Johnston.

### ***EMAIL BULLETINS***

The committee continued the practice of sending members Email Bulletins with news of current activities. In particular, they were used to apprise members of recent publications and forthcoming conferences and exhibitions relevant to the Group's activities. Twelve of these bulletins have been distributed since the previous Business Meeting, with some being also posted to members without email addresses.

### ***ESHG WEBSITE***

The new ESHG website, which was placed on-line in November 2011, continues to be updated as material becomes available. Copies of our Newsletters past are placed on the site a year or so after they are distributed to financial members, and most Email Bulletins are now available for downloading.

### ***TOM VALLANCE MEDAL***

At the Business Meeting in 2010 it was agreed that the ESHG should make a biennial award, to be named the Tom Vallance Medal, to a person who had made a significant contribution to the history of the earth sciences in Australia. The committee called for nominations for the award of the second medal in March this year and decided that it should be presented to Associate Professor, David Oldroyd. Unfortunately, David is unable to attend the convention, but the award will be made to his representative at an appropriate opportunity.

### ***CONTRIBUTIONS BY ESHG MEMBERS***

During the period under review, ESHG members have contributed many articles to TAG (*The Australian Geologist*) and a variety of other journals. A list of these publications is attached. Also, Cathy Brown, Susan White and Doug Finlayson have contributed regular columns to TAG on stratigraphic nomenclature, geoheritage matters and the Canberra "Rock Garden" respectively.

On the wider scene, Barry Cooper and Wolf Mayer continued their respective roles as Secretary-General and Editor of the International Commission on the History of the Geological Sciences (INHIGEO) while Angus Robinson remains Chair of the GSA's Subcommittee on Geotourism.

### ***FINANCES***

The Group's finances are in good order as shown by the financial statement from Treasurer Mike Freeman.

### ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

The committee thanks Sue Fletcher and staff at Head Office for their assistance in adding new material to our Website. We also thank the Executive Director, Geological Survey of Western Australia, for making facilities available for committee meetings and assistance in producing our Newsletters.

### ***CONCLUSION***

I believe that the present committee has run the Group successfully over the past six years and know that in passing responsibility for it to our Queensland colleagues, it will remain in good hands.

**PR DUNN** (Chair)

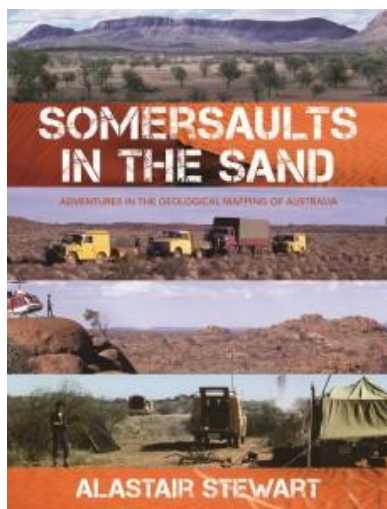
**CHAIRMAN**

**EARTH SCIENCES HISTORY GROUP**

## Publication of Interest

*Somersaults in the Sand: Adventures in the Geological Mapping of Australia* is written by Alastair Stewart and published by Halstead Press.

Alastair Stewart worked for nearly 40 years with the Bureau of Mineral Resources (now Geoscience Australia). He did 29 field seasons in the Northern Territory, Queensland, and Western Australia, and mapped just over one per cent of Australia's landmass (roughly equal to the size of Austria).



*Somersaults in the Sand* tells the story of his field career and the amusing, fascinating, and occasionally dangerous incidents that happened to him while mapping Australia's red centre.

As emphasized in ESHG Newsletter 41, the geological mapping of our entire landmass at a scale of 1:250 000 by BMR and the State geological surveys was possibly the greatest scientific program that has been attempted in Australia—work that has underpinned much of Australia's current economic prosperity through the discovery of our mineral wealth. The efforts of those involved deserve to be recognized by the wider community. Accounts such as this one of Alastair's, should help promote such a broader awareness.

The book provides fascinating insights into this significant undertaking, but reading some of the hair-raising adventures, one wonders if this initiative would ever have been as successful, and completed in the time-frame that it was, if today's emphasis on risk assessment and occupational health and safety had been in force.

The book is 152 pages long, and has 44 colour photos, six B/W locality maps, and a short appendix that explains what geologists do in the field and how they decide where to go and look.

<http://www.somersaultsinthesand.com/buythebook/>

\$29.95/book (includes postage)



## 2-DAY SYMPOSIUM – PERTH, WA

# Yilgarn Retrospective

**30th & 31st March 2015**

**8.30am to 5.30pm**

Tawarri, Esplanade, Dalkeith WA 6009

*Tawarri on the Perth foreshore is an excellent relaxing venue.  
There is ample free parking and easy access to toilets all on the same level.*

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### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This course may assist with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) compliance for many AIG Registered Professional Geoscientists (RPGeos).

### ABOUT THE EVENT

The Yilgarn Craton (Western Australia) in the second half of the 20th century witnessed a transformative period in the resources industry which included the discovery and successful exploitation of a new deposit type (komatiite-hosted nickel sulphide), a massive boom in exploration and mining of Archaean lode gold, and developments in a number of other commodities. The Yilgarn has a world-class endowment in nickel, gold, bauxite and tantalum, and significant iron ore, uranium and copper-lead-zinc-silver deposits. By 1999, twenty million tonnes of nickel were identified (Measured and Indicated Resources), and the gold inventory rose to 100 million ounces (Indicated or better Resources and Reserves). Nickel production reached 170,000 tonnes per annum and gold production was ~6.5 million ounces per annum, helping make mining Western Australia's primary industry. These commercial successes spawned research yielding new deposit models, a new appreciation of the regolith that blankets the Yilgarn and the tools to work beneath that regolith.

This two day-symposium will look at the **who, why and how** of this momentous era 1950 to 1999. The meeting will be a deliberate acknowledgement and record of the achievements of teams and individuals, some of whom are no longer with us.

**FORMAT:** All presentations will be for 25 minutes with 5 minutes for questions and discussion. The meeting will focus on reunion and the memory of events past with extended tea/coffee and lunch breaks. A dinner Monday evening in a nearby restaurant (separate account) will be arranged.

**ABSTRACT VOLUME:** All speakers are asked to submit an abstract with references where possible. (The AIG editors will allow a degree of flexibility in style so long as content is relevant.)

**CALL FOR PAPERS:** The AIG has invited a number of speakers. There remain several talking slots. If you would like to present at this meeting please forward an abstract to [training@geosymposia.com.au](mailto:training@geosymposia.com.au)