

GEOMETER DREAMS by Peter Byrne

A note on the back cover, see below, of *Geometer Dreams* declares the book is not about surveying. However, the author, Peter Byrne is a land surveyor and the book consists mainly of anecdotes on life in the surveying profession.

The anecdotes vary in length from a few lines to a few pages. Some contain observations and reflections beyond surveying but their source can be traced to surveying.

Most – but not all - of the anecdotes are drawn from Byrne’s own experiences. Seeking to avoid any pre-conceived ideas the reader may have of surveyors and their profession, Byrne, throughout his narrative, attributes all anecdotes to an anonymous “Geometer.” (A word of French origin that can be translated to mean “surveyor.”)

The Geometer’s early surveying was, predominantly, in northern Western Australia with notable excursions to Central Australia and the Blue Mountains. He later works in Indonesia, particularly Borneo, and while serving as an office bearer in the Institution of Surveyors, he travels world-wide.

Describing the Geometer’s life in Western Australia Byrne gives full play to his whimsical, self-effacing style. Solving problems associated with surveying in remote regions: utilising wheelbarrows and bicycles as means of transport – as well as helicopters. He has affection for traditional surveying equipment: early series Land Rovers, trig stations, heliographs – even early model tellurometers.

The Geometer suffers a condition that comes to people who spend a significant number of years “in the bush.” This condition recurs as dissatisfaction with urban living and a desire, if not to return to, at least to remember, time spent in the bush.

There is a section of *Geometer Dreams* in which the Geometer tells of projects that gave particular comfort on completion. Overcoming unusual complications with innovative solutions, resolving differences with objectionable clients – dealing with accusations of supplying data that was “wrong.” In all fairness, the Geometer does write of a couple of projects that did contain “mistakes.”

Inevitably, the Geometer’s activities move from field operations to management. He accepts the position of National President of the Institution of Surveyors (Australia). So he attends congresses, presents papers, serves on committees charged with the running and controlling the surveying profession in Australia. From here he joins the Australian bureau managing the world surveying body: (*Federation Internationale des Geometres* – FIG). More congresses and presentation of papers, more committees – now on the world stage.

Management duties and membership of these authorities provide less interesting material for his *Geometer Dreams*. However, the Geometer compensates with accounts of his dealings with a wide range of people connected – some tenuously – with surveying. He maintains a sense of humour – mischievous at times – while holding a position considered august in the world of *Geometres*.

The anecdotes are not in chronological order and it soon becomes obvious to the reader that a highlight of the Geometer's career was his assignment in Borneo and his association with the Dayak people of that country.

The final chapter of the book titled "Keith" – after Keith Barrie, the surveyor who was initially the head of the company that brought the Geometer to Western Australia, and later took him to the overseas projects. The two men had respect and regard for each other. Barrie had served with distinction in World War 2 – in Borneo.

National Mapping gets a mention, along with Natmappers Hocking and Porteous.

The book contains some black-and-white illustrations, comprehensive notes and references - giving explanations of surveying terms and extra information about people encountered in the anecdotes.

Geometer Dreams is about surveying. However, for the most part, surveying is placed in the wider context of the world at large. The easy-flowing, whimsical story-telling will appeal to readers inside and outside the surveying profession.

by Russell Wenholz, 2022

Geometer Dreams

ISBN 978 0 6454783 0 0

Available from Rabble Books and Games

www.rabblebooksandgames.com.au

\$35 plus postage

GEOMETER DREAMS

Peter Byrne

Peter Byrne has written a book about his forty years as a surveyor. Yet it is not a book about surveying. Written as vignettes, the shortest being just one line, together with some longer essays and reflections, *Geometer Dreams* is about people, their interactions and the circumstances they met. The story settings range from the Pilbara district of Western Australia to the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, from Borneo through Zimbabwe to Brazil and the United Nations. His experiences range from being hailed as a man of truth across an airport carousel to a torturous project in Sumatra.