

Victoria's 15th Antarctic expedition (1970-71) returns 12:00-14:45, Thursday, 8 June, 2023 Alan MacDiarmid AM101, Kelburn Campus

It's now 52 years since VUW's 15th expedition, seven men and one woman, spent three months with tents and toboggans mapping the Beacon strata on the edge of the Polar Plateau behind the McMurdo Dry Valleys. These were exciting times for geologists in Antarctica with many areas of the mountains being visited for the first or second time. It was also of international interest as Plate Tectonics had become a serious theory only a few years before, with the relatively unexplored Antarctic Gondwana strata a topic of international interest.

This event involves four of the eight members meeting together for the first time to share views on what VUW and the Antarctic expeditions were like then, with the help of slides and videos.

It will begin with an informal lunch for introductions, and then a series of talks. A separate event built around John McPherson's book published in 1975, "Footprints on a Frozen Continent", will take place in the evening at GBLT1 at 6 pm.

PROGRAMME

To join by ZOOM [click here](#):

- 12:00** *Lunch – beginning with expedition members present introduced by Professor Rob McKay
- 13:00** Prof Barry Kohn - VUW's Geology Department in the late 1960s and Prof Clark's Antarctic expeditions
- 13:20** Prof Peter Barrett - VUWAE 15 – only the rocks were familiar: new job, new people, new part of the Antarctic.
- 13:40** Video (11 minutes) VUWAE 15 Darwin Mountains (on field life, travel and work)
- 13:55** Dr John McPherson – reflections on lessons from the Antarctic experience
- 14:15** Dr Rosemary Askin by Zoom – memories of VUWAE 15
- 14:45** ENDS

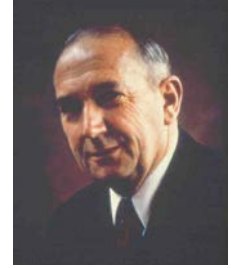


Back row L-R: Peter Barrett, David Reid, John McPherson, Alex Ritchie
Front row: Rodney Grapes, Gavin Young, Rosemary Askin. Photo: Barry Kohn

*Light refreshments at 12pm - RSVP acceptances only by Friday 2 June to Dao.Polsiri@vuw.ac.nz

Notes on VUWAE and VUWAE 15

Victoria University of Wellington Antarctic Expeditions (VUWAE) were initiated by Professor R.H. (Bob) Clark in 1957. Shortly before he had completed a PhD under geology pioneer Arthur Holmes in Edinburgh to take up the chair in Geology in 1954. Bob was Universities Representative on Government's Ross Sea Committee. This was set up for the International Geophysical Year, where the prevailing view was that Universities were there to teach. Bob persuaded them they could also contribute to research through their students.



VUWAE 1 comprised two third year Geology students Barrie McKelvey and Peter Webb, the latter being the first geologist to enter the McMurdo Dry Valleys. They worked well in a range of tasks at Scott Base and made good use of opportunities for geological reconnaissance. In short they made a good impression.

They returned to the Dry Valleys the following year with two VUW academics, explorer/physicist Colin Bull and biologist Jack Garrick, exuberantly recorded in Bull's "Innocents in the Dry Valleys". Expeditions continued annually with pioneering studies in geology, geophysics and lake chemistry, with a mix of staff and students. However, after ten years or so Bob thought it was time to appoint a staff member to take responsibility for future expeditions, and obtained permission from the University to advertise for a Post-Doctoral Fellow for this.



Peter Barrett was appointed in late 1969, having graduated from Ohio State University. His PhD thesis involved mapping Gondwana strata in the Beardmore Glacier area, and prior to that mapping similar strata with the NZ Antarctic Programme, but had no experience in these strata in the McMurdo region. In 1968/69 McKelvey and Webb returned to extend the stratigraphy of the Beacon Sandstone they had begun as Masters students by mapping south of the Dry Valleys, finding well-preserved ancient fossil fish remains.

VUWAE 15 (1970/71), to be led by Barrett, was map and measure the Beacon strata from the Allan Hills to the Darwin Mountains, with a focus on fossils, both fish and leaves, and the sills and lavas of the Jurassic basalts. Fortunately, McKelvey and Webb had included in their party a graduate student Barry Kohn., and he was extremely helpful both in planning and helping lead VUWAE 15. The whole party is listed below.

It was a productive season scientifically, in terms of the 5 km of strata measured metre by metre, the 1 ½ tonnes of rock with fish remains sent to the Australian Museum, the 10 papers, 2 PhD theses (John and Rosemary), and the contribution to Simon Cox's map of Southern Victoria Land over 30 years later.

Name	Role	Field
Peter Barrett	VUW PDF, Leader	Sedimentology, Stratigraphy
Barry Kohn	VUW PhD student, Deputy Leader	Geochemistry, Stratigraphy
Rosemary Askin	VUW PhD student	Palaeobotany
John McPherson	VUW PhD student	Sedimentology
David Reid	VUW MSc student	Petrology
Rodney Grapes	VUW PhD student	Petrology
Alex Ritchie	Australian Museum	Vertebrate Paleontology
Gavin Young	Australian Bureau of Mineral Resources	Vertebrate Paleontology
Shamus Curreen	Antarctic Division DSIR	Field assistant – 2 nd part

Since VUWAE 15, Victoria's Antarctic research activities primarily focused on geoscience research, leaving behind exploration and mapping by using drilling technology and modelling to discover more about [trends in Antarctica's past and future climate](#). The geological mapping of Antarctica has just been completed with Simon Cox's SCAR group on a [geological map of Antarctica](#), and its global release on 20 May, 2023. Of course, trends in Antarctica's past and future climate are a continuing story.

Peter Barrett 20 May 2023