

OBITUARY
ROBERT RAY (BOB) PARKER (1921–1999)

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I first met Bob Parker via the telephone several years ago. He had been given my name and number as a person who might help with some fungal identification and things rapidly progressed from there. Bob was an enthusiastic researcher into macrofungi and loved taxonomy. An excellent example of this is his short paper on *Cymatoderma elegans* in volume 18 of the *Australasian Mycologist* which also demonstrates his 'puckish' sense of humour with the inclusion of the Latin statement '*Nullius in verba!*'. Over the years, Bob, his wife Ginna and both my wife Dot, and I, thoroughly enjoyed our brief but productive contacts.

Bob was born in Seattle, Washington, U.S.A. on July 21, 1921. His mother was a school teacher while his father worked for the U.S.A. Postal Service; Bob was the 'middle child' between two sisters. Although somewhat of a 'rogue' as a child, Bob graduated from high-school and then sampled a number of different vocations.

He and an Icelandic friend built a commercial fishing boat, the *Silver Spray*, which apparently still travels the west coast of America. This was followed by crew work on commercial fishing boats and the achievement of a Mate's rating while working for a shipping company out of Seattle. His qualifications kept Bob in the Merchant Marine during WWII, running live ammunition. Bob obviously liked exciting work tinged with a spice of danger because his next work was as a raftsmen for Seattle Cedar Mill and it involved dashing about on the tops of logs lying in the water.

Bob then decided he wanted a different future and decided to enter the University of Washington, where he paid his own way and eventually gained a Bachelor of Science in Zoology. During his three month summer holidays, he worked for the U.S.A. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska and combined these summer jobs with collecting data on salmon life cycles that would later be used in his research papers. It was during these student days at university that he met his future wife and he and Virginia were married on June 15, 1946, two days after the graduation ceremony. Bob and Ginna celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1996.

After graduating, Bob worked for the University of Washington which was followed by a fisheries biologist position with the Washington State Fisheries Department in Seattle. Later Bob resigned and in February of 1950 went to Juneau, Alaska to help set up the Alaska State Fish and Game Department. Numerous occasions found Bob spending nights up in trees while an angry bear patrolled below!

In September 1956, Bob, Ginna and their three children moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Bob returned to university and by 1959 had achieved a Masters degree and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Zoology. Typically, Bob was back on the high seas at the time of the graduation ceremony, completing work for the Alaska Fish and Game Department. One can only sit back in admiration at the completion of Bob's PhD. In 1959, a bachelor degree carried enormous prestige and further qualifications were usually unnecessary. It is a measure of Bob's character to realise that the underlying reasons for his further studies were purely for the love of science and the pleasure of research.

Instead of returning to Juneau, Bob and his family now moved to Kodiak Island in the Gulf of Alaska where Bob ran a research program on the North Pacific salmon. Bob, together with several other helpers, built the initial structure of the research station. This was a very common thing in those last pioneering days in Alaska. Most men had to be (and were) jack's-of-all-trades, scientists or not.

In August of 1960, Bob and his family moved yet again and travelled southwards to Nanaimo on Vancouver Island. There, Bob took a position at the West Coast Biological Station as a fisheries biologist. He was to remain there 14 years, during which time he did research on ocean salmon populations, spawning salmon and a classic piece of research on the effects of pulp mill toxins on the bio-systems of a local coastal inlet. His last child, Dan, was born there in 1961, but as usual Bob was off dealing with fish that were hatching. While in Nanaimo he became interested in Scouting and became Scout Master for a small troop. Never one to stop, Bob went on to earn his Gillwell stripes and finally become Regional Commissioner for Scouting on Vancouver Island.

In 1974, Bob accepted a request from CSIRO Division of Fisheries and Oceanography in Sydney to come to Australia to study the Port Hacking estuary. Bob and his family were on their way 'down under'! Bob was to work with the CSIRO until 1981 when he retired. He had always wanted to own a farm so he and Ginna bought

the property at Dorrroughby in northern New South Wales in late December 1978. Bob commuted to Sydney for 2 1/2 years on holidays and flexi-time until his ultimate retirement when he and Ginna moved to the farm permanently in August of 1981. Here he raised Angus cattle (forming the Nightcap Angus stud) for a number of years. He took a welding course and also obtained a powder man class 3 certificate for agricultural blasting, which allowed him to blast away at unwanted stumps on the farm. In addition, he and Ginna became involved with a local astronomy group and what was then known as the Richmond Valley Naturalist Club. He was active in the beef cattle section of the Lismore Show and helped to set up the Stud Breeders Association. In his 'spare moments', he completely renovated the lovely old turn-of-the-century house on the property, mostly by himself.

After his second retirement-this time from farming-he began an in-depth study of local fungi, photographing them, writing them up and eventually culminating in what was hoped to be the first of many research style papers in both the *Australasian Mycologist* and other journals. Sadly it was not to be, and on September 5, 1999, he died in his sleep at home, on the farm he loved, at the age of 78.

Bob's work will not be forgotten. The generosity of his wife Ginna has led to the most extraordinary gift of his excellent Olympus microscope and associated drawing tube and digital camera, together with his field notes, specimens and hundreds of photographs of the fungi of the Nightcap Range/Whian Whian State Forest area to the Brisbane Herbarium. There are also mycological books and off-prints still to be sorted for presentation. These gifts will add enormously to the knowledge of the macrofungi of the region as the specimens come from the southern rim of the Mt Warning caldera; the Lamington National Park forms the northern rim and it is very fitting that Bob's collection should be lodged in the same location where the collections from the northern crater rim are housed. In addition, the microscope will allow further intensive studies of the macrofungi at Brisbane Herbarium for many years to come and the digital camera ensures that the accompanying micro-studies will be superbly illustrated. I know Bob would be delighted that his research material will have such a great future impact because his whole life has been dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge.

Bob was a dear friend and lived life to the fullest. Although largely unknown to many of the current generation of mycologists, mycology in Australia does owe a considerable debt to this enthusiastic and dedicated man. 'Vale Robert.'

'To lose a friend is the greatest of all evils, but endeavour rather to rejoice that you possessed him than to mourn his loss.'

Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, AD 63.

Acknowledgements

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Bob's Publication on Australian Macrofungi

Parker, Robert R. (1999) *Cymatoderma elegans* var. *lamellatum*. *Australasian Mycologist* 18, 10-11.