

Member Spotlight

A monthly highlight featuring an ASEG member. All past member spotlights can be found in our newsletter [archive](#).



We welcome **Kim Frankcombe** under the spotlight in this issue as he shares his enlightening story!

Kim runs a small consulting group and is Secretary of the Australian Geoscience Council

I'm a geophysical consultant, mainly hard rock exploration, but I do occasional non-seismic oil and gas exploration and high-level advice on geotechnical engineering geophysics programmes.

1. For how long have you been a geophysicist?

Over 40 years

2. What do you like most about being a geophysicist?

The thrill of the chase. Turning a squiggle into an idea, an idea into a drill hole and a drill hole into a discovery - or not. No matter how much you know, there is always something new to learn.

3. If you weren't a geophysicist, what would you be?

At my age, a nuisance. Some would say I already am.

4. What made you decide to be a geophysicist?

I decided when I was 5 that I was going to be a geologist if I grew up. I didn't really know what a geologist was other than they collected rocks, but that was good enough. Studying palaeontology during my first year at uni required that we draw fossils. I was rubbish at art and couldn't draw nautiloids properly. John Shirley and Roger Lewis (2 of our 3 geophysics lecturers) walked into the lab and picked up a trilobite; one asked the other what it was, to which the reply was, "I don't know, it's a rock; put it down" I decided to double in geology and geophysics.

5. What reaction do you mostly get when you tell someone that you are a geophysicist?

Either "That sounds interesting", or if they are an accountant "Oh, I used to be one of those"

6. When asked what you do – what do you do?

A geologist with a calculator

7. What aspect of geophysics do you enjoy most?

Seeing a hint of an anomaly in a data set and watching it develop into a drill target in my mind like a butterfly hatching from its chrysalis.

8. Who is your most respected geophysicist?

*No one person. Les Starkey and Bill Peters have been great mentors. Les for his "give it a go" support, and Bill for showing me how to make money and still have fun doing something I love. There are a bunch of UoT graduates from the 70's that I hold in high regard, as well as Jovan Silic, who can simultaneously edit a notebook of integral equations, program in FORTRAN **and** find mines whilst almost talking English.*

9. What's one thing that we wouldn't know about you?

If I told you that, you'd know!

10. What is Your funniest or worst field memory?

I have several that would qualify. Arguably, the worst was in the 70s as an exploration geologist running a team of 9 out in the Great Sandy Desert. One Sunday, I walked into the cook van to find the cook lying on the floor. That didn't concern me as he was a heavy drinker and dope smoker and stole the morphine from the Flying Doctor box when we went on break. I gave him a nudge with my boot and told him to get up and start making lunch. He groaned and complained of a sore chest and didn't seem hungover or stoned, so I rustled up the chopper pilot, and one of my fieldies and I carried the cook to the chopper, and we flew into Fitzroy Crossing, where the cook was transferred to the Flying Doctor and taken to Derby. He was 35 and had had a heart attack. None of us had first aid training so I booked myself in for a remote area course on my next break.

11. Where was your best sunrise/sunset location?

A tie between the infinity pool at Cockatoo Island after a day of seismic and dozer bogging and the wet mess at Nobles Nob after a day of gravity.



Sunset from the bar at the infinity pool on Cockatoo Island

12. Tell us about a challenge you overcame, and how did you do so?

On the Cockatoo Island job, we were given a 3-tonne explosives truck to move the gear around with. We were working in several metres of mud and 12-metre tides, and I managed to bog the truck. I called the Mine Manager to bring a snatch strap as it was an easy recovery with the right gear. He arrived in a Landcruiser and had nothing to pull with. He then called a Cat 990, 80-tonne loader, which got bogged halfway along the old pit. Undaunted, he called on a 112-tonne Cat D11L dozer, which walked down from the maintenance sheds into the pit and along to us. Meanwhile, the loader operator managed to free himself and joined us. No one had a rope, chain or anything to tow us out. The dozer operator decided he'd push us out backwards, I'm not sure why, as there was more mud that way and not a lot in front. He started moving backwards and forwards in front of the truck to fashion a ramp, and of course, the mud was thixotropic, and down he went so that only the top sprocket was above ground level. The loader could not pull him out because no one had a heavy chain, and the tide was coming in fast. They bagged all the inlets, isolated the electrics and left the dozer and truck to be completely submerged. They went back at 3 am as the tide was retreating and fed sleepers under the grousers, but the ripper at the back of the dozer blocked them. They decided to pull the retaining pins on the \$7k ripper, and because they had no chains or wire rope to restrain it, it disappeared vertically into the mud. The tide came in again, so they re-bagged it and waited again for low tide. By this stage, the engine was full of water, so the sump was pumped dry and refilled, the injectors and manifolds with turbochargers were removed, and the engine cranked by battery, causing water jets to shoot a hundred metres into the air from the injector holes. Not wanting to risk a third submersion, as soon as the last cylinder was clear

and the injector replaced, the engine was started. Without exhaust or turbo, they fed more sleepers under the grousers and managed to walk the dozer back at a deafening pace. What did I do to overcome this? 1. Rang the office to make sure our insurance was up to date. 2. Put two cartons of beer on the bar. Problem largely solved as they were having to explain to head office why they had lost a \$7k ripper and twice drowned a \$1M dozer for an \$80k truck



The bogged truck leads to a bogged dozer about to go under for the second time. The dozer was back on dry land prior to having the exhaust refitted.

13. Do you have any volunteering experience?

A bit. It started at high school, where I was on the Students Council, which had replaced Prefects as school leaders that year. The same happened again at the university residential college, where we mainly organised boat races (sculling contests) and beer fests. After a few years in the bush as a field geo, I helped with the first PESA conference in Melbourne. I then moved to Adelaide and spent a few years serving on the SA State branch of ASEG and the 88 ASEG conference Committee. When I moved to Perth in '89, Nick Sheard had already put me on the WA State Branch Committee, so I served some time there as well as a few more conference committees before being roped onto the ASEG FedEx for a few years, including one as President. After exiting FedEx, I took over from Ron Hackney as Secretary/Treasurer of the Australian Geoscience Council (AGC), A job I still have. I was also elected the District 12 (West Pacific) rep on the SEG Council for a couple of years, had a break for a couple of years and was pulled back in as a Special Adviser for District 12. Along with Suzi Uraniak I'm co-chair of the GeoSciEd Conference in 2026 - focusing on

Geoscience Education and Treasurer for the Australasian bid for the 38th International Geological Congress (IGC) in 2028. Other than the 3 am SEG Council meetings, it's all been fun and exposed me to a much bigger part of Geoscience than I could have had otherwise.

14. What's one thing you wish someone had told you when you were at university?

Pay more attention to your structural geology lectures; better still, ignore Clive and read a good Structural Geology textbook.

15. What is your best interview tip?

Know your target and be clear about what you want.

16. What are you reading at the moment?

Today: Over breakfast, one of Jovan's papers on AEM; during the day, Spector and Grant and the follow-on papers for the nth time; this evening, I am editing the last AGC Board meeting minutes from Leslie. Tomorrow will be different but the same.

17. What do you do in your spare time?

I have no idea what you are talking about. When it's not raining, and I'm not tied to the desk reporting to the bloody ATO, I am cutting some rust out of my old Landcruiser to get it ready for sale - anyone want to buy a beast only driven by a geophysicist? I have a big shed full of stuff that will come in handy one day and a couple of lawnmowers that won't run. I've stripped down and rebuilt the Zenith carbie on the Victa I bought second-hand in 1981 for \$15 and reckon it will start first crank (impulse starter) once I put it all back together again.

18. What's your most treasured textbook?

Blakely - Potential Theory in Gravity and Magnetic Applications and Sheriff - Encyclopedic Dictionary of Exploration Geophysics