The story of how the Landforms of the Basin & Range Province written starts a half-century ago. During the 1950s, a protracted drought in the southwestern USA at the same time there were large population shifts into the semiarid states. Both cities and irrigated agriculture were growing, but the drought raised danger flags. Congress appropriated monies for the states to make plans to direct resources to the most useful purposes. In Nevada, what resources occur, their use might be for the then-expanding pump-irrigated agriculture or pumping to newly enlarged cities. If for new crop land, how much land were in the basins with water? There were no soil surveys to estimate basins with water.

Since these federal water-planning funds had to be spent through the Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station proposed to do the needed cooperation with the then Soil Conservation Service. This situation, coupled with my interest as a soils professor, gave me the chance to go to the University of Nevada as a "soil-survey leader." Chances to do new work so often rise from mundane arrangements!

Only a small part of Nevada soils had been mapped at the time, information available for the huge basins where pump irrigation might be environmental concerns were driving interest in using soil interpretation for forest management across extensive federally owned lands. To get that soils information, the SCS (Ed Naphan, State Soil Scientist) proposed reconnaissance surveys; I could barely find myself on some fan piedmonts, let alone find a polypedon boundary with those photos! I bought a set of large-scale reconnaissance surveys; I could barely find myself on some fan piedmonts, let alone find a polypedon boundary with those photos! I bought a set of large-scale-scales for an area I was going to map by myself for learning purposes, but moving so slowly it would be a century later when I finished, particularly could only get a few weeks a year to map, given other responsibilities.

I soon had serious talk with Ed Naphan. Besides his soils knowledge and experience, Ed was a de facto civil engineer, and master of aerial photography. He explained—patiently, I now suspect—that he had picked "soil-survey leader." Chances to do new work so often rise from mundane arrangements!

The reconnaissance-survey learning curve was very steep for me. I had done had been of phases of soil types with locations identified from aerial photos (usually 3.2 or 4 inches/mile) in Wisconsin and New York, walking-out or seeing most of the boundary of each polypedon on seeing it on a photo. Ed Naphan had acquired 1 inch/mile (1:60,000) reconnaissance surveys; I could barely find myself on some fan piedmonts, let alone find a polypedon boundary with those photos! I bought a set of large-scale for an area I was going to map by myself for learning purposes, but moving so slowly it would be a century later when I finished, particularly could only get a few weeks a year to map, given other responsibilities.

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