



## IN MEMORIAM

William B. N. Berry  
Professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences  
UC Berkeley  
1931–2011

William B. N. (Bill) Berry, paleontologist and sustainability advocate, died May 20, 2011 of skin cancer and related complications. He was 79 and in his 53rd year on the UC Berkeley faculty. He was born September 1, 1931 in Boston and raised in Arlington, Massachusetts. He attended Harvard as a fourth generation member of his family. He received three degrees in geology: an A.B. in 1953 and an A.M. in 1955 from Harvard and a Ph.D. from Yale in 1957. After completing his Ph.D., he taught for one year at the University of Houston. He was recruited to Berkeley in 1958, where he remained until his death.

Berry's undergraduate interest in the marine fossil record was fostered by Harvard paleontologist and geologist Harry Whittington, who encouraged him to take up the study of graptolites, a bizarre and poorly understood group of extinct animals abundant in the world's oceans between 500 and 400 million years ago. Publication of Berry's doctoral research in 1960 marked the beginning of more than a half century of important contributions using graptolites to interpret ancient environments, to date and correlate rocks more precisely, to understand the processes of evolution and extinction, and to reconstruct the positions of ancient continents and ocean basins. His research led to more than 300 published papers, abstracts and books.

Precise age determination and correlation of ancient rocks was of great importance to the petroleum industry at the outset of Berry's research and later rose to even greater significance in understanding crises in earth and life history and the persistence of life in extreme environments. It is not surprising that he became concerned with the causes and effects of global climate change on multiple time scales. He recognized the potentially disastrous threat to the planet generated by human behavior when superimposed on natural scales of change. His concern for the environment became increasingly obvious in both his research and teaching.

He served as chair of the Department of Paleontology from 1975 until 1987 and as Director of the UC Museum of Paleontology from 1976–1987. When the paleontology department was split up in 1991, Berry elected to join the Department of Geology and Geophysics, which later became the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences (EPS). Although this choice separated him from paleontological colleagues who joined the new Department of Integrative Biology and moved to new quarters in the Life Sciences Building, he had become more concerned with research and instruction in the physical and chemical aspects of paleontology and with environmental science. In 2010, he taught or mentored more than 1,000 undergraduate students in EPS and the Environmental Science Program. He was Director of the Environmental Sciences Program for 14 years.

In the course of his career he also held appointments with the United States Geological Survey and the Applied Science Division of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. He was a recognized world authority on Paleozoic rocks and stratigraphy. He served as a member of the International Stratigraphic Commission Subcommittees on the Ordovician and Silurian Systems, as well as working groups and committees charged with placement of the boundaries between systems. He was an invited panelist at many

national and international conferences and symposia on global climate change, environmental planning, sustainability, and urban planning.

Berry involved undergraduate students in local environmental movements, including Save the Bay and Save Strawberry Canyon. Students participated in the landmark restoration studies of the Tennessee Hollow Watershed in the Presidio of San Francisco and an environmental studies program that he helped launch at the City's Galileo High School. He was honored at a campus-wide Sustainability Summit for "exploring environmental issues with generations of UC Berkeley students" and "giving students the tools and inspiration to think about problems from a sustainability standpoint and fostering a culture of sustainability and forward-thinking design."

Students in Berry's classes participated in designing policy and promoting recycling and waste reduction on campus and were instrumental in pushing the UC System to adopt an aggressive sustainability policy. In his environmental science courses students also conducted field studies on grasslands and wetlands, urban gardens, urban streams, green buildings, campus composting, harmful algal blooms and were involved in preservation and restoration projects that included Claremont Canyon, Cordornices Creek, Rheem Creek, Baxter Creek, Shorebird Park and the Richmond Greenway.

Berry's legacy in the Museum of Paleontology includes an internationally important archive of research specimens of graptolites and graptolite literature. He was one of the most active faculty curators in the history of the Museum, publishing on the role of natural history museums and the development of computerized catalogs and electronic databases. He also published papers on the history of science, including a detailed account in 2008 of the role of UC micropaleontologist R. M. Kleinpell as founder of the "Berkeley School of Stratigraphic Paleontology." Berry's book *Growth of a Prehistoric Time Scale, Based on Organic Evolution* (9 editions between 1968 and 1988) is held by 1,022 libraries worldwide. To popularize paleontology and to engage and educate the public, he instituted popular yearly Museum open houses.

Major service to campus committees included seven years on the committee that allocated space on campus and reviewed planned construction projects. He chaired the committee that produced UC Berkeley's Long Range Development Plan in 1988–91. He served for 15 years on the Committee on Undergraduate Scholarships and Honors and was deeply concerned about maintaining the affordability of a UC education. He was a member of the 2008 Systemwide Affordability Workgroup that drafted a detailed strategy for guaranteeing long-term financial accessibility for UC undergraduates.

Berry was a very private person and was considered shy by many of his colleagues. His non-academic interests included gardening and athletics at Cal. He attended football games regularly and for several years advised Women's Crew. He was noted for accommodating the schedules of athletes in his classes. He was seldom seen at social events and did not engage in chitchat, although he enlivened intellectual discussions with humor, curiosity, and perspicacity. He greatly enjoyed field conferences and excursions with colleagues with whom he shared an intellectual camaraderie. He was an attentive listener, quick to recognize and appreciate the insights of others, often augmenting them with supporting observations. He never seemed concerned with recognition or taking credit for ideas, and his work toward a sustainable society focused on planting and tending seeds that have come to bear fruit.

Berry is survived by his wife of 50 years, Suzanne Spaulding Berry, and son Bradford B. Berry, both of Berkeley.

Carole S. Hickman (Chair)  
Doris Sloan