

Dr David Francis Branagan

The honorary degree of Doctor of Science was conferred upon Dr David Francis Branagan by the Pro-Chancellor John McCarthy QC at the Faculty of Science graduation ceremony held at 2.00pm on 8 June 2007.



Dr Branagan standing as Professor "Charlie" Benrimoj reads the citation, *photo, copyright Memento Photography.*

Citation

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present Dr David Branagan for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.

David Branagan is amongst Australia's foremost geologists with an international reputation in the history of geology and geologists in Australasia, a field in which he has made outstanding and original contributions for over fifty years. Most recently he is the much acclaimed author of the definitive biography of Professor Edgeworth David, the world famous professor of geology at Sydney University in the early decades of the 20th century, a legendary figure in Australian scientific development and one of the greatest personalities ever associated with the University of Sydney.

David Branagan hails from Broken Hill which in retrospect seems almost inevitable for someone who developed a life long interest in minerals and rock formations – although coal, not silver, became his material for special study. During World War II, he left Broken Hill on a scholarship to St Ignatius College, Riverview, where he became a fine athlete and scholar.

David came to Sydney University in 1947 and graduated Bachelor of Science with honours in 1950. As an undergraduate, David represented New South Wales in athletics and is in the select band who have been awarded a Double Blue for sporting achievements. Studying geology, it is not surprising that he was interested in exploring caves and he was a founding member of the Sydney University Speleological Society making him, I suppose, one of Sydney University's first 'cavemen'.

After graduation in 1950, David Branagan worked for three years as a geologist for the Geological Survey of New South Wales. His principal field work included Western and Northern Coalfields, Far South Coast, Snowy Mountains, Broken Hill and Cobar. His main work was mapping Permian coal measures, Lower Palaeozoic and Pre-Cambrian sequences, engineering geology and metalliferous deposits. After working on

mineral exploration projects principally in north-west Queensland and central Australia, David Branagan spent two years in England and Europe. He combined geological work with his other well developed interest in music and art before returning to Australia via the United States.

In March 1958, he joined the Department of Geology and Geophysics at Sydney University as a Coal Research Fellow. During the next thirty years Dr Branagan carried out teaching and research in geology and geophysics becoming successively - lecturer, senior lecturer and associate professor. He obtained a Master of Science degree in 1958 and a PhD in 1963 for a major study of coal formation and utilisation in New South Wales. He specialised in teaching civil and mining engineering geology, photogeology, field mapping and geology of the Sydney Basin. His principal research areas included the tectonics of Sydney Basin, engineering geology and the history of geology.

Dr Branagan formally retired in July 1989 and since then has been an Honorary Research Associate in his old Department now re-badged as the School of Geophysics. He has also been an Honorary Associate of the Department of History and the Department for History and Philosophy of Science. Dr Branagan has been among our most productive scholars with more than 250 publications, including 20 books, 13 chapters of books, as well as papers, reviews and films on geological topics – 130 of the publications have been in the history of science concentrating on the biographical details of significant contributors to the science and development of geology in the Pacific region.

Dr Branagan has published new studies on a roll-call of major geologists and explorers including TW Edgeworth David, Samuel Stutchbury, PE Strzelecki, JE Tenison Woods, Ludwig Leichhardt and ARC Selwyn. His books and articles have laid the foundations for future research on important institutions in Australia such as the Faculty of Science and the Department of Geology and Geophysics at this university, the Royal Society of New South Wales and the Geological Society of Australia. He has drawn international attention to the work of scientists in the Pacific region, a contribution which, until recently, had been relatively ignored by historians of science in the Northern Hemisphere. He not only wrote on these themes but addressed and entertained fellow scientists at international conferences in North America, the United Kingdom, Japan and China.

Dr Branagan is a founding member of the Geological Society of Australia and the foundation editor of its journal *The Australian Geologist*. He has held numerous offices in the Society and was appointed a Life Member in 1992. He became a Fellow of the Geological Society of London, and the Geological Society of America. He has served on the International Commission for the History of Geology and was President from 1996 to 2000. He has also been President of the Royal Society of New South Wales, a committee member of the Australian Academy of Science, a member of the History of Earth Sciences Society and many other Australian and international scientific bodies.

Dr Branagan has received many awards and fellowships, including the Edgeworth David Travelling Scholarship in 1972, an Australia-New Zealand Foundation Grant in 1978, a Harold White Fellowship and the Royal Society of New South Wales Medal in 1998, National Library of Australia award in 1999, and a Mellon Fellowship in the University of Oklahoma in 2003.

Dr Branagan had held a formidable place in scientific education in New South Wales. Throughout the 1970s, he was Chairman and a member of the New South Wales Higher School Certificate Board of Studies for Science, the Chief Examiner in Geology and the Chairman of the Geology Syllabus Committee. Throughout his years on the staff at Sydney University, he was a major figure in the Sport Union and the Sydney University Athletics Club. His music skills and liturgical interests led to his involvement in church music, especially Gregorian chants, as the Director for thirty years from 1962 to 1992 of the St. Gregory Chorale and editor of *Hosanna*, a journal of Church music and history, from 1962 to 1972).

David Branagan, Sydney University salutes you, for your outstanding career as a scientist, as an inspiring teacher, a man of letters, a promoter of international scientific exchange and understanding, and great exemplar of the finest ideals and values of this University.

Pro-Chancellor, I present David Francis Branagan for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.