

SMEDG Life Member Medal to Mike Smith
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SMEDG GOLDEN JUBILEE DINNER

For meritorious service to the mineral exploration community, SMEDG would like to award the SMEDG Life Member Medal to Mike Smith.

The works of Mike Smith are ubiquitous in the Exploration and Geophysics fields in Australia. Mike's career has been in all aspects of exploration and geophysics. It spans the academic, government, industry, contracting, corporate and professional society fields. Mike's tireless career and volunteer efforts have often been out of general sight but always working for the betterment of the exploration community.

Mike was supported through a degree in Geology and Geophysics by a cadetship from the Bureau of Mineral Resources (Geoscience Australia). In 1968, having obtained First Class Honours from Sydney University he had clearly had made a lasting impression since, after two years with the BMR, he was enticed back to the University by Don Emerson to take up a position as Assistant Lecturer. He intended to combine this work with study towards a PhD but the late 1960's were a turbulent time in exploration as money poured into the industry courtesy of the "Nickel Boom".

Unable to resist the lure of the bright lights of the minerals industry, Mike left the serenity of academia and took a position with Esso Australia. Esso had a large program of exploration in Australia using the then relatively new "INPUT" airborne electromagnetic survey system and he followed it relentlessly around the country, circumnavigating the country at least three times in the process. He was also involved in helicopter-borne radiometric surveys and follow-up gamma ray logging.

Exxon Corp, Esso's parent had a research program in the use of CSAMT. The chief geophysicist had done a PhD on the method and the company considered it had a competitive advantage in its use. Mike was commissioned to evaluate its use in Australia but quickly determined that the deep weathering conditions here were probably not appropriate for the method, particularly when faced with competition from SIROTEM and other EM systems that were being developed at that time. However, the knowledge he obtained in this process proved useful several years later where he successfully applied the technique in less weathered environments, most notably in Japan and New Zealand.

Mike became Chief Geophysicist for Esso Australia. Work in the Exxon corporation led to him becoming the proud father of a multinational family. A daughter was born in Canada on a six months assignment to North America. His first son was born on return to Sydney and when Mike was transferred to the New York office, an American son appeared. A two year stint based in Spain failed to diversify the family further but resulted in extensive work experience doing geophysics in Spain, Germany and Scotland.

At the peak of his career and the grand old age of 40, Mike accepted a job in Perth as Esso's Exploration Manager for Western Australia. It proved to be short lived as the craze among oil industry moguls of pulling out of mineral exploration spread to Exxon and they closed all the exploration offices down. Mike returned to Sydney with his family.

He then joined a small listed exploration company Austpac Resources, exploring for epithermal gold in New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and Japan. His previous experience with the CSAMT method became valuable as it proved more useful in these places than it had in Australia. As the Japanese exchange rate made it too expensive to explore there, Mike spent some time working on projects in Bolivia and in Amazonian rivers searching for alluvial gold.

His employer, Austpac, was involved in researching ERMS, a method for processing heavy mineral sands. Some of this involved Mike in evaluation of deposits suitable for this process, but when this research started consuming a larger part of the budget at the expense of mineral exploration, Mike started working two jobs, in parallel. His work for Austpac was done concurrently with employment as Marketing Manager for Geoinstruments with Roger Henderson, contracting helicopter-borne magnetic and electromagnetic surveys in Australia and the Pacific. The highlight of this was the completion of an AUSAID project to provide magnetic maps of Fiji.

This amazing career was interleaved with Mike's family and volunteering work. As a father Mike was involved with his children's school education, including stints on the P&C association and on the School Council. He also indulged his love of baseball, playing the game and coaching his children's team. Later he moved up to umpiring baseball the point where he progressed to umpiring first and second grade competitions. Somewhere in there there was also the occasional game of golf.

As impressive as Mike Smith's career has been, he may be best known for his volunteer work for professional and learned societies in the exploration and geophysical fields. Starting at the top, Mike has been President of the AIG (Australian Institute of Geoscientists) for three years, President of the ASEG (Australian Society of Exploration Geophysicists), Chairman of the AGC (Australian Geoscience Council), Director of the Steering Committee of the NRG (National Rock Garden), NSW representative on the governing Council of GSA (Geological Society of Australia). He co-designed the AIG's Registered Geoscientist scheme and served as Chairman of the Registration Board for 18 years. He served as geoscience representative to STS (Science and Technology Australia - formerly FASTS) and was Treasurer.

He has also served on organising committees for numerous conferences and symposia both in the geophysics and also the wider exploration and geoscience fields.

Mike has been awarded the
ASEG Service Medal
ASEG Lindsay Ingall Memorial Award
ASEG Honorary Membership

His University connections include
Member of advisory committee at UNSW BEES and UTS Geology.
Organiser of student career nights at MU, SU and UNSW

He is currently
Deputy Chair of the National Rock Garden Trust
Chairman of AIG Awards Committee
Chairman ASEG History sub-committee for Electrical and EM exploration milestones.
Advisor to various GSA and ASEG branch committees.

Mike's biggest career regret is never attaining the PhD he enrolled for at the start of his career. Had he continued with this, academia would have been graced with an energetic, innovative and talented worker. But academia's gain may have been industry's loss so we should be thankful. With Mike's energy, perhaps there is still time.

We can only be amazed at the breadth of Mike Smith's career and thankful for his tireless efforts in working for the betterment of geophysics and the wider exploration industry.

It is with great pleasure that, on behalf of the SMEDG committee, I award Mike the SMEDG Life Member Medal.