

Peter Williams next introduced the main speaker for the evening, Penny Williamson, curator at the School of Earth & Environmental Sciences of the University of Wollongong welcoming her and fellow lecturer Paul Carr to the Meeting. The President referred to Penny Williamson's particular interest in preserving mineral specimens which has been the subject of a number of lectures which she has given around the world over the last few years. A lecture on preserving Australia's mineral heritage was given by Penny Williamson to the June 2002 Joint Mineralogical Societies Seminar in Brisbane and she and Paul Carr had contributed an article to the June 2003 issue of the Australian Journal of Mineralogy.

The President also referred to the work by the UoW School of Earth & Environmental Sciences staff in setting up a fine display of the Howard Worner mineral collection in the main foyer of the Sciences building, Building 41. During her talk Penny Williamson announced that in May this year she and Paul Carr had added a third display case to the two cases already set up.

'The Heritage Aspects of Mineral Collecting'.

Penny Williamson commenced her lecture by professing a passion for mineral specimens and her concern developed over many years that mineral specimens were an important feature of a nation's heritage and that all efforts should be made to preserve them for present and future generations. In view of this concern and her intention to stress wherever and whenever possible the need to preserve a country's mineral heritage, the speaker acknowledged that her lecture this evening was effectively that appearing in the June 2003 Australian Journal of Mineralogy and that any members wanting more information could refer to that issue.

Penny Williamson then proceeded to describe, emphasize and illustrate the theme in her lecture aided by a Power Point screening system. The lecture stressed that all collectors should look to the present and future preservation and disposal of their collections allowing for the unfortunate reality that properly stored mineral specimens should last for a much longer time than the collector. Since in effect if not reality, all collectors and not just Museum collection curators were custodians of a fraction of mineral heritage they had a responsibility to ensure that a collection built up over a very long or even over only a short period would be appropriately preserved for posterity.

The speaker also stressed that a part of the preservation process was to ensure adequate documentation and cataloguing. The more information that could be assigned to a specimen the better, including if available any interesting history of the mode of acquisition, but Penny Williamson particularly stressed the need for the location to be recorded, this item of information being of primary importance. The chemical composition, crystallography and mineral name of a specimen can readily be re-identified but the locality if not recorded adequately may be lost permanently.

The speaker referred to the Albert Chapman Mineral Collection which is widely regarded as one of the top ten in the world. As part of his collecting policy and interest Albert was committed to preserving Australian mineral heritage and made a point of searching out top-quality Australian specimens particularly including ones which had gone overseas, to bring them home. A Mineralogical Record article in 1988 referring to the Chapman Collection described specimens as having been selected on the basis of a combination of several factors, aesthetic appeal, uniqueness, historical importance and national heritage

value. The collection was sold to the N.S.W. government in 1988 at a greatly reduced price specifically to ensure that it remained intact; and is now proudly on permanent display in the Australian Museum.

The speaker recommended that all collectors be alert to problems encountered in traveling with specimens and related a few experiences of her own in trying to pass through customs in the US after attending the Denver Show and being required to unwrap for inspection virtually every specimen in a crowded transit area with only a short time before her flight left.

The same Denver Show also provided her with an anecdote from a dedicated local American collector who had picked her up on arrival and who described going on a field trip to a collecting site on a mountain-top at an altitude of 14,000 feet, well within the permafrost area and having to gradually chip and thaw a specimen of fluorite from an excavation over a period of several hours. This demonstrated not only the passion, but the story behind the collecting, which should be incorporated in the specimens' history.

The speaker clearly would like all mineral specimen collectors or 'custodians' to follow standardized procedures in their collecting and display policies, conservation and cataloguing since even museums did not follow the same practices. From her own knowledge of many museum collections it was clear that various policies notably in regard to the availability of display space and whether there was any commercial aspect to a museum's administration influenced not only what was put on display but what was adequately preserved. Notably the mineral collection of the Western Australian Museum had to be kept in storage for many years due to the lack of display space, (and presumably the funding to pay for this), and the collection deteriorated badly. Penny Williamson particularly deplored any tendency on the part of state or federal governments to regard a museum and all its displayed and stored material as a potential commercial asset rather than a heritage.

The speaker finally referred to the advent of computers which supposedly should have enhanced the recording, curating, cataloguing and dispensing of Museum specimen information immensely. To a certain extent this has been so but Museum collection databases have regularly suffered from the same problem encountered by presumably virtually everyone else who works with a computer, of the operating systems being changed by the manufacturer at regular intervals and gradually becoming incompatible with earlier versions.

Members may refer to the article by Penny Williamson and Paul Carr in the June 2003 Australian Journal of Mineralogy on '**Preserving Australia's Mineral Heritage**' where the authors put forward their views on and description of the problems and work associated with maintaining this country's mineral heritage and collections and particularly stress the case for the guaranteed longevity and support for the custodial institutions.

Further information on Australia's museum mineral collections was presented in the December 2000 edition of the A.J.M. '**Mineralogy in Australian Museums**'.