Obituary: Professor Allan H. Wilson (1947–2026)

Professor Allan H. Wilson, born in Bulawayo on 2 September 1947, will be remembered as one of Zimbabwe's most distinguished geologists, a mentor to generations of students, and a man whose love for the country's rocks and landscapes never waned.

Allan's fascination with geology began at the age of six when his mother took him to the Bulawayo Museum, where he met Dr Geoff Bond, the Curator. At Northlea School, he founded the Archaeological Club—affectionately known as the "Bones and Stones Club"—and joined the Exploration Society. His talents for research and leadership were already evident, as noted by Headmaster Mr. Bijl. In 1963, Allan and his school friends made a remarkable discovery in the Nyamandhlovu area: a new species of early Jurassic dinosaur later named *Syntarsus rhodesiensis* (now *Megapnosaurus*). This youthful achievement foreshadowed a lifetime of groundbreaking work.

He pursued geology at the University of Rhodesia (now University of Zimbabwe), inspired by Professors Geoff Bond and Jimmy Wilson, and on graduating with a special honour, in 1971, he received the **prestigious MacGregor Award for outstanding achievement** later in 1977 he completed his PhD on the Great Dyke, a geological feature that became the centerpiece of his career. Allan's keen observations and meticulous descriptions of the Great Dyke's features—ranging from geomorphology, weathering profiles, petrology, layering, and alteration—combined with his keen imagination enabled him to decipher and model the chambers from which these massive deposits were generated. His work on chambers and sub chambers established the nomenclature still in use today. Allan thus contributed directly to the economic positioning of platinum group metals (PGMs) on the Great Dyke, whose benefits have had exceptional impact on communities in Zimbabwe and will continue to do so into the future.

He was the first to identify the **footwall fault at Unki Mine**, initially recorded as a shear before he revised it to a fault, a discovery that remains critical to understanding ore body accessibility. Elsewhere, at Lalapanzi, he recognized the **Lalapanzi-break**, a structural gap that enabled him to define the North Chamber and South Chamber of the Great Dyke—insights that remain foundational to both geological science and mining practice.

Allan's devotion to Zimbabwe was profound. He led numerous exciting field trips across the country, inspiring students and colleagues alike, and edited critical publications on magmatic sulphides that advanced global understanding of ore deposit formation. His work on the Great Dyke earned him the **Geological Society of Zimbabwe's highest honor, the Phaup Award in 1982, for his seminal paper *The Geology of the Great Dyke, Zimbabwe: The Ultimate Rocks***. He later delivered the **MacGregor Memorial Lecture** and was awarded **honorary membership of the Geological Society of Zimbabwe**, a recognition of his lifelong contributions to the nation's geology.

Beyond his research, Allan was a selfless mentor. He supervised dozens of PhD and MSc students, many of them Zimbabwean, nurturing talent and ensuring that the country's geological expertise flourished. His humility, warmth, and ability to connect with people from all walks of life made him beloved by colleagues, students, and friends alike.

Internationally, Allan became a leading authority on nickel and platinum group element deposits, with research spanning South Africa, Zimbabwe, China, and Tanzania. He held senior academic positions at the University of Natal, University of KwaZulu-Natal and later directed the Economic Geology Research

Institute and the Earth Labs at the University of the Witwatersrand. Yet despite his global stature, Allan remained deeply rooted in Zimbabwe, cherishing its rocks, its people, and its future.

Professor Allan H. Wilson is survived by his beloved wife, Julie, and his sons, Greg and Andrew, from his first wife, Jenny. Greg and Andrew and their families reside in Melbourne, Australia. His legacy will endure in the geological maps, research papers, and generations of scientists he inspired. Zimbabwe and the wider geoscience community mourn the passing of a local son who became an international star, and who gave his life to the study of the earth beneath our feet.

Compiled

Caston Musa (Geological Society of Zimbabwe)