

Alexander Hollaender, Sunday hikes in the Cumberland Mountains

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on February 8, 2011)

Some of the most talented scientific minds have come to Oak Ridge over the years. Among the most talented might well have been those who populated the Oak Ridge National Laboratory's Biology Division located at Y-12. Recently I have undertaken the task of producing a set of short documentary films about the famous Biology Division featuring Liane (Lee) Russell.

It has been stated of Bill and Lee Russell in the ORNL Review, "Together, the Russells have formed one of the most fruitful collaborations in the annals of American science." Alexander Hollaender hired the husband and wife team in November, 1947. He saw their potential.

This article will feature a perspective of Alexander Hollaender from the memory of Jim Young who as a young boy was most impressed with this German scientist who went for hikes in the Cumberland Mountains on Sunday's. Join Jim as he tells his "footnote to history" about Alexander Hollaender, Biologist extraordinaire.

Jim graduated from Oak Ridge High School in 1974 and attended UT-Knoxville earning a Communications degree in Broadcast Management. While at UT, Jim participated in the co-op program that placed him as a cameraman at WBIR-TV. There he also made numerous appearances on the Cas Walker Farm and Home Hour singing country/bluegrass music.

After graduation he worked for WCPT-TV in Crossville TN where he met his wife of 32 years. He received an MBA from Tennessee Tech in Cookeville and after briefly working in Nashville returned to Crossville where he and his wife owned and operated an AM/FM radio station for 10 years.

Jim is currently employed full time with the Crossville Housing Authority as a Family Self-Sufficiency and Homeownership Coordinator. In addition he writes for the Crossville Chronicle, does voice radio news stories for the Moody Radio Network of the Southeast and is a widely published photographer.

Jim is also an avid collector of Oak Ridge and Manhattan Project memorabilia. He said, "You know, I probably should also mention that my first real job was as a paperboy for the Oak Ridger! My start in the media!"

Now for Jim's story:

"(Author's note: I emailed D. Ray Smith sometime back to suggest a story idea to him for his Historically Speaking series. I wanted to read about the Sunday morning fossil hikes that were led by Dr. Alexander Hollaender that I had tagged along on as a high school student. Ray suggested that perhaps I should write my recollections.

"As I started to try and research the topic I quickly found out there was almost nothing written about this footnote in Oak Ridge history. I found a couple of brief references to the hikes and how Hollaender used them to get to know his people a little better outside of the lab but that was about it. Thanks to Dick Setlow, Virginia White and Charles Congdon who responded to my email requests for information.

"While this is not really the article I originally envisioned when I started out, this is what I've come up with as my recollections of my experiences with the Sunday morning hikes that were a part of Oak Ridge's history. And hopefully others will pass their recollections on for future articles.)

"Growing up in Oak Ridge - it was sometimes an unusual childhood.

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"The annual Union Carbide sponsored Christmas Parties for the children of employees kept us in big bags full of plastic toys along with cartoons and live animal acts in the early years. The seriousness with which we school children practiced what to do in case of an atomic attack was probably the root of the nuclear nightmares I used to have. And there was the day the hijacked jetliner circled the city with the unlikely threat to crash into a reactor at one of the plants.

"While all these were interesting, there was an experience I had while in high school that I look back at now and marvel at what I was part of and really didn't even realize at the time how unique it was. As a youngster, I had developed a fascination with fossils that started on a Myrtle Beach vacation one summer when you could find shark teeth washing up along the shore that were millions of years old. My interest in fossils grew and I often looked for places closer to home to find them and add to my collection.

"My dad, Jack Young, who started with ORNL's analytical chemistry department in 1955, had heard about the Sunday morning Biology Division fossil hikes and encouraged me to go along if I was interested. The small group would meet at the Hilltop Market parking lot on Illinois Ave early each Sunday morning and venture out into the Cumberland Mountains in Anderson, Morgan and surrounding Counties. It sounded like an interesting thing to do and I showed up one Sunday morning and was welcomed along.

"There were several interesting people who were regulars and there would also be other people that would come along from time to time. I had no idea really who most of these folks were. I came along because I enjoyed getting outdoors looking for fossils and hiking places I'd never been.

"Of course the trips had been organized for a number of years by the eminent scientist Dr. Alexander Hollaender. He was the director of the well respected Biology Division at Oak Ridge. He was someone who I always found to be an interesting and down to earth man. As a high school student with an interest in other areas of science, I really had no idea who Dr. Hollaender was at the time. It was only as I look back now that I realized how important he was to science and to especially to Oak Ridge while he was there.

"Another biologist, Dr. Richard Setlow, was a regular who was in charge of the hikes if Dr. Hollaender happened to be away. Setlow had a nifty straight shift sedan with the good ground clearance necessary for often unpaved back roads we would travel on. He also had an interesting habit that I used in later life. He had a metal rimmed paper tag hung over the headlight switch that he would transfer to the keys in the ignition whenever he turned on the headlights. That tag would keep him from forgetting to turn the lights off when he pulled the keys from the ignition after turning off the engine. We didn't want to come back from a hike to find a dead battery!

"Another very regular Sunday hiker was Walter Nickel, a noted naturalist who had worked for the Cranbrook Institute in Michigan. Mr. Nickel could identify any plant, flower or bird that we would run across. He could even look at a twig in the winter and identify a tree species. His knowledge and skill was amazing and I developed a tremendous respect for his knowledge.

"What was also amazing was that even though Mr. Nickel had lost one lung to cancer he still rarely missed the hikes on Sunday mornings. Usually he would walk at his own speed and we would move on and while he never walked quite as far as we did, we would pick him up on the return walk to where ever we had parked the cars.

Next we will continue Jim's story of the Sunday "fossil hikes" led by Alexander Hollaender, preeminent scientist and founding manager of the historic Biology Division of Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

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Jim Young, Oak Ridger now living in Crossville, TN



Alexander Hollaender on one of the famous Sunday hikes in the Cumberland Mountains