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Memorial: Rodney M. Feldmann (1939–2024)

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> "My first contact with Rod Feldmann was his voicemail message: 'An incredible set of circumstances makes it impossible for me to come to the phone right now. Please leave a message and I will get back to you as soon as possible.' I was considering coming to Kent for graduate school and I thought, 'Wow, this guy is either really important or really arrogant.' I was right and wrong. He was never arrogant, but always important, and eventually of utmost importance to me."
>
> — Carrie Schweitzer

Rod was born in a gas station in Steele, North Dakota. His childhood experiences greatly shaped his life, and we loved his stories about smoking driftwood down by the Missouri River and working on the highway department away from home at age 14! His parents, Lois and Red DuPree, gave him the confidence to do this. Although he was quite a lot older than his brothers, he remembers Frank George (left) demanding to be fed only French toast and walking all over London with Don (middle) when Don was a graduate student in Wales (Fig. 1). The brothers did not see each other often, but they respectfully sparred on email over opposing political viewpoints and opinions on the merits of H.P. Lovecraft. Frank George came to visit in hospice, and they zoom called with Don.

Rod spent a year at MIT, and he received his B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. from the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. As an undergraduate, he paid his way by cooking pizza at North Dakota's first pizza shop. When he applied for the job, they asked him if he knew how to make pizza. He said of course! Never having cooked it once. His graduate advisor was F.D. "Bud" Holland, Jr., and Rod remembers cooking macaroni and cheese after an afternoon nap only to go up to work at school until late, having a beer with Bud afterward. He had a ferret named Sleaze that occasionally bit him (Fig. 2). At his marine biology field camp in California, he met Joel Hedgepeth, a contemporary of John Steinbeck, and cooked a road-killed deer for everyone.

Rod joined the Geology faculty at Kent State University (KSU) in 1965 and was actively researching and teaching until his death on May 1, 2024 (Fig. 3). Upon coming to KSU as a temporary instructor, he threw himself into the local geology, ran huge undergraduate field trips to local geology hotspots, and co-wrote several guidebooks of local interest. When not at school, he coached his daughter Aissa's little league softball team, sailed on Twin Lakes, and refinished furniture (Fig. 4). He was proud of the fact that the only time he was in the Ohio State football stadium was to watch his daughter in the marching band.

An enormous contribution and one of which Rod was very proud was his field work and interest in bringing Southern Hemisphere fossils into the limelight. He spent several field seasons in Antarctica and New Zealand, and with his wife Carrie Schweitzer, conducted field work in South America with his beloved colleague Silvio Casadío (Fig. 5). Rod loved traveling with students, taking them all over the world and even posing as a parent to get a family discount for student entry into a castle. He was up for anything, and ate nearly everything he was served, even sea-cucumber slime in Japan, but rather surprisingly declining to try pig liver cooked in its own blood in China. We traveled everywhere—I once calculated that we were traveling two or three months out of the year. We did three bucket-list trips, to Greece, the Galapagos/Machu Picchu, and Iceland (Fig. 6). Probably our favorite trip was our tour of the national parks in the United States Four Corners Region at Christmas time: cold, but empty and beautiful.

At KSU, Rod taught both undergraduate and graduate courses and managed a robust internationally known research program in the Department of Geology [Earth Sciences]. During his tenure he successfully graduated 45 M.S. students and 13 Ph.D. students as primary advisor and committee chair. In addition, he mentored numerous undergraduates and hosted many international visiting scientists who conducted research in his lab. His enthusiasm for science, especially paleontology, was conveyed to students through his deep understanding and excitement for the subject (Fig. 7). Rod's ability to show students how to ask, and answer, questions through the research process made him an outstanding research mentor. His focus on teaching, performing high-quality scholarship, and mastery of fundamental research skills meant his students were well prepared for their future educational steps or careers.

Rod's body of published research concentrated on the systematics, evolution, ecology, and biogeography of fossil decapod crustaceans (shrimps, lobsters, and crabs). He also worked on other allied arthropod groups including phyllocarids, isopods, stomatopods, and horseshoe



Figure 1. Brothers Frank DuPree, Don DuPree, and Rod Feldmann in 1965, before Rod came to Kent. Image from the archives of Don DuPree.

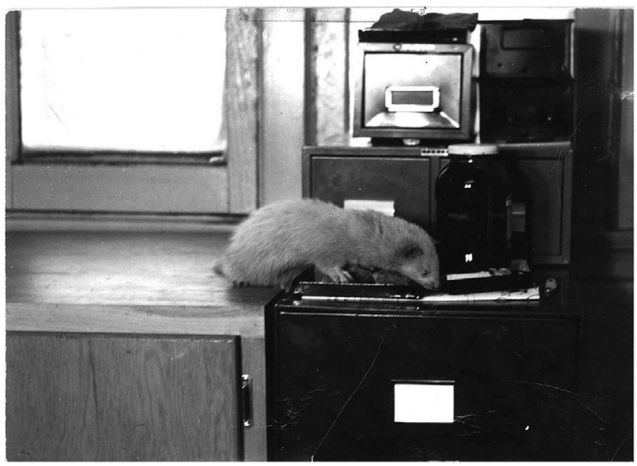


Figure 2. Sleaze the ferret. This picture was taken in the 1960s but was still in Rod's office in May of 2024.

crabs, as well as clams, worms, snails, and brachiopods (even entertaining a student interested in bryozoans). His field and museum research was international, taking him and his students to many locations, including Antarctica, Argentina, Chile, China, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, and countries in Western, Central and Eastern Europe (Fig. 8).

Rod was president of the Paleontological Society in 1993 and co-editor of the Journal of Paleontology from 1976 to 1982. He also served as president of the Paleontological Research Institution. He published over 450 scientific papers between 1962 and 2024 primarily on fossil decapod crustaceans (lobsters, crabs, and shrimps). Rod was co-coordinating editor of the revision of the Decapoda volume of the *Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology*, the major reference volume in the field, of which half was published before

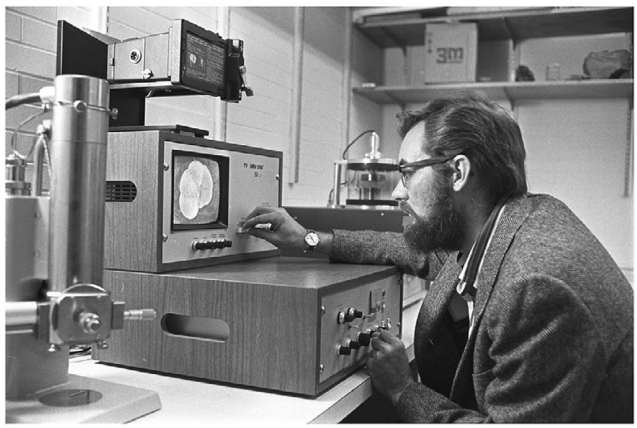


Figure 3. Rod working on a new-fangled SEM machine in 1977.

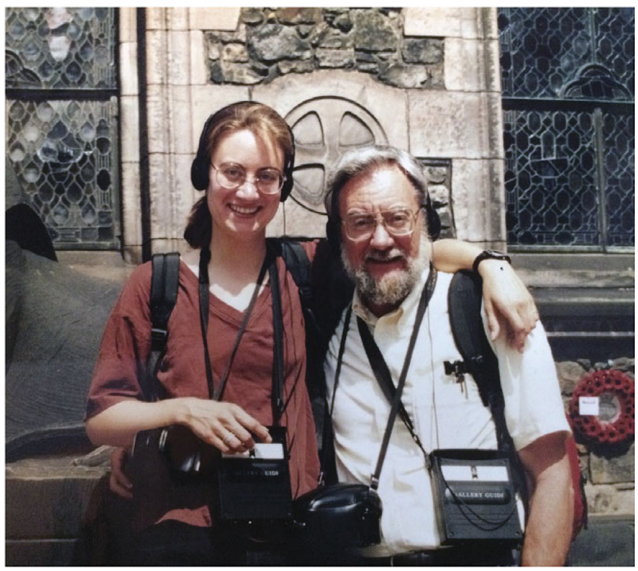


Figure 4. Aissa Feldmann and Rod nerding out on an audio tour of a castle in Scotland, circa 1990.



Figure 5. Silvio Casadío (left) and Rod prepare to trek into the Andes. About Rod, Silvio said, "He was always my model professor and colleague. He had contagious energy, and I always admired his curiosity for the most diverse topics, his ability to adapt to the most difficult contexts, and his patience and dedication to students."

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Figure 6. Rod and Carrie Schweitzer in Greece.



Figure 7. 2005 Spring Break Florida trip, collecting fossils outside of Sarasota. L to R: David Waugh, Roger Portell, Rob Crawford, Aubrey (Shirk) Bonde, Joel Allen, Carrie Schweitzer, Rod Feldmann.



Figure 8. Rod mapping in the Dry Valleys, Antarctica, early 1980s.

his passing and which continues under the watch of his wife, Carrie Schweitzer. He edited *Fossils of Ohio*, a now classic book published by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Geological Survey, which remains a big seller (Fig. 9). He was very serious about service to the profession. He reviewed nearly every



Figure 9. *Fossils of Ohio.* Image used with permission of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Geological Survey.

paper he was requested to review and was the introductory lab coordinator in the department at Kent State until his death. He even held meetings with students at home while in hospice.

Rod loved traveling, cooking, telling stories, entertaining graduate students and visiting scientists, reading crime novels, driving his classic 1937 gangster-style Packard 6, conducting geological field work, and working with students on research and teaching (Fig. 10). He was positive until the end, anxiously awaiting the next installment of *8 Days that made Rome* and commenting on the state of American politics. He lived intensely and well. He was an outstanding mentor and role model for students and colleagues, and his research continues to influence scientists worldwide. His



Figure 10. Colleagues and students enjoying a meal in the back yard. Standing L to R: Jessica Tashman (Ph.D. 2022), Adina Franţescu (Ph.D. 2013), Evin Maguire (Ph.D. 2022), Silvo Casadío, Rod, Carrie, Samantha Hartzell (M.S. 2022), Joshua Tungate (M.S. 2023), Jennifer Miller (M.S. 2022). Sitting: Ovidiu Franţescu (Ph.D. 2013), Dalton Thompson (M.S. 2022), David Waugh (Ph.D. 2013).

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Figure 11. Colleagues and students at the Geological Society of America Annual Meeting, 2023, "Advances in Arthropod Paleobiology" sessions honoring Rod. Standing: Sylvain Charbonnier, Loren Babcock (M.S. 1986), Carrie, Dale Tshudy (Ph.D. 1993), Rod, Ethan Lionetti, Caitlin LaBonte, Adina Franţescu, Ovidiu Franţescu, Jessica Tashman. Kneeling: Evin Maguire, Adiel Klompmaker (Ph.D. 2012).

philosophy, "If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life," never wavered. His life's work demonstrates his commitment to science, knowledge, and conveying the excitement of paleontology to audiences of all kinds (Fig. 11).

Author contribution. C. Schweitzer and A. Feldmann drafted the original obituary upon which this memorial is based. D. Waugh and S. Casadío added important observations about Rod's mentorship and commitment to students and colleagues.

Declaration of competing interests. The authors declare none.

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