PROFILE

John Travis

I grew up in Nottingham near large clay quarries and smoky collieries that held a fascination in my young imagination, because the burning tips of coal waste looked and smelled like volcanoes. So started the road to becoming the Society's new president.

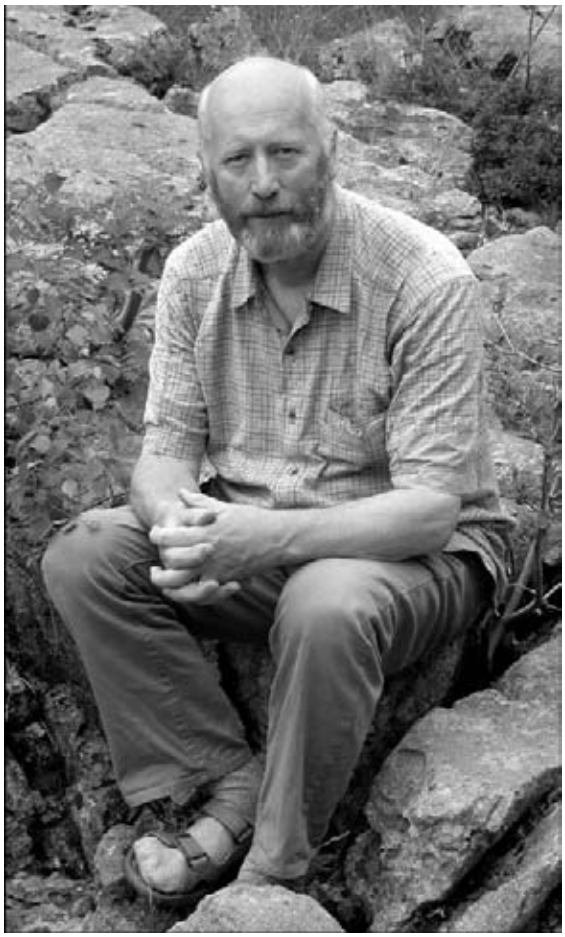
An early interest in landscape, geology and holes in the ground developed when an aunt took me walking in the Peak District, and I was intrigued by the minerals and crystals that we collected from lead mine dumps around open mine shafts. This interest in rocks, caves and mines was furthered on two school camps in the Peak District helped by the geography teacher Ron Disney, who had studied geology under H H Swinnerton at Nottingham University.

I started work on my 15th birthday for Boots, as an apprentice training in the chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturing departments. During my teenage years I spent hours reducing the family coal stocks to near-dust looking for fossils within the prized large lumps that were fashionable in those days of near-universal coal fires. Some lovely fossils were found, but they tended to be very friable and rarely survived long without treatment. Most of my geology was self-taught by reading until 1964, when I studied A-level geology at evening classes. In 1962, I moved to Nottingham University as a technician in the newly opened Chemical Engineering Department.

While working at Boots I met Josie, a keen and constant companion in the outdoor pursuits. We married in 1961, raising two daughters and a son. My walking, climbing and caving interests had meanwhile continued, first with the Scouts, and later with the newly-formed Four Ways Club (Caving, Climbing, Hiking and Camping). When the Derbyshire Caving Association was formed in 1960, I was elected as the representative for the Four Ways Club.

At the DCA I met people who helped to further my knowledge of geology and caves. Most notable was Trevor Ford, whom I assisted on some of the work on preparation for publication of the first edition of *Caves of Derbyshire*. I drove hundreds of miles on a scooter, checking locations and grid references, and correcting mismatches of old data and descriptions. I also joined Peak District Mines Historical Society in 1963, where I met Harold Sarjeant. He put me in touch with his son Bill in the Geology Department at Nottingham University. That friendship led, later that year to an invitation to a meeting to discuss the possible formation of a local geological society. From there the East Midlands Geological Society was born.

I served on the early council of the Society for two sessions, and on the editorial board for a spell. Josie was also active and supportive in the thankless tasks of those days such as regularly hand addressing hundreds of envelopes for the *Mercian*.



In 1973 I was head-hunted to work in Zürich for a researcher in chemical engineering going out from Nottingham University. For nearly two years, I was so busy at work that I saw little of the wonderful Alpine geology beyond some of the caves and karst.

In 1975 I returned to Britain, and immediately learned of a vacancy for a technician in the Geology Department at Nottingham University. With old friends still there, I was offered the job, and stayed for 11 enjoyable years, handling rocks from sources as diverse as meteorites and the deep-sea drilling project.

When the Geology Department closed, I returned to Chemical Engineering for another 11 years, and then jumped at a chance of early retirement. I had time to catch up on curating my mineral specimens, collecting ornaments made of stone and minerals, and pursuing interests in photography and natural history. Shortly after my retirement, Josie became seriously ill, but we managed a month's tour of Western Australia, visiting family and seeing some geology very different from that in Britain.

Among other trips overseas, NW USA was a highlight. The devastation by the Mt St Helen's 1980 eruption is unforgettable, and walking down a mile of lava cave was a novelty after 50 years of limestone caving.

My vision for the Society, like several of my predecessors, is to see younger members playing a greater role and moving us forward into the future.