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Welcome from the editorial team

Welcome to another Alumni newsletter with the usual mixture of research items, reflections and personal memories of times spent in Leeds. On the research front there are details of some ground-breaking work in both physical and human geography. Joe Holden’s new research project is a major coup for the water@leeds team and both Graeme Swindles and Simon Lewis are hitting the national headlines with their work on volcanos and peatlands respectively.

From a human geography perspective Lou Waite discusses the sad tale of modern slavery in the UK whilst Tina Brocklebank gives an emotive and powerful report from the former refugee camp in Calais. As usual many thanks to all the contributors and a special thank you to Tessa Grant for all her hard work in the editing and production of the newsletter. Remember – we would love to hear your experiences, memories etc. Please get in touch!!

Best wishes, Graham and Tessa.
Professor Joe Holden heads up a major new £6 million water solutions programme led by the University of Leeds. It’s predicted to benefit the Yorkshire economy by £50 million by reducing the costs and impact of water-related threats to the region.

Bringing together partners from across the region and using existing research funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the team will look to join up ways of improving water quality, resilience to floods and droughts, carbon storage and biodiversity. In doing so, the project will make more efficient uses of resources and enable planning across the whole catchment area, bringing both economic and societal benefits.

Work on the project, called Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Solutions Programme (iCASP), will begin in March 2017.

Professor Joseph Holden, leader of Yorkshire iCASP and Director of the University’s research group water@leeds, said: “By creating a region that is better able to deal with a more variable climate, and develop integrated solutions to floods, droughts, water quality and carbon storage it will become an area that attracts investment as people and their businesses opt to live and work in an area that has adapted to the severe effects of environmental change, with improved quality of life.”

Activities in Yorkshire iCASP will focus on the Yorkshire Ouse basin – encompassing the cities of Leeds, Bradford, York and Sheffield, as well as the rivers Aire, Calder, Derwent, Don, Swale, Wharfe, Ure and Nidd and their tributaries – but the findings will be applicable nationwide. The Yorkshire Ouse basin is home to 6.7% of the UK population and 30% of the Northern Powerhouse. The region includes a variety of different environments, from large urban areas to lowland agriculture and sparsely populated uplands, including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Key objectives of Yorkshire iCASP include reducing drought and flood risk through improved integration between weather forecasting, land management and water resource management; improvements in water quality for both human water supply and rivers; and better management of soils for improved regional food security and carbon storage.

Professor David Hodgson, deputy leader of the Yorkshire iCASP team from the School of Earth and Environment at the University of Leeds, said: “Working with partners in the region, we will be able to use our environmental science expertise to identify, test and improve catchment solutions that increase the resilience of towns, cities and our major rural agricultural economy to water-related threats.”

Yorkshire iCASP has already attracted £1.3 million in funding from 16 regional stakeholders – spanning government, businesses and charities – in addition to a grant of £4.7 million from NERC. The Yorkshire iCASP team hopes to bring more stakeholders on board, bringing together a diverse range of expertise and resources to tackle water-related problems.

Professor Holden concluded: “Yorkshire iCASP will enable us to join forces with organisations across the region to create a springboard for the future, moving beyond a region worried about water-related problems, to one that leads the world in integrated catchment solutions. It will show how a region can work together to create joined up water solutions, while ensuring thriving rural and urban communities.”
NEW STUDY ESTIMATES FREQUENCY OF VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS
Graeme Swindles – Associate Professor of Earth System Dynamics

An analysis of ash fallout over the past 7,000 years suggests ash clouds are a relatively common occurrence throughout history. But ash clouds have only reached northern Europe every 56 out of the past 1,000 years on average. The research is published in the journal Geology.

Lead author of the study Dr Graeme Swindles, from the School of Geography, University of Leeds said: “The ash cloud resulting from the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption caused severe disruption to air travel across Europe, but as a geological event it is not unprecedented.

“While the aviation industry and the travelling public will welcome the news that another large-scale ash event isn’t expected in the immediate future, they shouldn’t breathe a sigh of relief just yet. The difficulties in obtaining a comprehensive ash record mean that our figures are likely to be a conservative estimate of the frequency of major ash fall events, so Mother Nature may have some surprises in store for us yet.”

Dr Swindles and his team analysed documented historic ash falls along with microscopic ash layers found in lakes and peatlands in the UK, Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia and the Faroe Islands. Using statistical modelling of these ash records, they found that the probability of an ash cloud hitting northern Europe over the course of a decade is 16%.

Although in the past 1,000 years, volcanic ash clouds reached northern Europe with average return interval of 56 years (plus or minus nine years), this interval varied and can be shorter or longer. A minimum of six years and maximum of 115 years between events was recorded for the last 1,000 years.

Dr Swindles carried out this research with colleagues Ian Lawson and Ivan Savov, and in collaboration with Chuck Connor from the University of South Florida and Gill Plunkett of Queen’s University Belfast.

Interested in further study in physical geography?
MSc in Environmental Water Consultancy
MSc in River Basin Dynamics and Management with GIS
A vast peatland in the Congo Basin has been mapped for the first time, revealing it to be the largest in the tropics.

The new study found that the Cuvette Centrale peatlands in the central Congo Basin, which were unknown to exist five years ago, cover 145,500 square kilometres – an area larger than England. They lock in 30 billion tonnes of carbon making the region one of the most carbon-rich ecosystems on Earth.

The UK-Congolese research team spent three years exploring remote tropical swamp forests to find samples of peat for laboratory analysis. Their research, published today in Nature, combined the peat analysis with satellite data to estimate that the Congo Basin peatlands store the equivalent of three years of the world’s total fossil fuel emissions.

Co-leaders of the study, Professor Simon Lewis and Dr Greta Dargie, from University of Leeds and University College London first discovered the peatlands’ existence during fieldwork in 2012.

Professor Lewis said: “Our research shows that the peat in the central Congo Basin covers a colossal amount of land. It is 16 times larger than the previous estimate and is the single largest peatland complex found anywhere in the tropics.

“We have also found 30 billion tonnes of carbon that nobody knew existed. The peat covers only 4 per cent of the whole Congo Basin, but stores the same amount of carbon below ground as that stored above ground in the trees covering the other 96 per cent.

“These peatlands hold nearly 30 per cent of the world’s tropical peatland carbon, that’s about 20 years of the fossil fuel emissions of the United States of America.”

Dr Dargie said: “Our 2012 discovery of the Congo Basin peat gave us just enough insight to refine our searches. In 2014, when we found the deepest peat deposits in the most remote areas of swamp we realised the importance of the Cuvette Centrale peatlands.

“The sheer expanse of these peatlands makes central Africa home to the world’s most extensive peatland complex. It is astonishing that in 2016 discoveries like this can still be made.”

Professor Lewis added: “Our new peatland map is the first step in understanding this vast ecosystem. These swamp forests have been wrongly classified in all previous maps.

“I hope our work encourages much more investment in this neglected region to better understand the role of peatlands within the global carbon cycle and the climate system.”

Peat is an organic wetland soil made from part-decomposed plant debris, more commonly found in cool environments. Healthy peatlands act as carbon sinks, removing carbon from the atmosphere through plant growth.

Further decomposition of the peat is prevented by its waterlogged environment, locking up carbon. Year-round waterlogging is needed for peat to form in the tropics.

If peatlands dry out, either through changes in land use such as drainage for agriculture or reduced rainfall, further decomposition resumes, releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Professor Lewis said: “Peatlands are only a resource in the fight against climate change when left intact, and so maintaining large stores of carbon in undisturbed peatlands should be a priority. Our new results show that carbon has been building up in the Congo Basin’s peat for nearly 11,000 years.

“If the Congo Basin peatland complex was to be destroyed, this would release billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide into our atmosphere.”

A vital resource
The study places the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (RoC) as the second and third most important countries in the world for tropical peat carbon stocks. In first place is Indonesia, as it contains tropical peatlands across the islands of Borneo, Sumatra and New Guinea. These Asian islands have suffered damage or loss to about 94,000 square kilometres of peatland mostly by forest fires or drained for agricultural use over recent decades.
Due to their remote location, the peatlands in the Congo Basin are relatively undisturbed. But they could face threats from drainage for agricultural plantations, particularly for palm oil, as is happening in Indonesia.

As the Congolese peatlands are so newly-discovered, they do not feature in conservation plans to ensure they remain undisturbed.

The peat may also be vulnerable to the effects of climate change in two ways, if rising temperatures increase evaporation, or if average rainfall is reduced, to a level when the peat begins to dry out. At this point the peat would begin to release its carbon to the atmosphere.

Study co-author Dr Ifo Suspense, from the Université Marien Ngouabi in the RoC capital Brazzaville, said: “The discovery of the Cuvette Centrale peatlands could have a large impact on the climate and conservation policies of the Congo. The maintenance and protection of this peatland complex, alongside protecting our forests, could be central Africa’s great contribution to the global climate change problem.

“It is of the utmost importance that governments, conservation and scientific communities work with the people of the Cuvette Centrale to improve local livelihoods without compromising the integrity of this globally significant region of Earth.”

Importance of conservation
In addition to their status as a globally important region for carbon storage, the Congo Basin swamps are refuges for endangered species including lowland gorillas and forest elephants.

Dr Emma Stokes, Director of the Central Africa Program of the Wildlife Conservation Society said: “This research highlights the immense significance of these swamp forests for the stability of our climate. However, these forests, in the geographical heart of Africa, are also a vital refuge for many thousands of great apes, elephants and other large forest mammals that are threatened by developments in the surrounding landscape.

“The RoC government is considering the expansion of Lac Tele Community Reserve, a move that could safeguard an additional 50,000 square kilometres of swamp forest – much of it overlying peat – from future disturbance.

“We strongly support this move and commend the RoC government for this initiative. We urge both countries to continue efforts to protect these habitats from industrial transformation.”

Dr Greta Dargie said: “With so many of the world’s tropical peatlands under threat from land development and the need to reduce carbon emissions to zero over the coming decades, it is essential that the Congo Basin peatlands remain intact.”

The study details the researchers’ use of core samples to confirm the presence of peat soil and determine its depth. The average depth was 2.4 metres but at its deepest, it reached 5.9 metres – roughly the height of a two-storey building.

The study used field measurements that confirmed the presence of peat, and the vegetation that overlies it, to determine that only two specific forest types have peat underneath: a year-round waterlogged swamp of hardwood trees and a year-round waterlogged swamp dominated by one species of palm.

The researchers then used data from US and Japanese satellites to map the two specific peat swamp forest types across the whole region to determine the boundaries of the Congo Basin peatlands. Combining this area with peat depth and peat carbon content from the laboratory analyses allowed the total carbon stocks to be calculated.

The Cuvette Centrale wetlands occupy about 10 per cent of the Congo Basin. About 40 per cent of the total extent of all the Cuvette Centrale wetlands has peat underneath.

The research paper, “Age, extent, and carbon storage of the central Congo Basin peatland complex” was published in Nature on 11 January 2017. Funding was provided by Natural Environment Research Council.
MODERN SLAVERY IN THE UK: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT?
Louise Waite – Associate Professor in Human Geography

Dr Louise Waite is Associate Professor in Human Geography at the University of Leeds. Her research interests span migration, citizenship and belonging; with a particular focus on unfree/forced labour and exploitative work among asylum seekers and refugees in the UK.

Exploitation at work is a topic that has received significant attention throughout history. Yet there is a growing body of evidence that exploitation is on the rise across the world today. Often presented in the Global North as mainly a problem for poor countries and marginal workers in the Global South, over the past two decades the prevalence of extreme exploitation and what some have called ‘modern slavery’ has become increasingly apparent in the UK.

It is hard to precisely estimate the number of people trapped in conditions of modern slavery in the UK — but it’s thought that there may be upward of 13,000 individuals at any one time who are enslaved in the UK. In terms of who is affected; those who are vulnerable in various ways often fall victim to this crime, and although not exclusively — it is often the case that migrants are particularly vulnerable to modern slavery.

Research conducted in the School of Geography by myself and Stuart Hodkinson, called Precarious Lives, has revealed the types of experiences endured by modern slaves in the UK.

The research found that severe exploitation and slavery experiences ranged across a number of employment sectors — typically making or serving fast food, domestic work, factory packing, care work, cleaning and food processing. It is important to emphasise that these jobs covered both informal and formal employment relationships, with some being traditional ‘jobs’, entered into as formal employment with a recognised employer. Yet informal waged work accounted for over half the reported experiences where people worked with the expectation of ‘cash in hand’ with little if any verbal agreement or assurances of conditions.

Such evidence, alongside media attention over the past 10 years or so on incidences of slavery (such as the drowning of 19 gangmaster-controlled Chinese migrants while cockle-picking in Morecambe Bay in 2004), has catapulted the imperative to ‘end slavery’ onto the political agenda in affluent, liberal states like the UK. In 2013 the then Home Secretary Theresa May announced her intention to introduce a Modern Slavery Bill which was passed as an Act in March 2015. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is the first of its kind in Europe, and one of the first in the world, to specifically address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century. The legislation was introduced to great fanfare related to the UK upholding principles of liberty and continuing the historical trans-Atlantic slavery abolitionism led by William Wilberforce. Hence Theresa May and other key architects of the Modern Slavery Act are sometimes referred to as ‘neo-abolitionists’.

Yet it is curious; because on the one hand we have this new and important legislation which — although embodying problems — does shine a welcome light on the issue of modern slavery in the UK. But there are other political developments going on simultaneously that fly grotesquely in the face of the Modern Slavery Act’s spirit. With the 2015 Conservative general election victory, we are now arguably seeing a renewed zeal for, and zenith of achievement in, immigration restrictionism that revolves around the creation of discomfort and hostility. The desire to make certain migrants uncomfortable has been made most clear in the Immigration Act 2014 and the new Immigration Act 2016 which hold up the creation of a ‘hostile environment’ as their explicit goals. Policy changes in the realms of ‘illegal’ working, housing, financial resources, and healthcare are creating a swirling mix of enforcement through ‘everyday bordering’ and hostile governmentality. It is this that is producing a growing susceptibility to highly exploitative – and sometimes forced – labour for vulnerable migrants in particular. This increase in exploitation for vulnerable migrants is strikingly contradictory with government claims to wish to rid the UK of the ‘scourge of modern slavery’ through the Modern Slavery Act, 2015.

To finish, there are always glimmers of hope for campaigners for greater justice in this arena. The government recently announced (in October 2016) an Independent Review of Employment Practices in the Modern Economy. In the Review’s quest to gather evidence of the ‘modern labour market’ – it is essential that voices attesting to exploitation and enslavement of vulnerable migrant workers at the margins of our economy are heard. At this unique political juncture therefore when labour market and immigration policies are being re-thought in the light of Brexit, it is never more critical to speak ‘truth to power’ and to join other voices in cataloguing the degrading treatment experienced by vulnerable migrants that is meted out by the government. The research in the School of Geography makes a modest contribution in this regard.
THOUGHTS FROM THE ‘JUNGLE’ – THE FORMER REFUGEE CAMP IN CALAIS
Tina Brocklebank – BA Geography 2015

In 2015 Tina went to volunteer in the Calais ‘jungle’ for nine months, here’s her story.

The first thing that struck you were the mix of faces, the smiles that greeted you, the ease of making connections. Humanity was all around you, in the mud, in the dunes, in the despair, in the hope and in abundance. You were at once in France and yet not in France; the huge mix of nationalities – Iranian, Sudanese, Afghan, Iraqi, Syrian, Palestinian, Eritrean – had their own ‘zones’ but as more people arrived these defined spaces became more blurred as a pitch for a tent or a tarpaulin shelter was at a premium. The imprint of national identity on French soil shaped how camp space was demarcated and known; the Eritrean Church, the Afghan restaurants; you talked about where you were going in camp and people said ‘To Eritrea’ or ‘I’m in Sudan, I’ll be five minutes’. Surreal space.

The reasons why people were there; heartless inhuman immigration laws that separated families, religious persecution that prevented people returning to their homeland because they had changed religion to Christian from Islam and would be killed if they returned, people that could not return to their own countries and were deported from others, denied asylum in others. A 21 year old sent to make a life so that his Mother and two surviving siblings could join him from Syria, his Father and brother killed by terrorists. People lost and in limbo. The only way for people to get to the UK was to jump the two enormous barbed wire fences (kindly funded by Mr. Cameron) and then jump onto the moving freight trains to get through the tunnel. People died every night doing this. In the camp you saw people with bandaged hands and ankles... injuries from trying to climb the fences. But of course there were thousands of people who couldn’t even attempt this, families, children, older men, Grandmothers.

Conditions were appalling. I spent four days putting tents up for and with people who had just arrived (many people had never seen or put up a tent before). People were overjoyed with a tent-it was instantly called home. The site was split over sand dunes and an old landfill site, it was neither flat nor clean. There was human excrement everywhere – not because these people were dirty. They were proud people, the few water points were always abuzz with people washing and cleaning. But because there was an utter lack of appropriate sanitation provision, the French state had just been ordered by the Courts to provide more toilets.

There were churches, restaurants, shops, a barbers, bars, an extraordinary Nigerian guy built a school. All from wooden pallets, blankets as insulation and strong tarpaulin around the outside. Tents were squashed together – there was no adherence to Sphere humanitarian guidelines that dictate how close tents should be (for fire reasons), as more people arrived, available tent space was under severe competition. The French government said there were 3,000 people there – in reality there were 6-7,000 and the number grew every day. An army
of astonishing volunteers facilitated daily distributions and provision of food, shelter, clothes, sleeping bags, support, care, guidance – the French state would not invite any NGOs in, maybe because then they would have had to admit there was a problem.

The camp was at once a bottomless pool of hope and love and a dark pit of gut wrenching heartache and loss. Loss of identity, homeland, belonging, place. Hope for the chance of a safe and secure future. I cried with a Kurdish Mum, worried about her sick child and with a beautiful Persian man separated from his daughter for six years. I laughed with astonishingly brave, gentle Iranian men who have tried to jump the fence eight times, men with bandaged hands who would be killed if they returned to Iran. I shared tea with Afghani men who welcomed me, while I felt embarrassed for my English identity and the freedom it allows. These people were the ‘swarms’, the ‘invasion’ we are encouraged to fear. I never for one second felt afraid, I only ever felt respect and friendship – I have felt more intimidated in Leeds. Human connections there were astounding, the best of humanity was everywhere, the worst of humanity created this situation. It was at once humbling, inspiring and devastating.

“It was the most extraordinary place I have ever been.”
Meet the staff

Dr Paul Morris
Lecturer in Ecohydrology

Paul is a Lecturer in Ecohydrology and joined the School in 2014. Paul’s research interests lie in the fields of wetland hydrology, biogeography and climate-change impacts.

1. Why did you become interested in research?
I think it was a natural progression from my undergraduate studies. I enjoyed my first degree so much that I wanted to pursue physical geography, or at least a specialised topic within it, to its research frontier. The prospect of making a genuinely novel contribution to human knowledge and understanding excited me, and I wanted to be able to answer questions about the environment that represent research frontiers.

2. What are you currently working on?
As with most academics I’ve usually got several things on the go at any one time. Right now I’m leading a project that aims to understand the climatic conditions under which the world’s peatlands first formed, and in particular how they colonised bare landscapes following ice retreat after the last glacial phase 26,000 years ago. The answer to this question will help provide context for how the world’s peatlands are likely to respond to future climate change, and in particular whether their valuable soil carbon stores are vulnerable to the warming and changes in rainfall patterns that we expect to see in the coming century. The project is particularly exciting because it sees me leading a collaboration amongst several colleagues at Leeds, as well as in other universities both in the UK and Canada.

3. What is the most important finding from your research to date?
In 2015 I led a paper in Geophysical Research Letters that explored how ecological and hydrological mechanisms in peatlands can either amplify or negate climatic changes and their impacts on the health of peatland ecosystems. The research showed that although some kinds of climatic change are likely to damage peatland ecosystem functions such as carbon sequestration, peatlands can actually be highly resilient to certain types of climate change. The research has important implications for understanding both the likely future of peatlands under changing climates, and the records of past environmental change stored in peat stratigraphy.

4. What has been the highlight of your career so far?
I feel privileged to have spent extended periods of time in remote field locations, both as part of my research and as a lecturer on student fieldtrips. Most physical geographers have an affinity for the natural environment and the great outdoors, and I’m lucky enough to have spent time studying world famous sites such as the Canadian boreal forest, the Laurentian Great Lakes in the USA and the Southern Alps in New Zealand. Although I necessarily spend a lot of time in the office, getting your boots on the ground in the field is what it’s all about.

5. What advice would you give to someone interested in pursuing a research career in your field?
A career in research is demanding and requires determination and tenacity to succeed, especially in the early years when you’re trying to establish yourself as a leading expert in your subject area. For this reason I would say that it’s vital to pursue a topic that excites you so that you can maintain your enthusiasm when the going gets tough.

6. What is the most common question you are asked by non-researchers?
Peatlands are not prominent in the popular science media in the same way that certain other environments are, such as tropical rainforests or the West Antarctic Ice Sheet. So when meeting new people they often ask me why on earth I study a topic that seems so obscure, but the answer is an easy one. Globally, peatlands only cover around 3% of the Earth’s land surface, but contain at least a third of all global soil carbon, equivalent to the entire atmospheric carbon store. There is growing concern that this carbon store is vulnerable to changing climates, so it is vitally important that we understand the links between these carbon-dense ecosystems and climate change. This question is at the centre of my research.

7. What is your favourite hobby?
I’m a keen cyclist so I love to get out into the Yorkshire Dales or North York Moors National Parks for a spin at the weekend.
Get involved!

WWW.GEOG.LEEDS.AC.UK/ALUMNI

PRESENTING TO STUDENTS

Every year alumni return to the School to talk about their careers since graduating, either as part of our level 2 Careers module (October/November time) or on an ad hoc basis. It really helps students to start to focus on future career choices and appreciate how the skills they are learning throughout their degree apply in the world of work.

If you would like to share your expertise and experience with our students we are more than happy to fit talks around your busy schedule and to reimburse travel expenses where appropriate.

DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A DRAGON?

We have a new winning formula for our careers module! Do you want to join one of a panel of experts assessing student project pitches? Everyone who has taken part over the last two years has really enjoyed the experience and it is a great networking opportunity for both you and the students.

Could your company benefit from a placement student?

YEAR IN INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Work experience is key and as many of you will know, a year in industry really does put you ahead of the game. This year 60 of a level 2 cohort of 200 are out on placement and interest in the working year out continues to grow. And what’s more, the feedback we receive from employers about our students is nothing short of fantastic:

“We have offered Rebecca a job post-graduation! She outperformed some of the permanent staff and the company genuinely wished they did not have to lose her back to the University for a year!”

(Goldman Sachs)

We have long established contacts with several companies who recruit directly from our School and would love to grow this so if you would like to talk further about what this involves please get in touch.

SHORTER WORK PLACEMENTS (UNPAID)

Do you have a short-term project a level 3 student could get involved with?

For students who may not wish to extend their degree by a year but don’t want to miss out on the chance to get some hands-on experience in a relevant career we offer a short-term placement at level 3. The work is of 100 hours duration with the hours tailored to suit the needs of the student and employer. Quite often students who have undertaken a year in industry also choose this option to experience working in a totally different sector and we have lots of collaborations with local NGOs and charities.

Current undergraduate programmes

- BA Geography
- BA Geography with Transport Studies
- BA Economics and Geography
- BA Geography and Management
- BSc Geography
- BSc Geography and Geology
- BSc Geography and Environmental Maths
CAREERS FAIR – 23 OCTOBER 2017

We hold a Careers Fair every year for Faculty of Environment students and where possible we try to invite alumni from relevant companies to attend so that they can relate to the students specific degree skills. This year we are expanding the fair to include science and engineering students so will be expecting at least 1,000 students on the day. If you think your company/organisation would be interested in attending then please get in touch.

GRADUATE RECRUITMENT

Do you have a graduate job you want promoting? Send it across and we will ensure it reaches the relevant cohort, either through our mailing lists or by posting on our alumni Facebook page which is open to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students.

For all of the above and to discuss any other ideas you have about how you might like to get involved then please get in touch with our Professional Development Manager. We would love to hear from you.

Leeds Network

We are looking for more profiles from geography graduates on the Leeds Network to provide inspiration, advice and guidance to those studying the course now.

The Leeds Network is the University of Leeds’ exclusive online career networking tool which allows Leeds students to look at career profiles of Leeds alumni to see what they are doing now and how they progressed following their degree.

It’s easy to get involved. You simply need to sign-up and submit a short career profile. You can also opt to receive career-related questions by email, in which case you can cap the number of questions you receive each month so you’ll never feel you have too many.

For more information, visit www.alumni.leeds.ac.uk/leedsnetwork.
Anna’s research draws from her diverse educational background to span the fields of environmental policy and politics, contemporary art and somatic practices. Collectively, these interests inform her research focus on the production of knowledge through geographical methods and every-day activities.

1. Why did you become interested in research? 
I’d been doing research-like activities, for example, gathering materials for ephemeral text portraits of the artist Ray Johnson and the writer and collagist Kenneth Halliwell, or cycling around the city of Glasgow and swimming in all the open pools. My approach became more formalised during a Masters in Environmental Studies, in particular on a trip to the site of a proposed (and now built) section of the M74 ‘special road’. Writing and thinking about that road in-depth – for an assignment, a dissertation then as part of an opposing campaign – made me forcefully aware of the machinations surrounding infrastructure development and the constraints on most people’s participation in strategic decisions. It made me want to find out more.

2. What are you currently working on? 
My recent work links broader regulatory landscapes and somatic experience. This informed a text commissioned in an arts context discussing the formation of Glasgow’s water supply, its use in the Tennent Caledonian (or Wellpark) Brewery, its consumption through alcoholic drinks, and passage into sewerage. I’m currently making links between other urban industrial sites and the proliferation and use of particular branded products – thinking through how brands give form to ‘mundane’ urban environments, and even when outwardly absent, reverberate through our day-to-day activities.

3. What is the most important finding from your research to date? 
I can’t/won’t evaluate relative importance, but can offer two differing findings that affect me:

- Strategic initiatives often have ambiguous outcomes (even those which are deemed virtuous, such as environmental policies).
- Lower back discomfort can arise from the (mis)alignment of hip flexors, leading some focussed physiotherapy to be inappropriate or detrimental. Physical adjustment and stabilising exercises can provide a remedy.

4. What has been the highlight of your career so far? 
Rather than ‘highlights’ I’d prefer to think about ‘awakenings’. During my PhD I systematically established a yoga practice and then trained as a yoga teacher. The practice progressively draws attention to how bodily experience (tiredness, pain, elation etc) modifies how I think, feel and write. ‘I got’ that others might feel and think differently and try to recognise, accept and celebrate that, it adds to the richness. I attempt to come back to that recognition when I don’t ‘get’ something or am irritated by a situation.

5. What advice would you give to someone interested in pursuing a research career in your field? 
Become immersed in what you’re doing and permit yourself to discover. When your attitudes tighten up try to soften.

6. What is the most common question you are asked by non-researchers? 
What have you been up to?

7. What is your favourite hobby? 
I like exploring and experimenting with a variety of activities – cycling and trying to find out what’s going on, ways of moving and dancing, cooking and making cakes or desserts.
Where are they now?

TIM HEARD – BA GEOGRAPHY 2011
Co-Founder at Circle of Young Intrapreneurs, Vice President and Programme Manager, Barclays

Geography is an immensely powerful discipline in terms of the wide-ranging and sought after skill set it develops e.g. working both independently and in a team, public speaking, data analysis, critical argument etc. However five years on from the completion of my own degree in geography I've found that, as well as giving me a very solid career foundation, it also created something of a conflict around personal values, purpose and meaning which, eventually, was something I could no longer ignore and had to find an answer to.

When I finished my BA in Geography in 2011 I joined the Barclays graduate scheme. Through the scheme I rotated through various roles around the UK until I finally settled into a Project Manager role based in London in February 2013. As it turns out my 'geographer's toolkit' was pretty well suited to the role of a Project Manager and, combined with my own natural enthusiasm to take on an endless number of new initiatives and ideas, I experienced pretty rapid career progression. The corporate lifestyle was going well in a sense but, for me, there was something missing.

Based on my academic background I knew there was a much bigger world out there than just the four glass walls of an office building in Canary Wharf and, what's more, I knew that there were deep-seated social issues out there that I was doing nothing about. Historically you had a choice in these sorts of 'quarter-life' or 'mid-life' existential crises between joining an NGO or remaining in a corporate career, however, what I say (and what I've found out) is that you can do both; you can do well by doing good and do good by doing well, and the answer is called social intrapreneurship. Social Intrapreneurship is a new lens through which to view your career and bring about positive, consistent, coherent, social change without forsaking your home comforts. Social Intrapreneurs; changemakers of the corporate world.

Social Intrapreneurship is a methodology by which we can convert social problems into business opportunities by delivering sustainable solutions which aim to profitably do good. This is a much more sustainable model for Corporate Social Responsibility and, quite frankly, a better and more sustainable way of doing business in general. Intrapreneurship itself is a standalone term which means 'to act like an entrepreneur inside an existing company and deliver concepts/product on top of your day job which have value and meaning to you'. Fostering a culture of intrapreneurship is proven to increase market growth versus competitors by 20% but it also develops, engages, and ultimately retains top talent in the business and catalyses innovation. Social Intrapreneurship is a branch of Intrapreneurship which applies the social lens to this equation and, in my opinion, is the real power of the Intrapreneurship movement as it allows us to tap into one of the great untapped resources for social impact; existing companies.

I had never heard of the term Intrapreneurship when I applied for a place at the Intrapreneur Lab at Oxford University via an internal Barclays competition in October 2014 but, despite this, I successfully obtained a place alongside another Barclays colleague, David, who had applied with a similar idea. David is a Bristol University geography graduate which is by no means coincidental as it turned out David was experiencing the same existential career crisis I was. We had applied to the Lab with a Green Credit Card concept, a credit card which rewarded customers for green spend, but through the intensive ideation process at the lab this concept morphed into Roundup, a microdonation initiative, which would allow Barclays customers to make a big difference with their small change by opting in to roundup their purchases to the nearest pound, up to a monthly cap, and donating this to charity. The few months after the lab were spent refining and socialising the idea ahead of a pitch day to senior MDs across Barclays Group in March 2015 where David and I were lucky enough to receive initial funding to explore Roundup further. Delivering purpose driven projects inside big companies is hard and, having come so far in 12 months, we had reached a point in Oct 2015 where it looked unlikely that RoundUp would be delivered. We thought let’s at least use this experience for something, if we can’t deliver RoundUp then let’s use our key learns to help others. We realised that the social intrapreneurship movement really needed case studies to inspire others and there really was very little out there. That’s why David and I set up The Circle of Young Intrapreneurs in November 2015.

The Circle is a movement designed to inspire, guide, develop and deliver purpose-driven business ideas from young social intrapreneurs inside corporate organisations globally. We aim to drive positive social change through business by creating a community of changemakers, supporting them with mentoring and advice from leading intrapreneurs, encouraging pan-industry collaboration to solve shared societal challenges, and driving advocacy of the intrapreneurial agenda. Fast forward 12 months
from our founding and it seems that I wasn’t alone in feeling lost between the ‘do well’ and the ‘do good’ as we now have close to 1000 members in over 50 countries and over 300 companies worldwide. The further good news is, whilst building the Circle, we managed to get Roundup over the line with our pilot due to commence in early 2017. At full maturity we expect Roundup to raise over £100m pa for charities. We would never have got to this kind of scale without utilising the power of an existing corporation, in our case, Barclays 23m cards in the UK. A social enterprise, set up by a social entrepreneur, would take years to reach that kind of scale, if at all. This is the power of Social Intrapreneurship. It is now our mission to inspire other people feeling lost inside big business to develop, and deliver, their own ‘Roundup’.

What is helping here is that Social Intrapreneurship is starting to grow into a mainstream movement. This also has another effect whereby, somewhat to my surprise, I now get to participate in some prestigious global business events. For example I have just returned from presenting to 1,500 young leaders from around the world at One Young World in Canada where other speakers included Kofi Annan, Bob Geldof and Emma Watson. It’s amazing the journey you can go on when you just go for things and see what happens.

Youtube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2Zp1OM2vzo

The Circle journey has highlighted that, whilst it’s great we have created a lot of inspiration, and are helping to shape ideation, there is still a huge gap for implementation. With this in mind the next step for David and I next year is to mobilise a for profit consultancy company which builds the structures in companies which actively allow, and supports, profitably do good ideas to deliver. Ultimately by doing this we hope that we can change the entire paradigm in which global business is conducted so that companies exist for both shareholder value and positive social impact.

David and I are two ordinary ex-geographers who, through doing a sequence of relatively ordinary things, have managed to build something which has the potential to be extraordinary. The world of business is changing, and if we respond to it, we can create a better, a fairer, and a safer world where companies actively solve, and collaborate to solve, social problems. Join us at www.circleofyi.com and together let’s make business a force for good.
Futures supports first class graduate to manage £1.2m development

Amelia is managing her first major development – just 14 months after starting her career in housing. Amelia Norton, 22, is now Assistant Development Officer at Futures Housing Group having joined the East Midlands-based housing provider’s graduate scheme in September 2015. The Group, which manages almost 9,100 homes, has a core commitment to training, developing and providing opportunities for its staff and local people.

Amelia grabbed her opportunity with both hands. Despite never working in the sector before, she quickly made an impact at Futures and is now being supported to manage a £1.2m site that will provide 12 new homes in Somercotes, Derbyshire. “It was a really empowering moment to be given this project,” Amelia said. “I’d only been with Futures for five months and it was a really good opportunity to be trusted to manage the site having received coaching and one to one guidance from the Development Director. It’s important for me to get some on-site experience because development is all about getting out there and getting stuck in.”

Amelia has been involved in all aspects of the development from purchasing the land to working with the wider business to ensure the site delivers much-needed homes for local people. The development, which is grant-funded by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), has seen Amelia work directly with several external partners, including Anthony Collins, Richard Morris Associates, Letts Wheeler, Nottingham Developments Limited and Geo Dyne.

“We bought the land in April and that was an amazing experience as I’ll probably never be able to spend that amount of money myself!” Amelia said. “The approvals process followed which involved liaising with our neighbourhoods and assets teams to ensure the new properties will be right for Futures and our customers. “One of the biggest lessons I’ve learned is how crucial it is to look at the development process from a customer perspective and get different teams involved.”

Amelia’s site on Sleetmoor Lane, Somercotes comprises six one-bedroom flats, three two-bedroom flats and three two-bedroom houses and forms part of Futures’ ambitious plans to build 1,000 new homes by 2020. Alan Boucker, Director of Development at Futures Housing Group, said: “Amelia is the perfect example of a young person that has absolutely made the most of the opportunities she has been given at Futures. Amelia has learned a lot over a short space of time and being afforded this level of extra responsibility, with the support and guidance of other colleagues, seems like the logical step in her rapid development. Since joining the development team, Amelia has shown great initiative and work-ethnic to seamlessly fit in with our organisation and our vision for continued growth and providing great homes for our customers. I have been really impressed by her progress so far and look forward to seeing what she will achieve with this site and hopefully many other developments in the future.”

After completing a degree in Economics and Geography at the University of Leeds, Amelia joined Futures via the Charity Works Graduate Programme – a not-for-profit graduate scheme that connects recent graduates with charities offering a one-year graduate programme. During that year-long placement with Futures, Amelia made such an impression that she was appointed as assistant development officer and she is now fully focused on a career in the housing sector. “Before I joined Futures, I hadn’t even considered housing as a career,” Amelia admitted. “I wanted to work in the not-for-profit sector but housing wasn’t even on my radar. I would definitely recommend it as a career now though. There are so many aspects to it and the sector is really positive towards graduates. Futures has put trust in me and helped me develop and that’s why I want to continue working in housing.”

For more information on Futures Housing Group visit www.futureshg.co.uk
My name is Pakorn Meksangsouy from Bangkok in Thailand. I came to Leeds in September 2007 with a scholarship from the Royal Thai Government and started my PhD study in January 2008. I chose to study at the School of Geography in Leeds for three reasons. The first reason was the School itself. As I saw from the website, the School of Geography at Leeds is a big department in terms of number of academic staff and PhD students. Secondly I was very impressed by the supervisors. As Killeya (2008) stated, “Your supervisor will be a mentor, friend, confidante, adviser and also a voice of reason, so make sure it’s a voice you’ll want to hear”. I am delighted to say that I am very lucky to have had the best two supervisors: Prof Graham Clarke and Dr Paul Waley (Figure 1). Every time I contacted them via email at my pre-departure stage, I got very quick and warm responses from them. Thus, this was one of the indicators that I was making the right decision in choosing Leeds. I trusted that both of them would supervise my research very well and I was right. They not only supervised me very well on my research, but looked after me on a personal level too. For example, they were concerned about the huge flood in Thailand in 2011 in case it had impacted my hometown and gave me many fun experiences of British culture like team out socials with colleagues on Friday evenings (Figure 2). These social events not only helped us to get to know each other, but improved my English skills immeasurably. The third reason was the city. Leeds is a big but compact city located in the heart of the North, and it is easy to travel up to Scotland or go South to the capital. The location meant I could take advantage of the opportunity to travel around the UK during my studies.

My PhD research was involved with the impact of internationalisation on retailing in Bangkok and its implications for retail location models. This research attempted to explore retail geography knowledge, a core strength at Leeds, in retail emerging countries like Thailand. It was a good combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The former deals with consumer’s attitudes towards retail shopping in a transition retail landscape (from traditional retail stores to modern retail stores). The latter related to building up consumer’s shopping patterns by using the Spatial Interaction Model (SIM) in Bangkok, Thailand.

I returned to Bangkok in May 2012 after successfully completing my PhD. I am currently working as a lecturer in Human Geography at Srinakharinwirot University and teach on both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Geography and Geoinformatics (Figures 3, 4, 6). I also undertake research in retail geography, in particular attempting to apply SIM with Thai retail analysis. I can honestly say I learnt so much during my PhD study in Leeds and really enjoy sharing this knowledge with my students in Thailand. I am also appointed to work as an Assistant to the Dean for Information and Public Relations as well as Editor-in-chief of the Journal of Social Sciences, Srinakharinwirot University since 2013. This is challenging myself and my future career direction.

In addition, my friendship with colleagues at Leeds School of Geography did not end at the point of graduation. For example, I had a chance to be a local coordinator when my
supervisor and colleagues from Leeds came to Bangkok for the IGU Applied Geography Conference in 2015. And recently we extended our collaboration between the School of Geography at Leeds and the Department of Geography at SWU by signing an agreement to collaborate via the Memo of Understanding (MoU) in September 2016 (Figure 5). This collaboration will consolidate East meets West to share our knowledge and experience in terms of teaching, fieldwork, student exchange and visiting researchers.

I spent almost five years of my life at the School of Geography in Leeds and it has left me with so many positive memories on both the academic and social front. I have had numerous opportunities to fly back to the UK for conferences and after the conference has finished, I always visit Leeds and the School. I would say that I call this place ‘my second home’ because it feel likes home every time I revisit.

Reference
I was fortunate to find myself unexpectedly back at Leeds University in October last year, accompanying our 17 year old daughter to a university open day. I’m sure I was more excited than she was as it had been many, many years since my last visit to the city. Our route to the new School of Geography took in all the important landmarks – the Brotherton Library (still amazing!), the Parkinson Building and steps, the infamous lecture rooms in the Roger Steven’s Building and of course the Student Union & Refectory. A quick trip out to Headingley by taxi ensured a short stop in the Original Oak for old time’s sake. We went to some university and geography talks too!

It had been during my O-Levels that I had first taken an interest in geography, and by the time I was studying A-Levels I loved the subject – at last, a discipline that (to me at least) felt relevant, current and important. Gradually our syllabus had focused more and more on Human Geography and so I set my sights on studying this further at Leeds, which had a reputation of being the best School of Geography in the country. I arrived in Leeds that first time back in 1988 as a nervous ‘fresher’, assigned accommodation out at the distant Bodington Hall and unsure as to what lay ahead.

Over the next three years I had a fantastic time studying in Leeds, meeting amazing friends and thoroughly enjoying the experience of the city and surrounding Yorkshire countryside. The course was everything I had wanted it to be, introducing me to key areas such as market research, data manipulation, statistical modelling, and communication skills. We were treated as adults from the start and expected to contribute fully in the department.

Over the years the geography field trips were always a massive highlight, none more so than Montpellier of course. And for my final year dissertation I studied a group of ‘hippies’ living in tepees in mid-Wales. I must admit to having cold feet about this but was encouraged by my tutor (who shall remain nameless!) to see it through until the end. It focused on both the sociological aspects and ‘moral panic’ felt in communities about perceived ‘outsiders’ and tolerance (still highly topical today), as well as the response from local authorities and town planners to ‘unauthorised’ developments and settlements.

I remember my parents thinking I really had lost the plot altogether when I bought an old Fiat 128 for £400 and drove it to Wales, where I spent a week living with the tepee community. Remember, these were in the days before mobile phones, so that was the end of all communications for some time!

On graduating from Leeds with a BA (Hons) in Human Geography in 1991, the real world now beckoned. Like many I still yearned for those student days and contemplated the idea of ‘going travelling’. But it was time for a new phase in
my life and I sought employment and income – to pay off those student debts I had amassed. Several modules from our course had strong commercial elements in sectors such as retail and transport, and I was keen to gain commercial experience in a sales or marketing role. And so, perhaps more by accident than design initially, I took a sales position with a US pharmaceutical company – and I haven’t looked back since.

Fast forward – and I’ve worked for Pfizer, one of the world’s premier biopharmaceutical companies, in a variety of commercial roles for over twenty years. A geography graduate working in the pharmaceutical business might not seem the obvious career path but there is no doubt that my degree and time at Leeds has helped me enormously. I’ve specialised mainly in marketing roles both in the UK and across our business globally, and have relied on strong analytical and communications skills to be successful. Furthermore, in an environment which requires strong cross-functional collaboration (combining scientific and commercial considerations) I’ve had the privilege of leading many teams of talented colleagues.

I’m proud to work for a global company which discovers and develops medicines, vaccines and consumer healthcare products that help save and transform the lives of millions of people around the world every year. And in the end I have had the chance to work with colleagues from different countries and cultures and to travel all over the world. Our global HQ is based in Manhattan, NYC, and in the past year my area of responsibility has been mainly focused on developed Asia countries – Japan and Korea – and Australia. So, a truly global perspective.

A final thread to my story – and most importantly – is my family. With four children (aged 9-17) then ‘Dad’s taxi service’ is out on the road most days and evenings in the Surrey area where we have lived for fifteen years. Mum’s taxi service is even busier! Mum (Rebecca, 1989-1992) was also a geography graduate from Leeds, where we met. I came to Leeds as a bit of an indie kid, she converted me to disco and that was the end of that! Hopefully we will get the chance to visit Leeds in the not too distant future, assuming our daughter gets the A-Level grades she needs. Funnily enough it looks like Leeds is her top choice uni right now, with no influence from us at all! So we have everything crossed for her and we might yet get to revisit some of our old haunts after all these years...if they are still there.

If you were in Leeds between 1988-1991 and would like to contact Richard, his email address is simmo1810@hotmail.com
LAURA SHORT – BA GEOGRAPHY 2013
Senior Consultant, Locations & Analytics, Javelin Group

Favourite courses/modules?
The retail planning modules with Graham Clarke were always my favourite and are very relevant to my career at Javelin Group. These modules gave me a good understanding of modelling techniques integral to my everyday work e.g. gravity modelling and regression modelling. I really enjoyed the Athens field trip in my final year. The retail element of the trip was the most interesting part for me and provided me with a interesting topic to speak about in interviews.

Typical night out as a student?
Fruity Fridays were guaranteed to be the best nights out in Leeds. I was also the Secretary of GeogSoc and the regular socials with other geographers were always fun.

Fellow graduates you remain in contact with?
I still remain in contact with many of the Leeds Geographers including Jo Raven, Laura Kemps, Jessica Wynne, Florence Kerr. But there are also many other Leeds graduates at Javelin Group or in the industry that I regularly bump into or stay in contact with for instance Rachael Bedford, Sam Holmes, Joe Lipski, Charlie Archer and Nikki Parker-Hodds.

Has a geography degree been useful in your career choice?
My geography degree has been extremely useful in my career choice. The modules I took at Leeds opened many doors for me in the working world, both during my time at both Sainsbury's and Javelin Group. The modules I took gave me a comprehensive understanding of a wide-range of topics which I call upon regularly e.g. qualitative and quantitative research methods, GIS and retail planning.

Which living person do you most admire and why?
Michelle Obama is an inspirational role model to modern women around the world. Michelle is an advocate for girls’ and women’s health, education and rights at home and globally.

What is your favourite holiday destination?
I have been lucky to travel to many countries across the globe including Bali, Malaysia and Costa Rica. Guatemala is by far the most amazing country I have ever visited. I really enjoy hiking and watersports both of which I was able to do during my time in Guatemala.

Learn how to analyse consumer data and provide insights for successful marketing strategies:
MSc in Consumer Analytics and Marketing Strategy
Reilly Bergin Wilson is a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow in the Environmental Psychology doctoral program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and a research associate at the Children’s Environments Research Group. She was awarded a Masters by Research with Distinction in Geography from the University of Leeds for her thesis, Who Owns the Playground: Space and Power at Lollard Adventure Playground (1954-1961), funded through a US-UK Fulbright Commission University of Leeds Partnership Award. She also holds an Honors B.A. in Geography and Urban Studies from Temple University, for which she conducted funded research in Bosnia-Herzegovina on playground privatisation.

Currently, Reilly’s research is focused on constructing a critical history of adventure playgrounds in the United States. Reilly’s interest in playgrounds stems from her work as a caregiver for very young people, as she witnessed their constant efforts to find patches of loose materiality in mostly static playscapes. Reilly who has been nominated as a finalist for the Social Impact Alumni Awards in the US discusses her project in the article below:

This past year I co-founded a non-profit organization, play:groundNYC. This organization is dedicated to producing opportunities for young people’s self-directed play with waste materials. play:groundNYC has successfully opened the first playworker-run waste-material playground in New York City, popularly known as an adventure playground, in over forty years. As Board Chair, I have been responsible for overseeing many aspects of the organization, including hiring, scheduling, budgeting, marketing, and future visioning. play:groundNYC has received significant national and local press – including from The New York Times, The Atlantic, Stanford Social Innovation Review, CBS News, Truthout, Treehugger, Grist, and Seeker Video (17.5+ million views). This press has significantly contributed to a growing awareness of and support for the important role that adventure playgrounds can play in urban young people’s ability to access space and materials for imaginative free play.

Studying at the School of Geography, University of Leeds gave me access to one of the world’s most vibrant adventure playground milieus. Through my Masters by Research project, I was able to learn from the well-informed staff of Play England, an important play policy advocacy organization. That connection to individuals with extensive experience working with adventure playgrounds meant that I was able to harness valuable insights when making long-term and everyday decisions as Board Chair of play:groundNYC. Furthermore, through studying in the UK I was able to volunteer at The Big Swing Adventure Playground in Bradford, West Yorkshire, an experience which helped me to pre-emptively identify issues that were likely to surface in the on the ground running of an adventure playground. Furthermore, it provided me with access to historical documents regarding adventure playgrounds that I would not have otherwise had. In analysing these documents, I was able to identify common organizational pitfalls to avoid.

The success of play:groundNYC has had an obvious and significant impact on popular conversations about play access and importance in New York City and throughout the United States. Our adventure playground has garnered significant press nationally, amounting to more articles than all previous press on adventure playgrounds in the United States in the past decade combined. As a result of this raised awareness, individuals and organizations from across the US have contacted us for advice on how to start adventure playgrounds in their own communities. Locally, our own adventure playground has attracted on average 100-200 children on each of its open days, and enabled a vibrant discourse among parents, teachers, and school principals about the importance of reintroducing opportunities for self-directed learning through play and access to managed risk-taking for healthy child development.
Completing the UCAS form was a problematic task – no knowledge and no careers advice, but I did know that I wanted to go to Leeds. I was going to be a town planner and Leeds offered a third year option in planning. I also had family in nearby Wakefield and supported the rugby league team. My interview was with John Palmer, the landforms lecturer, and it didn’t start well as I sat in his chair on the wrong side of the desk. Despite acute embarrassment I must have done enough as I received an offer. The following summer I achieved my grades and was destined to join 50+ single honours geography students in October 1965. I was allocated digs with a fellow geography student by the University: the digs were on the city boundary in Leeds 14 (Foundry Lane), and my fellow student was Brian Chalkley. Brian greeted me effusively when I arrived with my parents and we have been friends and geographers for 50 years.

Leeds Registration Card

It was a long bus journey into Leeds along the York Road to City Square then a walk uphill to the campus. For Fresher’s Week the city was shrouded in dense smog. Streetlights glowed dimly and you could feel soft touches of falling soot on your skin. You could barely see the Union from the department on University Road. Our department introductory programme went ahead although our coach trip to the Dales (Pateley Bridge) in the foggy gloom gave little hint of the glory of the area. I recall that the registration for Arts students involved a long queue into the Parkinson Building. Once registered, and with my card stamped, I could buy a university scarf from Hardys on New Briggate. I waited for my grant cheque, sorted out a bank, registered at The Brotherton Library and Student Health, sorted out my timetable and subsidiaries, and attended departmental meetings to arrange tutorials.

In a letter dated 16 October 1965 I wrote to my parents that I was enjoying geography and economics but finding crystallography dull. Stratigraphy was with Dorothy Rayner, who like Speight (economics), was a better writer than lecturer. Physical geology was enjoyable and Brian splashed out on a wonderful red bound copy of Holmes Physical Geology. The three-hour geography practical sessions involved creating diagrams and weather maps using our Rötring mapping pens. Synoptic station data or flow diagrams of banana exports from Ecuador were tasks I remember. It was laborious inky work in the pre-computer age.

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My initial letter home even recorded my 1965 timetable.

Geological mapping was magic in 3-D, and the lists of minerals and fossils went on and on! We had a special affinity with Hildoceras, a big Jurassic Ammonite that we associated with a girl who we met in Bradford one Saturday at their university hop. Interestingly the fossil appeared in our first-year geology practical examination. Its appearance caused a strangled outburst from Paul Hallam, so we all knew we had one mark.

At the start lecture notes were rewritten but that was soon abandoned. Reading lists were dutifully read and noted but the notes were too detailed and without structure suffering also from poor layout and tiny writing. I have improved over the following fifty years! I have no memory of tutorials and only recall writing my first economics essay on Malthusian theory.

The lecture theatre established territory – Bernard, Keith, Graham, Martin, Clive, Chris Martins, Chris Mitchinson, Brian and I sat on the same row. The lecture theatre had frosted glass windows so you couldn’t see out, only the upper branches of the trees. The bench top was ridiculously small for a pad of notes. During lectures and over lunch in the Student Union we became a friendship group that dispersed to outlying digs in the evening. During the second and third years we all moved nearer to the campus so worked together in the Brotherton Library during the evening which further cemented the group.

During Fresher’s Week I signed up for the University rugby union club but only had one trial where I wore the University’s colours but never had a recall. I did play inter-departmental
football and became increasingly committed to intramural sport. During my second year I was playing football for geography, basketball, and university rugby league. In my third year I became geography society sports rep. As sports rep I had to organise teams and transport to compete for the Christie Cup. That year it was held in Manchester. Little did I know that I would end up living and teaching within a few miles of those university sport’s grounds.

During the first year we had exams in geography and our subsidiaries plus field courses in Grange over Sands and Antrim. During the Antrim geology field week I saw and learned about a “bifurcating dyke”, felt the machine gun patter of sleet at the Giant’s Causeway and fell into a quaking bog in company with Judith Roebuck. The hotel we stayed at in Ballycastle was subsequently blown up by the I.R.A. and was pictured in the Sunday Times magazine.

1966-67 was a more interesting year. Brian and I moved into digs on North Hill Road, Headingley. Brian had changed from a combined geography and sociology course to single honours geography. We walked together in to Hyde Park then across Woodhouse Moor for our lectures. The spring blossom on North Hill Road and on the Moor sticks in my memory. I was beginning to establish favourite lecturers – “Doc” Eyre, Glanville Jones and Gordon Dickinson in geography and Professor Maurice Beresford in economic history. During our second year many of us did economic history that revolved around course books written by Clapham and Court. They were uninspiring texts and the lecturers excited no real interest. There were some intriguing references on the long reading list but nothing as inspiring as Beresford’s urban history of Leeds. He also ran a seminar during which he selected two students to complete an essay that was marked then read aloud to one’s peers. Graham and I were unlucky enough to be selected to write about English foreign policy in the Middle Ages. Beresford dissected our prose and probed our meaning in public. I read out my introduction while Graham managed a whole paragraph. But it was Beresford’s focus on words, sentences, paragraphs, meaning and implication that I took to heart. His superb article, Prosperity Street and Others: An Essay in Visible Urban History in Leeds and its Region edited by Beresford and Jones, 1967 is an example of his imaginative research and incisive prose. Another inspiring text is his Walks Round Red Brick (1980), a perambulation around the buildings of the Leeds campus including the Beech Grove estate purchased in 1876 that subsequently became home to the geography department. Fowler’s lecture course on the West Riding and later on Europe was far from inspiring. He lectured with a cigarette dangling from his lip and we were fascinated both by the length of ash and how long it might last. He always stopped on the bell even if it was mid-sentence. We also had Lockwood for the mysteries of climatology. I took beautiful but baffling notes on Riehl and Geiger but steered clear of the subject in exams. I also boycotted Frank Leeming’s political course although I did find the U.S.S.R. and China fascinating.

I have cleared out a number of geography books since my retirement from teaching but kept Eyre’s Vegetation and Soils (1962), and Eyre and Jones’s Geography as Human Ecology Methodology by Example (1966). The latter volume contained Glanville Jones’s superb article on Rural Settlement in Anglesey illustrating his ideas on early land tenure and multiple estates. John Palmer also included an erudite summary article entitled Landforms, Drainage and Settlement in the Vale of York. What I did come to realise from the work of Jones and Eyre was that I supported the ecology methodology with its emphasis on man-landscape interaction and it was to underpin my approach to geography and environmental science throughout my career.

John Palmer wrote a Reflections piece for the departmental Alumni magazine in September 2009 covering the period from 1952-1991. In 1954 the departmental staff photo showed John Palmer, Bob Eyre, Glanville Jones, Fred Fowler, Ronnie Peel, Maurice Kirk, Frank Leeming and Gordon Dickinson, six of whom were well know to us in 1965. In his article Palmer noted that male students wore collars and ties, and women wore skirts well into the 1960s. This was very true illustrated by the departmental photos for 1966 and 1967. By 1968 things had loosened into ‘Army and Navy chic’. I was wearing an anorak and a polo neck but there were still many in collars and ties.

On 12 March 1967 Chris Mitchinson and I played in the first ever university student rugby league match against General Accident Assurance on Soldier’s Field, Roundhay. This was brought to my notice by Ruth Duckworth who gave me Dave Hadfield’s book Learning Curve: The Remarkable Story of Student Rugby League (2013). Recently Chris and I received notice that there is to be a reunion dinner at Headingley in March 2017 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of that match. I played during the 1966-1967 season, and briefly into 1968 as we faced Finals that year.

Our second year field trip was based in Llandudno and focused on settlement history and beach football.

In our third year Brian and I were fortunate to get a flat in the Henry Price complex. It had many advantages but chief among them were the short distance from the department that made us popular as a drop off visit location either before or after lectures. We chose our options and I did planning with Gordon Dickinson and the U.S.S.R with Glanville Jones both of which I greatly enjoyed. We now had routines – lunch and tea in the Refectory followed by hours working in the Brotherton Library during the evening. Chris Martins voiced the unspoken feeling of us all – “We are all after a 2:1". It was almost heresy to voice one’s aspiration just in case it became jinxed and didn’t happen. But we knew the pressure was out there. Other activities included fish and chips at the legendary Sweaty Betty’s, and a beer at the Eldon, the Skyrack or The Original Oak in Headingley.

During the final year we hosted the Northern Universities Geography Societies (NUGS) day. We had to organise two
speakers, a journal and a dance. The dance was the preserve of Graham who booked the Moody Blues, his all time favourite band. However nearer to the time things went pear-shaped, as the Moodies couldn’t come after the success of their single *Nights in White Satin*. We were offered the Searchers, a more expensive act, but we were worried that we wouldn’t get the interest or the numbers from the town. However there was still 60s nostalgia alive in Leeds and the event brought in the crowds and made a good profit. I have a vivid memory of the early evening before the Searcher’s set when I got sent down to the gent’s toilets in the Union where the band was getting ready to ask if they wanted any drinks. They were shaving, side by side, stripped to the waist at adjoining washbasins harmonising through “Sweets For My Sweet”. The acoustics were excellent. They put on a great show.

The geographers excelled at tennis that final year – I was always booking courts. Also a first crown green bowling tournament was organised up at the Moor. It lasted most of a day, on and off, with Anne Banks and Bernard Friar proving to be the main stars. Our field trip was to the Tarn Gorge then on to Montpellier returning via Paris. Shared beds in the Tarn Gorge and cheap, nasty red wine; table football and Dennis’s sleepwalking in Montpellier are among the memories. Also a coach trip onto the Causses Plateau with staff placing identifying labels around bushes. It was a time of much look-and-see geography with no hypothesis testing and data collection of any note. Back in Leeds Glanville Jones assigned us a village/parish to study and write a report on. I was given Shadwell in north Leeds and duly went to the Leeds Record Office in Sheepscar to look at a relevant estate plan. When my plan was available I was told that I needed to take my shoes off. I was puzzled until I entered the room to see that my estate plan covered the whole floor! The study was interesting, particularly in terms of field pattern and ownership, but nothing that would further Jones’s work on early estates.

After each exam the relevant files and folders were abandoned and thrown into the corner of my room. The pile accumulated. After the fifth exam it felt like it was all over. We even had a celebratory beer and played football on the Moor. Then it was actually finished and after a hitchhike challenge we all returned to Leeds and we waited for results. After one of many daily visits to the department we were walking out of the building when the secretary rushed after us as to tell us that Fred Fowler was putting up the results list. Success! Afterwards we walked over to the Student Union bar where numbers of geographers built up after they had consulted the results list. And on the 16th July 1968 in the Great Hall the Duchess of Kent admitted me to the degree along with forty-eight other geography main students. The career plan of entering town planning didn’t materialise. After a less than useful Careers interview I had a major re-think on University Road – I would teach.
Staff and students of the University of Leeds were deeply saddened to hear of the death of Piers Sellers following his brave fight with cancer in December 2016.

Piers Sellers, who was the acting director of the earth sciences division at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, featured in Leonardo DiCaprio’s climate change film, ‘Before The Flood’.

Piers Sellers was an inspirational astronaut and a distinguished climate scientist who gained a doctorate in biometeorology at the School of Geography in 1981 and was made an honorary Doctor of Science in 2007.

When the University’s new Priestley International Centre for Climate was launched in June 2016, he said: “I love Leeds University and I am still in awe of the reach and spirit of the place ....”[see video here].

Piers will always be remembered by the University through two prizes (inaugurated in 2016 and to be awarded annually) which bear his name, the first for world-leading contributions to solution-focused climate research, the second designed to encourage and reward a Leeds PhD student committed to tackling climate change.

‘As an astronaut I spacewalked 220 miles above the Earth.... From this God’s-eye-view, I saw how fragile and infinitely precious the Earth is. I am hopeful for its future.’

(Piers Sellers, New York Times, January 2016)

‘He cared deeply about our fragile planet and the people who inhabit it – his outstanding work and our fond memories of him will continue to inspire future generations.’

Alan Langlands (Vice Chancellor of the University of Leeds).

‘Piers was widely lauded as a true defender and eloquent spokesperson for our home planet.’

The Guardian