Lowell R. Laudon died on March 13, 1993, at the age of 88, in Waunakee, Wisconsin, following several years of declining health. Lowell was born February 5, 1905, in Redwood Falls, Minnesota, where he grew up and developed a lifelong love of fishing and hunting.

He began his higher education at the University of Minnesota, but soon transferred to Iowa State Teachers College (now Northern Iowa University), where he met his future wife, Florence Stanzel. He intended to pursue a course in physical education, but in 1926 he was introduced to geology during a summer course in the Black Hills taught by University of Iowa instructor Joseph Runner, who convinced young Laudon to transfer to Iowa City. Lowell did so, and received three Iowa degrees in rapid succession—B.S., 1928; M.S., 1929; and Ph.D., 1930. This must have been something of a record.

While at Iowa, he fell in love with fossils and began collecting every shell in sight. Laudon was the consummate paleontologist trained in a biostratigraphic tradition prevalent in pre–World War II midwestern universities. He uniquely coupled his mastery of stratigraphic paleontology with his love of field work in remote places. If set down blindfolded anywhere in the world where there were fossils, he could quickly locate himself within the stratigraphic column. Throughout his career, this talent served him well in many little-studied parts of western North America from New Mexico to Arctic Canada and Alaska.

Upon receiving his Ph.D. in 1930, Laudon and his new wife moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he began teaching at the University of Tulsa with a beginning salary of $3000. He was thankful to have gotten a position at all in those Depression days, but he was only able to keep it in 1933 by accepting a reduction to $1000 as well as assuming the duties of dean of men and assistant registrar. In 1941 Laudon moved to the University of Kansas at Lawrence, where he established his dual reputation for paleontological research and for the teaching of introductory geology. In collaboration with Raymond C. Moore, he was coauthor of a series of important papers on Paleozoic crinoids, including a classic monograph, *Evolution and Classification of Paleozoic Crinoidea* (1943).

In 1948 Wisconsin lured L. R., as he was known to friends, away from Kansas. He had been department chairman for six years, and was so tired of administration that he put a proviso in his acceptance letter to Wisconsin that he would never have to serve as chairman there. Professor Lewis Cline, who had been a student at Tulsa when Lowell arrived there, was delighted to have the Laudon paleontology expertise to complement his own interests and to help guide the postwar flood of graduate students. The rest of the department’s faculty, however, was more interested in his fame as a freshman geology lecturer.

The Laudon success in captivating beginning students was legendary. A protégée once said that L. R. could convince students that it is actually fun to collect fossils in cold, pouring rain while lying in two inches of mud. It was this kind of charisma that made Laudon one of the best
known names on the Madison campus for three decades. It has been estimated that during his 45-year teaching career, he taught more than 25,000 freshmen at three universities. During the 1960s enrollment crush, Laudon regularly had 500 students per class, and for a time he taught two such lecture sections each semester!

The Laudon mystique lured many young students into geology, and a large number of them went on to distinguished careers either in industry or academia. L. R.'s lectures were liberally illustrated with memorable anecdotes and colored slides, which he took during his many summer field expeditions. These images fired the imaginations of most students. Many of them accompanied Lowell on fossil collecting trips around the Midwest, and those who wanted more signed up for summer-long field excursions into the western mountains. One of the first such trips was in the late 1930s, when he and two students hiked the Yukon gold rush trail over Chilkoot Pass. Laudon's boundless energy and enthusiasm for geology were so infectious that almost all of those who accompanied him to the mountains were recruited to geology for their careers. During the 1950s, a dozen excellent students who had fallen under the Laudon spell at Kansas, followed Lowell to Madison to complete their graduate work. Most of his students worked with him in the high country of the United States and western Canada to complete a total of 47 M.S. and 18 Ph.D. degrees.

Laudon was never deterred by obstacles that would seem insurmountable to most people. For example, in 1947 he learned to fly, mortgaged his home, and bought a Republic Seabee flying boat to transport students and supplies to a remote camp at Wapiti Lake in the Canadian Rockies of British Columbia. During this expedition, the party discovered some exceptional triassic fish, which Lowell reported to the National Museum of Canada. Magnificent fossils from this locality are now displayed the the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller, Alberta, in an exhibit that features Laudon and his 1947 party—a fitting tribute to an indefatigable field geologist.

In 1953 Laudon began a decade of summers as a consultant for Exxon to do reconnaissance geology for new petroleum exploration frontiers. It was during the early years of this endeavor that I first fell under the Laudon spell when I was a young Exxon recruit assigned to work with him in Oregon and Washington. His later work in Alaska provided some of the background for Exxon that was to help eventually in the discovery of the giant Prudhoe Bay oil field. The Exxon association brought Lowell back to the Arctic, where he had worked in 1943 in the remote Mackenzie River country of northwestern Canada on the Canol Project to develop wartime petroleum resources for Alaska which would be safer than tanker shipments from California. Simultaneously, the Alcan, now Alaska, Highway, was built to provide a secure inland supply route to Alaska. After hostilities ended, Laudon and two students conducted a pioneer geological study along this new road in 1946 (the results were published in 1947 and 1949). Lowell was always happiest either in the mountains or the Arctic; thanks to Exxon he could be in both simultaneously. In the late 1960s, Laudon created a new and very popular introductory geology field course, which he taught in the mountains of British Columbia and the Yukon until his retirement.

Lowell Laudon is remembered in different ways by different people. Countless nongeology alumni of three universities remember his freshman lectures laced with many yarns and slides of field adventures. His many former graduate students remember L. R.'s incredible energy as he raced them up some mountain and then razzed them good-humoredly around the campfire in the evening because they found so few fossils. Fishing and hunting buddies remember fondly trying unsuccessfully to catch as many fish or shoot as many ducks as the "Old Man." Many of us also remember Laudon Manor on the northwest shore of Lake Mendota, where the latch string was always out for visitors and where Florence Laudon charmed all with her relaxed hospitality.

Professionally, the name Laudon is remembered for more than 40 publications on paleontology and stratigraphy. He was a master of biostratigraphy combined with reconnaissance field
geology. His passing represents a historical landmark, for the tradition of field-oriented stratigraphy and regional geology that he represented has been largely superseded in recent years by both laboratory-oriented and more narrowly focused field studies. Paleontology also has changed dramatically with the increased emphasis upon evolution and ecology; that is, paleobiology as opposed to taxonomy and biostratigraphy.

Lowell Laudon received several notable honors. In 1958–1959 he was a distinguished lecturer for the American Association of Petroleum Geologists. The lecture tour took him to 18 states and several provinces of Canada, where he spoke to thousands of professional geologists about his paleotectonic synthesis of many years of research in western North America. In 1973 he received the Standard Oil Company (Amoco) Distinguished Teaching Award from the University of Wisconsin, and in 1982 the Department of Geology and Geophysics formally named its auditorium in Weeks Hall the “Laudon Lecture Hall” to honor Lowell’s remarkable contributions to general education. In 1986 Laudon received the coveted Neil Miner Award from the National Association of Geology Teachers as further recognition of his unique, 45-year educational mission. He was without peer in blending the doing of science with the teaching of it and all the time having fun doing both. He was a great inspiration to many a budding teacher, showing us both the importance and the fun of reaching those many students who have no intention of pursuing geology professionally.

Perhaps the ultimate testimony to Lowell’s unparalleled success in spreading the gospel of geology is the fact that all four Laudon sons collectively earned 11 degrees in geology, and six grandchildren have earned 12 more geology degrees. At Lowell’s retirement party in 1975, his son Dick reported that he was 30 years old before he realized that there might have been any other career option. Thus the Laudon legacy shall live on through both genetic and intellectual descendants.

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