

## My Earth science educator story – Phil Murphy What I did, why I did it and what happened



My decision to study geology at university stemmed from my interest in exploring old copper mine workings in the Lake District National Park. As a keen caver and rock climber I became fascinated by the abandoned underground workings which litter the hills, and was involved in many trips underground, finding remains left by the original miners.

After university, I worked in the oil industry offshore in the North Sea and Arabian Gulf and onshore in Holland and Oman. After an industry-sponsored MSc in palynology at the University of Sheffield I worked for a biostratigraphy company in Aberdeen and London developing bio-steering for directional drilling in the North Sea. The oil price plummeted in the early 1990s and, along with most of my colleagues, I was out of work. I moved back to the north of England so I could go exploring caves in the limestone of the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

An advert in the local newspaper pointed me towards a science-facing postgraduate certificate in education course just starting at Bradford College (in those days Bradford and Ilkley Community College). This was a new initiative aimed at people

changing careers and the students on the course came from a range of backgrounds. The course was fantastic. I learnt so much about education and how it works, or doesn't, and my interest in understanding exactly what young people learn when we teach stems from this inspirational course.



On finishing the course, I ended up employed to support the delivery of the world-renowned Master's degree in exploration geophysics in what was the School of Earth Sciences at the University of Leeds. This was a time of major change in the English school education system, with the introduction of the national curriculum bringing earth sciences into its rightful place in the science curriculum for the first time. Part of my work for the university included helping schools to integrate geology into science lessons. I became involved in the Earth Science Education Unit, a continuing professional development provider whose aim was to ensure the new geology content of the science curriculum was taught well. This programme, led by Chris King and Peter Kennett, put me in contact with innovative and inspiring geoscience educators across the country. As time went on, my

knowledge of high school education became more and more valued by my employer, now the School of Earth and Environment and I am now admissions tutor and school liaison officer, as well as a lecturer.

I was awarded my PhD for research into the paleoclimate record preserved in the caves of the north of England, stemming from my love of underground exploration. As a lecturer, one of the modules I developed and am responsible for, offers our final year students a chance to work with young people in schools or other educational settings and has set many on a career in education. I contribute to education practitioner journals and am a fellow of the National Association for Environmental Education.

One of my main interests at all level of education is trying to overcome the widespread failure to appreciate how dependent we are as a society, and as individuals, on earth resources. How can we equip future leaders to make informed decisions, if they do not know what the things we take for granted in our daily lives are made from?



Phil on TV with Bear Grylls.

*Phil Murphy, aged 52, Leeds, UK,  
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