



In Memoriam Michael George Barbour

(February 24, 1942, Lansing, Michigan – January 7, 2021, Winters, California)

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Michael G. Barbour was Emeritus Professor of Botany and Plant Ecology at the University of California (Davis). He studied at Michigan State University, and obtained a doctorate in Botany and Plant Ecology from Duke University (North Carolina) in 1967 under the tutelage of Professor William D. Billings. That year he moved to California and began teaching at the University of California, where he continued working and exercising his expertise and leadership without interruption until his retirement in 2007.

Professor Barbour was a renowned plant ecologist and an expert in the synecology of vegetation under conditions of stress. His research covered a variety of territories in California (USA), Baja California (Mexico), northwest Argentina, southern Australia, Sardinia, Portugal, Spain and the coast of Israel, where he was involved in important collaborative projects.

Principal investigator in key projects at the national and state level, author and co-author of numerous publications, member of prestigious editorial committees, Professor Barbour also edited textbooks for university students and monographs to support the study of the disciplines taught in the field of botany and plant ecology and Californian habitat biodiversity, and on the need for conservation in the face of runaway development processes. Together with his wife Valerie Whitworth, he was at the forefront of nature conservation in the United States, and also strongly advocated for the need to respect the various residual populations of Native Americans in California. His commitment to social issues and the sustainability of natural resources was unshakeable.

At the time of my very first sabbatical stay at the University of California in 1996, I embarked on a scientific and personal relationship with Professor Barbour through which I was given access both state and federal research

institutions and resources in the United States. Thanks to this rewarding scientific and personal association, Michael Barbour became my scientific mentor in the North American Pacific, and through my participation in the research projects that he personally supported with his team and resources I was able to study in the national parks of California and undertake the systematic study of Californian vegetation.

The project on ultramafic (serpentinicolous) vegetation in California deserves special mention, and was a subject that was very close to his heart. He infected me with his enthusiasm and today I continue to work with several collaborators in this field. The comprehensive study of all the ultramafic areas in the state of California, localised thanks to the geological map published by the US Geological Survey, was a painstaking task shared with several enthusiastic doctoral students; some, such as Pilar Rodríguez-Rojo (Castile-La Mancha University) were involved from the start, and she continues to work on this ongoing project today. The first new results in this field were published in 1997.

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At the initiative of Dr. Barbour, some of the interesting preliminary findings of this vast undertaking were published in a new chapter incorporated in the third edition of his classic work entitled *Terrestrial Vegetation of California* (California University Press, Berkeley, 2007); Sargent cypress woodlands, grey pine-valley oak woodlands, ultramafic (serpentine) chaparrals, Brewer willow's riverine scrub, Ponderosa pine forests, Jeffrey pine forests, Shasta red fir forests, annual vegetation, etc. were among the ultramafic vegetation types recognized as new formations in geobotanical (plant sociology) studies in California.

In 1999, Michael Barbour took up a position as visiting professor at the Complutense University in Madrid, financed by the Ministry of Education and Science, when he entered a close and productive relationship with Iberian geobotanists that became stronger over the years. This led him to become a frequent visitor to Spain in all its diversity of landscapes. During his sabbatical he had the opportunity to work with colleagues from universities in the Basque Country, Asturias, Galicia, León, Valencia, Madrid and the Canary Islands in Spain; Évora and Lisbon in Portugal. From his base in Madrid he travelled incessantly, studying and comparing our Spanish mediterranean and temperate landscapes with those he knew so well in the territories of the Pacific Northwest. He was also an enthusiastic devotee of the Mediterranean culture and our cuisine and traditions, as befits a true seeker of knowledge.

He was an active member of numerous scientific organisations, in many of which he held positions of responsibility, such as the Ecological Society of America (1993-95), the International Association for Vegetation Science (1999-2003), and the Federal Panel on Vegetation Classification (1995-2009), among others.

Professor Barbour was appointed a Foreign Correspondent Member of the Spanish Royal Academy of Pharmacy, and on 29 May 2014, he was formally presented by the academician the late Salvador Rivas Martínez, who delivered his acceptance speech before the assembled company on his behalf.

In 2014, at the proposal of the erstwhile Department of Plant Biology II, he was proposed and formally nominated for investiture as an honorary doctor from the Complutense University in Madrid, although his poor state of health prevented him from travelling to the awards ceremony.

An eponym will shortly be published to honour Michael Barbour's memory as a botanist: *Arctostaphylos xbarbouri* (Barbour's manzanita). This is a natural hybrid between two manzanitas common in the Sierra Nevada: the pine-mat manzanita (*Arctostaphylos nevadensis*) and the greenleaf manzanita (*Arctostaphylos patula*); this nothospecies is common among the parentals in the supramediterranean areas of Sierra Nevada, a place Michael Barbour considered one of the great and magical natural Californian scenarios. He will remain in our hearts and memories for his outstanding personal qualities and for his important scientific legacy.



Rest in peace!
We miss you!