

In the Member Spotlight this month is the Senior Exploration Geophysicist at OZ Minerals, Andrew Thompson.



Photo: Mugshot of Andrew Thompson

1. What is your current role?

My current role is Senior Exploration Geophysicist at OZ Minerals

2. For how long have you been a geophysicist?

I graduated from Flinders University at the end of 1991, so into my 29th year.

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

There are lots of things I love about being a geophysicist, being able to look deep beneath cover where others cannot see, visiting places where few people go, but most of all I love the thrill of discovery.

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

I have a deep love of history, so if I wasn't a geophysicist, I believe I would do something in the field of history, either as a writer, a teacher or an archaeologist.

5. What is your best interview tip?

Interviews work both ways, always have questions ready for your interviewers.

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

I always wanted to be a fighter pilot ever since I was a kid but it was not to be. It turns out I am prone to motion sickness, so I probably made the right career choice.

7. Tell us about your best field meal?

Gotta be roast anything in the camp oven.

8. Where was your best sunrise/sunset location?

Cloncurry has the best sunsets.

9. What are you reading at the moment?

I have just finished a book written by a friend of mine called "The Dictionary of Lost Words" which is a historical fiction novel about the creation of the first Oxford Dictionary. I am currently reading a Japanese Fantasy book by Lian

Hearn called "Across the Nightingale Floor" on loan from one of the geologists from OZ Minerals

10. What made you decide to be a geophysicist?

When I first started my degree I had never heard of Geophysics but on reflection I have always enjoyed looking for things. I went to university to study science and was drawn to the Earth Sciences but didn't really enjoy chemistry at all and as such found my niche in Geophysics.

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

Take a gap year. After 17 years of study the last year or so was a real struggle.

12. What's your most treasured textbook?

Applied Geophysics by Telford.

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14. Your funniest or worst field memory?

Worst field memory is being chronically sick whilst working in the rain forests of Sumatra but I have some good memories of that place as well. I could write a book on that one.

15. Your most respected geophysicist?

That's a tough one as there are so many great geophysicists that I know. Ken Zonge for me was someone I had great respect for.

16. What do you do in your spare time?

I read a lot, spend time with my family, try to keep fit. More recently I have been trying my hand at coaching netball.

17. What is a challenge you have overcome and how did you do so?

I was asked to become chairperson for our school Governing Council. The role was really challenging as it involved a lot of public speaking and people management skills and I learnt a lot. I think my saving grace was that it was a voluntary position and no one else put their hand up so I thought well I will give it a go. I did so for the next 6 years and found it to be a really rewarding experience.

18. What is a challenge that you see in geoscience today, and how do you see the community overcoming it?

The biggest challenge in geoscience is our image. We do not do a great job at promoting how much value we add to the community.

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

Wow, that sounds interesting. What do you do exactly?

20. When you are asked "What's a geophysicist??" or "What does a geophysicist do?" what is your stock answer?

We study the physical properties of the earth such as how dense or magnetic or conductive the earth is.

21. What is the best way that the ASEG could let the public know about geophysics and its benefit to the everyday life?

Education through schools. Schools tend to focus on the environment which is important, but the conversation tends to be very one sided. Exploration and mining do not get a good look in and certainly the benefits to society are not discussed even though they are around us everywhere.

22. Where do you think exploration geophysics will head in the next 10-15 years?

As discoveries dry up exploration geophysicists will be required to search deeper and deeper to find the next generation of ore bodies. The focus will be on interpretation of those deep seeking technologies such as MT. I also expect drone technology to become more prevalent in our industry.

23. Given a choice, would you prefer extra mentoring on the science, your career or the how to handle/explain exploration geophysics and its benefits to the community?

The latter.

24. What aspect of geophysics do you enjoy most?

Working with geologists to come up with realistic models.

25. Do you think AI will take over your job or will the human element remain vital to exploration successes?

No, AI has been around ever since I started my career and does not seem to have progressed very far in that time despite the rapid improvement in computer power. AI would have to go through a step change for that to happen.