

Memorial to Geoffrey Bond

1912–1983

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Geoffrey Bond, former head of the Department of Geology and vice-principal of the University of Zimbabwe, died suddenly at his home in Harare, Zimbabwe, on 19 June 1983. A member of the Geological Society of America since 1953, Geoff was a distinguished scholar, an inspiring teacher, and a wise administrator. Most of his 66 publications dealt with two major themes—Pleistocene paleoclimates and Karoo stratigraphy and paleontology, but his writings also covered matters of economic geology, engineering geology, and gemology.

Born in Brighton, England, on 27 May 1912, Geoff spent much of his childhood and youth in Yorkshire. At the age of 18 he left school in Cumberland to face the frustrating task of job hunting in the depression years of the 1930s. He eventually found work as a school teacher in London.

His formative years among the largely limestone country of the Yorkshire dales had given him, from an early age, a love of geology and of the wide-open spaces. As a school teacher he further pursued his hobby of geology in evening classes at the nearby Chelsea Polytechnic. Friends eventually persuaded him to write the examinations for a Royal Scholarship in which, much to his astonishment, he found himself successful. Geology had suddenly become something more than a mere hobby, and thus financed, he embarked in 1937 on a 4-year B.Sc. course at the Imperial College of Science and Technology in London. World War II intervened, and from September 1940 to December 1945 he served with the Royal Air Force. He returned to Imperial College in January 1946 and, after a supreme two-term effort, graduated in July of that year with First-Class Honours.

Most of his wartime service was spent in what was then Southern Rhodesia. Geoff always maintained that his wartime posting to Africa, and that of several hundred others who accompanied him, was the result of a clerical error where "400 airscrews" became "400 aircrew." This posting changed the whole course of his life; it instilled in him a love of the bush and a determination to return to Southern Rhodesia after the war. So, in September 1946, he arrived in Bulawayo to take up the post of Keeper of Geology at the National Museum.

Though paleontology was still his prime interest, Geoff, with the late H. H. Read as one of his professors, was a good all-around geologist and therefore was able to cope competently and efficiently with the numerous and diverse tasks that confronted him. He soon became immersed in his new job.

For the next 14 years, save for 1 (June 1948–June 1949) when he returned to England to start a department of geology at Hull University College, he remained as Keeper of Geology in Bulawayo. This was a period of great excitement for him, and one during which he built up a sound knowledge of the geology of his adopted country from

first-hand experience. He traveled far and wide, but his interest gradually focused mainly on the Zambezi Valley which he grew to love. His Ph.D. in 1949 embraced the geology, climates, and cultures of the Pleistocene period in Matabeleland. This was followed by a second thesis for the Diploma of Membership of Imperial College, in 1953, on the Karoo System of the Zambezi basin.

Numerous scientific papers flowed from his pen, and he soon became an accepted authority, inside and outside Zimbabwe, on the Karoo System of the country. Also, from his day to day dealings with prospectors and mining companies, an integral part of his museum advisory work, he soon acquired a sound knowledge of the country's mineral wealth.

By 1960, therefore, when plans were laid for a department of geology at the recently established University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Geoffrey Bond was the obvious man to start it off. As a lifetime enthusiast of that uniquely English pastime called cricket, the idea of "opening bat" held no qualms for him, and on 1 November 1960 he was appointed as the inaugural Professor and Head of the Department of Geology. On the same day he married Marina Levitzky from Bulawayo achieving, as he put it, a unique double.

Within a short time his leadership and guidance built up a small but enthusiastic and happy department that over the years successfully produced not specialists but thinking men sufficiently well versed in all branches of their science to face with confidence any aspect of the local geological and mining scene. On the research side, the department produced results that have gained international recognition.

In July 1974 Geoff combined the headship with that of part-time vice-principal of the university, and in 1977 retired as professor of geology to become full-time vice-principal and deputy vice-chancellor. From June 1981 until his final retirement in June 1982 he served as vice-principal.

The later years of his service with the university were at a time of major political upheaval, and his duties required him to tread a very narrow and difficult path. Geoff as a modest man would never have claimed that he was more than one of a team, but his role was critical and his tact, diplomacy, and fair-mindedness were of infinite value to the university. In recognition of immense contribution to the development and progress of the university, the title of Professor Emeritus was conferred on him on his retirement.

Geoff's activities, however, extended well beyond the university confines. He gave long and distinguished service on the country's Natural Resources Board and at the time of his death was vice chairman. He was a member of the Board of National Museums and Monuments for 20 years, 13 of them as its chairman under three vastly different political regimes. In the mining field his advice was sought by many, and he was actively involved as a director of Rio Tinto Mining Zimbabwe Limited. A radio ham for many years, Geoff also had a keen interest in broadcasting, and his popular weekly programs brought science into many homes. He played an important part in the establishment of the Southern Rhodesian Branch of the Geological Society of South Africa, which in 1981 became the Geological Society of Zimbabwe. For many years he served on the Council of the Geological Society of South Africa and was elected its president; in 1983, only three months before his death, he was presented with the Society's highest award, the Draper Memorial Medal. Earlier in his career (1958) he had received the coveted Murchison Fund from the Geological Society of London. In a more national vein, in 1971, he was one of the first recipients of the Order of the Legion of Merit (OLM) for services to Rhodesia.

On his retirement as vice-principal in 1982, Geoff was appointed Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Geology. The return "home" of their friend and mentor was

welcomed by all. The return was real, and within a very short time he was once again back to active research in his beloved Zambezi Valley.

Geoff Bond led an active and full life and was a man of many parts who distinguished himself in many fields. Perhaps above all he was a kindly man who was concerned about others and was always ready to ease a tense situation with an amusing anecdote.

He is survived by his wife, Marina, who supported him so strongly in all that he undertook; his son, Ivan; and his daughter, Nina.

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