

JOHN A. FARRE | Geoscience Supervisor,
ExxonMobil Exploration Company, john.a.farre@exxonmobil.com

Degree: When, where, what, and what in?

I received my PhD in marine geology from the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University in 1984. I studied the Cenozoic evolution of the New Jersey continental slope using high-resolution geophysics, including deep-towed side-scan sonar. I also enjoyed working in the machine shop on deep-sea equipment, including still and video camera systems. I spent about 300 days at sea around the world while a graduate student at Lamont.

Did you stay in academia at all, and if so, for how long?

I left straight for Houston to join an international oil company research lab. I had feelers from several institutions for postdoc positions but I worried about all the challenges of an academic career and “soft money research” and wanted to try a career in what I thought was an exciting if possibly “under-appreciated” industry.

How did you go about searching for a job outside of the university setting?

Luckily, many of the major oil companies recruited at Lamont, so all I had to do was go to the interviews. I also met some oil company folks at my poster at the fall AGU meeting in San Francisco. I went on “plant visits” in Dallas and Houston and chose the Houston job because it was a better match with my strengths (research and application of high-resolution geophysics for drilling,



John Farre taking a break from field work in Nigeria.

pipeline, and platform positioning). At the time I was interviewing (mid 1980s), it was a down cycle in the industry and I felt lucky to get a job.

Is this the only job (post-academia) that you've had? If not, what else did you do?

Yes, the only job, but working in a big oil company provides lots of opportunity to try new things and work different basins around the world. In fact, about 18 months after I started my job in high-resolution geophysics, we went through a reorganization and modest downsizing (welcome to the oil industry of the 1980s!). I moved to a geochemistry team to apply and grow my seismic interpretation skills toward subregional petroleum source-rock identification and mapping.

What is your current job? What path did you take to get there?

I am about to move to Lagos, Nigeria, in a technology management role. I will lead a team of geoscience specialists who support our upstream operations (exploration, development, and production). It should be interesting to participate in such a broad range of technical projects in a fairly challenging business environment. Early in my career, I accepted the opportunity to lead/supervise technical projects (as opposed to becoming a senior technical contributor). Until now, I have been based in Houston but have worked in several of our upstream companies and have traveled to our various affiliated offices around the world. In about 2003, I started working on projects from our Nigeria portfolio

and found the people, geology, and business to be enjoyable, interesting, and challenging.

Is the job satisfying? What aspects of the job do you like best/least?

Over my career, I've had super challenging/satisfying assignments as well as some where I struggled. The best aspects are working on challenging projects with talented people using generally great data for a company with strong technical expectations and business ethics. The least favorite aspects relate to big company processes and procedures (the flip side of what I like!).

What did your oceanographic education give you that is useful in your current job?

My education opened the door to numerous opportunities, including the one I chose in industry. The broad multidisciplinary education I received at Lamont in MG&G, oceanography, seismology, geochemistry, and other topics provided a great foundation to work at an oil industry research lab, and following that, in operations. In particular, exploration for deepwater reservoirs was beginning to take off in the late 1980s and my background in

deepwater depositional processes allowed me to quickly contribute to thematic and regional studies focused on better understanding this emerging opportunity. Also, I believe that the experience of preparing for and carrying out oceanographic expeditions served me well in a company culture that greatly values leadership and teamwork. My background in MG&G also gave me an opportunity stay connected with academia through participation in the Ocean Drilling Program Site Survey and Pollution Prevention and Safety panels. This outside service provided me exposure to new data and I got to travel and meet very interesting colleagues from academia.

Do you have any recommendations for new grads looking for jobs?

Just the obvious: don't limit yourself to only one type of work or location. Use the network you've developed over the years to find opportunities other than those advertised in *Eos* or other major sources. Go to as many interviews and job fairs as possible to see what's available. Open your job-search aperture and don't be afraid to try something that is not exactly what you always assumed you would do. And good luck! ☑