

**Jean-Paul Turcaud,**  
**one of our most adventurous prospectors has joined**  
**the immortals of the Prospectors Hall of Fame.**

The office of the Government Mineralogist attracted many prospectors and geologists over the years. It was the only source of reliable mineral identifications in Western Australia. Most prospectors and geologists had little real knowledge of minerals other than the common economic minerals. As the saying goes, they could not tell crap from clay.

The opportunity to talk to the mineralogists and to get advice was eagerly taken by many. Dr E. S. Simpson's three volume Minerals of WA was almost unique in the world of regional mineralogy, and has never been surpassed anywhere. The mineralogists continued this work which was made available to the public. A great many 'discoveries' and fortunes were merely the commercial application of this information.

Jean-Paul was one of these prospectors who I met sometime in the late 1960s. Being a bit footloose myself after 5 and on weekends, we met socially as well. This was long before the metal detector business started and the gold price was then absurdly low. Prospectors were interested in other economic metallic and industrial minerals. The nickel boom was energised by the quick pegging of any areas of ultrabasics that were mentioned in the Mines Department publications. Mostly these were areas devoid of gold and so of little interest to the preceding generations of prospectors and companies.

Jean-Paul was a brave officer who experienced terrible fighting with the French army in Algeria and so was familiar with desert travel. He had an old short wheel base Landrover well set up for his work. At that time few people had Landrover 4WDs. Interestingly he also had a metal detector, but as he and others found, the early models were useless in the Australian mineralised soils. I have forgotten where he travelled, in between study for a commercial pilots licence, working at the nickel smelter near Kalgoorlie, and in one rough period as an estate agent. But he was not a natural liar so did not last in that city jungle.

He became well known in the circles of prospectors, both in the bush and in their relaxations.

I think I must have been living at my parents place at the time and Jean-Paul was sort of adopted by my mother, to whom he told his tales of woe. They kept a correspondence for many years.

Weekends in Perth at that time were somewhat lazy, with few of the degenerate distractions that now allow so little time for thought. The old Perth Art Gallery was an attraction and there one day, barefoot in jeans and with Jean-Paul, we saw a demure damsel seated near the great Australian painting, *Droving Into the Light*. Uncouth as we were we must have looked slightly intelligent, at least not yobs, so the off duty Cathay Pacific air hostess accompanied us on a quick tour to Yanchep. A year or so later we were married. But like some jinxed aircraft, we later crashed.

We flew to Bunbury one time to make up his flying hours, and on the way back he dived over one of the lakes while flocks of birds scattered. That got me so scared that I refused to ever go flying again. Once Jean-Paul and I were driving on the Narrows roundabout. We were not speeding but the road was wet and we slid to the kerb which promptly flipped the 4WD upside down. We were not hurt, only embarrassed.

The story of Telfer has been told in Bob Shepherd's *The Golden Rule*. Jean-Paul had almost done a perish there and was saved by the timely arrival of the brothers Ives. Their story is now being prepared by Phil Bianchi. Their father 'Wild West' Ives had explored much of that desolate area on camels in the 1930s, part of which is related in *The Longest Fence in the World*.

Jean-Paul came into the laboratory with samples that he had collected. These were identified and placed in the national collections, as the area, according to the latest available geological maps, was barren of minerals. He had named places after his sister and distinctive geographical features. I

then gave the details of these to the Surveyor General as a claim for new place names. Fortunately, as it turns out, he replied to my Director, who matted me for unofficial correspondence. I was absolved as the letter was just c/o. I then wrote a sharp note to the SG who took a turn, abusing me and cancelling any new name registrations.

Jean-Paul did not peg the area, it was too immense, and it would alert the usual gangs of claim cannibals that would descend on the area and cut it up piecemeal, a problem prospector's face. He wanted to find a company to take on the project that he considered was of national significance. Unfortunately men of such vision rarely find others that appreciate such, and have the capital to apply. Philosophically he was like an incipient Socrates, Christ or Hypatia, and we all know what happened to them.

Several large companies visited the area with Jean-Paul. While they acted morally, unfortunately they were not very sensible. Jean-Paul approached Newmont, only several hundred yards from the Department. He gave them his data and maps. They knocked him back, but kept his data and pegged a large territory. Despite Jean-Paul's objections to their behaviour they claimed the new discovery as their own and denied all knowledge of Jean-Paul's approach. However, the 1973 Annual Report of the Geological Survey of WA contained a map given to the Geological Survey by Newmont which had the unique place names from Jean-Paul's map that had not been published or made available elsewhere. Gotcha!

What really upset Jean-Paul was the lies and manipulations. I believe he was not really worried about huge sums of money, but he did want recognition of his discovery. He was a man of honour. An insult was thrown in his face. But not all wars are won on the battlefield.

Corporate criminals and liars are seldom laid low, but the eventual publication of Bob Shepherd's 2002 book went a little way towards evening the balance. It may have been a moral victory, which resonated with the prospecting community, but that does not pay for the food and travel.

Some object that he found a copper mine but that the real value was the gold. This certainly was not apparent at the time. Mining history is full of stories of the initial mineral of interest being economically replaced by a discarded by-product.

With the possible exception of several lawyers of goldfields origin, he had little support among the powerful. Politicians from both sides made great to do when approached, but as soon as they were in power Jean-Paul was forgotten.

Jean-Paul was very bitter over this further betrayal and his forthright correspondence had him on a black watch list if he ever wanted to return to Australia, which he did not. Future historians will hopefully find the correspondence files and tag the scum of the nation as it set out to destroy Jean-Paul.

Jean-Paul early on found out about the corruption of power in Australia, which we, its citizens, are now slowly realising. He was a man of honour.

In May 2018, my wife, daughter, and myself visited Jean-Paul and Martine in La Rochelle. It was a good reunion.

Jean-Paul kept a wide correspondence in technical and political matters and developed several inventions and theses which created wide interest, and a little controversy.

We were good friends for 50 years. He will be missed.

Jean-Paul Turcaud died at home in La Rochelle on Saturday 15 August 2020. He was 80.