

The BVDP team is extremely sad to report that our colleague, mentor and friend Lew Ashwal passed away on Monday, March 16, 2026, aged 77. Our hearts go out to his bereaved family and friends.

Lewis David Ashwal was born in 1949 in New York City. After a distinguished career at the Lunar and Planetary Institute in Houston, USA, Lew moved to South Africa in 1990 to join the Geology Department at Rand Afrikaans University (now University of Johannesburg) and then moved to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), where he has been Distinguished Professor since 2001. Lew Ashwal's many scientific achievements and his lasting impact on South African Earth Science will be told elsewhere. Here, we would like to single out his contribution to the Bushveld Drilling Project (BVDP).

Lew Ashwal may hold the world record for the most core-meters of rock ever analyzed in scientific detail. He and his Wits colleague and life partner, Prof. Susan Webb, worked through nearly three kilometers of core from the Bellevue borehole in the north-eastern Bushveld Complex (Fig. 1). That was in 2004 and now that same Bellevue drill core is part of BVDP.

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) is the host institution of the ICDP Bushveld Drilling Project where Lew was one of the driving forces from the very beginning. Under his guidance, the School of Geoscience at Wits hosted the ICDP Bushveld workshop in 2014 (Fig. 2). Lew helped put the drilling proposal together and drummed up support for the project from Wits administration. He and his colleagues successfully solicited co-funding from the South African National Research Foundation and they also used their connections and leverage within industry to secure the donation of almost 10,000 meters of Bushveld drill core for the project. His hard work paid off when the ICDP approved the Bushveld Drilling Project and, on April, 26, 2024, the first BVDP drill core came on deck at the Marula Mine drill site.



Figure 1 (left). Lew Ashwal and Sue Webb measuring magnetic susceptibility on 2950 meters of Bellevue core (image courtesy of the South African Journal of Geology)

Figure 2 (right). Lew Ashwal at the ICDP Workshop in Johannesburg, helping Bob Trumbull collect drill-site suggestions

Lew participated in all weekly Zoom meetings of the BVDP science team during almost 18 months of drilling and beyond. His sharp wit and engaging questions will be missed by all.

May he rest in peace