



Left photo: Cerro Chato, Sierra San Pedro Martir, Baja California, Mexico, 1964  
Right Photo: Tubac Festival of the Arts, Tubac, AZ, 2011.

## Geologist Saddles Up

Richard Sherer trades in the rock hammer for leather-working tools **By Meghan Fern**

At one time, Richard Sherer was a dual career-man holding titles of research/exploration geologist and a part-time custom saddlemaker. Upon his retirement, Sherer traded in his geology tools to pursue his life-long hobby of designing and making custom saddlery.

Sherer graduated from ASU in 1965 with a Bachelor of Science in Geology. He graduated just two years after ASU received a

large National Science Foundation (NSF) grant, a landmark that catalyzed the transformation of the geology department.

Early in his undergraduate career, Sherer, although holding onto his childhood dream of becoming a geologist, began taking engineering and high-level mathematics courses with the intent of later pursuing a master's degree in engineering. Sherer noted that

the geology department, in his early years as a student at ASU, placed a greater emphasis on the transition of students into earth science teachers opposed to industry geologists.

Following the receipt of a number of NSF and NASA grants, the geology department was restructured. Professor Carlton Moore and Professor Robert Lundin were introduced to ASU and heavily influenced and inspired Sherer to focus his studies on the geological sciences.

"My whole perspective changed with them," said Sherer, who spent the summers of 1964 and 1965 doing geological mapping in Baja California, Mexico.

After graduation, Sherer enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Wyoming, receiving an NSF Traineeship that provided him with a full scholarship. His dissertation, which focused on nephrite deposits in Wyoming, was an economic thesis funded by the state survey. After graduating with a Ph.D. in Geology in 1969, Sherer pursued work that emphasized exploration. He initially went to work for Bear Creek Mining Co. (Kennecott Copper Co.), doing Cu-Mo exploration, but left in 1971 to work for UNOCAL (Union Oil Co.), where he did Cu-Mo exploration in Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada.

To help pay for his college tuition, Sherer **made belts on his kitchen table** in his basement apartment

In 1978, Sherer, sent to Mt. Pass, Calif., carried out a three-year research program in which he mapped and studied the carbonatite ore body and lanthanide mineralization. Following his completion of research in Mt. Pass, he transferred to Denver where he was an in-house consultant for worldwide specialty metal projects, and also, where he had a mineralogical lab for transmitted and reflected light microscopy and cathodoluminescence. Additionally, Sherer had a budget to use SEM/EDAX at Denver University and had his own field projects within the United States.

In 1990, Sherer retired, and began pursuing his artwork full time. It was at this point that Sherer

Custom Saddles, established in 1973, became a full-time venture.

Sherer, who was initially introduced to leatherwork at the age of nine, began it as a childhood hobby in hopes of staying busy during the sweltering months that encompass an Arizona summer. According to him, harness makers and saddlers were part of his family's history

dating back to the New England Colonies. His great uncle was a professional harness maker in the early 1900s, and his grandfather and great grandfathers built harness and shoes on their farms in Ohio.

In 1959, Sherer, looking to afford college expenses independently, started an apprenticeship in the saddlery trade that lasted until he grad-



uated college in 1965. Throughout his studies, undergraduate, graduate, and even throughout his professional career, Sherer continued to work with leather. Upon arriving in Laramie for graduate school, Sherer took his belt pattern board to the high-end western store and negotiated, eventually building a relationship where he would provide them with custom handcrafted belts.

"I made belts on my kitchen table in my basement apartment in Laramie," he said. His range of work increased, and when The United States Geological Survey (USGS) and the Wyoming State Survey, which were located in the same building as the geology department in Wyoming, discovered that Sherer did leatherwork, he was asked to make field cases for geologists. He continued making field cases after receiving his doctorate and entering the mining and exploration field.

Sherer, a master of the sciences is now considered a master saddlemaker. His work goes beyond the saddles and horse gear of a typical western saddlemaker. He designs chaps

and custom bridles for English riders; restores antique saddles; builds contemporary and historic reproduction gun leathers; and uses exotic leathers to make personal leather goods — and all his pieces exhibit a level of craftsmanship that is only achieved through decades of dedication to an art form. His works can be viewed at [www.sherersaddlesinc.com](http://www.sherersaddlesinc.com).