3
The Buildings

Plate 3.1 Campus map showing buildings occupied by the Geology Department. ‘Old Huts’, Building 31 (1959–60); Physics Building, Building 39 (1962–63); Old Geology Building, Building 32 (1963–91); D. A. Brown Building, Building 47 (1991 – present); RSES, Building 61, future location?
R. E. Barwick modified from original map courtesy of Paul Sjoberg, ANU Facilities and Services

The Geology Building (Plate 3.2), last in the row along University Avenue, was well designed by Bill Batt (the University Architect) and W. Pearce (Clerk of Works), implemented by ANU administrative staff (T. M. Owen and P. W. Brett), and built under the watchful eyes of geology staff members. Initially, deeper footings had to be sunk due to the ground structure and Sullivans Creek gravels. A central lecture theatre was surrounded by a 50-seat first-year laboratory, four smaller corner labs and four demonstrators’ rooms. The entrance foyer had wall-map displays and two large display cases for museum and teaching specimens (Plate 3.3), plus an artistic polished-slab wall made from local rocks (Plate 7.4). Upstairs, a large, airy map-room over the lecture theatre was surrounded by staff offices, administration rooms and student cubicles with essential rock stacks. Also on this floor were a small Geochemistry Lab, X-ray analysis and diffraction labs, and a library. Technical services, the Lapidary Lab and a large museum with modern compactus units were located in an eastern single-storey wing. For a while, we also housed the Science Faculty Office, when
Doug McAlpine was Faculty Secretary. Following public service custom, the staffrooms were shown on the initial plans to be different sizes depending on rank, but this was quickly changed when Professor Brown pointed out that all staff would expect to be promoted.

The move into the new building was accomplished rapidly, although a spectacular accident occurred when bottles of ammonia and hydrochloric acid fell off a trolley next to the air intake; white fumes spread rapidly throughout the building, causing its rapid evacuation and a visit from the fire brigade (Plate 3.4). There was a problem with clocks installed in the corridors, which hung from the ceiling; several tall staff and students bent the stalks, so the clocks had to be raised. Another problem was with possums. One took refuge in the typewriter cupboard and another hibernated for a week in the X-ray machine. The small tearoom was a major social centre; a group of 10 contributed to purchase a tapestry print for $100 from Leo Seewen, the departmental photographer, who had a side business marketing artworks. This adorned the tearoom wall for many years. Several staff thought, rudely, that it was a most expensive tea towel. It disappeared during the move to the Botany Building!
Plate 3.3 Museum showcases in the foyer of the Old Building

Plate 3.4 Firemen visit the Old Building. Alan White and George Halford discuss the situation with one of the firemen.
The eastern end of the grounds was swampy, so the Buildings and Grounds Department (now Facility Services) planted a small copse of oak trees to soak up the water. Later, in 1965, when planned extensions were to be built (Plate 3.5), there were protests against removing some of the trees. Moreover, the cost of the extension had been miscalculated so that 1.5 m had to be trimmed off the length of the building. The extension housed a 40-seat second-year laboratory, a well-lit library with small compactus for reprint storage, a palynology lab, a sedimentary lab and a large flume room, for demonstrating current action on sediments, in addition to three staffrooms and cubicles for graduate students. The roof of the new wing was none too watertight and some overseas students were amazed to see academic staff up to their ankles in water, mopping up after a storm.

Plate 3.5 The new wing of the Old Geology Building under construction
Photo: Sue Jephcott

The flume (Plate 3.6) required a large underground watertank outside the building. The flume was a joint venture with CSIRO; it was duly opened in 1970, by Sir Frederick White, Chairman of the CSIRO, who ceremoniously ‘pulled the chain for the first flush’. The flume was an excellent teaching aid, but little used for research. There were two memorable projects: a physics honours student, Peter Killen, carried out a study on the design of surfboards, which was later published in the *Journal of Fluid Dynamics*; and an engineer from the
Military College, Duntroon, made a major study on the design of floodways in the Australian Capital Territory. Several years later, in 1982, the flume was dismantled and reassembled at CSIRO, after which the room was converted into a large geochemistry laboratory. This teaching and research accommodation served the department well for many years and made it a student-friendly base.

The 1991 forced transfer to the Botany Building (the New Geology Building; Plates 3.1 and 3.7) was a nightmare, but a major transport achievement. The X-ray machines, which were extremely heavy, and the large globe necessitated removal of doorframes. The valuable William Smith map in its large frame also required a skilled effort to move. The museum collection, which by then comprised several thousand specimens, had to be moved carefully and was split into two to fit the new storage space. We managed to take the compactus units with us and fitted them underground. We also acquired an outdoor storage cage for larger specimens. Unfortunately, the rock wall could not be moved, and is still anomalously decorating the Engineering Building (Plate 7.4). We managed to convince Buildings and Grounds that the old coconut mats in the upstairs entrance hall were dangerously worn, so we had them replaced with four rock slabs, chosen by David Ellis and provided by Hans Hensell. These are now used for teaching as well as for decorative purposes.
The new accommodation was built around a central courtyard (Plate 7.4), with a large first-year laboratory on the ground floor and a large lab upstairs that was split in two with a sliding partition to give separate second and third-year labs. This arrangement enabled us to keep practical material for each class near at hand so that students could work in their own time.

In the New Building, staff and students shared a tearoom off the courtyard (Plate 3.8), and the students had a Geological Society office that housed a pool table. This room was later converted into an experimental petrology laboratory. Graduate-student and honours-student cubicles built upstairs were equipped with some of the furniture salvaged from the Old Building. When technical services and a large geochemical lab were built downstairs, the powerlines had to be drastically rearranged. For the first few years, members of the Botany Department continued to use the glasshouse on the northern side of the building; eventually (in 1994), it was removed and additional office space was added to house the growing Regolith Centre.
The unfortunate placement of a radioactive safe (lead-brick lined) under a cable channel in the thick concrete ceiling of the Geochemistry Lab caused a minor $\gamma$-ray radiation leak. Despite its trivial nature, the event occasioned considerable press coverage. The possible serious nature of this incident prompted a university-wide survey of the handling of radioactive materials.

There was no room for the map collection so this went on permanent loan to the Geography Department and the Australian Geological Survey Organisation (AGSO; now Geoscience Australia). The space allocated for it became a computer room, and a small drawing office was fitted out for marine survey work. The first seminar room was eventually converted to honours cubicles in 2001, and the small lecture theatre downstairs was rechristened the ‘D. A. Brown Lecture Theatre’ in honour of the first Professor of Geology.

Plate 3.8 The tearoom in the New Building on the occasion of Professor Campbell’s seventieth birthday party. From left to right: Dick Barwick, Tim Munson, Robin Westcott, Ken Campbell, John Vickers, Judith Caton, Judy Papps, Wolf Meyer, Mike Rickard (standing), Prame Chopra, Judith Shelley, Dave Ellis, Des Strusz, Tony Phimphisane.

Photo: Gavin Young

The Buildings and Grounds Department had promised to repaint the building, but they never got round to it, so, then Head Technical Officer, Henry Zapasnik, organised a student working party to cover up the dirty battleship-grey walls with a bright coat of cream paint. The roof of the building had also
sprung several leaks. This contributed to major flooding during a hailstorm in February 2007. The building has always been fully occupied and the influx of Postdoctoral Fellows required allocation of additional office space in the new Life Sciences Building next door. Plans to move the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES) and to establish a closer link between Geography and Geology to make a School of Resource and Environmental Management (SREM) precinct have never materialised.