

National Geographic Society Bell Medals

National Geographic Society Board Chairman Gil Grosvenor recognizes Dr. Roger Tomlinson for his inventiveness in providing humanity with the ability to understand the Earth in ways never before thought possible. The award is also given to Jack Dangermond for transforming the field of geography and bringing the use of geographic information to virtually every field of human endeavor and every corner of the globe.

<http://video.esri.com/watch/48/national-geographic-society-bell-medals>

Video Transcription

00:01 And now I want to take a few minutes on behalf of the National Geographic Society...

00:05 ...to honor the inspiration and the inventiveness that brings us GIS technology.

00:14 I'm excited because this is a big day in the history of National Geographic's 123-year history, and I hope you'll enjoy sharing it.

00:27 In 1980, we created the Alexander Graham Bell Medal, designated to honor research and geography.

00:37 Along with the Hubbard Medal given for exploration, discovery, and research...

00:43 ...the Bell Medal is the highest honor National Geographic bestows.

00:49 Alexander Graham Bell is remembered for the telephone, as a teacher of the deaf...

00:55 ...and for contributions to manned flight, and for many other inventions and such roles.

01:03 But his innovation that is closest to my heart, which has defined my career, is what he coinvented, you might say...

01:14 ...with his father-in-law and a young man who would become his son-in-law, Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor.

01:21 GHG, my grandfather, described Bell as "a daring original thinker with a mind that tirelessly questioned and probed."

01:32 Bell supported the National Geographic Society financially in its infancy, when it otherwise would never have survived.

01:41 He never considered abandoning the struggling enterprise, and why?

01:46 Because he had that inventor's confidence of vision because he felt that the public would support a geographic magazine...

01:56 ...and so long as it captured the world's wonder and the spirit of those who inhabit the planet earth.

02:04 The Bell Medal is a rare honor, and giving it today to Roger Tomlinson...

02:11 ...we recognize the profound impact that the invention and application of the GIS has made on the study of geography.

02:19 GIS has broadened our ability to articulate what geography is all about.

02:27 The wisdom available to us through GIS as textured nuance vision...

02:33 ...has benefited humankind tremendously and will continue to do so.

02:40 The first recipients of the Bell Medal, the only ones as a matter of fact before today...

02:47 ...were Bradford and Barbara Washburn for their exploration, measurement, and meticulous mapping of the Grand Canyon.

02:56 The Washburns would also go on to portray Mt. Everest in detail as it had never been done before.

03:06 The Washburns were really quite extraordinary people.

03:11 When they decided to get married, they gave a lot of thought to what they would do on their honeymoon...

03:16 ...and where they would go, and they chose Mt. McKinley...

03:20 ...and they decided that they would hike and climb around Mt. McKinley and enjoy themselves.

03:30 It's interesting, because one day Barbara and Brad Washburn found themselves on the summit of Mt. McKinley.

03:42 She was the first woman ever to summit Mt. McKinley, and she was on her honeymoon.

03:48 Now if there are any young guys out there planning a honeymoon, you're going to find that one hard to top.

03:56 Barbara Washburn's words resonate today as we present Roger Tomlinson with the Bell Medal...

04:02 ...and I quote, "In a world where all the great geographical discoveries seem to have been made..."

04:08 ...one wonders what is still left to explore. Although it is true that the big things have been discovered...

04:16 ...today's thrills lie in deepening and understanding of those same places.

04:24 The simple search for more of the truth about our world is just as important today...

04:31 ...as it was in the days of ancient Egypt or Columbus or Peary."

04:39 And the words of the late Brad Washburn, who lived to 96, also summed up Roger Tomlinson's approach...

04:47 ...and I quote, "Both explorers and inventors like to work at the pioneer fringe, the cutting edge of knowledge.

04:58 They are unhappy with the status quo. They are restless.

05:01 They want to expand the frontiers of knowledge and in so doing, they want to broaden our horizons, improve the quality of life.

05:11 We have the joy of sharing natural beauty and scientific information with others in ways that makes this sharing as vivid as possible."

05:24 In presenting this award, we honor the qualities that we find in the great innovators.

05:30 In the wide field of geography, Roger Tomlinson is certainly such a person.

05:36 And, Roger, will you please join me on stage.

05:50 Sir, this is indeed a pleasure. And you would like to say some words.

05:54 I would indeed.

05:55 Would you like to go here or here? Either way. OK.

06:04 First of all, thank you to the National Geographic Society.

06:09 At times like this, a suitable quote, I think, is appropriate and I found one that says...

06:17 ..."Great discoveries and improvements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds."

06:27 I may be given credit for having blazed the trail in GIS, but when I look at the subsequent development...

06:38 ...I feel the credit is due to others rather than just myself.

06:46 That quote is from Alexander Graham Bell and is appropriate...

06:53 ...and delightful that his great grandson is giving me this award today. Thank you.

06:59 Thank you, sir.

07:10 And, Roger, just as the invention of the telescope through new opportunities for exploration of astronomy...

07:22 ...just as the microscope allowed us to complete the makeup of planets, biology, and chemistry...

07:29 ...your inventiveness has provided humanity with the power to see and analyze the earth and its systems in ways never before possible.

07:40 You were a budget-constrained young geographer grappling with the boundaries of your job...

07:47 ...given a task that would have required funding and staffing that weren't available.

07:54 With necessity as the mother of invention, you employed computers in a novel way and

brought us GIS.

08:05 The innovation not only assured your job and a career, it expanded the practice of geography and guaranteed you a place in history.

08:16 I thank you for making geographers out of people who don't even know they're geographers.

08:22 Through your innovation, you provided the means through which people can better understand and better use the living spaces we share.

08:31 And now, finally, I am mindful that you and Bell shared a common heritage.

08:41 Yes, we [unintelligible].

08:42 Canada!

08:43 Yes!

08:45 You're both tied to Canada. And so now I would like to present this medal to you.

08:55 It's a great pleasure, sir.

08:56 Very handsome. Thank you very much.

08:58 Thank you very much.

09:06 It's right behind me.

09:17 If you can't read it, I'll read it.

09:19 To Roger Tomlinson, the father of geographic information systems for transforming the field of geography...

09:26 ...through the development of GIS technology...

09:29 ...and for the dynamic cultivation of the field of geographic information science for over four decades. July 12, 2010.

09:39 And, sir, I thank you very much.

09:41 Thank you, again.

09:54 But wait. There is more.

09:59 Bell was also known for his freshness of vision, his contagious spirit, and his scrupulous concern for truth.

10:09 He had unquestionable hopefulness and the thirst for knowledge as well as an inexhaustible capacity for wonder.

10:22 One of his greatest inspirations was to enliven geography, to draw the public into it...

10:28 ...and to present it invitingly, engagingly, and usefully.

10:35 Bell rejected dry geography.

10:38 He saw geography as a connective tool encompassing all life...

10:45 ...its connections to the earth's feature including human systems at play...

10:50 ...he defined geography broadly, as I quote, "The world and all that's in it."

10:59 And not surprisingly, that's the motto that I have followed for 56 years at National Geographic...

11:06 ...and I have never regretted adopting it.

11:10 The connection between Bell's philosophy and Jack Dangermond's mission couldn't be clearer.

11:18 Will you please join me, Jack, on the stage.

11:32 Thank you sir.

11:33 Thank you.

11:37 Bell would have been amazed, I'm sure, at the numerous innovations of GIS...

11:42 ...that today allow the public to routinely interact with geography in such dynamic and personalized ways...

11:50 ...as the students showed us a few minutes ago.

11:53 Jack, your technological advances of GIS have allowed us to look at our world with greater clarity.

12:00 Your nurturing of GIS and your inspired zeal on its behalf has brought a greater understanding of the earth to the millions...

12:09 ...just as we have started interacting with the earth in ways that make that understanding so urgent.

12:19 Jack, you have resurrected the discipline of a geography, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

12:31 Thank you.

12:41 And I would like to read the description on Jack Dangermond's medal.

12:46 To Jack Dangermond for transforming the field of geography and by recognizing the fundamental potential of GIS technology...

12:54 ...bringing the use of geographic information to virtually every field of human endeavor in every corner of the globe.

13:03 July 12, 2010.

13:08 Jack, you wholeheartedly deserve this recognition.

13:12 Thank you.

13:15 That's the least we could do, my friend. [unintelligible] fantastic.

[13:19](#) Thank you very much. Here it is. Thank you.

[13:29](#) And thank you, everyone, for your interest and attention.

[13:33](#) I hope you will continue your own geographic exploration and innovations and continue to enjoy this fantastic event.

[13:43](#) Thank you very much.

[13:53](#) Thank you, Gil. Thank you very much.

[13:55](#) Thank you.

[13:56](#) I accept that medal on behalf of you, the people who actually have done it. It was easy.

[14:03](#) Thank you, Gil.