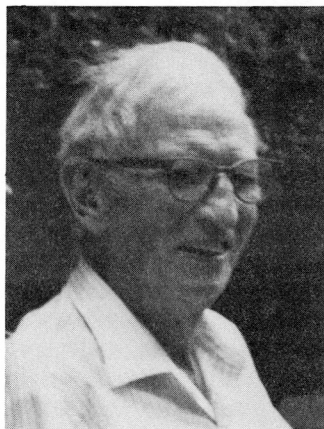


# Memorial to Frank Reeves

## 1886–1986

ERIC RUDD

*2 Wahroonga Ave., Wattle Park, South Australia 50666*



Frank Reeves died in his 100th year on January 24, 1986, at Clarke County, West Virginia, after a short illness. He had returned with his wife Dorothy to the Blue Ridge County he loved so well, after travelling the world making reconnaissance geologic surveys of potential petroleum provinces. His work took him to Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, Central and South America, as well as North America. In each country he contributed basic geologic information which has stood the test of time.

He was born of Welsh stock October 11, 1886, in the small town of Tiune, halfway between Fairmont and Morgantown, West Virginia. After graduating from Fairmont State Normal School, he taught for one winter (1906–1907) before going to Wooster College at the University of West Virginia. There he developed his interest in geology and obtained his

Bachelor's degree. He earned his Ph.D. in Geology in 1916 from Johns Hopkins University, which was then at Baltimore. His thesis was related to the oil sands of West Virginia. Immediately after graduation, he married his first wife, a German girl.

In 1917, just after the outbreak of World War I, Reeves was arrested as a German spy while scouting around an oil field on Cabin Creek, West Virginia. He was carrying in his backpack a letter in German from his wife and a German paperback by Ibsen. He was also in possession of suspicious equipment such as a Brunton compass and an Abney level. He was released after he arrived at Charleston.

In 1918, he received his first foreign assignment—to the Darien Basin in Panama; he returned to this area again in 1929. The next 12 years were spent in the employ of the USGS, mapping the geology and resources of vast areas of the western United States. While mapping the Permian phosphates of Montana and Wyoming, he came into contact with Dale Condit, also of the USGS. This association was to last for many years, taking Reeves on several foreign assignments. Reeves' work with the USGS resulted in a number of publications related to oil fields and potential resource areas, as well as regional surveys. In 1929 and 1930, he worked with an assistant, Walter Wilson, in Canada and Mexico. Wilson would later follow Reeves to other parts of the world.

Reeves and some associates knew the tough times of the depression during the early 1930s. He and several colleagues participated in the construction of log cabins near Oakland, Maryland, during this time. Some of Reeves' descendants still live there.

By 1934, Dale Condit had become chief geologist for Oil Search Limited in Australia. He sent for Reeves to make a reconnaissance survey of the country north of Roma, Queensland, where some oil and gas had previously been found. Reeves assembled a small team and, for most of the next two years, they worked in the Carnarvon Ranges, producing a map of this remote, mountainous area of southeastern Queensland. This work was a classic example of his field mapping of a vast, unsurveyed area without the aid of air photos, and under difficult conditions.

From 1937 to 1938, he was engaged in a reconnaissance of the northern parts of Iran and Afghanistan, adjacent to the Russian border, for the Amiranian Oil Company. He probably would

have returned to that region again in 1939 but for a telegram from Dale Condit—then chief geologist of Standard Vacuum Oil Company—asking him to go to South Africa. He travelled extensively through that part of Africa, assessing the oil prospects of various regions. World War II broke out while he was there; in mid-1940 he returned to the United States, where he married his second wife, Dorothy. During the war years, he was employed writing reports on European oil areas. After the war, he was asked to examine captured documents on German oilfields.

In 1946, Reeves again travelled to Australia with Dale Condit; they spent until 1948 making a reconnaissance of the Bonaparte Gulf area, the Kimberleys, and the Great Sandy Desert of north-western Australia—now called the Canning Basin. During this period, Reeves discovered the Wolf Creek Meteorite Crater. Smithsonian scientists subsequently visited the crater and named a nickel-iron mineral, Reevesite, in his honor. In 1986, this crater became a strategic spot from which to view Halley's comet, especially for many Japanese who visited it.

He and his wife returned to Washington in 1949, acquiring an old log farmhouse near Paris, Virginia. This was their home from then on. Reeves called the property "Kimberley Farm," after the area in northwestern Australia, and also to avoid naming it after a Civil War battle. He spent much of his time reviewing and writing reports on foreign oil provinces. He also spent time enjoying the flora and fauna, and the scenery, of the area he loved so well.

In late 1957, at the age of 71, he made a visit to Bolivia, travelling with his usual enthusiasm. As Reeves put it, "What I especially enjoyed (was) travelling in unexplored, sparsely inhabited regions and studying the geology of unmapped terrains." This he did with great skill and understanding. He was essentially a loner, working with a few well tried assistants. They remember the persistence with which he penetrated inaccessible areas, by airplane, vehicle, camel, or horse. He was more at home with his bedroll in the bush than in a city hotel. Combined with his understanding of geology was his deep appreciation of the people and natural surroundings that he encountered in his travels. He developed a great love and knowledge of bird life that gave him companionship until the end of his long life.

Frank Reeves was a member of the Geological Society of America and became a Fellow in 1924. He was also a member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, and contributed a number of papers to the AAPG *Bulletin*. He enjoyed good health, was alert and active, and continued reading the AAPG *Bulletin*, *The Explorer*, and other newspapers and publications until his death. He had a long and productive life, and is remembered with great respect by those who had the privilege of knowing him.