



International Association of Geomorphologists

Association Internationale des Géomorphologues

IAG/AIG Newsletter No. 26 (4/2010)

From the Editor's Desk

Dear Geomorphologists

I thank you all for your kind help and co-operation in enabling me to publish the newsletter on time. I request that you continue this co-operation in order that future issues of the newsletter continue to be published on time.

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1. Obituary

Nicholas James Preston 1965 –2010



Nicholas James Preston
1965 –2010

Nicholas (Nick) James Preston, respected Geomorphologist and dedicated teacher, died December 29, 2010 after a long and brave struggle against cancer. Nick leaves behind his family: wife Anja and two children Lucie (3 years) and Jannik (1 year).

Born in New Zealand on 17 December 1965, Nick was brought up together with his sister Bridget by their mother Eileen in Korokoro, a small but beautiful suburb in the hills of Lower Hutt, Wellington. After having finished primary and secondary education, he went to Australia and worked in Sydney, ultimately completing training as a chef. During this time, he realized that his intellectual curiosity remained unsatisfied and he wanted to learn more of life.

He returned to New Zealand, where he enrolled at Victoria University of Wellington for a Geography degree. During his studies, he became enthusiastic about landscapes and, subsequently focused his efforts on geomorphology, particularly on landslide research. His Masters thesis, supervised by Professor Mike Crozier, investigated the change in geotechnical slope resistance to shallow landsliding with time. This research provided the first quantitative demonstration of

how certain catchments may become increasingly resistant to failure as a result of successive landslide events. Encouraged by his mentor Mike and colleagues, he went to the University of Bonn, Germany in 1996 to study for a PhD, and worked in Professor Richard Dikau's group over the next four years. While there he met Anja Feise, a Geography student who he later married. Scientifically, he moved towards soil erosion and sediment budgets, submitting an outstanding PhD thesis on use of radiocaesium to determine sediment distributions in a small catchment in Germany. His outstanding scientific achievements have been recognized internationally

In 2001, Anja and Nick went back to NZ and Nick started working at Landcare Research in Palmerston North. Two years later he obtained a lecturing position at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. Here he worked with Prof. Gary Brierley and Kirstie Fryirs on the interconnected nature of drainage basins. Besides scientific research he very much enjoyed working with students. In 2005 Nick returned to Wellington to take up a lectureship at the School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, Victoria University. This position allowed him to continue his research on landslides and erosion and to excel in teaching. Just before the cancer was diagnosed in early 2009, he was awarded the Outstanding Graduate Supervisor Award by Victoria University.

Nick was greatly liked and well respected by his colleagues in the scientific community, but also and in particular by his friends. He was a quiet and thoughtful person, who took opportunities when they arose and accomplished them with rigour and modesty. If he accepted tasks and duties, one could always be sure that he fulfilled all the expectations – because his own standards were so high. In professional and personal situations, he behaved with the highest integrity, discretion and loyalty. He familiarized himself quickly with

new challenges and demands. As a critical observer with a considered, clear and focused judgement, he was a key player in many research projects. He also dedicated much time to his PhD and Masters students. During his illness, he displayed a very positive and highly admirable attitude, never complaining, but addressing his illness with great honesty and openness, trying to ease the burden on those around him, and sheltering his family and friends as much as he could.

Nick was member of New Zealand Geographical Society, the Australia New Zealand geomorphology Group and an active organiser for LUCIFS.

His colleagues and friends have lost a great and loyal mate. He will be missed very much.

Thomas Glade, Professor of Geomorphology, University of Vienna

2. Publications

Francisco Gutiérrez, Mauro Soldati, Franck Audemard and Dan Bălțeanu (Guest Editors). **Recent advances in landslide investigation**. Special Issue of *Geomorphology*, **124 (3-4)**. Elsevier Science

The recently published special issue of *Geomorphology* (Vol. 124, 3-4) titled "Recent advances in landslide investigation", includes 14 papers dealing with landslides selected from two conferences of the International Association of Geomorphologists (IAG): the Regional Conference held in Brasov, Romania, in September 2008 and the Seventh International Conference celebrated in Melbourne, Australia, in July 2009. The Regional Conference, under the theme "Landslides, floods and global environmental change in mountain regions", was organized by Prof. Dan Bălțeanu (Institute of Geography of the Romanian Academy) and his collaborators in a classic landslide area, the Carpathian Mountains. The participation reached 150 delegates from 30 countries. The programme of this meeting included 12 sessions with 116 contributions, 49 of which related to landslides. This issue includes 8 papers out of the 11 selected presentations. The rest of the articles are derived from the "Hillslopes and Mass Movements" session of the Seventh International Conference on Geomorphology, organized by the Australian and New Zealand Geomorphology Group (ANZGG) under the leadership of Prof. Brian Finlayson (Monash University, Australia). Participation in this major event reached 648 delegates from 50 countries and the programme included 37 theme sessions. A total of 6 papers were selected from the 46 contributions presented at the "Hillslopes and Mass Movements" session convened by professors Mike Crozier (Victoria University, New Zealand) and Mauro Soldati (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy).

This compilation of articles covers a wide geographical and thematic canvas, with a special flavour from Eastern Europe derived from the IAG Regional Conference held in Romania. The study areas include all the major continents with the exception of North America. Eight papers from Europe (Andorra, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland) deal with a wide diversity of topics; magnitude and frequency relationships in the Pyrenees, paleoenvironmental record of landslide activity in the Carpathians, slope instability in glaciolacustrine clays in the Estonian coastal plain, landslide characterization in the Bohemian Massif, susceptibility mapping in Romania, mapping and assessment of debris-flow sediment sources in the Swiss Alps, and shallow slides and trenching applied to large landslides in a reservoir in the Pyrenees. Two papers deal with a catastrophic rock slide-avalanche in Japan. There is a paper on the interaction between large dam-forming landslides and fluvial activity in the deepest valley in the world located in Nepal. An article from Venezuela documents very large landslides associated with the Boconó Fault in the Andes. A paper reviews blanket peat landslides in subantarctic islands. Finally, one paper discusses the relative role played by climate change and human activity on landslide activity, with numerous examples from New Zealand.

3. IAG/AIG Working Group Reports

A report from the International Symposium on Sandstone Landforms, Zhangjiajie, China

On 9-12 November 2010 a symposium was held in Zhangjiajie, Henan, China, focused on geomorphology of sandstone landscapes, particularly the stone forest of Zhangjiajie, also known as Wulingyuan. Upon an invitation from the organizers, the Geological Society of China, the Geographical Society of China, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Zhangjiajie Municipality, the symposium was attended by a group of IAG officers, including the President Michael Crozier, Vice-President Piotr Migoń, and past President, Andrew Goudie, besides other geomorphologists and geologists from UK, Australia, and Germany. An Executive member from China, Yang Xiaoping, was also present.

The symposium lasted three days and involved two days of field excursion and one day of sessions and discussions. Zhangjiajie represents a unique example of a highly dissected and fragmented sandstone plateau, with a total relief of c. 500 m. The sandstone sequence is of Devonian age, but the age of actual landscape is late Cenozoic, being still the matter of scientific debate. Its landmark features are about 3,000 free-standing angular sandstone columns and towers, some as high as 300 m. In a few places larger mesas occur, whereas structural benches underlain by iron-rich sandstone unit flank the area from north and south. Minor features of interest include rock arches, river gorges, and bedrock channels. Altogether, Zhangjiajie is an extreme example of direct joint control on process and form, and the scale of the landscape makes it probably unique in the world. The outstanding universal value of Zhangjiajie was recognized by the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO, which inscribed the area on the World Heritage list in 1992. Zhangjiajie is also one of Global Geoparks of UNESCO.

On the third day, the participants had the opportunity to see two presentations by Chinese colleagues, on the geomorphic history of Zhangjiajie itself (Yang Guifang) and on the typology of sandstone morphologies in China (Qi Deli). These were followed by two keynote presentations from foreign participants, Robert Wray on the diversity of sandstone landscapes in Australia and Piotr Migoń on recent progress and challenges in sandstone landscape research. Afternoon panel discussions helped to realize the unique values of the Zhangjiajie landscape and to identify further research priorities. Research opportunities identified included the influence of rock mass strength (including lithology, structure and jointing), sediment budgeting, and the frequency /magnitude of processes, especially with respect to Pleistocene climate changes and neotectonics. The workshop ended with a press conference that illustrated the wider public interest in the role of geomorphology from both a scientific and heritage perspective.

Organization of the symposium was perfect and weather cooperated nicely. The IAG is grateful to the organizing committee, chaired by Professor Chen An Ze and Professor He-Qing Huang, for providing the opportunity to attend and to extend international dimension of IAG activities. Last but not least, we pass our sincere thanks to the dedicated group of young volunteers who immensely contributed to the success of the symposium.

Piotr Migoń, Vice President (IAG/AIG Working Groups)

4. Young Geomorphologists Section

a. Final Result of the Selection for IAG/AIG Grants for participating the IAG Regional Conference on Geomorphology, Ethiopia, 18-22 February 2011

The Call for GRANTS was open to Young Geomorphologists from AFRICA.

19 eligible applications have been submitted, plus 3 non-eligible.

This is the most successful Call for Grants devoted to African scientists that IAG ever made. Beside the 19 final candidates, I was actually contacted by many other scientists asking for information and checking about the possibility to apply.

Six IAG/AIG grants have been awarded to support the participation of outstanding young scientists from four African countries in the IAG Regional Conference and in the pre-Conference Intensive Course for Young Geomorphologists. The winners of the grants are as follows.

Merlin GOUNTIE DEDZO (Cameroun)

Rebecca JOUBERT (South Africa)

Stephan SADIKI NDYANABO (Democratic Republic of Congo)

Benjamin VAN DER WAAL (South Africa)

Tesfay Araya WELDESILASSIE (Ethiopia)

Ghislain ZANGMO TEFOGOU (Cameroun)

Mauro Soldati, IAG/AIG Training Officer

b. Reports on the Post-graduate Training Research Workshop, Windsor, 13-16 December 2010

IAG/AIG GRANTS intended to favour participation in the BSG Postgraduate Training Workshop of Windsor, UK, were awarded to three PhD students in Geomorphology from EUROPE: Borbála SÜMEGHI (Hungary), Matteo VACCHI (Italy) and Malgorzata WISTUBA (Poland). Their participation in the course was successful and they found the experience highly instructive, as stated in the following reports:

- i. In this report I will describe the Postgraduate Research Training in Windsor, organised by the British Society for Geomorphology. Every year European students have an opportunity to win an IAG Grant covering the course fee and some assistance for travel.

The Workshop was a very useful training. The programme was very busy, but the topics and the exercises were very interesting and useful. During these four days I got a lot of good - and sometimes bad - information about the problems of the three year long PhD student life. We got a lot of necessary data about the fieldwork and work in the laboratory which form a substantial part of the PhD work. For me it was very beneficial to see the differences between the PhD requirements in different European countries.

The teachers who helped us during the training were very helpful and kindly and gave us a lot of good ideas and information. They conducted the workshop very smoothly, there was not any awkward situation and they tried to help everybody who had a problem with her/his work.

In my opinion it would be better if we had a little bit more free time. Our days were very busy and we spent these days in Windsor. Because I am Hungarian and I do not know when I can go back to England, maybe if the training had been one day long, we could visit the Windsor Park several times. I think this visit was missing from our programme.

On the whole, the Windsor Workshop was very helpful and interesting a good experience for me indeed.

Borbála Sümeghy, University of Szeged, Hungary

- ii. The BSG training in geomorphology, held in Cumberland lodge (Windsor UK), gave me really interesting new ideas about my role as PhD student. Aim of the training was to share with other early stage researcher impressions and ideas not just focused on research methods but also on the life of a PhD in different European countries. I found very interesting this opportunity and I really appreciated the kindness both of the other participants and of the professors. The atmosphere was really familiar and the location, in the middle of the forest, was ideal to make the attendance at the course very enjoyable. The accommodation was fantastic: the historical cottage was fully furnished and the personnel were very kind. Despite the location was outside London, it was not difficult to reach the airport. The participation was for the majority of postgraduates from UK but five other countries were represented: Poland, Austria, Hungary, Italy and USA.

The role and the mission of a PhD was the main topic of the first two days lessons. In particular, I found very interesting the research planning proposed by Prof. Brian Whalley. The experimental design lesson was interesting as well. Despite I had a quite good knowledge in terms of statistic applied to geomorphology, I gained very interesting suggestion from the lesson of Prof. Paul Farres.

The third day was dedicated to the personal researches. The presentation of the personal PhD project was a bit diversified because some of the postgraduates were really at the beginning of their research others, like me, already presented some results of their research. Nevertheless, good suggestions were achieved both from other student and from the professors. The research topics of the participants covered a wide range of subjects. My topic, coastal geomorphology, was studied in territories showing problematic in field methods very different from mine (Ocean vs. Mediterranean).

Along the three days I found a good balance between theoretical lessons and others more focused on field activities and analysis of the results. I also appreciated the lesson about how to write scientific papers.

In conclusion, I consider the attendance at the BSG training as a very interesting opportunity that, for sure, will help me to going ahead with my PhD. The grant of the IAG was fundamental in order to cover the costs of the inscription and a part of the travel.

Matteo Vacchi, University of Genova, Italy



The Windsor IAG grant holders with the course organizer Prof. Brian Whalley

- iii. To the BSG Windsor Workshop I came as a PhD student in the middle of thesis preparation (after 2 from 4 years dedicated for postgraduate studies in Poland). Despite the advanced stage of research – training in Windsor, organized for young scientists, was useful also for me.

Windsor Workshop is a great training of self-motivation and an opportunity to improve research competences, which is desired on every stage of doctoral thesis preparation. During workshop as particularly interesting and useful I considered: lectures and exercises on models and experiments in geomorphology, and the discussion on strategy of publishing papers and giving conference presentations. Time spent discussing the selection of journal, review process, answering reviews and making corrections in the text were especially valuable. The workshop leaders showed us examples from their papers and reviews received. Thanks to that, we could learn the publishing process from the inside. Myself, I learned, that writing scientific papers demands constant effort and improvement of qualifications, even from experienced ones. Examples given by workshop leaders, also proved, that irritation on remarks made by reviewers is quite common and naturally hard to overcome. After my first attempts in publishing papers I found that encouraging.

Group work was an important element of the Windsor Workshop – especially planning of the realisation of PhD research project. Plan made year by year and task by task was presented in front of other groups and workshop leaders. The necessity of working on the topic completely different than my own, allowed me to focus on formal problems of research project realisation. A lot of group work, including unusual tasks (e.g. analysing the distribution of mole hills in the Great Windsor Park), allowed to free oneself of common patterns of thinking and to get to know with other participants of the workshop. During our individual PhD topics presentation we were able to learn about scientific interests of our colleagues and receive a bit of positive criticism on our own work.

Energy and passion for work, passion for geomorphology and the will to share experience among the workshop leaders were clear and impressing. Also our guest evening lecturer – vice-president of British Society for Geomorphology – Heather Viles gave us an amazing example of the joy drawn from creative scientific work in the field of geomorphology.

Malgorzata Wistuba, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

5. Upcoming Seminars/Conferences/Workshops/Trainings Programmes

- a. REMOTE SENSING, NATURAL HAZARDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE, **28-29 July 2011, Centre for Remote Sensing and Processing (CRISP), National University of Singapore, Singapore**. Please visit the web site of the conference: <http://www.crisp.nus.edu.sg/conferences/RSNHEC/index.html>. Liew Soo Chin, CRISP, NUS (sccliew@nus.edu.sg); Jean-Claude Thouret, LMV, Université Blaise Pascal (thouret@opgc.univ-bpclermont.fr); Avijit Gupta, Large Rivers and Climate Change, IAG (avijit@foxhill.demon.co.uk)
- b. THE SECOND WORLD LANDSLIDE FORUM, **3-9 October 2011, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy**. Conference website: <http://www.wlf2.org/home/home-page>
The Second World Landslide Forum has the objective to further develop the outcomes of the First Forum in Tokyo 2008 by providing a global cross-cutting information and cooperation platform for all types of organizations representing academia, United Nations organisations, governments, private enterprises and individuals that contribute to landslide research, practice, education and decision making and are willing to strengthen landslide and other related Earth system risk reduction strategies.

Editor's Note

The success of the IAG/AIG Newsletter depends upon the contributions that we receive. On behalf of IAG/AIG, I would request you to assist us by supplying information related to the forthcoming activities and innovations in geomorphology in your respective countries (commentaries, reviews of regional or national meetings and field trips, summaries of issues pertinent to geomorphology and announcements of future meetings and workshops. Your contributions should be forwarded to the IAG/AIG Publications Officer.

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