

Dr Ray Merchant – Obituary

Ray Merchant passed away 30 October 2024 in his native New Zealand amongst his family and friends, detailed in a New Zealand Herald obituary. He will also be remembered with great affection by the many Pacific Rim geologists who sought Ray's help to understand epithermal gold mineralisation. Ray was part of an impressive cohort of geologists that graduated from Auckland University in the 1970's and entered the mineral exploration industry. He was the life of the Geology Department and at that time developed his reputation for entertaining us with his unique wit, generally when least expected, and which always features fondly in any discussion of Ray.



Ray examines a specimen of glauconite at a farm at Gisborne, New Zealand in 2011. Photo courtesy of Stuff Limited Newsletter, New Zealand (www.stuff.co.nz).

Ray's career in epithermal geology began with a 1978 PhD on Metallogenesis in the Thames - Tapu area, Coromandel Peninsula, NZ, where in addition to the Thames goldfield, he was also exposed to the Ohio Creek porphyry Cu-Au and Lookout Rocks advanced argillic alteration. He continued exploration of the Ohio Creek Porphyry for Amoco Minerals with many of the team from university. Curiously, Ray was colour-blind, so he did not actually carry out petrology, but was adept at synthesising petrological and other data, often for presentation as exploration geology models.

At the start of the 1980's gold exploration boom Ray managed a Minerals Division for KRTA, which was already engaged in the provision of consulting services to the Energy

Sector on New Zealand and the Philippines geothermal systems. There, working with university colleague [Terry Leach](#), Ray applied geothermal science to Pacific Rim epithermal gold mineral exploration using a foundation of petrology, as he continued to mix with a wider exploration community. Ray played a role in the early exploration of many projects, such as Lihir Island, PNG in 1984. From 1985 Ray and Terry continued their work as Charter Mineral Services (CMS) where they also trained younger petrologists. Here, Ray “got the reports out” that remain a first go-to in reviews of any Pacific rim exploration project of that era. In 1987 Ray and Terry were part of the Austpac Gold team who were the first foreigners to explore for epithermal Au in Japan, while Ray also managed New Zealand exploration for Austpac Gold. From the early 1990’s, Ray continued as Terry’s right-hand-man, and assisted Terry and myself in the application of a new body of geological models to mineral exploration and the presentation of training short courses, while CMS morphed into Terry Leach and Co in 1995.

After the passing of Terry Leach in 2007 Ray focused upon his passion for applications of zeolite and clay minerals, which he had previously begun to commercialise as products ranging from foot powders to his PAWS pet litter. Many explorationists were delighted to meet up with Ray when he spoke at the [2008 AIG-SMEDG](#) Symposium in honour of Terry Leach. Ray was a talented mineralogist with a valuable geological knowledge who quietly contributed to many exploration projects and technical studies. He will be remembered by the geoscience community with great affection and respect.

Greg Corbett and others
12 November 2024

Also: [New Zealand Herald](#)