

# FIELD NOTES

The Geography Students' Association Newsletter

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October 2007



## GSA News

BY NICK GALLANT

The past several weeks have been exciting and busy for the GSA. In this news section the focus will be on the people who've made it all come together and on what you can do to make the UBC Geography community even better!

The most important element in any club, people make the good times happen. Mem-

bers, Exec, and Faculty/Staff Champions are all integral if the club is to ultimately succeed. Our memberships sit in the 80's which indicates that there is a strong belief that this year's GSA will provide value to its members and to the community... either that or people just really like the free beer. Members' suggestions drive exec initiatives; for instance the idea for a faculty cup competition (see the news section at [www.ams.ubc.ca/clubs/gsa](http://www.ams.ubc.ca/clubs/gsa)) was born out of a suggestion from member at large Adam Kebede at a GSA meeting. We have also grown to encompass a large and active seventeen member exec.

to work to get the GSA re-involved with the SUS.

- **Sian Weatherley** has consistently been on the ball when it comes to event advertisement. She is also working on exec profiles which will go onto the bulletin board outside of Geog 100.

- **Albert Huang** is working with organizations like UBC Alumni Affairs and the Department of Geography to craft fun ways for current Geog students to engage with Geog alumni. A "Meet the Alumni" featured Geopit is currently being planned.

- **Trevor Cook** has re-made the GSA's website. It is now much easier to read and edit because of his reformatting (see [www.ams.ubc.ca/clubs/gsa](http://www.ams.ubc.ca/clubs/gsa))

- **Rebecca Chaster** is spreading the Geography gospel to the rest of the Faculty of Arts. She sits on AUS council, pushes for funding for the GSA, and makes regular contributions to the AUS newsletter.

It's also important to recognize the efforts of the faculty and staff who act as supporters, mentors and participants. In particular **Karen Young, Sally Hermansen, Graeme Wynn** and the department's office staff are collaborating with the GSA to enhance the UBC Geography community.

Everyone - members, exec, and faculty/staff champions - can continually strive to build the UBC Geography community. With more than 350 declared geog majors, and more than 4700 undergrad students enrolled in Geography classes there is clearly room for more engagement with the GSA. YOU can help us make a positive impact within your department:

- Forward this newsletter along to show others the great things that are happening at UBC Geography

- Email any comments or suggestions to [ubcgas@hotmail.com](mailto:ubcgas@hotmail.com)

- Spread the word about GSA events, get a group of friends together and come out!

- Invite your (or fellow) profs/supervisors to an event

- Lend a hand. The GSA is always looking for more people-power! We send out notices regularly though our mailing list

- Spearhead a project

- Apply for the 2008/2009 Exec

The GSA look forward to hearing from you and seeing you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Nick Gallant on behalf of Your Friendly GSA



Hard working execs Eva Lillquist and Meredith Klassen man the GSA booth at Clubs' Days

Photo Credit: Meredith Klassen

- **Rory Babin** is working with **Eva Lillquist** on getting UBC Geography's *Trail Six* undergrad journal off to a strong start. Together they've obtained submissions from students and bites from libraries nationwide.

- **Meredith Klassen** planned our clubs days booth, has gotten a crew together to clean up the undergrad lounge, and is liaising with the GSA's internal exec members.

- **Michelle Sawka** has done a fantastic job in keeping the GSA's finances in order by setting regulations for the club. She is also ensuring continuity by keeping track of this year's GSA's activities.

- **Mary-Beth Thompson** has made one excellent Geopit happen already and is currently working on the Halloween edition which promises to be even better!

- **Alena Robinson** ensures that GSA events are logged on our calendar and takes care of other key administrative items.

- **Alex Burkholder** has been working from afar (Australia) to ensure that this year's Geogala will be one of the best ever, securing the Cecil Green Mansion as a venue. Mark your calendars for March 27th!

- **Jason Wong** has been working close to home to arrange grad photo sessions

- **Dave Jameson** (a 2008 OLYMPIC athlete!) led the GSA's Bad Latitude Team to a strong showing at Day of the Longboat in late September; he is currently drumming up support for Gladiator

- **Kate Liss** compiled this newsletter, is coordinating GSA booths, and has been collaborating with **Nadia Formigoni** to work Community Service Learning options into Geography courses. **Nadia** is also working with the curriculum committee and arranging our spooky bake sale.

- **Dave Abbott** has been championing the GSA's cause with the Science Undergrad Society. He met with their exec and continues

# The Continental Drift Salt of the Earth

BY MARY-BETH THOMPSON

In Bolivia there is a place like no other. Truly. The sky is an intense, vibrant blue smeared with wispy cirrus clouds, only you don't really notice it because you're too busy looking down at the ground. After all that's why you're there. You are standing on the Salar de Uyuni, a vast expanse of salt. Now I admit that may not sound overly thrilling, but really, this is good stuff!

At 3650 meters above sea level, the Salar de Uyuni is a spectacular thing to witness. 40,000 years ago the Salar de Uyuni was part of a giant lake, Lago Minchin, however when the lake dried up it left behind two smaller lakes (Lago Poopo and Uru Uru) as well as two salt deserts, Salar de Coipasa and Salar de Uyuni. The Salar de Uyuni is credited with being the largest salt flat in the world and debatably one of the flattest places. It is popularly estimated to be 8-12,000 sq. kilometres (depending on where the boundaries are set) and is over 10 meters thick at its centre. Annually up to 25,000 tons of salt is extracted, however given that the source contains approximately 10 billion tons, the removal is viewed as somewhat negligible.

When you sign up for a tour (unfortunately it's pretty tricky and dangerous to do it alone) you have a choice of 3 or 4 days- take the four days! The area isn't just about salt (though did I mention that you can sleep in a house of salt? Everything from the walls to the furniture is blocks of salt!). Once you're on board you will see La Isla de Pescado, an old coral island covered in giant cacti that are over 1000 years old and riddled with small

caves to explore. There are rock formations eroded by wind and sand to look like trees and frogs, and volcanoes composed of coloured layers left after each eruption. When you emerge from hot springs in the area, your clothes freeze (perhaps I forgot to mention that you climb to elevations greater than 4,800 meters above sea level where it can drop to negative 20 degrees Celsius at night).

There are lakes that may as well be right out of Alice in Wonderland - some are tinted red with algae, others green with arsenic, lead, copper and other such heavy metals. A few are white from borax, blue with magnesium and manganese, or sulphur yellow. The really fun thing is most of these lakes are dotted pink with flamingos

since the Salar de Uyuni acts as the breeding grounds for three types of flamingos, the Chilean, James's and Andean.

In the end, whether you're there to check out the interesting hexagon patterns that are formed in the cracked basin, to take pictures of your friends dancing on the palm of your hand, or to hope for a day of rain that will transform the land into a flawless mirror of the perfectly inverted sky, there is no question that you are there for the salt.

*World traveller Mary-Beth Thompson wound through South America in the summer of 2006, spending 3 magnificent days in June in the Salar de Uyuni.*

Below: Catherine Thompson (left) dances in the palm of Mary-Beth's hand



Above: Hexagonal patterns formed on the surface of the Salar de Uyuni

Photo credits: Mary-Beth Thompson

**Do you have a great story or photo from your travels to share?**  
Email [kate\\_liss@hotmail.com](mailto:kate_liss@hotmail.com) by November 16th to submit to The Continental Drift.

## What's up with the GSA? Upcoming events

**Come see for yourself! Regular meetings take place Thursdays from 12:30-1:30 and are open to all!**

**Keep your eyes open for our revamp of the Geography Lounge.**

Got ideas of what you want to see?  
Send suggestions to [ubcgsa@hotmail.com](mailto:ubcgsa@hotmail.com)

**Grad School Information Sessions  
Planning with Professor Tom Hutton**

Wednesday, October 24 12:15-1:00 in Geog 201

**M.A. in Geography with Professor David Ley**

Wednesday, October 31 12:00-1:00 in Geog 215

**M.Sc. in Geography with Professor Ian McKendry**

Wednesday, November 7 12:00-1:00 Geog 215

**Geopit!**

**Halloween Bzzr Garden and Spooky Bake Sale**

Friday Oct. 26th, 4-9pm in the Geography Lounge  
(Bake Sale throughout the day)

Games, Bzzr, Czzder, Pzzop, Baked Goods and a scary fun time!

**Wynn and Cheese**

Meet for a free lunch and great discussions with Department Head Graeme Wynn, Geography Faculty, and the GSA

October 26th with Professor Dan Moore

November 5th with Professor David Edgington

November 30th

Contact [ubcgsa@hotmail.com](mailto:ubcgsa@hotmail.com) for more information or to get on the guest list for a free, fun, cheesy time!

## Where are they now? Alumni Profile: Greg Mitchell

BY: REBECCA CHASTER

Greg Mitchell graduated with a BA in Geography in 2000, and three years later completed a Master's in Urban and Regional Planning at Queens University. While at UBC he worked for TREK and came back again after finishing his Master's degree to work in Campus Planning for a year. He now works as an Associate Planner for the city of Surrey.

So how did Greg get to where he is today, you ask? Look no further for the how-to guide to becoming an Urban Planner just like him!

### **What were the most valuable educational experiences for you both in and outside of university?**

Outside of school, working as a server for four years at Earls was definitely an invaluable experience – the ability to just talk with all sorts of people is imperative in every aspect of life, including your career. International travel also gives you a unique perspective that you can't achieve through any other means. At university, as corny as it may sound, the most valuable skill I gained was the ability to think critically about issues, to see all the sides of a particular problem, and to argue my own point. Also, just learning a general history of geography and Planning itself – it never ceases to amaze me how much that aspect of the field comes up in this job.

### **What was your favourite part of being an undergraduate UBC student? of being a Geography major?**

I was very involved on campus during my undergraduate years and consequently had a great experience. I strongly believe in the university's motto: "Tuum Est" or "It Is Yours", "It's Up To You", and I know my involvement in things like student government really contributed immensely to my overall experience at UBC. As for

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### **Get Involved!**

Looking to get involved in the department or around campus? The GSA has got you connected.

### **Trick or Eat - Wed, October 31 at 6pm**

The GSA is putting together a team for the Trick or Eat fundraiser this Halloween. We'll all go trick-or-treating, but instead of stockpiling candy for ourselves, we collect non-perishable goods for the 2.4 million Canadians suffering from hunger. To join the GSA trick or eat team, email [jasonwong\\_ca@hotmail.com](mailto:jasonwong_ca@hotmail.com) to sign up. This is a great opportunity to do good and have a fabulous time.

### **Gladiator - UBC REC**

Join Bad Latitude (the GSA Rec Team) for a competition that's not to be missed. Combining the events formerly known as The Amazing Maze and The Gladiator Team Challenge into one massive two-night event, this year's Gladiator promises non-stop action and fun. Teams compete in five American Gladiator based games including The Maze, Joust, and the Inflatable Obstacle Course.

To join Bad Latitude contact Dave Jameson at [djameson@shaw.ca](mailto:djameson@shaw.ca) by Friday, October 26th.

### **Spotlight:**



## Sumatran earthquake sends endangered turtles overseas

BY: EVA LILLQUIST

Approximately 50 endangered Hawksbill sea turtles were swept across the Malacca Strait following the Sumatran earthquake on September 12th. Though the 8.4-scale earthquake did not trigger a tsunami, stronger currents still managed to carry the turtles some 100 kilometres off course of their usual route.

The turtles were discovered by locals on the beaches of Malaysian island Kuala Tanjung. Found scrambling amongst containers with Indonesian labels, it was clear that the turtles had not come to this beach intentionally, since the rocky shores of Kuala Tanjung were unsuitable for nesting.

State fisheries director Sani Mohamad Isa comments on the rarity of the situation. "In the last five to 10 years, we had sightings of only one or two and that was on Langkawi Island, not in Kuala Tanjung.

What we found on Saturday is very rare".

Of the 50 turtles found, 2 of them had died and 5 were injured. The injured turtles are being held in a local health facility, and will be released back into the ocean after they have recovered.

Seismic activity is not the only threat facing sea turtles today however. A study from the University of Sydney's School of Biological Sciences suggests the potential extinction of the Green sea turtle on Florida's Atlantic coast.

Due primarily to climate change, there has been an increase of aggressive tropical storms hitting the coast, washing away eggs and causing a significant drop in successful hatchings. Similar to the situation of the leatherback turtle, predictions suggest that the turtles could go extinct within the next 100 years.

<http://www.earthweek.com/online/ew071005/ew071005c>.



Students, staff and faculty mingle at the first Geopit of the year.

Photo Credit: Meredith Klassen

## It's all fun and games...

BY DAVE ABBOTT

You find yourself at the Greenjack table. It is played with a deck of only 16 cards, divided into 4 suits: Red, Blue, Orange and Green. There are four cards in each suit: Ace, King, Queen and Jack. Ace outranks King, which outranks Queen, which outranks Jack - except for the Green Jack, which outranks every other card. If two cards have the same face value, then Red outranks Blue, which outranks Orange, which outranks Green, again except for the Green Jack, which outranks everything.

### Here's how the game is played:

You are dealt one card face up, and the dealer is dealt one card face down. The dealer then makes some true statements, and you have to work out who has the higher card, you or the dealer.

#### Round 1:

You are dealt the Green Ace and the dealer makes three statements:

1. My card is higher than any Queen.
2. Knowing this, if my card is more likely to beat yours, then my card is Blue. Otherwise it isn't.
3. Given all of the information you now know, if your card is more likely to beat mine, then my card is a King. Otherwise it isn't.

#### Who has the higher card, you or the dealer?

#### Round 2:

You are dealt the Blue King and the dealer makes three statements:

1. My card would beat a Green King.
2. Knowing this, if my card is more likely to be a Jack than a Queen, then my card is a King. Otherwise, it isn't.
3. Given all of the information you now know, if my card is more likely to beat yours than not, then my card is Red card. Otherwise, it isn't.

#### Who has the higher card, you or the dealer?

See Page 5 for Answers

### Continued from Page 3 - Alumni Profile - Greg Mitchell

being a Geography major, well, the geog lounge was a great place to nap! The people in Geography are the subject's greatest strength – Geography doesn't attract selfish people, so consequently in the department you will find fascinating people interested in things beyond themselves.

#### Why did you decide to pursue planning?

I've traced my interest in Urban Planning back to playing SimCity in grade eight. Like so many other first-year Arts students, I was planning on transferring into Commerce as soon as I could. I obviously didn't get in, which I'm happy about now, and I always enjoyed the Geography courses I took. Geography 210 was my favourite course in the department.

#### Do you have an ultimate career goal in mind?

My long-term goal is to eventually have my own private planning company – doing everything from consulting with municipalities, to facilitating and running public meetings, to negotiating and arbitrating between developers and the city, etc...

#### What's "A Day in the Life of a Planner" like?

Talk, talk, talk – in this career you have a lot of conversations with a lot of different people. No two days are ever the same either – there are always new, out-of-the-ordinary events going on such as workshops, opportunities to meet new people and to share ideas, etc. You are constantly learning new things and being faced with new situations, which can be tough but at the same time immensely rewarding. For example, this morning I rode along with the RCMP through Surrey's city center to get a better idea of the area for a project I'm working. Now that's something you don't get to do every day!

#### Any advice pertinent for undergrad students considering planning?

Get as broad a knowledge base as you can in undergrad. Take society-based courses, from psychology to anthropology to geography to sociology, because in the end they all relate and complement one another. For example, my boss has a BA in English and is a successful Planner. That's the beauty of a Planning degree – it's universal in nature because anyone can go into this field and contribute something unique and different. There are so many streams within Planning itself, i.e. Social Planning, Development Planning, Urban Planning, that you will always be challenged and it is impossible to get bored.



Bad Latitude suits up to face the rough seas for Day of the Longboat

Photo Credit: Meredith Klassen

# Geography students make their mark

## Student Profile: Nira Salant

BY MICHELLE SAWKA



**What is your area of concentration?**

Fluvial geomorphology and aquatic ecology

**Where's your hometown?**

Newton, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

**Where did you complete your previous degrees?**

Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire:  
 B.A. in Environmental Biology  
 M.Sc. in Earth Sciences

**What sorts of research are you working on?**

I am interested in the feedbacks between the physical and ecological components of stream systems, specifically focusing on the relationship between fine sediment and aquatic organisms. For my master's thesis, I studied sediment transport, morphologic changes, and invertebrate community response in flow-regulated streams of eastern Vermont. My doctoral research investigates the interacting physical and biological factors that influence the suspension, deposi-

tion, and infiltration of fine particles. I am using a laboratory-based experimental design to model how streambed conditions, namely bed composition and biofilm structure, affect near-bed hydraulics and particle trapping mechanisms, in turn altering particle movement and storage. Bed composition experiments test the effects of high streambed sand fractions; my research has shown this can increase suspended concentrations and the importance of in-channel storage. Biofilm experiments test varying densities and types of these bacterial-algal growth forms; I have found that 'sticky', low-profile diatoms significantly enhance particle trapping, while filamentous algae greatly alter near-bed velocities and turbulence intensities, two important particle transport mechanisms. These results indicate that biofilm can have a profound physical effect on their local environment, altering flow and sedimentation patterns and in turn exerting influence on their local habitat and neighboring organisms. My overarching objective is to better understand the interacting physical and biological variables that influence the movement of fine particles in the water-column and the streambed, so that any negative impacts of these particles can be effectively avoided or resolved.

**What's your favorite geography related movie?**

Let's say 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' – romance, action, adventure, globe-trotting, archeology, and a cute college professor – sounds like Geography to me!

*Nira Salant is a PhD candidate in Fluvial Geomorphology*

**Don't forget this week's Halloween Geopit!**  
**Wed, Oct. 26: 4-9pm in the Geography Lounge**



Photo credit: Sian Weatherley

### The Geography Undergrad Journal

The **Geography Undergrad Journal** is a student-run academic journal that publishes essays and articles on geography. We welcome submissions on both physical and human geography. This is a great opportunity to beef up your resume or improve a grad school application. Submissions don't have to be current, so feel free to submit work from last year or before.

Deadline for submissions: January 1st, 2008

Please send your essay in a word document to [geog\\_journal@hotmail.com](mailto:geog_journal@hotmail.com)

Rory Babin and Eva Lillquist  
 Executive Editors



Photo credit: Meredith Klassen

**Questions? Comments?**  
**Got a great story that you want to submit to the next edition of Field Notes?**

**Contact Kate Liss ([kate\\_liss@hotmail.com](mailto:kate_liss@hotmail.com)) or come out to the regular GSA meetings on Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 in Geography Room 215.**

**Submissions for the next issue are due by Friday, November 16th**

**Puzzle Answers (from page 4)**

**Round 1:** Who has the higher card, you or the dealer?  
 The dealer: After #1 you know that you have the Green Ace (GA) and the dealer's card is higher than any Queen, so the dealer can only have one of the following cards: RA, RK, BA, BK, OA, OK, GK, GL. Of these eight, 4 could beat your card, therefore by #2 their card is not Blue. They are now left one of the following: RA, RK, OA, OK, GK, GL. Of these six, 3 could beat your card, therefore by #3 their card is not a King. So the dealer has one of the following: RA, OA, GL, all of which can beat your card. QED.

**Round 2:** Who has the higher card, you or the dealer?  
 You: After #1 you know that you have the Blue King (BK) and the dealer's card is higher than the Green King, so the dealer can only have one of the following cards: RA, RK, BA, OA, OK, GA, GJ, therefore by #2 their card is a King. They are now left one of the following: RK, OK. Of these two, 1 could beat your card, therefore by #3 their card is not Red. So the dealer must have the Orange King, which your card beats. QED.