

Awards and Citations

Response by Erle G. Kauffman† for the 2014 Paleontological Society Medal



Erle G. Kauffman

My first words this evening must of necessity be directed to the Paleontological Society and its selection committee for choosing me to receive this prestigious medal. I am profoundly grateful and deeply honored. I assure you that this award is one I shall treasure for the rest of my days and, although I have every intention of continuing my work in paleontology, I see it as a crowning tribute to a career that already has brought me boundless joy, pleasure, and satisfaction.

On occasions such as this it is only natural to reflect on one's career, to recall its high points, and to remember those who helped advance it through selfless gifts of time and knowledge, far exceeding that to be expected of any teacher or

mentor. In my case, such reflection takes me back many years, to my initial ventures in paleontological research as a University of Michigan graduate student. There I first described a new Ordovician trilobite under the watchful eye of Professor Erwin Stumm and, based on that, published my first paper in the *Journal of Paleontology*. With Dr. R.V. Kesling as co-author came my first Cretaceous paper, and one that proved to be among the most popular I ever wrote: “*An Upper Cretaceous ammonite bitten by a mososaur.*” It appeared in the University of Michigan *Contributions to Paleontology*—that widely acknowledged series that stands as a singular tribute to Michigan's paleontological prowess.

Yet it was the completion of my Ph.D. thesis, with Dr. J.A. Dorr as advisor, on the Middle and Upper Cretaceous

† Erle G. Kauffman is deceased.

geology of Huerfano Park in south-central Colorado, that truly cemented what was to become a passionate, career-long, love affair with the Cretaceous System and its biotas, particularly as developed in the continental Western Interior. Huerfano Park proved to be an area priceless beyond compare in which to develop my interests. Its faunas constituted an ecotone—a mixing zone of endemic, cool- to warm-temperate taxa, and subtropical faunas of southern origins. I became hooked on using mollusks—mostly ammonites and inoceramid bivalves—to solve a variety of paleontologic and stratigraphic problems. I record my deep indebtedness to the University of Michigan for all I learned there in my early years.

From Ann Arbor, I migrated to the U.S. National Museum, Smithsonian Institution, where I was entrenched for twenty years building what might be called the early mature segment of my research career. I was intently focused on the Western Interior Cretaceous System, but extended my field studies to include the Caribbean region, both for its proximity and the special opportunities it presented. This was a time of world travel, when I was invited to Europe and Asia and had the pleasure of looking at many classical Cretaceous sections and developing new collaborations and friendships that I will always cherish.

The second stint of my so-called mature career took me to the University of Colorado in Boulder, and thus to live where I mostly worked—in a state and a mountain system that I have loved since my youth. Like my time at the National Museum, it was deeply enriching to teach the science that I am so devoted to, and thus help prepare future generations to expand its boundaries. It was my privilege to advise many talented students who now occupy senior positions in academia, public service, or private enterprise, and are recognized as standard-bearers in the

field. Too numerous to name, I simply thank them collectively for what they gave to me, both when we worked together as co-investigators, and subsequently as the close friends so many of them have become. Lastly, I gratefully acknowledge the warmth and generosity with which Indiana University has embraced me, as professor and now professor emeritus.

Now let me return to where I began and say a word or two about the place of paleontology today. As the story of life's history on Earth, from its primitive origins to the present day, and as a critical source of evidence for the fact of evolution, a course in paleontology should, to my way of thinking, be a requirement for all biology and geology students. The importance of this reaches farther and assumes a greater urgency today than it did even a decade or two ago. In recent years we have come to appreciate as never before the effects that global environmental change may wreak on the planet's biosphere. As with other branches of history, so with life history, we need to learn and understand from relevant events of the past. It is this critical context that paleontology provides.

The Paleontological Society is one of the premier world organizations charged with promoting paleontology as a key aspect of interdisciplinary science, and it must continue to do so if we are to learn more of the invaluable lessons that the history of life has to teach us. I salute the Society's efforts on our behalf. To be recognized individually by such an organization as the Paleontological Society, as I have been today, requires me to say again how deeply honored I am to be the recipient of the 2014 Paleontological Society Medal. Thank you.

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