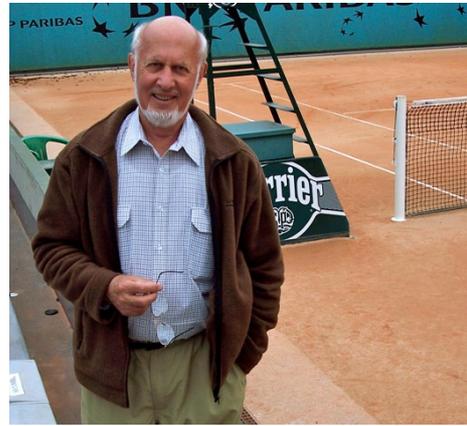


# Members in Profile

September 2012

## Bruce Ryan

During my final years at Sydney Technical High School, I began thinking of myself as a geographer, probably because Fred Gallie (the geography master and Balmain cricketer) invited me to meetings of the Geographical Society in Science House. I joined the Society in 1954, as a freshman at Sydney University. Luck and design have sustained me as a geographer ever since, a staunch defender of the faith, even after retiring from academia 45 years later.



Photograph by Carolyn B Miller

Becoming a professional geographer meant completing degrees at Sydney University and ANU, and then teaching at universities in Western Australia, Wales, and the United States. During my 33 years at the University of Cincinnati, it meant serving as Department Head for a decade, guiding research on Appalachian regional development, directing heritage surveys, instituting a rudimentary Australian studies program (for parochial Americans), leading excursions along the Ohio River and into the coal-mining hollows of Kentucky and West Virginia, organizing national and state conferences, and keeping geography afloat during tempestuous weather.

But it also meant building my own wonderfully compatible, comfortable nest. How fortunate the man whose paid employment can be so deeply rewarding, so close to his heart's desire, whose colleagues are so boundlessly stimulating. Becoming a geographer allowed me to pursue my love of cartography (and calligraphy), to explore the world without the scampering tourist's guilt, to confer with planners and executives about serious matters. It enabled me to engage intellectually with students from every continent, and to beam with pride when they became National Park rangers, military surveyors, airport developers, location analysts, realtors, entrepreneurs with executive jets, heritage conservators, college presidents, attorneys, state senators, ambassadors, environmental scientists, and care-giving saviours in every corner of the under-privileged world. My own halo merely reflected their glory.

Yet I still can't say what geography is. My parents had no notion of what I was up to. Everyone is concerned about the world, they said, not just you geographers. Everyone needs to understand the Earth's environment, its human settlements, its resources, and human migration--those abiding pillars of the discipline. Geographers attending a conference were always

being asked in the hotel elevators what geographers did. They could only splutter something incomprehensible before the elevator let them out. I love that bewilderment. It releases me to do whatever I please in that vibrant Los Angeles of a discipline, packed with distinctly tribal communities, where nobody can find the CBD. My own pilgrimage is chronicled, fictitiously, in *Bowman—A Novel for Lovers of Geography (2011)*.

In all of this, the Geographical Society has remained the lighthouse that guided me back to Australia, keeping me in touch with Australian concerns and geographical endeavours. It has rejuvenated my retirement, while certifying me as the old curmudgeon I'd always hoped to be.

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July 20, 2012

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