

## **Dr Peter Nixon – Diamond Geologist & Lesotho Expert**

Dear Friends and Colleagues of Peter Nixon,

It is with considerable sadness that I have to tell you that Peter Nixon passed away last week. Peter's family asked me to pass on the sad news to his colleagues, and request some privacy and solitude while they grieve the loss of their dear father.

Peter was a true giant in the field of mantle xenoliths and kimberlites. Well liked by all who interacted with him, his popularity with all his colleagues opened many doors for his students.

On graduating from the African Institute of Earth Sciences in 1957, Peter embarked on a remarkable PhD at Leeds under WQ Kennedy, that involved lengthy treks across what was then Basutoland (now Lesotho). In Sept '57, after camping on the new world famous Letseng-la-Terae kimberlite, he pitted the area and defined the extent of the pipe. This enabled 6000 local diggers to move in and start what was to become the mine that produces the world's most valuable diamonds.

After completing his PhD in 1961, Peter worked for 9 years, as Principal Geologist at the Geological Survey of Uganda, from 1960 to 1969, in what was a magical time for him and his young family. Leaving for Lesotho to be Mining Geologist and Acting Commissioner of Mines, from 1969 to 1974 he made critical contributions to the mining industry of that country, Co-heading a UN diamond exploration project and bringing, in 1973, a large cohort of international geologists to see the amazing kimberlites and mantle samples that he had played a primary role in discovering. During these years in Africa, Peter and his wife Mary were renown for extending their hospitality to many geoscientists who passed through these far-flung but beautiful places.

Starting at Leeds, his sense of adventure and nose for interesting geological opportunities led Peter to agree to be seconded to a Foundation Professorship at the University of Papua New Guinea for 4 year. This position yielded some wild tales as well as the critical sampling visit to the Malaita alnoite, exposed on a human sacrificial burial ground - a trip few could have pulled off without Peter's ability to befriend people.

Peter became Professor at Leeds and was the Director of the Institute of African Geosciences from 1989 until his retirement - a position he was supremely qualified for.

Peter had an amazing nose for important scientific problems. He was an inspiration in the field, with an open mind, supported by an encyclopaedic knowledge of rocks and minerals plus an ability, through sheer force of personality, to gain access to pretty much any land to examine rocks. And yet he was a very humble person, with a very well adjusted work/life balance and valued, above all else, time spent with his wife Mary and their daughters, Jacky, Sally, Kathy and Penny and the many grandchildren.

He will be sorely missed as a scientist, friend and mentor to many.

A more extended biography, documenting Peter's many scientific accomplishments, will be published elsewhere.

**Graham Pearson**  
**University of Alberta**  
**15 April 2025**