

My Earth science educator story – Benjamin Mapani What I did, why I did it and what happened



My career in Earth Science (Geology) began when I completed my BSc degree in Mineral Science at the University of Zambia in 1986. In my first year as a geology student, Professor David Turner presented a lecture on what geologists do and what opportunities they have. Mining featured quite a lot in his talk, but in addition, to his credit, he highlighted careers in geophysics, hydrogeology and geological mapping. I wanted a job where I could spend time outdoors, not locked up in a room each day! This was what I wanted and Prof. Turner had done his job!

At that time in 1982, he promised us that everyone would get a job when they completed their studies, adding that those who opted for the mining sector would be compensated more than other employers such as the government. This was a big draw, as geological careers were not well known at that time. The geology class normally varied between five and eight students, but our class topped the list as we had a healthy dozen students enrolled.

On completion of my studies in 1986, I was offered a job by the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines. However, by this time I had come to appreciate what a mine geologist actually does, having served as an intern on the Copperbelt.

Needless to say, I turned down the offer, and instead, gained employment at the Geological Survey as a mapping geologist. This was a most rewarding job, despite not being a high paying one; it made me investigate rock processes from igneous to sedimentary, more deeply, and how these rocks actually end up in a pile of mountains through plate tectonics. This fascinated me and I suddenly had a desire for further education.

Four years later, I had completed my map and gained a scholarship to do a Master's degree in France, specialising in geochemistry and geostatistics. This was not my original choice, as I really wanted to study plate tectonics, however, I completed my MSc in 1989. I went back to the Geological Survey, but I was invited to take a teaching position at the University of Zambia. From there my career took off, as I had discovered what I enjoyed most.



Students examining a rhyolite: Chiedza Musekiwa, left; Peter Nyabeze, centre and Ben Mapani, far right sampling hot springs in Opuwo, Namibia (2013).

I served one year at the University of Zambia and gained a scholarship to study structural geology at the University of Melbourne, Australia, under the mentorship of Professor Chris Wilson. My three and half years in Melbourne yielded a PhD in the structural control of gold deposits, using the example of the Stawell

Gold Mine in Victoria. I returned to teaching at the University of Zambia, and really enjoyed taking students in the field. To me this was the “holy grail” of my subject. I noticed that once students had been exposed in the field, classroom studies became much easier to grasp and we (the students and teachers) all participated as though the classroom was a “recall” session of what we had learnt in the field.

To this day, several decades later and several years wiser, teaching field geology remains my passion.



A student measuring dip and strike.

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