

Issue 1 | Winter 2010

# Altitude

Welcome to the new School of Geography newsletter. In this issue we have a whole range of interesting articles about the school including a prestigious Royal Geographical Society dissertation award presented by its patron Michael Palin, groundbreaking research news on alleviating poverty and the School President giving his student perspective.

# Investigating Madagascan species extinction wins RGS award

In 2010 Joseph Jenkinson received the Alfred Steers Dissertation Prize from the Royal Geographical Society presented by its patron Michael Palin. Joseph explains his winning dissertation choice:

“I decided that I wanted to highlight a couple of the anthropogenic-environmental relationship issues that I came across whilst working for an NGO in SE Madagascar during my gap year. I had heard of an unstudied and critically endangered palm species *Dypsis saintelupei* (Arecaceae), which has importance both for the local community (who weave their lobster pots from the fronds) and conservationists. Furthermore, a multinational mining corporation had started mining in the area threatening the remaining individuals of this species with extinction.

Working alongside a local NGO, I created a project that collected environmental data using techniques acquired through my time at Southampton, and anthropogenic data through interviews with the local community. I hoped to uncover a greater understanding of the species from the view points of both the conservationists and the local communities, whilst exposing some of the many issues at play in rural SE Madagascar. I am currently living and working in London in pursuit of a career within sustainable development.”

Joseph Jenkinson  
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Investigating the underwater city of Dunwich

## BBC's The One Show features School of Geography research into 'Britain's Atlantis'

Investigations of the underwater city of Dunwich, led by Professor David Sear from Geography, featured on The One Show recently with Dan Snow. David and a team of marine archaeologists are using new underwater technology to reveal the medieval city, which was lost to the sea centuries ago. Read more about David's research by visiting [www.southampton.ac.uk/geography](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/geography)

## Southampton professor appointed to Economic and Social Research Council

Professor David Martin, of the University of Southampton's School of Geography, has been appointed to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). David is a Professor in the School of Geography and is co-director of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods. Since 2002 he has been the coordinator of the ESRC Census Programme. His research interests include census methods, geographical information systems and the delivery of health care. David's appointment to the ESRC runs for three years to July 2013.



# The world in your hands

## Getting to know the University

As well as academic support offered there is also a network of students within the School who you can talk to about any issues. A School President is elected each year and this year it is BA Geography student Steve Beakhust. Here he explains what it's like studying in Southampton.

### *What are the benefits of studying in Southampton?*

The University of Southampton is a researched institution in which teaching and learning take place in an active research environment. Undergraduate teaching is delivered by the School's academics, and students therefore have the benefit and excitement of being taught by leading researchers who expose students to pioneering concepts and innovative courses, driven by the research interests of the academic staff.

### *What do you like about the School of Geography?*

The School offers a wide variety of modules to choose from, meaning you can specialise in areas that appeal to you most. There is also the option to take on external modules in other subjects to complement your degree or just pursue a topic that interests you. The staff are friendly and approachable and able to offer help and advice if needed. Additionally, the student network provides another valuable source of support.

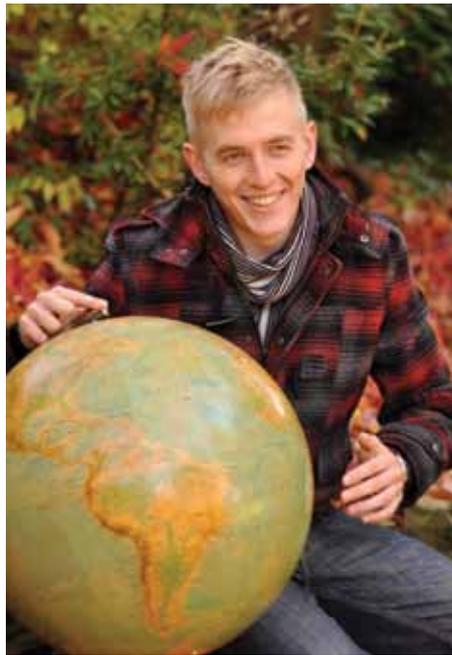
### *What do you think about the field trips?*

For me the fieldtrips have been the highlight of my degree. Throughout the course I have visited the New Forest, Amsterdam and recently I returned from a trip to Berlin. Those studying the BSc degree have enjoyed trips to Tenerife, Arolla and the Picos de Europa. These courses allow you to study a wide range of topics and get hands on in conducting your own research out in the field. It is also a great opportunity to get to know your lecturers better as well as socialising with fellow students on your course.

### *What is it like socially within the School?*

The School of Geography has one of the largest student intakes each year, meaning there are literally hundreds of like minded geographers to meet. GeogSoc is the second largest society in the university and they host regular events including fancy dress socials, quiz nights and the infamous Christmas and Summer Balls, which are always the highlight of the year!

Students undertaking fieldwork experiments



Steve Beakhust

### *What would you say to someone thinking of studying here?*

The combination of experienced academics, the wide range of topics to choose from and the amazing social life means it is an excellent choice for anyone looking to get the most out of their degree. Additionally, the Union offers hundreds of sports and recreational societies to join, ranging from scuba diving and karting to pole dancing! There is always something interesting going on and studying at Southampton is a decision you will be unlikely to regret.

## Dissertation success on 1950s flood devastation



Nick Yeo, who graduated in 2010 with first class honours has recently been awarded the British

Hydrological Society's best undergraduate dissertation prize for work he undertook entitled "A lichenometric and palaeohydraulic flood reconstruction of the East and West Lyn, Lynmouth". Despite the devastation of the 1952 Lynmouth flood, the Lyn Rivers have remained ungauged requiring flood reconstruction through indirect methods. Boulder deposits were dated to multiple flood events using lichenometry, then discharge was reconstructed using a series of palaeohydraulic equations. The results provide a record of flood magnitudes since 1952 and suggest that the 1952 flood itself may have been a lower magnitude than previously thought. This has significance for flood planning, defence, prediction and the robustness of the 1952 alleviation works. Beating the runner-up student from Cambridge University, his £400 prize and certificate were presented at the Society's AGM.

## Research to control sleeping sickness

Professor Peter Atkinson is leading an Environmental and Social Ecology of Infectious Diseases project, Vector-borne disease systems; from mapping to understanding, which is part of the Living With Environmental Change (LWEC) initiative. This work will focus on the neglected tropical disease, sleeping sickness, and will cross traditional research discipline boundaries for improved understanding of the ecology of disease transmission systems. Ultimately, the project will provide evidence and support tools to control the spread of sleeping sickness and reduce the burden of disease.

# Commendation for making satellite images clearer

Robin Wilson, also a recent graduate with first class honours has been highly commended for the quality of his dissertation work entitled “Automated Selection of Suitable Atmospheric Calibration Sites for Satellite Imagery”, which was recently judged within the top three submissions for the RGS-IBG Quantitative Methods Research Group undergraduate dissertation awards. Robin’s work focused on automating the process of removing the effects of the atmosphere from satellite images of the Earth. He wrote computer software to automatically select calibration sites that would allow the highest quality calibration to be performed. His dissertation research was presented at the Remote Sensing and Photogrammetry Society Annual Conference, and he is hoping to publish a paper based on his research later this year. Commencing his PhD research at Southampton through the Complex Systems Simulation Doctoral Training Centre, Robin is looking at the complexity within satellite imaging systems. See [www.rtwilson.com/academic](http://www.rtwilson.com/academic) for more details.



Children playing in the green polluted waters of the Yangtze River

## Geographers to aid poverty alleviation with new research grants

The University of Southampton have been successful in getting four awards from the NERC/ESRC/DfID funded Ecological Services and Poverty Alleviation programme; with the School of Geography involved in three of them totalling over £350,000. The research projects, funded under the RCUK LWEC theme, aim to reduce poverty and to protect ecosystems in developing countries.

Led by Geographer Professor John Dearing, the research project called Poverty and ecology: developing a new evolutionary approach, will work with colleagues in China to compile a range of social and ecological data in combination with new Google Earth technology. This will allow recent changes in the environment to be shown to key stakeholders including farmers and politicians with an aim of making a more sustainable future.

With a similar award, Geographer Professor Terry Dawson also leads an investigation into food security with a project called the Forest-agriculture Interface: A complex systems analysis of ecosystem services trade-offs and tipping points. This will show the impact that ecological processes at landscape scale have on food and welfare at a local level.

Professor Steve Darby from the School is involved in a further project called Coastal ecosystems, governance and poverty: A case study of managing the Brahmaputra-Ganges mega-delta in a changing world. This will develop methods to understand and characterise the effects of sea-level rise and develop management systems that are resilient in the face of the large uncertainties that exist for the 21st Century.

The last two projects will develop larger consortium proposals involving several universities in order to further the aims of their activities.

### For more information

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