*American Mineralogist, Volume 91, pages 973–974, 2006*

# Presentation of the Distinguished Public Service Medal of the Mineralogical Society of America for 2005 to Robin Brett

**PETER J. WYLLIE**

Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California 91125, U.S.A.

Mr. President, members of the society, and guests:

It is my pleasure to present Robin Brett for the Distinguished Public Service Medal of our Mineralogical Society of America. There is a remarkably close match between his lifetime of Public Service efforts, and a section in the "Description of the Award" that specifies: "extraordinary service to national or international science societies."

This nomination is inspired by Robin's repeated and continuing excursions into national and international science with public ramifications, including NASA, NSF, AGU, IUGG, GSA, IGC, IUGS, USGS, and ICSU, where he has served us all in vigorous style. I should add that while pursuing a career with the USGS and NASA, Robin has produced a publication list that also establishes his credentials as a distinguished mineralogist and geochemist.

Robin Brett came from Australia working his way to a 1963 Ph.D. at Harvard as a Teaching Fellow in ore microscopy and mineral deposits. From 1961–1964 he was a Fellow at the Geophysical Laboratory, Washington, generating a series of articles on sulfide textural assemblages and phase equilibria in sulfide systems within Cu-Fe-Pb-S (1962–1969). In 1964 he joined the U.S. Geological Survey Branch of Astrogeology, continuing a long research career dealing with the mineralogy of meteorites, tektites, meteorite impact structures, lunar geology, the Earth's core, ore deposits, and undersea sulfide-precipitating hot springs (from *Alvin*).

Klaus Keil and Robin discovered and characterized a new mineral from the Bustee meteorite. They published a paper in the American Mineralogist with a sentence that reads: "Surprisingly, the Bustee meteorite shows no discernable cleavage." Robin doubts that this would escape the editorial PC screen of the *American Mineralogist* these days. I think that one of his proudest achievements involves minerals and mass extinctions. He was the first to suggest that heavily shocked anhydrite was a major murder weapon that helped to do in the dinosaurs.

Robin spent two tours out of his USGS office. The first was for a 5-year term as Chief of the Geochemistry branch at NASA's Johnson Space Center (1969–1974), where he supervised a team studying the rocks returned from the Moon. In addition to making policy and writing papers on the mineralogy, petrology, and geochemistry of these precious samples, he dealt extensively with the press. Lunar rocks had captured the public imagination and, via the press, Robin facilitated continuing public enthusiasm and comprehension of the science involved in this incredible engineering feat.

The second tour, after four years back with the USGS (1974–1978), was for a term as Director of the Division of Earth Sciences of the National Science Foundation and the Deep Sea Drilling Program (1978–1982). In this position, he dealt with Congressional Committees, the National Science Board, and many NAS/NRC Committees. He re-organized the Division structure and added several new Programs. I can confirm the scope and impact of his changes, having been on the NSF Earth Sciences Advisory Panel before he arrived, and on the NSF Earth Sciences Advisory Board during his tenure. I understand that he was largely responsible for a significant budget increase. Now, there's public service!

In 1984 he joined the NRC Board on Earth Sciences (1984–1987), and became involved with many national committees, and with international science. He was vice-chairman of the Board's "Report on the Future of the Geological Sciences" (1987–1988), again generating something for all of us. For 1994–1995 he joined a Canadian Committee on the same topic. He was a member of the U.S. National Committee for IUGG for 14 years (1984–1998), serving as Chairman through 1987-1991; this Committee is organized by American Geophysical Union. He joined the U.S. Geodynamics Committee (1985–1988) and became Chairman from 1991–1994. He was International Secretary for the AGU from 1992–1998, and thus served on AGU's Executive Committee. He worked with the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) through 1985–1989 as a member of the Commission on Comparative Planetology. In 1989 he served as Vice President for Scientific Programs for the Bureau of the 28th International Geological Congress (IGC) held in Washington, D.C. Here again, I have observed his effectiveness—I was IMA representative on the Program Committee and sessions proposed on "minerals" received Robin's full attention.

It was at the 1989 Washington IGC that Robin was elected Secretary-General of IUGS. He was next elected President of IUGS for the term 1996–2000, and then served as past-President for another four years. He has made many unpublished speeches on formal and informal occasions, to the public, to two heads of state and to scientists, about the role of earth sciences in our social world.

During the late 1990s, the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) undertook a major re-evaluation and restructuring. In a rare coincidence, IUGS and IUGG had American Presidents through the same time interval, and Robin worked hard with me (as President of IUGG) to make the case that it was essential for ICSU to maintain earth science representation

0003-004X/06/0506–973$05.00/DOI: 10.2138/am.2006.461

in its governance. Representatives from other sciences appeared not to appreciate the extent to which many of the ICSU Programs depended on earth sciences. I expect that this lack of understanding from colleagues (e.g., in physics and chemistry) is familiar to many of us. The outcome of this agitation was that Robin was elected to two terms on the Executive Board of the new ICSU, "The International Council for Science" (1999–2002, 2002–2005). In this position, his public service for mineralogy and geology has been directed toward international leaders in other sciences, as well as to the general public that ICSU tries to reach. He represents us all, from mineralogists to geophysicists and environmental scientists.

Finally, during recent years back at the USGS, Robin has also served as a part-time Administrative Judge for geology-related cases at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The paper work is so excessive that he ran out of floor space in his home office and has been forced to store his voluminous paper stacks in an unused bathtub—his law library.

I think that the four preceding paragraphs offer a good definition for the term "Public Service." When one considers as well Robin's earlier work with NASA and NSF, along with a string of other activities including Journal editorships, he has surely earned the 2005 award of the Distinguished Public Service Medal of the Mineralogical Society of America.