



Forbes Kingsbury Wilson (1910 –1990)

2005 Inductee from Mining's Past

Forbes Kingsbury Wilson was born in York, Maine, on February 16, 1910. He was educated at Worchester Academy in Massachusetts and graduated from Yale University in 1931 with a degree in Mining Geology. Upon graduation, he worked as a shift boss at the Braden Copper Company in Chile until 1933. From this time on, he held a succession of jobs: Mine Superintendent and General Superintendent Manager at Minera Timmins Ochali Mining Company in Colombia; Administrative Manager, General Engineer and General Manager at Freeport Minerals Company's Nicaro Nickel Company, Cuba; and President of Rising & Nelson Slate Company in Vermont. In 1951, he rejoined the Freeport Minerals Company as Manager of Exploration in New York City. By 1956, he became Vice President and in 1970, Senior Vice President. In 1966, he became President and Director, Freeport Indonesia, Inc., which is a subsidiary of Freeport Minerals Company. He retired from Freeport in 1974.

Forbes Wilson's greatest accomplishment was the development of the Ertsberg copper deposit in New Guinea (now Irian Jaya, Indonesia). This was a copper-rich outcrop on the side of a 9,000-foot mountain tucked deep in an almost impenetrable jungle. In May of 1960, he set out with an expedition of some co-workers and Irianese for a 17-day hike over some of the world's most treacherous terrain – just to get rock samples of the Ertsberg. As he describes in his book, *The Conquest of Copper Mountain* (Athenaeum, New York, 1981), although he had had extensive experience in exploration on mule back in the Andes, nothing he had undertaken resembled the overland hikes required to penetrate the New Guinea jungle. Wilson not only had to deal with unknown land, but also the threat of malaria and other diseases, the continuous bad weather, and the indigenous people who still practiced Stone-Age customs. On July 1, 1973, the Ertsberg became operational.

Subsequently, largely based on Wilson's geologic interpretation of the region, in 1988 the Grasberg copper-gold deposit was located. Today the Grasberg/Ertsberg complex is the world's lowest cost producer of copper. Forbes Wilson received many honors during his career,

Mining Foundation of the Southwest
American Mining Hall of Fame

including the coveted “Legion of Honor” and the “Daniel C. Jackling Award” from the Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers.