

DAVE SUPPEL

1943–2011



Dave Suppel passed away on 11 March this year after a three year battle with cancer. Many in the minerals industry would have known Dave as the long-time Principal Geologist Metallic Minerals in the Geological Survey of New South Wales. To encounter a Dave Suppel in a career is to have had an experience one should value for a lifetime. Quality individuals such as Dave are unfortunately rarer than we would like to think. Accordingly, Dave Suppel's death is not only a loss to our professional cadre but also a loss to that small cohort of good men.

Dave entered Geology in much the same way many of us did, more by accident than design. After completing his Leaving Certificate at Marist Brothers Parramatta in 1960 he embarked on what he thought would be a career in industrial chemistry and commenced a science degree in 1961. Geology, of course, lay lurking in the shadows. Dave was majoring in both chemistry and geology at Sydney University and it was geology's gain that he was offered a New South Wales Mines Department traineeship at the end of his third year at university. The traineeship scheme often involved the selection of the best and the brightest at school and university to be supported in full time university study in geology to eventually join the Geological Survey of New South Wales. This scheme fundamentally benefited both government and ultimately industry geoscience for many former trainees subsequently became prominent in the minerals industry.

After completing an Honours thesis in 1963 entitled "Geology of the Orange Lower Lewis Ponds district" Dave started in the Geological Survey in January 1964. His initial exposure was to coal geology and the then regional coal resource drilling program in the Sydney Basin. Over much of the 1960s however Dave worked in the Metallics Section, more particularly in the Ferrous and Allied group. During this time he worked with many illustrious geologists on assessments and mapping of

many of the smaller prospector operations around the State. Young geologists at this time in the Geological Survey cut their teeth on mapping underground mine workings and their geology. This was very much a part of the way the Mines Department in those days supported the prospecting industry. Although tin was a major focus, Dave worked on numerous mineral deposits in the New England including Torrington, Attunga, Mulla Creek, Trough Gully, Tomalla, and Cells Creek. It was during period that much of the detailed data on small prospects were collected; data that provided the information base for the NSW metallogenic mapping program in the 1970s and 1980s. Dave loved underground mapping, the darker and smaller the drive the better. Not good for claustrophobia, but Dave was like a pig in mud!

In 1968, the new Director of the Geological Survey Cliff McElroy established a number of specialist units in the Survey. One of these was to focus on geochemistry. Dave took over the role of Senior Geochemist and through to 1970 conducted numerous exploration and environmental geochemical surveys across the State including at Tottenham, Collisons, Boona, and Bobs Well. A feature of the geochemical studies at the time was work on the granite-related antimony-gold-silver-molybdenum mineralisation associated with the Triassic coastal granitoids on the mid north coast of NSW.

Strangely, working in government often involved confronting mindless bureaucracy. A case in point was when Dave was running the Geochemistry group in the early 1970s. They needed a mobile laboratory to have on site during the many surveys across the state. Clearly a powerful van was needed to carry the equipment of a small laboratory. Despite protests the Government Motor Garage in its infinite wisdom decided that a Ford Commer Van would do the trick. Usual story, yes the government saved money but unfortunately the van was very underpowered and fully loaded had difficulty getting over the Blue Mountains. Surprisingly it didn't get used much as you would appreciate most of the geochemical survey opportunities lay west of the Blue Mountains.

In 1970, Dave was appointed Principal Geologist Metallics and, as he would tell you, he was the youngest ever geologist to be appointed to the position of Principal Geologist in the Survey. He went on to supervise the metallogenic mapping program and he also conducted a number of large studies including that of the stratiform copper mineralisation in the Girilambone Group at the old Tottenham mining field (an abiding love). He led major studies in western NSW including work on the mineral fields at Cobar, Nymagee, Mt Hope and Shuttleton. He subsequently completed an MSc on the mineral deposits of the Cobar region.

Dave had a keen interest in metallogenesis, particularly that of the Lachlan Fold Belt, and in the 1980s published extensively on this subject. His work has provided an essential framework for subsequent resource and land use studies of this region of NSW, which is so critical to the State's mineral wealth. During this time, he made important contributions to the understanding of platinum mineralisation in NSW through his work at Fifield.

In 1988, following the election of the Greiner Government, Dave took over an innovative program known as the Mineral Resources Audit. A statewide audit of the State's natural resources was a key focus of the government. The program set in train innovations that have benefitted the Geological Survey ever since. He worked closely with Peter Lewis, Rob Barnes and the late Adelmo Agostini. He led the development of GIS and mineral potential analysis capability in the Geological Survey. Dave was an innovator and it was he who led the establishment of digital capabilities that then allowed Discovery 2000 (the 1994-2000 mineral exploration initiative) to take GSNSW to the position then as arguably the premier geological survey in Australia.

With the change in government in the mid 1990s Dave led the Department's involvement with the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) and the associated Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA) processes. This required him to deal extensively with other agencies including National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests, Planning NSW, etc. He earned respect across government as a true professional. His involvement in the strategic land use assessment process earned the then NSW Department of Mineral Resources and the Geological Survey a credibility that couldn't be bought. Dave and his colleagues in the Survey did outstanding work in a difficult and vexatious environment.

In 2001, Dave returned to his first love, metalliferous geology. He further expanded collaboration with CSIRO in lead-isotope work particularly which allowed him to provide invaluable insights to others on metallogenesis, resource analysis and land use planning. Dave gave 40 years of his life to public service in the Geological Survey and for much of this time he loved what he did. He would often say that he felt he should be paying the government for what he did, not them paying him. He eventually retired in 2003 after a proud and illustrious career. He did well!

Dave enjoyed a beer as many geologists did and still do! He also enjoyed the delights of remote country pubs in western NSW such as the Rabbit Trap Hotel at Albert and the Metropolitan Hotel at Nymagee. He has been a great friend and mentor for many over 40 years – he taught many about such things as spicy food, words and bad beer! He was a particular fan of hot curries and introduced many of his colleagues to the painful delights of the Malaya restaurant in Haymarket, then next to the Crystal Palace Hotel, where in 1970 you could get a beef curry for 85c or a hot beef sambol for \$1.10. This of course followed the obligatory visit to the Dunbarton Castle Hotel in Kent St.

Dave, first and foremost, was a loving husband and father. He was also a mentor and role model to many in his profession. His unassuming charm caused many to warm to him instantly and to have known Dave is to be richer for that experience. He had a well developed social conscience and he valued public service. He saw working for government as a noble calling. He was not so much personally ambitious, but he was ambitious for his science. He was a clear thinker and a skilful writer. Dave had a fundamental honesty and would, if prodded, provide an insightful assessment based on his values of integrity and decency. He fostered many a geologist's interest in ore deposit geology, but also taught them to write, speechify, and love language! His humanity infected us all.

Dave leaves his wife Mary, son James, daughter Kate, son-in-law Brad, and sister Di. His friends and colleagues share their grief and are honoured to have known David Walter Suppel.

Lindsay Gilligan

