



Neville Ronsley ('Nod') Parsons

(1926 -2017)



Nod Parsons passed away peacefully in his sleep in 30 December at the age of 91. "Nod" wintered at Macca in 1950 and Mawson in 1955 as Cosray and Auroral Physicist. He also participated in trips to Macca in 61/62 and 63/64. He was awarded the Polar Medal in 1956.

He was a Foundation and Life Member of the ANARE Club.

"Nod" was born in Tasmania in 1926, and educated at Scotch College, Launceston and the Universities of Tasmania and Melbourne. From 1949 Parsons spent fourteen years on the staff of the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE), spending 1950 at Macquarie Island and 1955 at Mawson Station in Antarctica as a cosmic ray and Auroral physicist, establishing cosmic ray observatories in each case. He installed two giant Cosray telescopes in the Mawson laboratory and recorded the remarkable solar flare event of February 1956 on one of these instruments.

He also spent the summers of 1961-62 and 1963-64 at Macquarie Island participating in joint programs with the University of California of high-altitude balloon studies of x-rays associated with auroral displays.

During his time at Mawson Station in Antarctica he was a member of a five-man party led by John Bérchevaise which, in early January 1956, made the first ever visits to the Masson, David and Casey ranges south west of the station.

In 1964 he moved to the University of Calgary then the University of Alberta, Calgary in Canada where he guided both the physics department and Faculty of Science in their formative years continuing his Auroral research. He started as a professor of physics, eventually becoming acting department head, vice-dean (student affairs), and then dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. He was the founding dean of the Faculty of Science.

He returned to Australia, going to Brisbane in 1978 to take up the position of Director of the Brisbane College of Advanced Education and, in 1988, retired from and returned to his native Tasmania.

“Nod’s” advice for future students of physics or astronomy (recalled by the then Associate Dean of Science at Calgary, (Dr Tom Swaddle) mirrors how he has lived his entire career. “Make sure you have a solid grounding in mathematics,” he said, “and a yearning to explore the way the physical world works.”

Mount Parsons, (67°47'S 62°35'E), a prominent peak in the David Range bears his name. It features on one of the Australia Post series of stamps, issued in 2013, featuring Antarctic mountains.



Joe Johnson