

Awards and Citations

Presentation of the 2014 Paleontological Society Medal to Erle G. Kauffman

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Good evening members of the Paleontological Society, friends of paleontology, and guests. It is both a distinct honor and pleasure for me to have nominated and be the citationist for Erle Galen Kauffman as a recipient of the Paleontological Society Medal. Put simply, he is one of the most influential paleontologists of his generation. Erle was born and grew up in Washington, DC and eventually found his way to the University of Michigan where he received his Bachelor's, Master's, and culminated with his Ph.D. in 1961. From there, he started his professional career at the Smithsonian Institution, and initiated a number of very fruitful collaborations with colleagues both at that institution, most notably with Norm Sohl, and with numerous colleagues both nationally and internationally that would characterize the rest of his career. From there, he relocated to his beloved Colorado and started teaching at the CU-Boulder in 1980. In his last relocation, he moved to Indiana University in 1996 where he is currently a Professor Emeritus.

In considering the qualities that make Erle such a worthy recipient of this distinguished medal, I think it is best to look at three components: his research, his mentorship of aspiring paleontologists, and his approach to life. But I think we also have to look beyond those aspects and consider his unwavering passion for the discipline, his ability to meld paleontology with a range of other disciplines, his emphasis on using field-based observations to delve into various pressing problems in the geosciences, his unceasing willingness to share his knowledge with all, and his mode of engaging all around him. As a scientist, Erle's impact on the discipline reflects his interests in integrating paleontology into the broader spectrum of the Geosciences. This reflects the seemingly limitless range of his interests, knowledge base, and energy—an approach that started early in his academic career. During his Ph.D. research, he initially was working on the stratigraphy and structural history of Huerfano Park in southern Colorado. Given that his advisor, J.A. Dorr, went on sabbatical as Erle was close to finishing, he decided that, given the free time on his hands, he might as well work up the paleontology while he was waiting—and thus launched a life-time of work. His dissertation ended up being an amazing 1500 page, two-volume matching set (and some of his students took it as a challenge to match that length, although not me) and became the starting point that launched Erle's career using his beloved Western Interior Seaway as a natural laboratory for both him, his students, and other researchers he brought into the region.

Within this setting, and given his ready ability to articulate what he saw in the field to a range of insights, he began using

what he had learned in that basin to address a host of issues ranging from mass extinction to anoxia to sequence stratigraphy and beyond. In looking at his vita, there is such an incredible range to what he was involved in—bivalve functional morphology, evolutionary patterns and rates, Milankovitch cyclicity in the Cretaceous, low-oxygen facies, biogeography, the list goes on. But I feel he is best known for his work in three areas: the detailed documentation of mass extinction and other bioevents, his critical contributions to the development of high-resolution stratigraphy, and last, but certainly not least, his work on two groups of bizarre and enigmatic bivalves: the inoceramids and rudistids.

Another of Erle's outstanding attributes was his willingness to share and collaborate. During my time at CU, and I'm sure this has been a pattern throughout his career, there were a countless streams of both established researchers and students who made the pilgrimage to Boulder to learn about the Western Interior, plan various collaborations, and, most importantly, get a 'field's-eye' view of various sections, especially Pueblo—now the GSS for the Cenomanian-Turonian boundary—from one of the people who put that basin on the map as a great natural laboratory for unraveling Earth history.

Erle has also been a very active mentor of students throughout his career, and it is in this setting that I first came to know him—as a Ph.D. student at the University Colorado. I was lucky enough to spend the year following my Bachelor's working in what was then the Department of Invertebrates at the American Museum of Natural History as a photographer, primarily for Neil Landman. In discussing my future plans and my passion for fieldwork, Neil had suggested that I get in touch with Erle. Given that this was in the days before Skype(!) let alone the internet, my initial conversations with Erle were by phone and snail mail, and I certainly was enthralled by his expectations of students working with him. However, when I first met Erle in person I was in shock; here was a professor who was dressed in straggly t-shirt and a pair of shorts barely held together with an assortment of baby pins and the like. As soon as we started talking, however, his passion for all that he did shone through, and he was forced to by a pair of new shorts because those that he treasured just wouldn't do for a fieldtrip he was leading for Exxon.

Returning to his mentoring, he assisted numerous aspiring paleontologists while he was at the Smithsonian and got them involved in paleontologic research generally with a focus on using fieldwork to analyze various problems. There, he

graduated his first Ph.D. student, Carl Koch, through the affiliation with George Washington University; his move to the University of Colorado in 1980 led to a rapid and dramatic growth in the number of students Erle was supervising. This group, which at one point reached something approaching 20 Master's and Ph.D. students, became known as the CAT—the Cretaceous Attack Team feared by outcrops across the basin—and resulted in large numbers of publications, let alone theses and dissertations, dedicated to better understanding the Western Interior Seaway. Furthermore, following Erle's lead in considering himself to be a prominent source of erosion within the basin given the prodigious collections he made, the CAT also contributed to the flattening of the region with numerous tons of rock in beer flats schlepped back to Boulder, straining not only the springs of our vehicles but our patience in splitting the material bedding plane by bedding plane to produce the high-level records Erle pushed us to produce. In addition to students working on Cretaceous-focused projects, he also has a vast number of mentees who worked on a huge spectrum of other problems, ranging from Devonian conodonts to trace fossils to the stratigraphy of Bermuda. His love for a good paleontologic/geologic problem never wavered.

Related to this, Karl Flessa—back in the days when he was looking at the number and 'pedigree' of paleontology positions in the US—contacted me relative to the dramatic increase in the number of CU graduates who had obtained academic jobs in the later 80s and early 90s. Although there were a few who had been advised by other faculty at CU, it was indeed predominantly what I'll term the 'Erle Effect'. His enthusiasm for problems was infectious and his patience in working with students was amazing, especially with someone like me who, I'm sure, he felt would never be able to tell one seemingly identical species of one from another! In addition he had incredible focus—let me relate a quick story. Although I didn't take part in this escapade because it was before my time as a PhD student, given his propensity to sit in his office with his fingers always typing something on the keyboard (generally his trusty blue IBM Selectric in

those days), his students decided to see if they could rouse him. So, they installed a speaker and then used a microphone from the grad student bullpen in an attempt to startle him. Try as they might—and they tested it numerous times when he wasn't in the office to ensure it worked—he apparently never heard a thing!

In addition to his research and mentoring talents, Erle combined that with a true love of life, and I think indirectly tried to show us students that we should work hard and play hard. As students we were often invited to his house for one of his famous pig roasts or, in the winter, potlucks, and those were always a great time largely not only for the conversation and camaraderie, but also because they usually ended with Erle pulling out his banjo and engaging us all with his witty ballads—the one that sticks in my mind is the 'Lowstand Blues'. And this speaks to his creativity—I'm pretty sure he's the only author who snuck a mermaid into one of his figures in JP (sorry Steve [Hageman] and Brian [Pratt], it's too late to retract that) and has a poem devoted to sulfur-sucking symbionts in *Palaios*. He is a true Renaissance man and made a point to encourage the love of the things beyond paleontology, especially the arts, in his students. He also taught his students some very valuable life skills. One of those was how to feed yourself when you were hungry. His professed approach was to map all the roadkill on his way to the outcrop, and then monitor for any carcasses not on the map during the trip home; those had to be fresh!

Finally, this citation would be incomplete without mentioning Erle's wife and colleague, Claudia Johnson. Somehow through this all, she has been Erle's anchor and the fact that he is here today—in all meaning of the words—reflects her tenacity in never giving up. Claudia, this award is also for you.

So, in closing, here's to you Erle—a gentleman, a true scholar, and a true lover of all life has to offer. Fellow members of the Paleontological Society as well as guests, please join me in congratulating the recipient of the 2014 Paleontological Society Medal, Erle Galen Kauffman.

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