

OKLAHOMA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE
President's Message Fall 2014

I hope you are all had a great summer. It is the time of year for many of us to do a little field work or other research, to attend conferences, and to catch up on other things such as writing. I am doing all three of these things. I am using my car trip to Boise, Idaho to stop at various places and look at famous fossil deposits, and make videos about them. The first is Ashfall Beds State Park in Nebraska, which is one of the best deposits of mammal fossils in the world. The bones of hundreds of animals, entombed in volcanic ash 12 million years ago, are still articulated. The second is the Great Unconformity in the Black Hills, in which horizontal Cambrian deposits sit atop Precambrian deposits that are at a 70 degree angle, with almost two billion years of sediments missing. The meeting of angled and horizontal deposits could not have been produced by a Great Flood; one glance at this unconformity disproves young-earth creationism. The third is Fossil Bowl, which 15 million years ago the leaves of many species of trees that now grow only in eastern North America or in western Asia fell into a lake and were preserved, nearly intact. And that's just on the road to the Botany 2014 conference in which I will participate. I will be bringing two students with me on this trip.

What do you do with an old thesis? In my case, I got it out and tried to read it and cringed. Needless to say, I was not nearly as good of a writer in 1986 as I am now. My thesis, dating from the microfilm era, is almost impossible to find—perhaps just as well. It also dated from the hand-drawing and Zipatone era, just before Cricket Graph. Why should anyone want to look at it? Because it is an interesting story—both the research results that I obtained, and the process that I used to obtain them, everything from crawling through weeds to build-your-own photosynthetic gas exchange devices. The work contained lots of interesting human stories, backed up by general-interest photos that were not permitted in a thesis. So I decided to rewrite my thesis, putting it in plain English, and telling the stories of how the work was done—for a general audience, not for a committee or peers. The original thesis text, from before Word and Word Perfect, was only on paper—and saved it as a PDF. I have now posted it on my website at http://www.stanleyrice.com/articles/stanley_rice_thesis_popular_version.pdf. Only the first two chapters ever got published. You might consider doing the same with your old thesis. You, as I did, can use it as a story of the adventure of science, rather than just a technical document.

Soon the fall semester will begin. Remember that the Fall Field Meeting is at Black Mesa State Park in September. This is one of the most unique places in Oklahoma. Also, remember the Fall Technical Meeting at Northeastern State Broken Arrow in November. I always look forward to meeting with my scientific and educational colleagues from around the state. Remember that these meetings, especially the field meetings each fall and spring, are open to students of all ages.

Stanley Rice, Ph.D.
OAS President