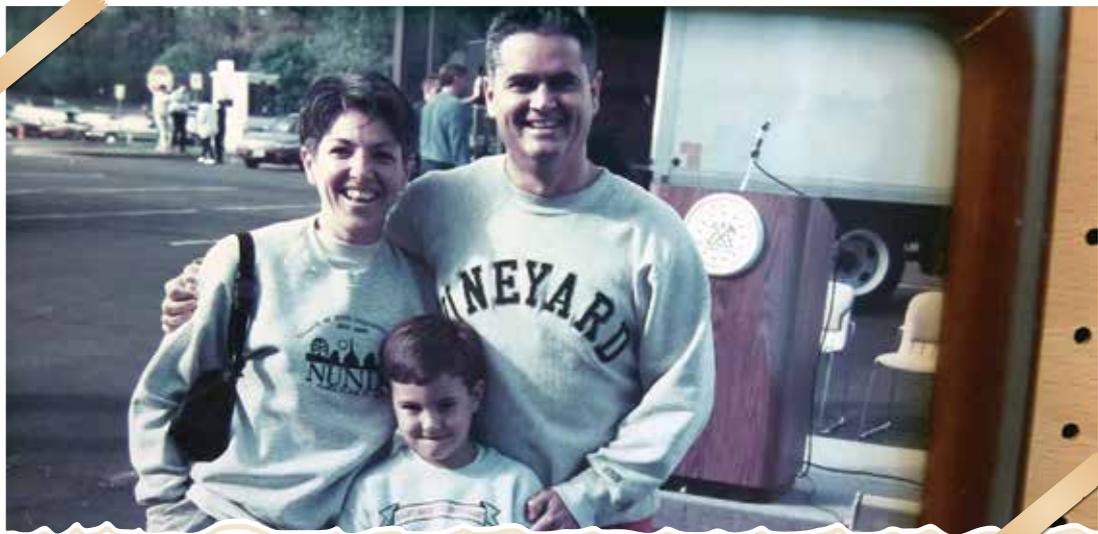


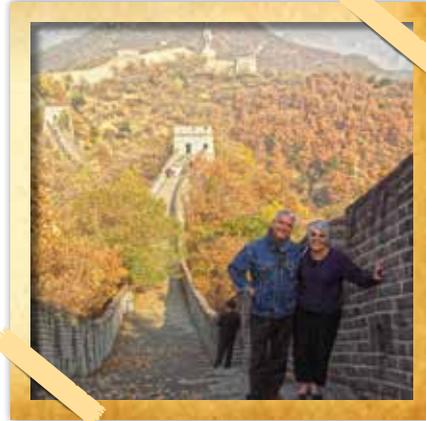
# Hall of Fame.



OUR VERY  
ESSENCE IS  
LINKED TO  
THE POWER  
OF PLACE



*Ryan with her  
husband and son at  
USGS Open House*



*Top: Happily married for 38 years, Ryan with her husband at the Great Wall of China*

*Left: Ryan with her 1-week-old grandchild on the Big Island of Hawaii*

# A SALT-OF-THE-EARTH WOMAN

**S**HE GREW UP IN THE small town of Dalton in western New York, population 300, quite close to Letchworth State Park or the 'Grand Canyon of the East'. Much of her childhood time was spent outdoors. Playing in woods and fields surrounding her home, spending countless hours building sailboats out of twigs and sending them down the creek that ran past the field, putting rocks and stones in the stream to create dams...

"I think that is where my love for geography began," Barbara J Ryan muses. "You could really see how interconnected things are... I actually did a double major — in geology and in earth science education — from the State University of New York at Cortland."

Ryan joined the United States Geological Survey (USGS) — the nation's largest civilian mapping agency — in 1974. Every January, Ryan and a few others would descend upon the Great Plains to measure ground water withdrawals from the Ogallala Aquifer — the vast underground reservoir fueling the

# Hall of Fame.

“Scientists are wonderful people, but we are often not very good at communicating key messages. And politicians are going to make their decisions, with or without earth observation information.”

Courtesy: U.S. Mission Geneva



Ryan briefing the media at the UN on the GEO-X Plenary and Geneva Ministerial Summit, January 2014



A nature lover, South Africa



With ISPRS Congress Director Lena Halounova at the XXIII ISPRS Congress 2016

breadbasket of America. “The kind of connection people share with the land is so amazing; it instilled in my psyche the importance of “place” in people’s lives.”

It also made Ryan an unrelenting environmental activist. An avid believer that every action we take has a profound impact on the world, Ryan can often be spotted returning from her walks with both hands filled with other people’s trash. It wasn’t long before she became an expert in groundwater contamination, studying the effects that low-level radioactive waste burial had on water quality.

Climbing the ladder steadily at the USGS, Ryan earned master’s degrees in geography from the University of Denver and in civil engineering from Stanford University along the way. Soon,



# EARTH OBSERVAT CENTER



*Ryan with family friend, Jerry Spurr, Denver, Colorado, 2016*



*Ryan with delegates from the African Association of Remote Sensing of the Environment (AARSE) at the 1st AfriGEOSS Symposium, Zimbabwe, May 2016*

she found herself serving as a staff assistant to the Department of the Interior's top official for water and science. Her main job was to communicate information clearly, coherently, and convincingly — an experience that has come in quite handy in her later years as the Secretariat Director of the intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations (GEO).

"It was the first time in my career that I saw how politicians look at science issues," Ryan recalls. "Scientists are wonderful people, but we are often not very good at communicating key messages. And politicians are going to make their decisions, with or without earth observation information. So, why not feed them good scientific information in a timely fashion?" This also included creating the position of a geographic information officer, or GIO, at the USGS for the very first time. Advancing comfortably at the mapping agency, Ryan became an associate director, responsible for the USGS' remote



*Ryan at the Earth Observation Center, in Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany*

# Hall of Fame.



Mount Ryan, Antarctica  
78°25' S, 85°56' W

Mount Ryan is a mostly ice-free mountain rising to 3200 meters between Mount Shear and Mount Gardner in the central ridge of the Sentinel Range, Ellsworth Mountains. At the recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names, this mountain was named by the United States Board on Geographic Names in 2006. It honors Barbara J. Ryan, Associate Director for Geography, United States Geological Survey (USGS), who has program and policy responsibilities for the nation's Landsat satellites, and the agency's remote sensing, geography, and science impact programs. During her 30-year career with the USGS, she worked in seven states and Washington, D.C. Much of her early career was spent as a field hydrologist studying ground-water contamination and participating in the nation's first systematic study of water quality conditions. From 1989 to 1991 she served as Staff Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science at the Department of Interior where she coordinated the Government's first compilation of Federal ground-water programs. Before becoming Chief Geographer, she served as the agency's Chief Information Officer as well as Chief Financial Officer. Most recently she championed the development of *The National Map*, a consistent framework for geographic knowledge that provides public access to high-quality, geospatial data and information from multiple partners to help support decision-making by resource managers and the public. Barbara Ryan served on a number of committees related to photogrammetry and remote sensing and additionally, from 2001 to 2005, was Department of Interior representative on the United States Board on Geographic Names. In the 2001-02 field season she was a team member of the USGS Geodesy, Remote Sensing and Mapping Program in the McMurdo Dry Valleys of Victoria Land, Antarctica.



*Mount Ryan, Antarctica, was named by the United States Board on Geographic Names in 2008. It honors Ryan's contribution towards geospatial community*



*Ryan during her expedition to the South Pole, Antarctica in 2001*

sensing, geography and civilian mapping programs. And also, the Landsat satellites. "The first Landsat satellite was launched in 1972. And for the next 35 years, people were fighting to have the data from the Landsat program made freely and openly available. It just so happened that I was in a senior career position from 2000 to 2008. I could reignite the issue," she recalls.

An analysis soon revealed that the federal government was the biggest buyer of Landsat data. This meant that the government was simply taking the money from one pocket and putting it into another. Ryan was leading the effort to change the decades-old Landsat data policy to full and open.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
BARBARA RYAN WANTED TO PURSUE A CAREER IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION BEFORE SHE GOT HOOKED TO THE EARTH SCIENCES

“We show governments across the world that it makes financial sense to release broadly and openly the data that the taxpayer has already paid for”

In 2008, the USGS adopted an open access policy for the free distribution of all data in the US Landsat archive via the Internet. "The then - Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne made this announcement at the GEO Ministerial in Cape Town, South Africa, instead of in the US, and that got us so much more political and international attention," Ryan smiles. The policy change resulted in an annual \$1.7 billion of economic benefit in just three years. "We referenced this economic analysis in the many letters we wrote to the European Commission, encouraging them to adopt a broad open data policy for the Sentinel missions as well."



*Left to right: Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak, Secretary-General, EAD; Jacqueline McGlade, UNEP; Barbara Ryan, Secretariat Director, GEO; Janet Ranganathan, WRI; and Thomas Brooks, IUCN*

With this decisive feather secured in her hat, Ryan decided to end her 34-year career with the USGS and moved to Geneva to serve as the director of the World Meteorological Organization's space program. Though she was no stranger to the ways of the bureaucratic world, Ryan chuckles as she talks about the cultural transition she had to witness. "As a native English speaker, and one who uses a fair number of idioms in her



*With Petteri Taalas, Secretary-General, WMO, Geneva, Switzerland, 2016*



*Left to right: Bert Jarreau, Chief, Technology Officer, National Association of Counties; Barbara Ryan, Associate Director for Geography, USGS; William F. Johnson, President, National States Geographic Information Council*

# Hall of Fame.



*Ryan in her office in Geneva, Switzerland, 2016*



*Left to right: Stephan Bojinski, WMO Space Programme; James Muldoon, husband; Ryan; Jerome and Delphine Lafeuille, WMO Space Programme; Jean Louis Fellous, COSPAR Executive Director; Mariinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation*

“The kind of connection people share with the land is so amazing; it instilled in my psyche the importance of “place” in people’s lives

speech, I have to speak a lot more slowly, more clearly and not use as many idioms because they do not translate very well. I often say, ‘Oh my goodness, we can wait until the cow comes home!’ And I remember someone from another country asking me what do cows have to do with this?”

In 2012, Ryan joined GEO to integrate earth observation systems from around the world into a federated, comprehensive system that uses coordinated data to understand how environmental factors impact both the landscape and human life. She tells, “We show governments across the world that it makes financial sense to release broadly and openly the data that the taxpayer has already paid for. It will build your economy, it is certainly good for transparent government and, it is a boon for capacity building and education.”

Even as Ryan serves as a mentor and a role model for colleagues across the world, she counts her family as her biggest asset. Happily married for 38 years, and grandmother to a now 9-month-old, Ryan says, “We moved eight different times for the USGS, and then we moved to Europe. My family certainly got the short end of the stick in all this. But, they were always there for me.”

“I remember when I retired from the USGS in 2008, my son — a sophomore at the time — made a David-Letterman-like list of his Top 10 memories with me and my work.” It had several less-than-favorable items like Ryan dragging Thomas to USGS Open Houses and numerous science camps. “But, the one that really choked me up was him saying: ‘No matter how tired my mom was when she got home from work, we would always find time to read a book together before going to bed,’” she smiles. Because for Ryan, people are just as important as “place” is. 🌍

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
RYAN HAS SERVED AS CHAIR OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE ON EARTH OBSERVATION SATELLITES, WHICH COORDINATES INFORMATION FROM MORE THAN 100 CIVILIAN SATELLITES