

# My *incredible* two years

by **Sonia Griffin**

When I first visited Aberystwyth University on an open day I talked to IGES about what opportunities there were to travel with a Geography degree. When IGES mentioned they ran a field trip to New Zealand, studying my two favourite topics - Volcanoes and Glaciers, I was convinced it was the place for me!

That field trip was 18 remarkable days filled with unforgettable sights and experiences; seeing my first glacier, (walking on it!), exploring a crazy town full of volcanic hazards, hiking through a misty valley to see "Mt. Doom"...and wading into a FREEZING glacial meltwater stream for our first assignment, are just a few of my favourite memories from that trip!

But before I even left for New Zealand, I already knew what my next adventure was to be. I had applied through Aberystwyth's Year in Employment Scheme for an internship in California at an Outdoor Education Centre called SCICON. They run week long programs alongside the local county's schools, with 200+ 6th grade students a week coming to a residential campus way up in the Sierra Nevada foothills, to learn all about science and conservation. When I was offered the job I was so excited; my own love for Geography had started after a week staying in a similar centre in Wales when I was ten!



Fieldwork in Svalbard – a moraine cave

Working at SCICON was the best year of my life - I LOVED my job and it made it so clear what I want to do in future: teach! There is no better feeling than seeing a child's face light up when they "get it". Every



Sonia at the Grand Canyon

three weeks we switched positions - we taught science standards outside on trails using "hands-on" techniques to get students interested and excited about learning. We also took "power positions" such as leading and organising all the evening activities or being the Village Co-ordinator, who is in charge of a whole village; which could include up to 120 6th graders and 20+ high school student volunteers who were their Cabin Leaders. Every week was different and most of the time it didn't even feel like work as it was so much fun! Hiking 5miles up a mountain every Thursday afternoon with a line of kids following you just to see a rickety old cabin! Learning how to handle injured birds of prey, such as owls, kestrels and once a peregrine falcon! After 10months working, I, and four of my best friends and co-workers from SCICON, took an amazing road trip to see geological landmarks I've dreamed of seeing for years – like Yellowstone National Park and the Grand Canyon!

To my parents' disappointment I spent barely a month at home before I was off again – this time back to my 3rd year of studying Geography – but this time as an Erasmus scholarship student at UNIS, the University of the Arctic based on Svalbard, an Archipelago of islands at 78°N!! Seeing two Polar bears within my first two weeks, living with glaciers in my "back yard", watching the Northern Lights in the dark season and studying in one of the most extreme environments in the world are just some of the awesome experiences I will never forget!

I'm really looking forward to coming back to Aber, finishing my degree and seeing all my friends, but it's been an incredible two years! I never dreamed it was possible to be this fortunate - I just applied for everything I could and somehow got lucky! Aberystwyth definitely gave me opportunities I have never heard offered by any other institute.

(Sonia's two incredible years just show what can be achieved in IGES at Aberystwyth University if you seize the opportunity with both hands!).

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“We want our students to engage with real world issues, but we had not expected Rebecca O’Connell to take us quite so literally!”



# New Orleans: The Clean Up

by Rebecca O’Connell

Approaching New Orleans in the summer of 2006, a year after Hurricane Katrina had hit, I had expected much of the clean up to have taken place, but after driving past miles of flattened forests and what used to be a shopping centre, with broken windows from looting, and a school bus on its side, rusting, I realised my expectations were unrealistic. The destructive power of the hurricane and its chaotic aftermath could still be seen everywhere.

Since the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, ‘Hands On New Orleans’ ([www.handsonneworleans.org/](http://www.handsonneworleans.org/)) volunteers have been at work every day to assist in the cleaning and rebuilding of many of the city’s sections, for no profit, and helped by donations and volunteers. The charity is funded by corporate sponsors, such as Home Depot, as red tape still prevents easy access to financial support from the government.

New Orleans looks on the outside like a normal city, but when you drive into the residential areas along the pot holed dirt roads, past house after house which is boarded up, you realise what a legacy this hurricane left behind. I was assigned to a gutting team, which work on homes that suffered water damage during the storm. The entire interior of the home must be removed - sheet rock, insulation, panelling, appliances, furniture and any left over personal belongings - everything. The teams also rip out the flooring and remove all of the nails. Once this process is complete, the home is ready for the mould to be removed.

We arrived armed with a claw hammer and a crowbar, dressed in work boots, a safety suit, ventilator, hard hat and goggles, in 80 degrees (F). Then we literally gutted the house. When we were there another team found two decomposing bodies in a property!!

Working from 8am-5pm, with a team of nine volunteers who gave us accommodation, food and water for free, we finished the house ready for the next stage. This was only one house in thousands that need sorting before the owners can move back in, who, nearly 2 years on, are still living in temporary accommodation. Those who can afford to pay builders to rebuild their houses are lucky, but most have to wait on a long list for help from charities to return to their own homes.



Rebecca (centre) ready for work



Rebecca is seen here (1<sup>st</sup> right on the back row) before climbing a glacier in New Zealand



Lucy Young wanted to make a difference and gain vital experience – she certainly did both.

# Relief That Works

by Lucy Young

Having always found development work interesting, I applied to do a year in employment with Christian Aid, which involves working in one of their offices around the UK, speaking to groups about the issues of poverty and Christian Aid's role in that fight, as well as a trip to Kenya to see the work for ourselves.

Christian Aid works in a unique manner in that it works with over 600 partners in over 60 countries, funding local NGOs and groups who then reach into their local community and deal with the issues that arise. By doing this, the work is done at a community level, enabling those with knowledge of the area to tackle the problems.

Our first week in Kenya was spent with the partner BIDII (Benevolent Institute of Development Initiatives), based in the Machakos district of eastern Kenya. They recognise that a key concern in their area is the empowerment of people, as well as the number of HIV/AIDS orphans. We were shown many SLA (Saving and Loan Association) groups made up of widows and widowers who look after the orphans. Through training, these communities have developed skills that enable them to generate their own income so they can provide sufficiently for their families.

Grace Muli is the chairwoman of a SLA that has been given a bull from BIDII. The members of the community each pay 50Ksh (40p) to have their cow 'served' by the bull. The calves can be sold to generate income, as well as producing milk, and the manure used to grow crops. Ultimately, the family and community all benefit from the system.



Christian Aid recognise that the onset of climate change will impact upon the world's poorest the most. UCCS (Ukamba Church Community Services) are a partner in the Kitui district of eastern Kenya which deals with the intense drought and the pressing need for access to water in the area. They train people to build sub surface dams along dry river beds, so when the long awaited rains come, the water seeps into the sand and is stored under ground.



The dam prevents the water from being washed away, and the sand acts as a natural fridge and filter. The Kingaatuko community now no longer have to walk 7km to get to a well, but can take the water from the sand.

The visit to Kenya, and the work that we do back in the UK allows us to see

first hand the work that Christian Aid does, and the relationships that have formed between the partners and beneficiaries. There are many aspects to development, not all of which is based overseas, I have been given a clear insight into the different roles that people play. I'd like to thank IGES for their contribution towards the funds required for me to do this year, and for fuelling my desire for seeing what I, as an individual, can do to help some of the world's poorest people.

Information about the gap year can be found at [www.pressureworks.org](http://www.pressureworks.org) or [www.Christianaid.org](http://www.Christianaid.org), and if anyone wants any more information, my email is [lyoung@christian-aid.org](mailto:lyoung@christian-aid.org)



*"Together we succeed."*  
Kamale (sub location in Kitui) motto

*"When BIDII came in and taught us to make things like this... I can now sell soap and buy food and pay school fees. I am very grateful for the knowledge we have received from BIDII. We can do things on our own now and live sustainably."*  
Magdaline Ngei, soap maker at the Mbee sub location SLA



“One of our students, Adam Hurrell, was on placement with a BBC Radio station as the flooding of 2007 unfolded. His story is just one more confirmation that geography matters.”

## Gloucestershire Flood Summer 2007

by Adam Hurrell

Perhaps the title of this piece *Gloucestershire Flood Summer 2007* is being a little optimistic. After all, there was no summer in 2007. Particularly, for those, like myself, who were affected by the severe flooding that devastated a large part of Gloucestershire, causing millions of pounds worth of damage, bringing the county virtually to its knees.

It all started on July 20<sup>th</sup> when weeks of persistent rain culminated in an evening of chaos and trauma. By midday roads were flooding and people were being sent home from work. The schools had broken up that afternoon for the summer holidays and the roads were busier than normal. However, come 5pm the major trunk roads, such as the A40 Golden Valley Bypass that links Gloucester and Cheltenham, were under 3 feet of water, and the M5 going both north and southbound between junctions 10 and 11 was shut with thousands of people stuck in there cars. And the water continued to rise.



From 3pm I had been answering the phones for my local BBC Radio station, BBC Radio Gloucestershire, passing on vital information to motorists and general members of the public whose houses were flooding and had missing relatives. The team and I were also giving advice and passing on helpline numbers to members of the public in desperate need of advice. Many needed emergency shelter. I shall never forget one elderly lady who rang in to say her house was flooding, as water came pouring in under her back door. She was over 80 and so were the majority of her neighbours. She was at her wits end about what to do and after calling every possible person who could help her to no avail she rang the radio station. All I could do was help her as best I could as she cried down the phone in sheer distress as her living room filled with water. No training can help you to deal with that kind of stress when you know full well there is very little you can actually do to help. We stayed on the air and taking calls well into the early hours of Saturday morning helping those stuck on the motorway through the night and keeping them company. That Friday was the worst day of the summer flooding but little did we know we would be in for another two weeks of it.



Over the following few days we lost all tap water, but luckily we did not lose electricity. However, had the flood waters broken the barriers at the Walham Substation over 600,000 people in the West and parts of Wales would have lost power. The authorities even discussed the possibility of evacuating 250,000 people.

For nearly two weeks we had no running water, as the Mythe Water treatment works on the banks of the River Severn near Tewksbury flooded. So we had to make do with water from the water butts in the garden and from the bowser at the end of the road. Collecting bottled water from the supermarkets became the norm and we soon made the best of the situation. In the midst of the biggest civil disaster operation since the war the people of Gloucestershire pulled together to help each other out. Neighbours helped each other to collect water and there was certainly a “mucking in” spirit. In addition, and perhaps most important of all, we didn’t lose our sense of humour. One friend from Oxford rang to ask me for my address, so he could post me some drinking water as I must be getting thirsty. I replied saying that whilst his offer was most generous I was not thirsty. There was wine in the cellar, gin and tonic in the fridge and the pubs for the most part stayed open!

When you lose tap water it makes you aware of how much we actually use every day and how we take it for granted. You review your daily activities and you constantly try to conserve water, a lesson which has stayed with me. Do you really need to run the tap when cleaning your teeth? How full do we actually need the kettle to be able to have just one cup? And for those few items, wouldn’t it be better to wash them up by hand instead of running the dishwasher through? It takes us to lose something to notice how much our daily lives depend upon it. This made all of us reflect upon those who have to face this sort of problem on a daily basis and it makes us realise just how lucky we are to have safe, clean drinking water in our taps.

I was involved in covering the protest marches that took place in Tewkesbury, campaigning against homes that are proposed to be built on flood plains and it was driving through the town that made me realise the full extent of the destruction that took place. Nearly every house had a caravan on the driveway and a skip full of ruined possessions. Whole lives were thrown away that summer as they went feet under brown, filthy, stinking water. Furniture, photos, clothes, toys, everything. These people now faced a winter and Christmas in a caravan because their houses were still uninhabitable. And those were the lucky ones. The ones who could actually afford home insurance. Thousands of people did not even have that reassurance. And sadly, three people lost their lives in the chaos.

When you sit around your dining room table, in the warm and the dry, spare a thought for all of those people who have been affected by last summer’s flooding. Some will still be living in caravans.....such was the extent of the damage.

“You might think our lecturers spend their time in Ivory Towers; Alun Hubbard’s story of how he learned to sail suggests that this assumption might not be quite correct!”

# Sailing for beginners

by Alun Hubbard



Some 10 years ago whilst studying in Vancouver, a mate and I begged, borrowed and scraped our pennies together to buy a 47' ketch called *Gambo*. Not particularly remarkable other than that neither of us had sailed before but with the aid of a varied crew of climbing misfits, barflies and disillusioned students - we managed to more or less bumble up to Alaska, the Aleutians and through the Bering Strait into the Beaufort Sea. Ostensibly, our mission was to carry out 'cutting edge' science whilst heroically conquering unclimbed mountains in Bonnington-esque fashion, but the operation more resembled a low-budget floating gypsy camp/failing circus/eco-tourist operation. Over the course of this journey I made many new friends, lost some, sort of learnt how to sail, shout loudly and forgot how to climb. Thankfully, I have a strict word limit which precludes a blow-by-blow account of this surreal voyage, so instead, I'll recount a couple of memorable user-friendly 'vignettes'.

## *May 1998, Vancouver.*

Dave and I are in a fix. We have the whole summer off but our planned Alaskan adventure has been seriously derailed when our good friend and team-stalwart died attempting to ski down the north-ridge of Mt. Rainier. Furthermore, Andy, the skipper and owner of the yacht that was to be our trusty-steed north has dumped us for his live-aboard girlfriend and Bertrand has lady-troubles (actually we've all got 'lady-troubles', or specifically a lack thereof but we're not all French). So, no team, no transport, no women and I'm feeling pretty hung-over to boot.

But it's a balmy spring day and we meet Andy for a conciliatory *voyagette* around Vancouver Harbour: fairly pointless but equipped with a strong g&t it's a pleasant enough way to pass an afternoon. I spot a big red dragon painted on the bow of a sailboat moored in one of the mariners. Later, when Andy's girlfriend kicks us off, Dave and I stumble over a gate to get a closer look at this boat; it is big, green,

and built like the proverbial brick out-house. A gruff Welsh voice hails us from below and I compliment him on such a fine boat. Dai, the authentic salty sea-dog, pops his head up, invites us aboard and cracks the seal on a bottle of Captain Morgan. I explain our plight and he enquires as to how much we've got in the bank...

## *Ten days later,*

the registration papers are signed and in our possession. Within the hour, we weigh *Gambo's* hefty anchor and head in a vaguely northerly direction with our new crew, Chris, Greg and Tobyn, all shanghaied at the local pub. The boat's skookum and we haven't a care in the world, apart from where to put fuel, how to hoist sails, avoid ships, read a tide-table etc...

## *Four weeks later, somewhere near the top of Mt Cook, St Elias Mountains, Alaska.*

After an uncomfortable and chilly night spent dug into a snow slope at 4,500m forced by a blizzard that sprang up 15 hours earlier, leaving us wandering around blindly like lost sheep looking for the summit, we stumble out of our snow-hole to a clear dawn and a stunning post-storm skyscape. Dave's toes are frostbitten and we're into the last of the rations. The wind has dropped though and it has risen to a balmy -18°C; the 'dream team' is back in action. Everything around is plastered in wind-blown rime-ice; ropes, crampons and axes have to be chipped out and broken free from their ice-cocoons but we are eager to move to warm up and bring life to our cramped and ailing limbs. During the final 20-minutes of moderate ice-climb, the surrounding peaks to the east start to glow and are then brilliantly silhouetted against the watery rising sun. At the summit we shake hands, take photos, smile inanely and stamp about trying to keep warm. It's a sublime, joyous moment and I innocently ask Dave, now that we've got the hang of this boating lark, if he'd be up for a little jaunt to Antarctica.



“By day Harry Toland is a Postdoctoral Researcher in IGES, but by night, sword in hand, he is West Wales’ own masked avenger!”



# Commonwealth Games Fencing Competition 2007

## *Harry Toland fights for Welsh pride*

From all corners of the country and from overseas, the Welsh team descended on Toronto in Canada and when the dust had settled on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> of July, 2007, our own Dr Harry Toland joined 11 keen and finely-honed fellow Welsh athletes (finely honed that is for veterans i.e. aged 40 and over) prepared to take on all-comers in the 7<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Veterans Fencing Championship.

Foil, Épée and Sabre were the weapons of choice for our IGES representative. The opposition from Canada, Australia, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man squared up for the ensuing 3 days of solid first-class fencing.

In first day of competition Harry started well in the initial seeding pool and moved up to the second pool in strong position. Harry left the field just out of the medals in 7<sup>th</sup> place.

On the second day the Welsh Men’s foil team, captained by Harry, entered the team competition, and fenced Canada B initially, who they dispatched after a spirited fight by. This got them a place in the final and their next opponents were the Canadian A team! These Canadians were a much more formidable team and in the end they proved too strong. However, Wales were content with a hard-earned silver medal.

In the Team event, the competition was fierce, with the Wales Men’s team fighting hard but just missing out on a place in the final, being beaten by a very keen Scottish team, who were the eventual silver medallists. The Wales Men’s sabre team, again captained by Harry, went on to beat Canada in a fiercely contested fight to win third place and bronze medals.

The whole Welsh team came away from the 7th Commonwealth Veterans Fencing Championship with 16 medals, an amazing result considering the pool of fencers within Wales. The Welsh



team exemplified Welsh pride and tenacity and Harry, winner of a silver and bronze Commonwealth medal for foil and sabre, commented that the spirit and determination shown by all the Welsh team members was truly inspiring. Should you wish to take up this exciting sport please don’t hesitate to ask Harry for details of where and when the Aberystwyth fencing club meets ([hht@aber.ac.uk](mailto:hht@aber.ac.uk)).

“In IGES the research we undertake is relevant to the planet’s future. One of Mike Hambrey’s recent papers tackles climate change issues head on.”

# Shrinking Ice Sheets

by Mike Hambrey

The most frequently downloaded article in the popular earth science publication *Geology Today* during the 12 months to December 2007 is by IGES staff member Mike Hambrey and former colleague, Poul Christofferson. It deals with the highly topical question of the stability of the Greenland Ice Sheet and its potential contribution to sea level rise.

At the time of writing it can be downloaded free from the publisher’s website: [www.blackwell-synergy.com/action/showMostReadArticles?journalCode=gto](http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/action/showMostReadArticles?journalCode=gto)

Meltpools forming on the upper reaches of the Dauugard\_Jensen glacier.



The fast flowing Dauugard-Jensen glacier – east Greenland

**FEATURE**

## Feature

### Is the Greenland Ice Sheet in a state of collapse?

**The Greenland Ice Sheet is thinning at an accelerating pace and the ice sheet’s contribution to sea-level rise has doubled in less than a decade. New data show rapid and widespread changes in the behaviour of the ice sheet, particularly along the coastal margin. These changes coincide with a decade of sustained Arctic warming of up to 3 °C. Decay of the Greenland Ice Sheet in response to global warming will not only be governed by increased surface melting during longer and warmer summers but also by a speed-up of coastal glaciers that drain the interior ice sheet. A precise estimate of sea-level rise in the twenty-first century relies on improved theoretical treatment of these glaciers in computer models.**

**Poul Christofferson & Michael J. Hambrey**  
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The Greenland Ice Sheet – positioned between 60–65° north and 20–70° east – contains 2.8 million cubic kilometres of ice (Fig. 1). If it were to melt completely, release of this frozen reservoir would raise the global sea level by approximately 7 m. Although sea level is unlikely to rise by this much in the immediate future, fast sea-level rise at rates of up to 80 mm/year did occur in the past when Northern Hemisphere ice sheets decayed in response to the termination of the last ice age. The present rate of sea-level rise is about 1.5 mm/year. A recent study shows that Greenland’s contribution to global sea-level rise increased from 0.23 mm/year in 1998 to 0.57 mm/year in 2005 due, in part, to the accelerated flow of coastal outlet glaciers (Fig. 2). Glaciologists have for many years assumed that the ice sheet is relatively stable and that its demise would require thousands of years of melting. This view needs to be revised. Earth-observing satellites, such as Landsat, SRS, QuikSCAT, Terra/Aqua and CryoSat, have improved our spatial coverage of polar environments. The increased abundance and variety of data, as well as the development of new analysis techniques, have greatly improved our picture of the behaviour of the Greenland Ice Sheet.

**Global warming and sea-level rise**

An increasing number of scientific studies have shown that human activities, e.g. burning of fossil fuels, have increased the concentration of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The Industrial Revolution is thought to have increased the level of carbon dioxide from 280 ppm in 1750 to 385 ppm in 2000. Today, the level has increased to 381 ppm and it is evident that global temperatures have been raised with the increase in greenhouse gases. 2005 was the warmest year in more than a century, while the second warmest year was 1998, followed closely by 2001, 2003 and 2004 (Fig. 3). This progressive warming trend strongly suggests that human activity is contributing significantly to

**Fig. 1.** Map showing digital elevation model for the Greenland Ice Sheet (Hambrey, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 2003; <http://www.igees.ac.uk>). Names refer to outlet glaciers discussed in text.

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“Our students do not just sit back and wait for lecturers to feed them information, postgraduate Johanna Breyer decided to find out more for herself and attended an important conference on climate change”

# Talking the talk or walking the walk?

## *Government and Climate Change*

by Johanna Breyer

On 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> November I attended the International Parliamentary Conference on Climate Change organized by the UK branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association ([www.cpaukbranch.org](http://www.cpaukbranch.org)) in London. The meeting was attended mainly by parliamentary representatives of the Commonwealth countries, as well as Japan and France and several scientific and NGO-connected observers.

Speakers included Mohan Munasinghe, Vice-Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); David King, the UK Government chief scientist; Jonathon Porritt, Chair of the Sustainable Development Commission; John Ashton, UK special representative for climate change; James Smith, Chairman of Shell UK and Tom Delay, Chief Executive of the Carbon Trust.

Presentations could be clearly divided in those who just talk and those who actually walk. It was unequivocally acknowledged that the scientific debate about climate change is over and that it is most likely that a natural pattern of climatic oscillations has been strongly amplified, at least on the rising part, through anthropogenic causes. Most speakers were just as unequivocal about the fact that not enough is done about reducing climate influencing emissions, not even within our possibilities from the individual to the legislative level and that we cannot afford to lose more time over this as has been done since Kyoto.

We do possess the necessary technology to mitigate and adapt to climate change to a certain degree, but the political will to implement these technologies is largely lacking and extensive changes in behavioural patterns have to take place, to maximize the effectiveness of mitigation strategies.

While individual countries' efforts were applauded it was also stressed, that a global consent on actions and strategies is essential,

as this is a global responsibility. Regrettably, in many ways the inertia of political systems matches that of climatic systems, however government action alone will not be enough and the active participation of civil society is essential.

No amount of mitigation will avoid near term temperature rises, so the near term solution has to be adaptation, which is reducing the impact of problems, though adaptation and mitigation should always be considered together.

Due to the presence of parliamentarians from many African countries and Pacific island states, the anger of developing countries at possibly being expected to slow or adapt their own development to curb a problem not of their own making, as well as the already strongly felt direct impacts of climate change on their countries, was clearly expressed. This was directed especially at the UK government representatives present and James Smith (Shell UK) had a particularly uncomfortable grilling on his company's unsavoury track record in the Niger delta from a Nigerian MP. It was repeatedly stressed that all talk is an elitist exercise and direct action is needed now.

Accordingly there was a large debate on helping developing nations to “leapfrog” carbon intensive development through technology transfer and adaptation strategies. Effective measures to penalize countries who do not fulfil globally agreed emission reduction targets were also discussed, suggestions including for example, levying goods produced in such countries with a “climate tax” and to tax the costs of adaptation on pollution levels.

If this scares you as much as it should, then bear in mind the contribution of the solitary representative from Samoa. After a particularly violent hurricane in the 60s, the Samoan government introduced a compulsory annual prayer and fasting week and Samoa has been hurricane free ever since!





*The compulsory rifle training all UNIS students must go through*



*Team line-ups for the biannual football match between Longyearbyen and Barentsburg*

During their time at university many a student will undertake a semester abroad. But a semester abroad in the high Arctic is something a little more unusual and was an opportunity that I just could not resist. So, at the end of July 2007, I, and three other IGES students, left the summer floods behind and flew out to the island archipelago of Svalbard where we began our new life seventy-eight degrees north of the equator.

My first realisation that life in Svalbard was not going to be quite the same as the UK was when our plane touched down at 1.30am with the sun still in the sky. At first getting used to permanent daylight was a little strange but gradually my body adjusted and accepted what it was experiencing. During my time studying at the University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS) I was to experience both twenty-four hour daylight and perpetual darkness and with both came very different, but all the same, incredible stories.

All UNIS courses have a strong fieldwork element to them, something that really stimulated interest within myself and my fellow students. However, before such fieldwork could be undertaken we first had to undergo a safety course on the dangers of our new home. One potential threat to our lives on Svalbard was the polar bear. There is approximately one polar bear to every human inhabitant on Svalbard and as such it is a legal requirement to carry a firearm when travelling outside the limits of the main settlements. As such, all students are required to undergo rifle training before fieldwork can be undertaken. Furthermore, during the field trips transportation around the islands was via boat and thus we had to learn what to do in an emergency. This involved being trained in how to use survival suits properly and manifested itself on the course by us having to jump into a fjord wearing the suits and swimming into a group in order to attach everyone together as quickly as possible.



*The Aurora Borealis over Sarkofagen, Spitsbergen*

The field trips themselves were just amazing. Not only did I get to see all the unique wildlife such as whales and polar bears but the scenery was breathtaking. I saw glaciers calving, I got woken up by alarms at 2.00am because the ship had hit an iceberg, I explored a Russian ghost town in August snow and through all this, due to the still fairly minimal research conducted so far on Svalbard, I was actually contributing to science. It made everything I have read about in books and journals so much more real being able to see it all in the field. Back in the classroom the work load and lectures, although intense, were so invigorating and refreshing that I discovered a great passion to learn more about the Arctic.

Nevertheless, it was not just an academic experience. My week was very active, ranging from Red Cross meetings, playing football and badminton at the local club, taking a Norwegian language course, being a lifeguard at the swimming pool and organising social events for fellow UNIS staff, students and affiliates. All these different activities opened up new doors for me too. For example, I was selected to play for the town's football team against the Russian settlement on the archipelago in a biannual sports exchange. It was so interesting to see such a conflicting way of life compared to where I was based in the Norwegian town of Longyearbyen, as well as seeing the power of sport bringing such different people from such different backgrounds together. Further with the Red Cross, I was fortunate enough to be flown out in a helicopter for a long weekend retreat to a privately owned cabin. It was one of my favourite memories of my time on the island. During the day we went for hikes, whilst at night we sat around the fire, shared stories and watched the aurora borealis.

The northern lights were simply majestic to witness. The lack of pollution over Svalbard also meant that the night sky was just beautiful. Whether it be a full moon that would light up the whole of the islands, the Milky Way, Mars or Venus that I can make out with my naked eye or the shooting stars that were so common a sighting they just became the norm, Svalbard always gave me something special to behold. Svalbard also gave me my first taste of driving a snow mobile and of cross-country skiing.

Writing all my adventures into one short piece is just impossible. There is just so much I could say about my autumn semester but just not enough space to write it all down here. There is a saying on Svalbard, 'what happens in Svalbard, stays on Svalbard'. I believe that really says a lot. To fully appreciate what I have seen, experienced and been through you had to be there with me. I feel so privileged to have gone to such a unique location and I would not hesitate in recommending IGES and the Svalbard experience to any other student.

**"The whole experience was the most challenging, exciting, yet fulfilling experience of my life!"**

*Yasmin Paul, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year BA Geography*

HANNAH LEES revisited the places she saw devastated in the 2004 tsunami and helped to save some turtles! CAROLINE MARTINGELL taught advanced rugby skills to Zambian schoolchildren. ANOUSKA MENDZIL travelled along the Thai coast while BECKY WELLER visited ruins and zip wired through the rainforest in Central America. LINDSAY PENNEY explored the ancient and modern hazards of Mt Etna, while SARAH JONES explored the rather scarier risks associated with Mt Vesuvius. AMY GREENWOOD helped save coral reefs in Indonesia and YASMIN PAUL and friends explored the remoter corners of Peru.

Each year we offer up to 13 travel awards, worth up to £400, to students with adventure in their souls. Here are a selection of stories from those who made it back!

# IGES TRAVEL AWARDS 2007

## Hannah Lees visited SRI LANKA

In 2004 I watched the tsunami wave crash against the walls of the hotel I was staying at. In 2007 I revisited the island of Sri Lanka for 16 days, travelling around the coastal areas affected by the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. My time in Sri Lanka was spent interviewing local people on how they are coping nearly 3 years on and to revisit local people I met and came to know during Christmas 2004. I also studied areas of mangrove forests to see how they have been regenerating over the past 3 years.

I also helped release turtle hatchlings into the ocean, further endangered by the Tsunami event, which are cared for at the turtle sanctuary.



*Galle – one of the worst hit areas. Houses have still not been rebuilt nearly 3 years after the disaster.*



*Taking a trip through the mangroves in Bentota village with a local guide*



*Visiting the turtles cared for by Chandrasiri at the turtle sanctuary*

## Sarah Jones: Volcanic risk – VESUVIUS

For one week I visited the Bay of Naples in Italy. The area surrounding Naples holds many interesting geographical, historical and cultural sights, of which we visited Vesuvius, Pompeii, Herculaneum, Sorrento, the historical centre of Naples and the Temple of Serapis to the North of Naples itself.

My time in Italy was both exciting and inspiring; the week clearly illustrated the danger that Vesuvius imposes upon the entire region and the problems with the Government's evacuation plan, which is an area that I would like to influence during my career.



*Vesuvius looms over the excavated ruins of Pompeii as a warning of past disasters*



## Becky Weller visited CENTRAL AMERICA

I spent three weeks travelling around Southern Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. I saw many Mayan ruins, climbed a volcano, went caving and explored old colonial towns and zip wired through the jungle. Seeing such a diverse culture has broadened my views and given me a greater appreciation for my Latin American studies.



View over Lake Atitlan, Guatemala



Cycling around the small island of Caye Caulker, Belize



Travelling by Chicken Bus in Guatemala.

## Anouska Mendzil explored THAILAND

During the summer I took the opportunity to visit Thailand for a month. I travelled the length of the country stopping at many cities, towns, rural villages and islands along the way. I explored as much of the country as I could and experienced numerous different cultural, religious, historical, geographical and unique experiences. I particularly enjoyed my time in Thailand and would like to return in the future.



Looking out at the limestone cliffs on a long tail boat, Krabi



Evacuation Route sign in Ko Phi Phi



A view of the Golden Palace in Bangkok

## Caroline Martingell taught rugby in ZAMBIA

I travelled to Zambia with the Tag Rugby Development Trust in order to coach rugby to Grade 5 pupils in selected Kitwe and Lusaka Schools.



All of the rugby teams and volunteers at the first tournament in Kitwe



The children's reaction on seeing a Muzungo (white person)

This trip had many benefits; the key one being able to experience a very different culture, which has opened my mind to other ways of life within less economically developed countries. An added bonus was also achieving a Community Rugby Coaching certificate, and making many lifelong friends.

## Lindsay Penney climbed MOUNT ETNA

I spent eight days in Sicily, visiting the largest and most well-known active volcano in Europe – Mount Etna. We went on walks and guided tours around craters on the east flank, climbing up to around 3000m, as well as visiting local cities to get a taste of Sicilian life.

The study of Geohazards is something I have always found fascinating, and this visit, and the further reading I have done on Mt. Etna, has given me more insight into the risks associated with such a hazard, and how people have adapted their lives to living with a volcano.



Lindsay on Mt Etna

## Amy Greenwood visited INDONESIA



Collecting data for dissertation. On the mudflats, in Ambeua, Kaledupa

I spent four weeks on the Island Hoga in the Wakotobi National Park, Indonesia. I travelled with Operation Wallacea, a conservation organisation. While I was there I went diving, looking at the amazing habitat of coral reefs and assisting in research conducted in the coral reefs. I enjoyed collecting data for my dissertation, even though covered in mud everyday. This was an amazing experience and hopefully someday I will return and assist in the research projects.



Visiting Sampela, near Kaledupa. The local community lives on the water



When exploring the Island you find extraordinary features



## Yasmin Paul trekked in PERU

I used the Gareth Thomas Travel Award to help fund my travels in Peru for three months in extremely remote and challenging places.

We flew to the noisy smog-filled capital of Lima and observed life in a third-world city, gaining a better understanding of economic, cultural, social and political issues.

We experienced life with an indigenous tribe in the remote Amazon jungle whose 'primitive' interaction with their environment amazed us and made us question the disconnected materialism of western society. We trekked for days through the dense jungle to the incredible waterfall of Parijaro; a real test of fitness and endurance.



*Women and children of the Ashaninca tribe in a remote rainforest community*

We then did high-altitude walking in the breathtaking glacial scenery of the Cordillera Blanca mountains in the Andes up to the snowline at 5000m; hard work! We travelled to the colonial white city of Arequipa surrounded by a wondrous volcanic landscape of igneous geology. We visited Lake Titicaca and the Uros Indians on their floating reed islands, before travelling to Cusco to visit the many Incan ruins and trek to the wonders of Machu Piccu. We then explored the amazing Colca Canyon with its huge condors, before travelling to the Northern Desert. Here we visited a beautiful and highly biodiverse dryland forest and the ancient tombs of the Valley of the Pyramids.



*Yasmin (right) and companions*

I am now much more confident speaking Spanish and have greatly improved my physical fitness along with my anthropological awareness and general understanding and perceptions of the world. The whole experience was the most challenging, exciting, yet fulfilling experience of my life!

## John Groves took part in an expedition to the YUKON

The theme of the Yukon 2007 science projects was climate change. Projects involved collaboration with the research programme for the International Polar Year (2007-2008) and the Yukon-based Northern Climate Exchange. The International Polar Year is a major international science initiative for Polar Regions, first held in 1882-83, and has a major influence in improving our understanding of global processes, collecting a broad range of measurements that provide a snapshot in time of the state of the Polar Regions.

I learnt a lot of useful skills, including camp cooking and how to site and dig campsite latrines! I spent time with local people, including animal trappers, learning about their lifestyle and culture. I also saw more wildlife than I could dream of, including a cow moose and her calf, eagles and marmots. The most unfriendly local wildlife was the ubiquitous mosquito and of course bears!



When visiting some of the Yukon First Nations people we learned of their lives and culture. We



*Nothing goes to waste, butchering a bull moose.*

learned that any animal trapped or shot is used completely, there is no waste; quite a contrast to our own way of life. We also explored and assessed the environmental impact of several old abandoned silver lead mines.

The whole event was an experience of a lifetime and I am grateful to IGES for sponsoring me.



*Preparing for a 12 hour trek, checking we have the bear repellent!*

# FIELD COURSES

## Crossing Mordor!

The 2007 fieldcourse to New Zealand contained the usual exciting mix of tall glaciers, raging rivers and smoking volcanoes. So frenetic is the pace of the trip that one would have thought that lecturers and students would spend their day off on North Island relaxing, not a bit of it! Instead, one very early morning in April 36 eager young and not so young people set off to attempt the Tongariro Crossing, rated as one of the best walks in the world and which crosses several active volcanoes on its 17 km route.

One of the attractions of the walk is that it crosses the landscape that was used to portray "The land of Mordor" in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. For the fit and foolhardy the challenge of the crossing can be stepped up a notch by including an ascent of the volcano Ngaurahoe AKA MT DOOM, which just happens to be one of the most active volcanoes in the world.

The party soon split into three groups. The first, led by Dr James "Aragorn" Brasington, would attempt a speedy crossing of the classic route, the second, led by Professor Mike "Gandalf" Hambrey, would follow at a more leisurely pace; while the third, led by Dr John "Gollum" Grattan would attempt to include an ascent of Mt Doom in the day.



*In the southern crater of Tongariro volcano*

All parties met with great success and everyone agreed it was one of the best days of their lives; enlivened by hot rocks, sulphur lakes and the stench of volcanic gases. Yes, some of the students felt and looked like Orcs at the end of the day, but no gold rings were lost. Dr Grattan's only regret was that the volcano Ruapehu erupted shortly after they left the island and not while they were there!

*Mt Doom seen from the start of the trail*



*The route to the summit!*



*From the summit of Mt Doom with the remainder of the trail stretched out below.*



*We did it!*



# Viva España

In September 2007, 2nd and 3rd year environmental scientists took part in a new field course in northern Spain. Centred around Zaragoza in the Ebro Basin and the town of Jaca in the foothills of the Pyrenees, students investigated a range of contemporary environmental issues. We were able to see at first hand the considerable water resource and supply problems facing the Spanish government and the devastating impacts of landslides in mountain environments. After a wet and not so warm Welsh summer, the 30 degree temperatures were appreciated by all! Students and staff alike thoroughly enjoyed the trip.



## A HIGHLY RATED department in a HIGHLY rated university - don't just take our word for it!



Professor Aled Jones, Pro Vice-Chancellor at Aberystwyth University said:

"Making the shortlist for such a prestigious award is an outstanding achievement in itself, and one that everybody at Aberystwyth can be very proud of."

"The combination of committed staff, academic programmes, fantastic location and the wonderfully friendly community spirit that makes studying at Aberystwyth such a memorable and rewarding experience for students, has earned the University its rightful place at the top table of Universities for the best places to study in the UK," he added.

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HUMAN GEOGRAPHY 2007	
	Overall satisfaction
1. Aberystwyth	4.7 / 5
2. Cambridge	4.6 / 5
3. Glasgow	4.6 / 5
4. Manchester	4.5 / 5
5. Leicester	4.4 / 5
6. Plymouth	4.4 / 5
7. Oxford	4.4 / 5
8. Royal Holloway	4.4 / 5
9. Birmingham	4.4 / 5
10. Swansea	4.4 / 5

The National Student Survey in 2007 rated the Human Geography degree at IGES as the best in Britain. Our Science geography degree just missed the top slot by 0.2%.



Highest score in the UK for student satisfaction

The Times Good University Guide 2008, August 2007



www.accommodationforstudents.com (June 2007)



Aberystwyth University was 5th in UK and Top in Wales with a satisfaction rating of 90%.

The old story is that geography graduates can only follow careers as teachers or travel agents! Here are just five examples among many of our recent graduates who beg to differ. Typically 91% of graduates are in employment or studying for a postgraduate qualification within 6 months of graduation; a tribute to the high quality of our students and the quality of their tutors.

# GRADUATE BIOGRAPHIES

Matthew Hogan

## Health Emergency Planning Officer

*West Midlands Ambulance Service*

Going into my final year at Aber I was conscious that it was only 9 months until I was out in the 'real world' and that I really needed to start thinking about a career. During the Christmas holidays of my final year, I arranged some voluntary work experience with the Regional Emergency Planning Team at the Health Protection Agency in Birmingham – mainly because it sounded quite exciting – and it was!

Returning to Uni I was clear about the direction that I wanted to pursue, I was fortunate in that I was able to slightly modify, with support from tutors, my dissertation from the original proposal into something more closely related to my chosen career path, which I hoped would be useful for future employers.

I was offered the position of Health Emergency Planning Officer at West Midlands Ambulance Service. Here, I am responsible for ensuring the NHS in the West Midlands is prepared for any challenges it may face. My role includes the development of contingency plans for a range of scenarios, staff training and an on-call emergency response. In my position, I get to work with lots of other people from all the emergency services, local

authorities, utility providers and voluntary organisations. I have also been nominated to be on a national steering group for Pandemic Influenza planning for the Ambulance Services in the UK.

Over the last 18 months we have carried out 3 live simulation exercises which have received regional and national media coverage and I have personally been involved in the response to 8 significant incidents, which have included a suspect package, a tornado, extreme flooding and a large scale power failure. In addition to this are the 'day-to-day' incidents of chemical fires and multiple road traffic collisions.

In October 2007 I am starting a Disaster Management MSc, which I hope will broaden my knowledge and allow me to progress my career in this exciting and challenging field.

*Note: I studied Physical Geography from 2002-2005. My dissertation title was 'Comparison of Topographic Detail from Remote Sensing Sources: Watershed Analysis in the Nepal Himalayas'. Modules that I particularly enjoyed were Geohazards, Forensic Geoscience, and the Palaeoclimate and Environmental Change related modules.*



Matthew (pictured right) with megaphone during a biohazard alert drill





Anne Gallagher

## Documentary Film Maker

In June 2007, exactly 3 years after I graduated, I received a 'Tinny' Award from the Swansea Bay Film festival for my first film and first documentary - 'The Amadis Project'

Between September 2001 and June 2004 I studied for a joint honours degree in Geography/Film & TV Studies at Aberystwyth, a degree scheme which my school careers advisor told me would never get me a job! It was a

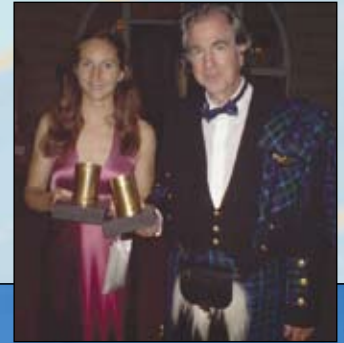
fantastic three years and I found every module interesting and the variety stimulating.

Whilst in my third year a recent Aber Marine Biology graduate Lily Kozmian-Ledward offered me a place on a research trip she was running around the West Indies. Seeing the opportunity I asked if I could film the trip and 6 months after graduating I found myself filming in the Caribbean.

While putting the film through post-production I decided to set up a small production company for the documentary to come out of and with the help of a small grant from the Welsh Assembly Government I set up Tusker Films in April 2006. It's not been easy and I'm still having to teach surfing on weekends through the summer, but I love being able to work for myself and on projects that I am interested in.

Most of my films are about environmental issues and the latest project is a documentary on climate change and it's local effects here in Wales. It will be filmed in monthly instalments and uploaded monthly to [www.undercurrents.org](http://www.undercurrents.org) and at the end of the year a 50min film will be produced.

I'm never going to be a millionaire but I'm doing a job I enjoy in a place I love.



Fiona Fyfe

## Works as a Landscape Architect

Fiona graduated from IGES in 1998 with a BSc in Geography. Her preferred modules related to historical geography, rural and protected landscapes, surveying and planning, and she was delighted to discover a career which utilises all of them! She is now a Chartered Landscape Architect. In 2006 she established her own business: Living Landscapes Consultancy Ltd.

Fiona's work is at the large-scale end of the landscape architecture spectrum, assessing landscape character, understanding what makes a landscape special, and determining where- and how- any development can best take place to ensure that the special qualities of the landscape are retained. Essential to the job is the ability to read the landscape and to understand its physical and cultural development, so knowledge and skills gained on the Aberystwyth geography course are used on a daily basis.

Career highlights so far have included defining the boundaries of the proposed South Downs National Park, preparing the management plan for the Giant's Causeway World Heritage Site, winning a Landscape Institute Award for the Cambridge Greenbelt Study (which will guide the development and growth of Cambridge for the next 25 years or so), going up in a helicopter to gather data for a landscape capacity study for fish-farming off Shetland, and (nearly as big an adrenaline buzz as the helicopter ride!) being a Professional Witness at Public Inquiries.





Natalie Hoare

## Now works as an Editor for Publishing House

After graduation and a brief period of confusion as to which career path to take, Natalie Hoare decided to use several months of work experience gained during summer and Easter breaks as an editorial assistant on an annual travel guide, to pursue a career in publishing.

During the next six years Natalie worked on a weekly job magazine for the University of London, a large circulation monthly about caravanning and became the editor of a monthly business title for a publishing house in Richmond, Surrey. While in this last position, the publishing house won the contract to produce the Royal Geographical Society's magazine – *Geographical*. After badgering her boss everyday for several months, the golden ticket to her dream job proved to be the geography degree from Aberystwyth (among other things) and she was offered the position of features editor on *Geographical* in March 2006. The role involves a mix of



extensive writing, editing, interviewing key figures in the world of geography, exploration, commissioning features and – the best bit – international travel. So far she's tested Gore-Tex jackets in Tenerife (Spain's highest mountain is there); examined how the former Portuguese colony and gambling haven of Macau is maintaining its cultural heritage while it reinvents

itself as the Las Vegas of the East; investigated sustainable tourism projects in the Atlantic rainforest in southern Brazil and, a bit closer to home, she's researched the landscapes and histories of the Mendip Hills and Quantock Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Natalie Hoare graduated with a Geography BA (Hons) degree from IGES at Aberystwyth in 2001. To subscribe to *Geographical*, see [www.geographical.co.uk](http://www.geographical.co.uk).



Richard Skipworth

## Now works for Golder Associates as an Environmental Consultant

After graduating from the University of Wales Aberystwyth in June 2003, I took a gap year and travelled to Malaysia, Malaysian Borneo, Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. Over this time I reinforced my passion for environmental interests, visiting some of the worlds most beautiful and yet vulnerable ecosystems. On returning to Britain, I applied for Environmental Consultancy jobs and posted my CV on some online job sites. This proved worthwhile, as numerous companies invited me for interviews thanks to the skills I had learned during my Geography degree.

I eventually took a job with Cleanaway UK Ltd, a large waste management consultancy that employs more than 8,000 people, operating a nationwide network of waste service depots, high-temperature hazardous waste incinerators and four landfill sites. Starting in November 2004, I was employed by the technical centre based in Eastwood, Essex, which operates a UKAS accredited laboratory and employs a small work force employed to monitor and remediate Cleanaway sites around the UK. Working as the soil controller, my duties were to overhaul the soil acceptance protocol for accepting waste soils into landfill sites to comply with new hazardous waste regulations; and conduct contaminated land site investigations. In this time, I reinforced skills and knowledge gained during my degree, becoming proficient in using environmental risk assessment software such as CLEA and ConSim, which help assess human and environmental impacts of exposure from contamination sites.

I recently moved to Golder Associates, who specialize in ground engineering and environmental services. My first project at the company will be working at Bradwell nuclear power station, helping with the decommissioning and demolition of the buildings, ensuring the waste will be put in the correct waste streams.





# Departmental NEWS

## Dr Henry Lamb reports

The Tana Project: In January 2007, an IGES team, with colleagues from Addis Ababa and St Andrews University, successfully retrieved a 92m-long core of sediment from Lake Tana, in northern Ethiopia. The



This drilling vessel was specially built on the shores of the lake for the Tana project.

lake is the source of the Blue Nile, so the core should provide information about the history of the Nile, and climate change over many thousands of years.



## Royal approval for questioning local democracy

Dr Graham Gardner (gsg@aber.ac.uk) has been made a fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts (FRSA) after challenging government policy on neighbourhood renewal. The award followed on the heels

of a feature profile on Dr Gardner in *Regeneration and Renewal* magazine in which he argued that the growing emphasis on community empowerment in the regeneration of deprived areas could exacerbate economic inequalities, undermine social cohesion and put unreasonable burdens on local people. His comments provoked a storm of responses, and Dr Gardner has since received invitations to address policy-makers and community development professionals on the same issue.

## IGES wins Definiens GMES Award

IGES researchers Richard Lucas and Peter Bunting received the top prize at the Definiens AG Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) Research Awards in April 2007 following presentation of their work on characterising and mapping vegetation in Wales.

Definiens AG is a world leading image processing company ([www.definiens.com](http://www.definiens.com)) with whom the remote sensing and GIS unit has gained strong links with for a number of years through their software suite. The GMES ([www.gmes.info](http://www.gmes.info)) is a European lead initiative to provide tools for monitoring the planet for environmental security and disaster support. With support from the Countryside Council of Wales (CCW) and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), the remote sensing and GIS unit within IGES has undertaken a number of mapping pilot projects to assess the ability of satellite sensor data to map and monitor upland vegetation habitats within Wales.

Following the success of these pilot projects a consortium, lead by IGES and Environment Systems ([www.enssys.co.uk](http://www.enssys.co.uk)), an Aberystwyth based GIS and remote sensing consultancy, is currently undertaking a larger project mapping semi-natural habitats throughout Wales using the Definiens image processing suite and time series of remote sensing data. The method for the mapping developed within IGES was considered to be innovative and an excellent use of the Definiens software suite. The judges highlighted the automation, cost effectiveness and time saving nature of the approach as those which made the project stand out and therefore successful at the awards.

## Exploring the archives in Argentina – Dr Heidi Scott

This summer, as part of an ongoing research project that began in 2006, I spent three weeks carrying out research in Argentina's national archives in Buenos Aires. I was there to collect information about a number of missions that were established by the Franciscan order between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Amazon frontier region of



The missionaries map

Apolobamba in what is now northern Bolivia.

The most fascinating document that I came across, perhaps, was a beautiful and detailed sketch-map of one of the

Franciscan missions, incorporated into a long missionary's report from the late eighteenth century. What surprised me most was that even though this report has been used as a source of data by various historians, none (to my knowledge) have actually discussed the map in any detail!

Not all my time in Argentina, of course, was spent in the archives. My weekends were spent exploring the seemingly countless bookshops, cafés and restaurants that Buenos Aires has to offer... in fact, I enjoyed the city so much that I'm hoping to devise another research project that will take me back there!



The Definiens GMES award presented to Dr Peter Bunting of IGES (right) by Professor Gerd Binnig (centre) the founder of Definiens AG and Mark Doherty (left) Head of Earth Observation Exploration and Services Division of the European Space Agency (ESA).

## A flying visit to Patagonia – a story of climate change, Wales, and whales...

Dr Helen Roberts attended a *Multidisciplinary workshop on Southern South American Dust* held in Puerto Madryn, Argentina, from 3 – 5 October 2007, taking almost as long to travel there as she spent at the meeting!



Whale basking in the sunshine

Southern South America is of interest for studies of climate change because it has been suggested to be the largest probable source of dust during the Last Glacial Maximum (~20,000 years ago). Increased levels of terrestrial dust are observed in the palaeo-record during glacial periods and are believed to be a *product* of climate change. Recently, however, ideas have shifted and dust is now also believed to be a *cause* of climate change. Many questions remain unanswered about the link between dust and climate change, and in the southern hemisphere even the very basic issues of dust production, transport and chemical composition have not been systematically addressed. This meeting aimed to bring together key scientists who are currently working to improve our understanding of the role of dust in climate change, to exchange ideas and foster collaborative links with local Argentine researchers.

The meeting was also of interest beyond the topic of climate change, as the town of Puerto Madryn, in the Province of Chubut, Patagonia, was founded by Welsh settlers in 1865. "Porth Madryn", as it was originally named by the settlers, was founded when around 150 settlers landed in the natural harbour aboard a converted tea-clipper named *Mimosa*. They had taken the difficult decision to leave Wales in order to escape the poverty at home, and to preserve their Welsh identity. Patagonia was suggested as a fertile new home, which had the advantage of being sparsely populated and could therefore offer the opportunity of preserving the Welsh culture and language intact after arrival. The living was not as easy as it had been assumed though, with droughts, floods, and a lack of potable drinking water being just some of the challenges that faced the new settlers. One prediction which did hold true, however, was that the language and culture could be preserved here, and today Welsh culture is alive and well. This has not been achieved without challenges - the status of the

Welsh language and culture in Patagonia took a serious blow when the military dictatorship that held power in Argentina between 1976 and 1983 made it illegal to give children Welsh names. Today, Welsh is still spoken by around 5,000 people (in addition to Spanish – a curious mix!), and numerous 'traditional' Welsh tea houses can be found in Chubut Province.

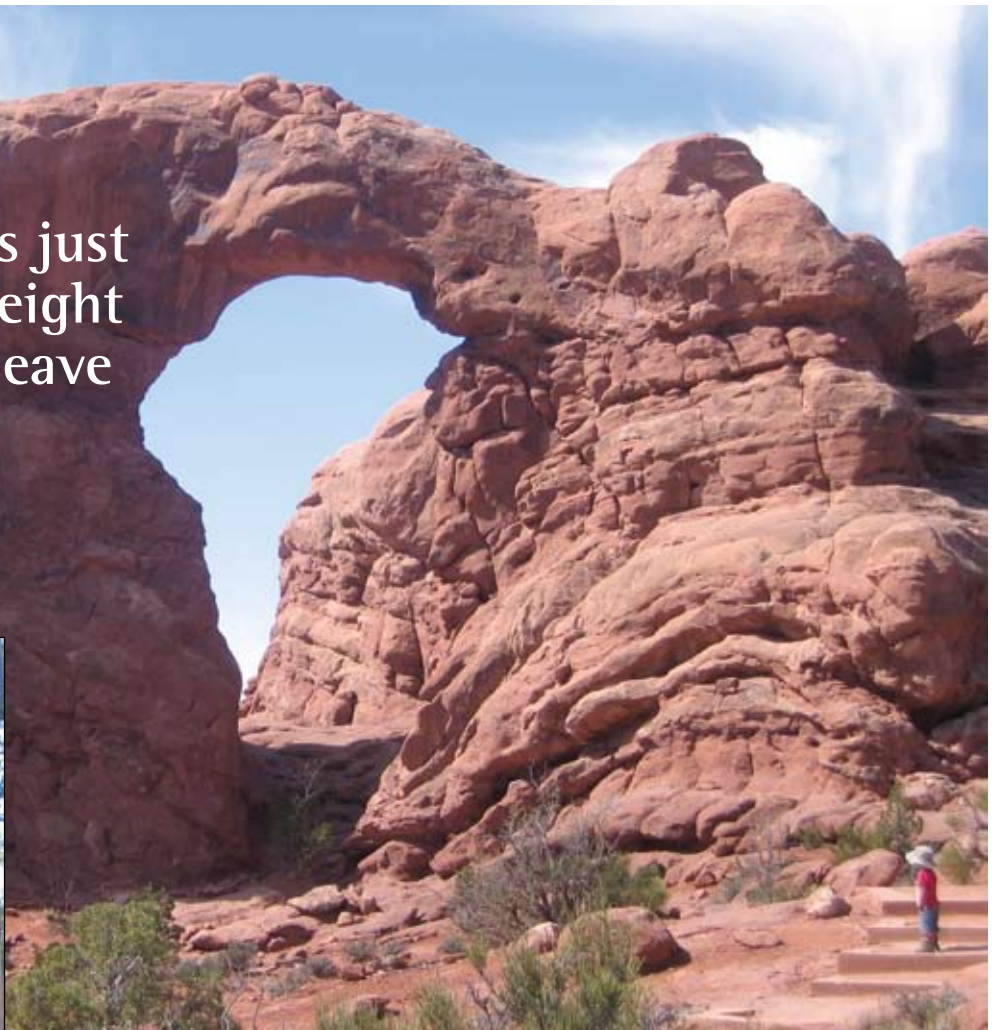
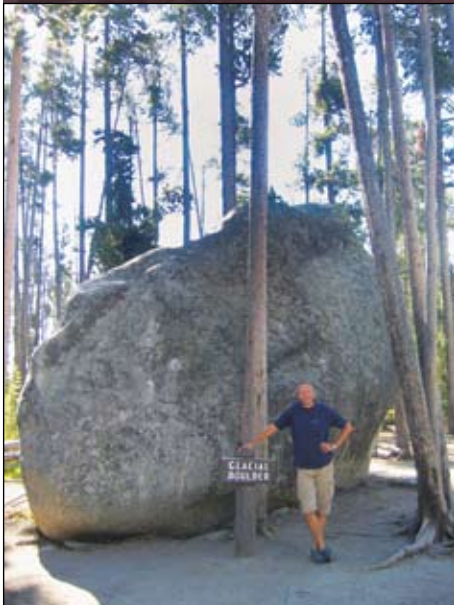
*"It's strange to have travelled so far and then to be greeted by the Welsh flag on arrival",* Dr Roberts said. *"The people are very proud of their Welsh heritage; they were extremely interested to hear that I came from Aberystwyth University and snapped up all of my bilingual business cards so they could have a memento of the language in use in Wales".* She added *"There were some clear reminders that you're a long way from Aberystwyth though, as you step outside from the conference meeting into the October 'spring' sunshine only to see the visiting Southern Right whales breaching the water playfully in the expansive bay." "All in all this was a fascinating, if rather fleeting, trip",* she concluded, *"...although I hope it won't be my last!"*



Argentinian/Welsh airport!



Neil Glasser has just returned from eight months study leave in the USA.



From January 2007 to August 2007 Neil worked with colleagues at the National Snow and Ice Data Centre (NSICD) and Colorado

University in Boulder on a new research project dealing with the structure and stability of Antarctic Peninsula ice shelves. His work was supported by a Fulbright Distinguished Scholars Award and a Research Fellowship from Colorado University.

Neil was collecting data about the structure and stability of the ice shelves that fringe the Antarctic continent from optical satellite imagery. Several of these ice shelves have broken up dramatically in the last few years partly as a response to climate warming in the Antarctic Peninsula region so the aim of the project was to look for

signs of present and future instabilities. Neil reports that he spent several months learning new software and GIS techniques, mapping and interpreting images of a number of different ice shelves on the Antarctic Peninsula, digitising their major structural features and making inferences about their dynamic behaviour. This work has resulted in a number of scientific papers and a conference presentation at the American Geophysical Union (AGU) Fall Meeting in San Francisco in December 2007.

Neil also tells us that although he was working hard, he was able to sneak out of the office now and again to take advantage of the local Colorado ski slopes. He was also able to take the family on a tour of the National Parks of the western USA. The Glassers visited the Grand Canyon, as well as Yellowstone, Arches, Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks. On the way home, they also travelled up the West Coast of the USA, visiting the Redwoods National Park, Crater Lake and the Oregon Coast.

## *'The Secret Life of the Motorway'* BBC4 television series

Peter Merriman recently appeared in the much-repeated BBC 4 television series 'The Secret Life of the Motorway'. The three-part series combined archive film footage with interviews with retired engineers, labourers, motorway service area staff, AA patrolmen, politicians, planners, road protestors, and many others to chart the history of Britain's motorways. Peter's research was drawn upon by the researchers and producers throughout all three episodes. The series was widely praised in the national press, although one Guardian journalist appeared to be rather lacking in geographical knowledge: "You met all sorts bowling along *The Secret Life of the Motorway*, including people with really impenetrable occupations, such as a human geographer, transport mathematician, shopping historian and loo-of-the-year inspector".



## NATO and Water Security

Tony Jones has just returned from acting as the NATO-country director of a NATO Advanced Research Workshop in Armenia devoted to water security. Entitled *Natural disasters and water security: risk assessment, emergency response and environmental management* the meeting was attended by 51 scientists from NATO and NATO partner countries. Appropriately, the venue was held under the shadow of Mount Ararat, where Noah's Ark is supposed to have grounded – the most successful emergency response in history.



NATO delegates at the Armenian National Memorial to the World War I genocide

## New COURSES



In September Gareth Hoskins began the 3rd year option module

### Geographies of Memory

**My intention with the course is to explore the ways**

**memory has become an organising principle in so many aspects of our lives. Memory is said to heal wounds, restore dignity and prompt uprisings, it informs politics, provides us with a sense of self, and shapes the way we think about space and time.**

Memory also plays a crucial role in the production of place and construction of landscape - New York's Ground Zero, Auschwitz, Robben Island, and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park are explored alongside the laboratories of experimental psychologists, nuclear waste dumps, electronic graveyards, and ghost towns to demonstrate how debates over the definition and functioning of memory are central to the production of the

geographical. One of the most interesting aspects of the course is the mid-semester assignment where students construct a topography of memory that closely examines the ways the past is brought into the present at a particular place in or around Aberystwyth. Each submission contributes to a growing inventory of memory to be made accessible to students and members of the local community. I've been really impressed with the creativity in choice of topics so far.

Students have explored the politics of gender at the Aberystwyth War Memorial, the changing inscriptions of "ELVIS" on the local landmark rock next to the A44, the emotional distress and agitation caused by early tourist trips on the Vale of Rheidol Railway, and the illicit subterranean wanderings of students commemorating their final days at University by journeying through local sewers? The diversity of topics illustrates perfectly just how complex and compelling memory studies can be.





# New STAFF



**Dr Carol Richards** recently joined the Department and teaches in human geography, specialising in the areas of environment, sustainability and nature. The social dimensions of natural resource management were the focus of her recently completed PhD work, which was conducted in a remote area of Queensland, Australia.

As part of her research fieldwork, Carol visited cattle grazing properties and interviewed graziers about their practices, experiences and beliefs in relation to the production of beef and social, ecological and economic sustainability. This fieldwork also meant being involved in sorting calves in cattle pens, assisting the local vet in treating horses and interviewing a grazer couple through the noisy chorus of a plague of green tree frogs following an unusual downpour of rain. The experience of this fieldwork allowed for a greater appreciation of the trials and tribulations of raising beef and managing vast parcels of land in the context of dry climatic conditions and ever restricting economic terms of trade for primary producers. This research is also drawn upon in teaching students about the relationship between the global political economy, local cultural practices and environmental sustainability.



**Dr Chris Yeomans** started out in political research and coordination, working first for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Amman and then for the European Parliament in Brussels. He became fascinated with the ins and outs of governance but frustrated at not having the skills, the resources or the time to explore this field in depth. So, in 2002 he joined the Institute as

a postgraduate and has gradually worked his way into his current position as Lecturer in Political Geography. His particular research interests lie in the spatial cultures and politics of societal transition (which he explores through the post-socialist landscapes of Central and Eastern Europe), and in the often hidden rhythms of urban and European Union societal management (which have led him into a close relationship with the city of Berlin). Chris is a keen musician and mountaineer and is currently training for the notoriously grueling Three Peaks Challenge.



**Dr Duncan Quincey** is based in the Centre for Glaciology as a Research Fellow, having previously worked with Environment Agency Wales in Flood Risk Management. He recently completed his PhD in Aberystwyth University but spent much of his three years here with an industrial partner, who specialises in the formation of large and hazardous glacial lakes in the Andes and the Himalaya. Duncan's expertise is in the use of satellite and aerial photography for studying glaciers and glacial lakes, which normally means hours sitting behind a computer screen, but every so often

he ventures into his study areas on foot. His work so far has taken him to Nepal, India and Peru, to mountain valleys known only to locals and a few lucky outsiders. The highlight of these trips was meeting a Buddhist lama who is reported to have been reincarnated eight times. Now how many Aberystwyth members of staff can claim that!



Graciela with Kara friends in the Lower Omo Valley, southern Ethiopia.

**Dr Graciela Gil-Romera** joined the Institute in February 2008, after three weeks fieldwork in the Omo Valley. The Omo Valley Project aims to gain a detailed understanding of how environmental changes in the Lower Omo

over the past 200-300 years have influenced the land-use practices, social institutions and cultural values of the exceptionally diverse ethnic groups of this part of Africa. Graciela comes to us from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, where she recently completed her PhD on the vegetation history of the Namibian desert, using pollen from fossil hyrax middens. For more information, see <http://gil.romera.googlepages.com/>, or contact Graciela at [gmg@aber.ac.uk](mailto:gmg@aber.ac.uk)

**Dr Graham Bird** joined IGES in September 2007 as a lecturer in Physical Geography. Graham's research interests are in the field of geochemistry, in particular the impact of metal mining activity upon fluvial systems. Recent research has included investigating contamination problems in Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania), investigating the patterns and processes of solute and sediment-associated contaminant dispersal, from both historical and current metal mining as well as from mine-tailings dam failures. Recent published work has also focused upon the use of Sequential Extraction Procedures to investigate contaminant metal speciation and its influence upon metal mobility and environmental significance. Out of the office Graham is an ever-slowing centre-back and keen golfer.



**Dr Peter Bunting** joined the department in 2004 for his PhD titled *Integration of remote sensing data for the characterisation of Australian forests*. Following the completion of his PhD in the summer of 2007 Pete could not bare the thought of leaving Aberystwyth and therefore took a lectureship in remote sensing and GIS. Pete teaches on the undergraduate and postgraduate remote sensing and GIS courses leading the students on a merry-go-round of measuring trees in Penglais woods to wandering around the town or through the fields looking at satellite imagery. In his spare time Pete can be found walking one of the many mountains around Wales or doing his best to stay on his mountain bike.



# Off the BOOKSHELF

## Living Under the Shadow

**JOHN GRATTAN** and **ROBIN TORRENCE** have just produced the latest in a series of edited volumes on natural disasters and their consequences in the ancient world.

These examples can lead to better decision making during future disaster management. Popularist treatments of ancient disasters like volcanic eruptions have grossly overstated their capacity for death, destruction, and societal collapse. Contributors to this volume – from anthropology, archaeology, environmental studies, geology, and biology – show that human societies have been incredibly resilient and, in the long run, have often recovered remarkably well from wide scale disruption and significant mortality. They have often used eruptions as a trigger for environmental enrichment, cultural change, and adaptation.

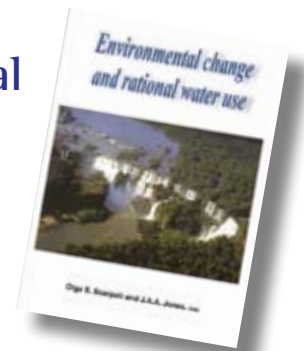
These historical studies are relevant to modern hazard management because they provide records for a far wider range of events and responses than have been recorded in written records, yet are often closely datable and trackable using standard archaeological and geological techniques. Contributors also show the importance of traditional knowledge systems in creating a cultural memory of dangerous locations and community responses to disaster. The global and temporal coverage of the research reported is impressive, comprising studies from North and Central America, Europe, Asia, and the Pacific, and ranging in time from the Middle Palaeolithic to the modern day.



## Environmental change and rational water use

**TONY JONES** co-edited this book published in 2007 with Prof Olga Scarpati of the University of Buenos Aires.

It contains over 30 papers from around the world focussing on issues of water sustainability, climate change and sound management practices. Papers were contributed by members of the IGU Commission for Water Sustainability.



## Peoples/States/Territories

This extremely important book was written by **RHYS JONES**. It provides a compelling historical analysis of the British state and will be of interest to geographers, political scientists, historians and sociologists.

It is the best account we have on the territorial foundations of British political authority and demonstrates the enormous potential of integrating techniques and ideas from both historical and political geography.



## Managing water resources in a changing physical and social environment

**TONY JONES** is one of the editors of the first volume devoted to physical geography in the new "Home of Geography" series from the International Geographical Union.

It is entitled "Managing water resources in a changing physical and social environment" and addresses an issue which is critically important for the future. Sixteen chapters written by members of the IGU Commission for Water Sustainability cover topics from water ethics to flood modelling and climate change around the world. See publications at <http://water-sustainability.ph.unito.it>.



## Driving Spaces

Driving is a fairly ordinary activity with major environmental consequences, but it is only fairly recently that social scientists have begun examining the social and cultural significance of the motor car in any depth.

In this new book, published in the Royal Geographical Society's book series, **DR PETER MERRIMAN** ([prm@aber.ac.uk](mailto:prm@aber.ac.uk)) examines spaces of driving in twentieth century Britain, paying particular attention to the design, construction and use of England's M1 motorway in the 1950s and 1960s. The book takes an interdisciplinary focus, taking insights from work in history and sociology, as well as geography. Further details may be found on Blackwell's website: [www.blackwellpublishing.com/](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/)

