

Dave Blake

1937 — 2014



Some recollections and tribute from Geoff Derrick

16th June 2014

Some memories of Dave Blake

Dave's passing has been a great shock to us, and we extend to Robin and her family our condolences and our deepest sympathy for their loss.

I joined BMR in 1964, and at that time Dave had been busy sorting out the physically challenging geology of Bougainville and I had been consigned to assist with mapping of the Kimberley. During this time the scene was one of young geologists learning their craft and being mentored by the old hands, lubricated by a regular social feature of Canberra life, the 'Quarry Party'.

It was not until the BMR became involved in the Mt Isa district in 1969-1975 that our geological and personal lives crossed significantly, when Dave took on the task of researching the Duchess area from 1975, to add to the earlier work we had undertaken on adjoining areas from Cloncurry to Mt Isa 1969-75.

It was during this period that I learnt a little more of Dave the accomplished geologist who was always seeking for the geological truth, nearly always working from first principles from whence a picture emerged—a view of the geology which was field-based and all the better for that. Dave never settled for and was not interested in the status quo, and if his geology took him to some place few others had ventured previously, then so be it. It was a case of letting the intellectual challenges begin !!

Our debates over time were stimulating and challenging, and no one could be intellectual lazy when talking geology with Dave. Favoured concepts and long-held theories were always there to be debated, in many cases along the path of the devil's advocate, and the process of pro and con and give and take at times resembled a court of (geological) law. The only winner was to be the science of geology pursued with passion and skill, with some satisfying compromise generally being the outcome of all this cross-examination and deliberation. All those BMR geologists who participated in INAG, the Inspection Tour of North Australia in 1977, would appreciate that any supposedly 'settled' geological story is really only there to be re-examined with gusto as new eyes were brought to bear on all parts of the geological mantra.

It was only after my leaving BMR in 1980 that one fully realised and appreciated Dave's prodigious work ethic as sole or senior author, and his capacity to grab a project and shake it around a little.

He helped produce in some astonishingly short timeframe the major published works for which the BMR was highly regarded—the Bulletin series, including 219 in 1984, the Geology of the Duchess region, 225 in 1987, the Geology of the Mt Isa Inlier, and 226 in 1987, the Geology of the Davenport province, are cases in point, and arguably reflect a ‘golden age’ of BMR output. Dave also worked in concert with the Geological Survey of WA around 1992, and he was co-compiler and editor with Dean Hoatson of the seminal and multidisciplinary AGSO Bulletin 246 describing the geology and economic potential of the East Kimberley mafic and ultramafic intrusions, published in 2000.

With some hindsight, however, the work by Dave and Yanis Miezitis on Bougainville may better reflect Dave’s capacity and ability to produce a professional and skilled synthesis of field geology in a region of challenging logistics, geography and geology. From only a 3 month period of field work April to July 1965, there followed publication of Bulletin 93 in 1967, producing a coherent geological picture of the entire island of Bougainville, complete with an informative and highly useful colour map of the island which any real geologist would likely regard as a major highlight and accomplishment of such a short field season. This map was at 1:250,000 scale, and was compiled by Yanis Miezitis and drawn by Max Nancarrow, one of the many able and talented members of the BMR Drafting section which produced all of our Kimberley geological maps at about the same time.

It is only from some small personal involvement that I know Dave spent some time on secondment to the Geological Survey of Canada in 1976, expanding his own experiences and assisting the GSC with a degree of cross-fertilization of geological ideas. It may be that we received a reciprocal visit from Don Sangster, sedex Pb-Zn expert, in 1977 as part of the Dave Blake exchange. The personal matters arise from the fact that Dave asked us to look after his white Fiat 124 Station Wagon while he and his family were away in Canada, and with the car came the dog—a beautiful Lassie-type male collie by the name of ‘Kenda’, who became a close friend of our own male retriever “Nelson”. Kenda was a beautiful and stylish dog, but he had a prodigious bladder capacity, prompting many a neighbour in Torrens, ACT, to seek compensation for limp and dying newly planted street trees.

In my experience Dave was a shy man who did not seek publicity; nor did he offer himself often as a photographic subject, so in the pictures which follow Dave is just a part of the geological crowd—except for the BMR reunion of 2006, for which Helen and I retain much fondness and regard for all of our dear friends. We will miss David’s presence amongst us, his long friendship and his gentle but matter-of-fact personality and his care and sensitivity to all.

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Dave Blake—just a face in the geological crowd

Some images from the INAG tour of Northern Australian Geology in June 1977



On a Georgetown outcrop, June 1977, INAG tour; Dave is at the far left, dressed in khaki and armed with gaiters, hammer and camera ; others include Ian Crick (centre), the well-dressed Stuart Needham, the pensive Bob Bultitude (top right) and John Bain (right foreground) overcoming mild nausea.



At Nabarlek, June 1977, INAG tour; Dave is at the far right, still in his khaki and still with camera. The shirtless wonders include Rod Page (grey hat top left) and Ian Withnall (GSQ, centre). Ian Wilson (GSQ) is holding the Geiger counter.

Dave Blake—just a face in the geological crowd

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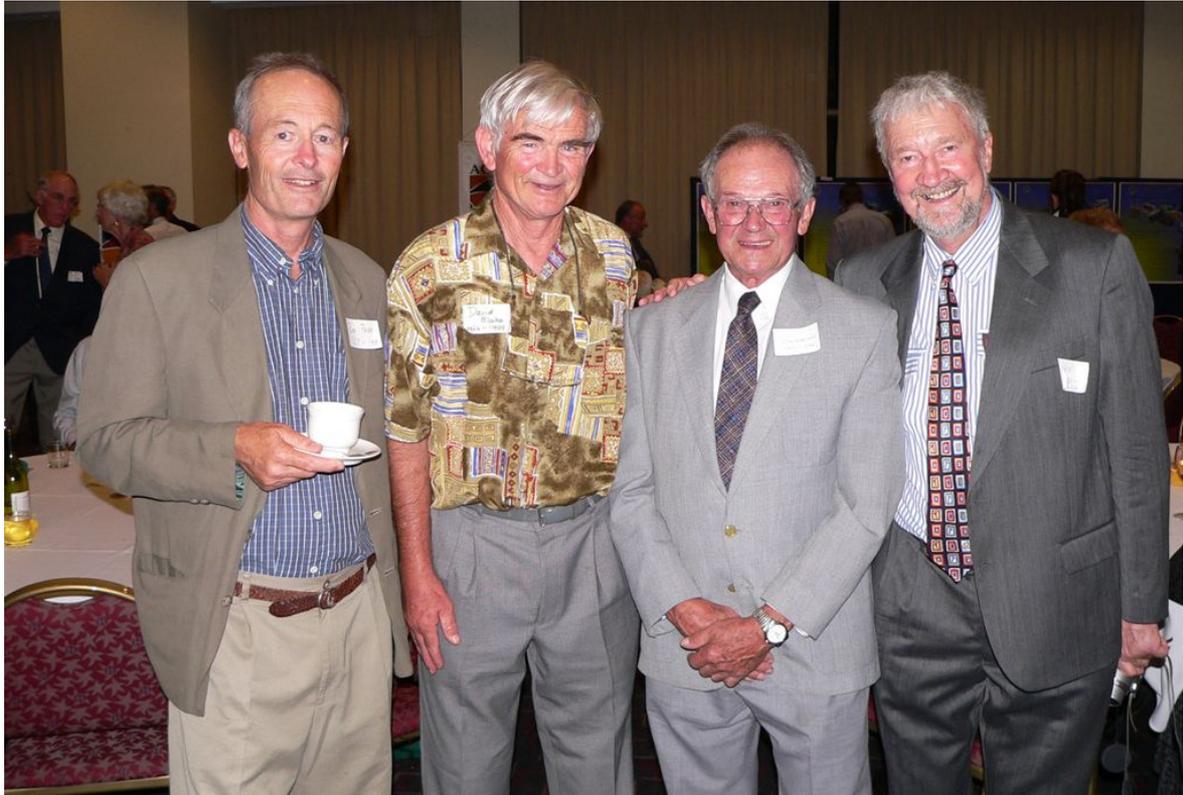


INAG tour, 1977: Dave in Pine Creek area, preparing a billy for a lunchtime cup of tea, still wearing his khaki geo-uniform and gaiters.



In the Arunta, June 1977, INAG tour; Bob Tingey, a good friend of Dave, demonstrating his electric toothbrush to the overnight campsite, with ?Ian Withnall (GSQ) taking notes by the fire.

Dave and Robin Blake and friends — BMR reunion, March 2006



BMR Reunion, March 2006—Rod Page, Dave Blake, Ken Walker and Don Perkin



BMR reunion. March 2006: Robin Blake with Evelyn and David Gellatly

The Blake's Fiat and canine connection, 1976



The Derricks minded the Blake's Fiat station wagon, which looked a bit like this 1966 Fiat 124 model



Nelson Derrick and Kenda Blake, at Torrens, 1976:

Kenda is being groomed, while being doted upon by the young Derrick boys Matthew (left) and Alex (right). As an aside, these boys are now 47 and 43 years old respectively.

