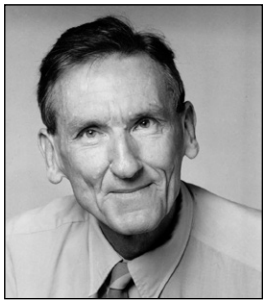
Memorial to John James Veevers 1930–2018

MALCOLM WALTER



John James Veevers was born in Sydney, Australia, on 13 October 1930 and died 12 August 2018, in Eastwood, New South Wales, Australia. After attending Newington College, he won a scholarship to Sydney University, where he majored in geology and agricultural chemistry, graduating with first class honors in 1951. While at university, he was awarded a cadetship by the Bureau of Mineral Resources (BMR, now Geoscience Australia). That led in one summer vacation to a job assisting Bureau geologists mapping the area of the forthcoming Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme. For his honors year he mapped an area between Queanbeyan and Captains Flat.

John joined the BMR in 1952, and his first job was prospecting for coal in the Hunter Valley. That experience was repeated in the early 1960s when he mapped the western flank of the Bowen Basin in Queensland. This formed the basis for an M.Sc. from Sydney University.

Following a fire in the BMR's Canberra offices in 1953, John was sent to the Kimberleys to re-collect fossils from the Fitzroy River area. He then took leave, and with those fossils and without pay he undertook a study of Devonian brachiopods at Imperial College in London and was awarded a Ph.D. in 1956. In 1957, he led the BMR Canning Basin party to the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia. During a helicopter survey, he discovered a meteorite impact crater that later was named after him. He and Allen Wells produced a BMR *Bulletin* on the geology of the Canning Basin, published in 1960.

During his work on the Canning Basin, John compiled a chart of what could be surmised about the offshore extension of the basin. That led to participation in Indian Ocean and Timor Sea cruises and the beginning of a strong interest in marine geology. He was awarded a Harkness Fellowship to work at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California where he heard Bob Dietz's announcement of the recognition of seafloor spreading. Back in Australia he spent field seasons in 1963 and 1965 in the Bonaparte Gulf Basin.

In 1968, John joined the newly formed Macquarie University as a senior lecturer. He stayed there until his retirement in 1998, having been promoted to full professor, in a personal chair, in 1991. He spent some time as a consultant to Esso Australia. In addition to his teaching he spent much of his time researching the rapidly developing theory of plate tectonics. In 1971, he visited the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory in New York State to learn about seafloor magnetic anomalies and to gather seismic information about drilling sites in the Indian Ocean.

In 1972, John participated in two Deep Sea Drilling Project cruises to the Indian Ocean, one as co-chief scientist. This was followed by other cruises in 1976, 1981, and 1984, all of which led to numerous publications on the geology of the oceans surrounding Australia. A grand synthesis followed in 1984, edited and partly written by John: *Phanerozoic Earth History of Australia*.

This obituary is slightly modified (and appended with a bibliography) from the original version by Malcolm Walter, published in *The Australian Geologist*, December 2018, by the Geological Society of Australia, and is posted with permission. Image credit: Macquarie University, courtesy of the Veevers family.

In collaboration with Chris Powell and others, numerous papers followed on the geology of the supercontinent Gondwanaland and on tectonic supercycles, culminating in 2000 in yet another grand synthesis: *Billion-Year Earth History of Australia and Neighbours in Gondwanaland*. This included a new interest in Proterozoic geology fostered by myself and a group of excellent research students.

Throughout his time at Macquarie University, with his colleagues John taught undergraduate courses in Australian and world stratigraphy and lithospheric environments. Each year he ran student field trips to coastal exposures of the southern Sydney Basin. For many years, he ran the departmental Friday seminar series.

In 1992, John received a Special Investigator Award from the Australian Research Council and in the same year won the S.W. Carey Medal of the Geological Society. In 1995, John's outstanding contribution to science was honoured by election to the Fellowship of the Australian Academy of Science. He thought of himself as a "general practitioner" but he researched thoroughly, read voraciously and always kept in mind the big picture. He was a pioneer of plate tectonic theory. Throughout his career John was characterized by his focus and discipline.

Although John "retired" in 1998 (and was made emeritus professor), for the following 20 years he kept regular office hours (at home) and continued his research and publishing. His final paper was published in 2018 on the Antarctic subglacial Gamburtsev Mountains and East Gondwanaland.

John was a devoted, brilliant, and very productive scientist, but he had other interests as well, particularly classical music, art, films, and rugby. He was also a devoted family man, his wife Erica accompanying him on much of his field work. Shortly after their marriage in June 1953, on John's first collecting trip to the Kimberleys, Erica joined the small party. Later, in the Bowen Basin (1960, 1961) and again in the Bonaparte Basin (1963, 1965), she joined the parties with their very young children. Later still in the 1990s, they made geological visits to all the Pangean continents, with the exception of Antarctica.

John is survived by his wife Erica and his children Tom, Kirstina, and Elisabeth, and he is fondly remembered by his seven grandchildren.

Malcolm Walters was helped by notes compiled by John Veevers and the assistance of his family and Dr Richard Flood.

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