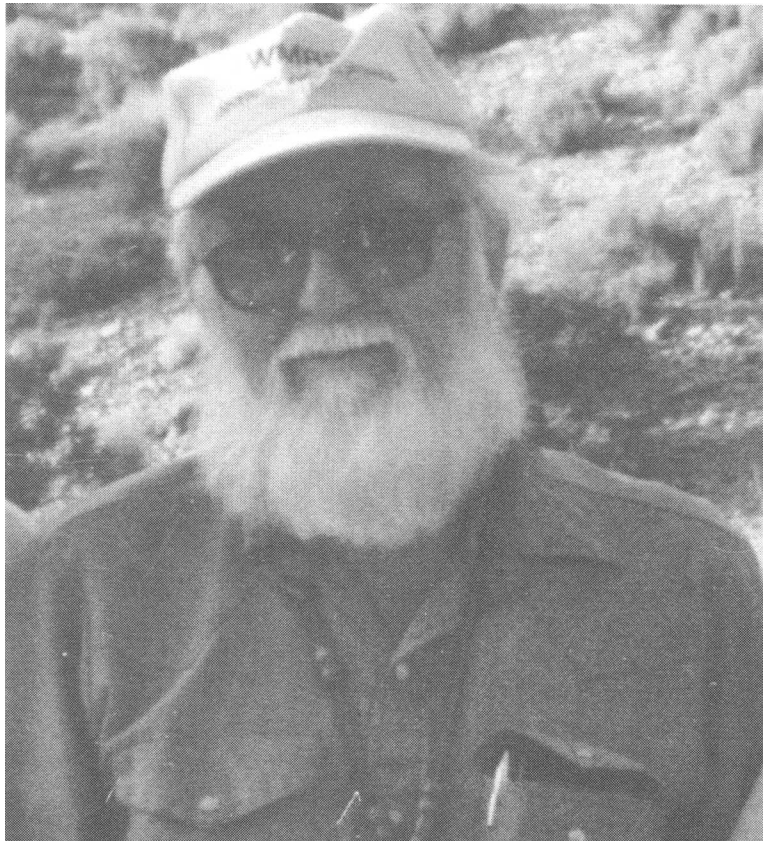


Clem Nelson, 1918-2004

Paleontologist, Stratigrapher and Structural Geologist



IN ANY FIELD OF STUDY, we rely heavily on the groundwork laid by key individuals who came before us. One of those individuals, Clem Nelson, passed away on March 3, 2004 at the age of 85. Clem was the kind of geologist and paleontologist that we rarely see today: He is best known internationally for his studies of Precambrian/Cambrian stratigraphy, the Cambrian explosion, his detailed trilobite biostratigraphy, as well as his maps of the structurally complex White-Inyo region of southeastern California. Few geologists today are respected in fields as diverse as structural geology and paleontology! He was also a dedicated and very effective teacher, having spent most of his career at UCLA. In his emeritus years, he was a

supporter and resident geologist at the University of California's White Mountain Research Station in Bishop, California (see <http://www.wmrs.edu/people/BIOs/clem%20nelson/default.htm>).

Clem was kind and possessed a subtle humor that he displayed for students often. His courses in field geology and stratigraphy were enlightening and exciting, and his seminars in stratigraphy brought deep understanding of the problems in what seemed like a rather straightforward discipline to most of us. In keeping us honest, his kindness showed through in spite of dumb questions and off-the-cuff explanations we had for various topics.

We were privileged to know Clem at three stages in our careers and at two different times in

his. We were undergraduates, graduate students, and professors about three decades apart and Clem seems not to have changed his approach to students or colleagues over those decades. At each stage, he offered us nothing but encouragement, sometimes directly, but more often through witty banter designed to make us think. He was always the consummate teacher, even in things non-geological. For example he once carefully observed Frank as he took a perch in the shade of a nearby pinon pine after a morning of trilobite hunting...as Frank sat, Clem informed him that the pinons are known for their profuse sap production, while the junipers, where he was sitting, produced little...a fact Frank realized only too late when he found his backside covered in sticky sap. Jere recalls once turning in an abstract of a proposed paper he was going to write for Clem's stratigraphy seminar. Clem kindly told Jere that a paper in his course had to be a lot longer than one paragraph! Embarrassed at forgetting to tell Clem it was just an abstract, Jere wrote a much longer than required paper to compensate. Clem passed kindly and useful judgment on it.

Perhaps his greatest contribution was the countless University of California (from most campuses) geology students who learned how to map in an area he discovered known as Poleta Folds, east of Big Pine, California. Clem liked to refer to the area as "the best mildly-complicated place" for an introduction to mapping. While it may seem mildly-complicated to those who finished the course, it was certainly extraordinarily complicated

for those mapping it for the first time as undergraduates! Clem had a way of explaining that complexity so that eventually most students were able to understand it and to produce a reasonable map, but most importantly to have learned how to do it skillfully.

Of course, we will never forget the lessons Clem provided, and we will never forget Clem. Nor we suspect will anyone who ever had the good fortune to spend a little time with him in the classroom or in the field. Such times were always pleasant, warm and totally illuminating.

In honor of Clem's contributions to the field of Precambrian and Cambrian studies and to the field of geology in general, we are honored to dedicate this volume to his memory.

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