

Presentation of the Distinguished Public Service Medal for 2000 to Richard S. Fiske

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Mr. President, Officers, Councilors and Members of the Mineralogical Society of America, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a distinct honor and my great pleasure to introduce to you Richard S. Fiske, the year 2000 recipient of MSA's Public Service Medal. Why is this an honor? Well, one is seldom placed in a position to publicly praise the guy who hired you. And no, Dick is not getting the Public Service Medal for having created, back in 1984, an entirely new position for a metamorphic petrologist! It is my pleasure to be able to tell you about Dick's contributions to a broader audience's understanding of volcanoes, especially Hawaiian volcanoes.

These contributions have been made over a career as a research geologist, first at the United States Geological Survey, and now at the Smithsonian Institution, a career that has sustained two significant interruptions. Sitting before you is a veritable volcanological Lazarus, a man who has returned from a senior administrative post to a highly productive research life not once, but twice! Dick Fiske was Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History from 1980–1985, and Deputy Chief and then Chief of the Office of Geochemistry and Geophysics from 1971–1976. In both of these positions he was, as his Hawai'i volcano colleagues might say, the Big Kahuna. As Director and as Chief, Dick presided over the activities of hundreds of scientists and even larger support infrastructures. But no one, least of all a group heavily populated by research scientists, has as yet recognized science management to be Public Service.

To prepare this presentation, for this is the first time I have been asked to cite anyone, I sought the counsel of others. A very wise colleague, whose advice I almost always follow, suggested that I confine myself to one example of the kinds of contributions Dick has made to Public Service. Because I am not particularly good at taking direction, I have chosen two.

In 1986, Dick, Don Swanson, and Wendall Duffield arranged for the late, great volcano cinematographer Maurice Krafft to prepare a full-production motion picture, *Inside Hawaiian Volcanoes*. Dick engaged the narrator in his customary, take-no-prisoners fashion. As he tells it, at a Sunday brunch "deep inside the Washington beltway," he spotted none other than Roger Mudd across the room. He edged over and asked whether Mr.

Mudd would consider narrating a film about Hawaiian volcanoes. Mudd is said to have replied, in that famous, reassuring voice, "Mr. Fiske, you have no way of knowing this, but my father worked as a topographer for the Geological Survey, mapping the islands of Hawaii. So yes, I'd be delighted to narrate your film!" Score one, for Fiske. It's not so unusual to make a film, even one about volcanoes that happens to be narrated by Roger Mudd. It was Dick's sustained contributions to the film's possibilities that made both very special. What did Dick do? He arranged for the film to be made into a 24-minute video, and, with Wendall Duffield, Dick wrote a teacher's guide to accompany it. Since 1989, nearly 6000 copies of the video-plus-guide have been sold, and the product is still for sale in the gift shops of the Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park.

In addition to a talent for repurposing media into different educational products of extraordinary longevity, Dick stands out as a genuine Washington media darling. His dramatic and informative photographs have been published in *Life*, *National Geographic*, *Geotimes*, and *Science News*; he boasts three cover photographs for *Science* (the magazine, that is). And, although Dick says he stopped keeping track of such things a long time ago, over the past 10 years he admits he's been on the MacNeill-Lehrer News Hour on PBS, and thrice on the Diane Rehm show on NPR. It seems to have escaped his mind that he was most recently featured on a somewhat less highbrow MSNBC special on volcanic hazards that my channel-flipping spouse pointed out to me a mere two weeks ago.

My two examples are used up. I would therefore like to make two brief observations. The first is, that nearly all of Dick's contributions to Public Service neither required nor used the infrastructure of the National Museum of Natural History: they were self-initiated projects. The second is, that Dick's contributions to Public Service were fit into the interstices of a vibrant research career, one that is continuing today with his report about the amazing submarine calderas of the Izu-Bonin arc at this meeting, and his paper about the incredible overlooked tephra deposits of Kilauea that will be presented in December at the meeting of the American Geophysical Union. With these points in mind, I present to you Richard S. Fiske, spokesman for volcanoes.