

Los Angeles Geographical Society Southland Geographic Notes

April 2008



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President's Message: *Whose Geography in the 21st Century?*

By Gary Booher, 2008 President

Everything old is new again.... ♪ ♪

As the words to this song suggest, I think that a Circle of Life affects almost everything, and that there is also a "Circle of Geography". Although change constantly occurs, there may also be recurrent trends. As I assume the role of President for 2008, I would like to both introduce myself and reflect on how I have personally seen Geography evolve over the last 50 years, both as a discipline and as the mission of the Los Angeles Geographical Society.

My vantage point is as a recycled or "Born Again" Geographer. Many years ago, I was first "turned on" to Geography by a wonderful woman instructor at a local community college who had seen the World and about which she freely shared by "showing" us Geography through her many slides and illustrations and stories. That seed was personally sown and harvested through earning Bachelor and Master degrees in Geography, respectively at a California State University and an out-of-state private university. My experience also included doctoral studies (not completed) at UCLA, while working as a city planning professional with the Los Angeles City Planning Department (which ended with retirement this February after a 34-year career). Although I have experienced all academic environments, ranging from shy young student at a community college to all types of big public and private universities, most of my career has been in an application of Geography in government, and I have remained somewhat distant and aloof from the many paradigm shifts that have occurred in academia. Nevertheless, after traveling to many countries, I "rediscovered" Geography a few years ago and now teach as adjunct faculty at El Camino College.

(President's Message continued on page 6)

Upcoming Events

May 9, 2008
8:00 p.m.

Student Presentation Night

Research by Geography
Students at local Colleges
and Universities in
Southern California

May 10, 2008

Historic Downtown Los Angeles Field Trip

(Details on page 8)

In This Issue

President's Message:
Page 1

Recent Lectures:
Page 2, 3, 4

Preview of the 2008-
2009 Lecture Series:
Page 5

2008-2009 Lecture
Series Schedule:
Page 9

April Lecture:

Murals of Belfast, Northern Ireland

By Irene Naesse, Orange Coast College
Based on notes submitted by Yeimi Ibarra,
El Camino College student

The murals of Northern Ireland are symbols that represent the past and the present views of the people. About 2,000 murals have been recorded since the 1960s, which contain some of the most known political murals in the World. Most of the murals in Northern Ireland represent either the Provisional Irish Republican Army or the Ulster Volunteer Force, and the people who have died because of the rivalry between the two groups. The murals are also political expressions that define territory. In addition, some murals are about commemorating events, mythology and other moments of Irish history.

Northern Ireland has been for many years the place of a violent and ethno-political conflict, between people who are Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists. Belfast is the largest city of Northern Ireland and here the first loyalist Unionist mural was painted. The Unionists often defined their territory by painting the Union Jack flag to embrace loyalty to the United Kingdom.

One of the most famous opposing Nationalist murals was painted in Londonderry, also simply known as "Derry" to many local people. This mural is located at what is known as the Free Derry Corner, where emblazoned are the words "You Are Now Entering Free Derry". It was originally intended as an area declared by the

Nationalists to be sovereign territory, free from the United Kingdom.

Many murals commemorate the death of civilians and combatants who were murdered as the result of civil unrest in Northern Ireland. There are murals about the 10 Irish prison strikers that died after they starved themselves, including Bobby Sands who during the strike was elected as a member of the United Kingdom Parliament. The murals have become memorials of the battle of the ex-prisoners. Other murals are about women fell who during the struggle of the people.

Much has changed over time since the modern rise of civil unrest during the 1970s. More recent murals continue the art form of political statements, but are now about issues not related to the civil unrest known as "The Troubles". An example is a mural showing U.S. President George W. Bush sucking oil from the Iraqis. The murals are an effective method by the artists to let others know how they feel about what is going on the World. There are murals created by artists who tell the story of the community, in hope for peace, while letting people today also learn about the mistakes of the past. Peace murals are becoming more important while murals depicting past civil unrest are being taken down and replaced.

At the end of the presentation, concluding thoughts included: Should the murals reflect what is happening in society? Should murals remain the same in order to let people reflect on the past? Murals are indeed important symbols of a community and the perspective of different groups. If they are positive or negative, it all lies in the eyes of the beholder.

March Lecture:

Peru: From the Amazon to the Andes

By Cristy Brenner, Saddleback College
Write up by Vienne Vu

At March's lecture, Cristy Brenner delighted us with her photos and stories from her trip to Peru. She experienced Peru's diverse landscapes as she traveled through the country.

She began her trip in the capital city, Lima. From there, she traveled to Iquitos – the largest city in the Peruvian rainforests. She shared with us the spectacular settings that she saw, as well as some not-so-spectacular lodging situations that she encountered (which included spidery outhouses and mosquito filled rooms). She also shared pictures of birds and mammals that the locals kept as pets. The audience favorite seemed to be the disturbingly adorable *capybara*. This giant mammal can weigh up to 140 pounds, making it the largest member of the rodent family!

From Iquitos, she took a somewhat questionable plane to Cusco. Here, she explored the Incan and Spanish influences of the city and indulged in some of the local fare, including *cuy* (guinea pig).

Cusco is the starting point for many who travel to Machu Picchu. From Cusco, she took the scenic Vistadome train to Aguas Calientes, a small town that sits roughly four miles from Machu Picchu, then took a bus up to the famous site. While in Machu Picchu, Cristy braved the steep, worn, ancient steps that zig-zag up the towering heights of Huayna Picchu (the mist-shrouded mountain in the background of the picture below).

After conquering Machu Picchu and other ancient ruins near the area, she headed off to Lake Titicaca, her last stop. Here, at the highest lake in the world, she interacted with the locals on floating reed islands and visited the town of Copacabana, famous for its Basilica.

Of course, her trip wouldn't be complete without bromeliad sightings and, lucky for her, she spotted more than a few everywhere she went.

Machu Picchu



February Lecture:

Bosnia, Slovenia, Croatia, and Montenegro

By Matt Ebner, El Camino College
Write up by Zia Salim

The February lecture was another chance to see Matt Ebner at his globe-trotting best. The audience was treated to a virtual tour of four independent countries formed after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia.

Slovenia was the first republic to separate in 1991. The country is nicknamed "Europe in Miniature" due to the fact that it has beautiful mountains, small towns, and coastal areas in a compact area. It contains the eastern-most extent of the Alps (known as the Julian Alps), complete with large glacial valleys dotted with small lakes called paternoster lakes because of their resemblance to rosary beads. While hiking in one of the gorges Matt was nearly killed by a softball sized rock that fell from above onto the ground right behind him! We are glad that the powers that be are watching out for him.

One of the interesting geomorphic features in Slovenia is Karst, which refers to limestone dissolved by water. This process results in the formation of caves and sinkholes. Matt showed pictures of Predjama castle, which is built into a cave, complete with secret exits and entrances. Parts of Slovenia were controlled by the Venetian Empire, which is why the architecture of the city of Piran (below) looks similar to Venice.

Croatia was the second country discussed. One of its distinctive features is a long coastline along the Adriatic, which in Matt's opinion is one of the two most beautiful in all of Europe. One of the stops in Croatia was Plitvice Lakes National Park (below), where the shallow lakes have a gorgeous turquoise color. Another stop was the medieval city of Dubrovnik, with its narrow streets and walled old city. Dubrovnik suffered at the hands of the Yugoslavian army but is now peaceful. In an effort to recapture the mood of a medieval city, vehicles are prohibited from entering the old town during the middle of the day.

Matt's lecture also included Montenegro (the newest country in the world) and Bosnia Herzegovina. Bosnia is a true crossroads location, with influences that came from every direction. The old Turkish city of Mostar was very atmospheric.



Preview of the 2008-2009 Lecture Series

By Gary Booher, President

The 2008-2009 Lecture Series will have "something old, something new, something borrowed...." The presentations will span the breadth of geographical inquiry, with regional, physical, and cultural topics well represented. Also, the full range of colleges and universities will be showcased, including a variety of local community colleges, California State Universities, and UCLA. In addition, our most popular presenters will return to favor us with another lecture about their recent travel or research.

The Lecture Series will begin in September with the return of Dr. Ray Sumner, Professor of Geography at Long Beach City College. She will give an encore of her recent presentation at the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers. She will speak about *Blue Nights in Corsica: Boundedness and Island Identity*, highlighting the island's geography in the context of ethnicity and historical and political geography.

October will feature Dr. Thomas Gillespie, a dynamic younger Professor of Geography at UCLA. I originally heard him present *The World's Most Endangered Forest* at the recent Annual Luncheon of the UCLA Friends of Geography and can promise he will be an exciting and engaging speaker with lots of slides and satellite imagery involving climate change, biogeography, and remote sensing about our evolving planet.

November will again feature the ever popular World traveler Matt Ebner, Professor of Geography at El Camino College.

He is truly a World-wide traveler who has visited over 130 countries and all continents. Matt will share another of his territorial conquests, accentuated by his award-winning photography, in showing us *Madagascar & Mauritius*. Matt is always a delight with his photography, insight and stories.

The Annual Banquet on December 12 will feature an expert on an important place that is seldom seen at the LA Geographical Society. Dr. Dmitrii Sidorov, a Professor of Geography at California State University at Long Beach, is an urban and political geographer who is also native to Russia. His presentation on *Moscow: Then and Now* will highlight the city's urban geography and the changes that have occurred before and after the end of the Soviet period. I am sure that we will have lots of questions for him about this dynamic World city.

The recurring "Weather Month" has been moved this year to February, when Jeff Brown will return with a different presentation about *La Niña & the Wild Weather of 2008*. Jeff continues to provide interesting and practical information about the most recent weather trends. Jeff is a Consultant for Fritz Coleman at KNBC/Universal and he anticipates finishing his Master of Arts from California State University at Los Angeles prior to his next presentation.

March will feature another perennial as Cristy Brenner will show us the *"Lost World" of the Venezuelan Tepuis*. Cristy Brenner is a Professor of Geography at Saddleback College and is truly the heart and spine of the LA Geographical Society for our

(Preview of Lecture Series continued on page 6)

(Preview of Lecture Series continued from page 5)

dedicated returning audience over many years. Her presentation will provide her unique botanical insight into the biogeography of this isolated region known for its "Islands in the Sky".

April will be a brand new adventure with another younger and newer faculty from California State University at Northridge. Dr. Ron Davidson, known for his research on the perception of public space in Los Angeles, and who previously studied under Yi-Fu Tuan, will favor us with an exciting journey *From Greek Agora to Universal's "Citywalk": The Decline of Public Space*. Dr. Davidson is a popular professor at CSUN and is sure to enlighten us about public space in the urban environment.

The month of May will close the year when we return again to our students to hear them present their research done while studying Geography at local universities in Southern California. The evening will again be a "mini-conference" with multiple rooms and simultaneous 20-minute presentations, posters, and maps. Bring good walking shoes, as the evening should again provide the latest breadth and depth of geographical research by current university students.

There you have it all. The 2008-2009 Lecture Series of the Los Angeles Geographical Society features the breadth and range of geographical research at many local universities, and will show us many places seldom visited or academically explored. See you all next year for an exciting journey to further explore our World.

Newsletter Photo Credits:
Page 2: Zia Salim
Page 3: Matt Ebner

(President's Message continued from page 1)

So much has changed, and yet some things may not change all that much. When I began, Geography was squarely in the area studies tradition of studying place, as also influenced by both the earth science and man-land relationship traditions. The spatial tradition had not yet really hit the classroom by the time I was awarded a B.A. degree in 1970. During later degree study, the winds of environmental analysis, environmental perception, spatial analysis and modeling, and the Marxian dialectic were among the complementary and competing forces, while computer cartography and GIS were still not even a gleam in anyone's eye. And of course other paradigms later emerged and enriched the discipline, such as qualitative humanistic social science, feminism, post-feminism, post-modernism, and more. However, although much has changed, some of the current research seems somehow reminiscent of the original core fundamental interests of studying people and place.

All of this adds to the current questions that are often asked regarding the Los Angeles Geographical Society. What is the Mission and Role of the LA Geographical Society after over 50 years of spreading geographical knowledge in Southern California? And more critically, is there still a need for the LA Geographical Society? Society operations have evolved from being initially founded by geographers at UCLA and USC, later administered by professors from various CSU universities, and most recently having a leadership core of instructors from local community colleges and graduate students at CSU universities. A dedicated yet aging core audience has

(President's Message continued on page 7)

(*President's Message* continued from page 6)

sustained the monthly lectures, complemented by very young students from local community colleges. Further, there are currently additional practical circumstances of distance (and traffic) and technology that pose new challenges or opportunities for the Society.

So "Whose Geography in the 21st Century?" becomes a valid question as we contemplate whether there is still a need for the LA Geographical Society. I would offer that there is still a clearly demonstrated need for the Society in Los Angeles and Southern California as one of the major urban centers of the World. If nothing else, there is still a need to introduce and "turn on" students to Geography, just as that glorious woman did so effectively for me so many years ago at LA Harbor College. There is still a need to "show" geography and the diversity and complexity of the World in which we live. The Los Angeles Geographical Society has continued to feature "illustrated lectures" for over 50 years and has brought Geography to students, faculty, and the general public.

Nevertheless, I sense a widening distance between the LA Geographical Society and the many academic institutions at which so many of us furthered our knowledge in Geography. Current researchers may now be less interested in the monthly lectures due to a possible perception that they are little more than "Travelogues" that may not seriously consider more theoretical inquiry. As a "Born Again" Geographer I am sensitive to that chasm and feel that there may be "common ground" for everyone. Perhaps it is still possible to "show" geography and "turn on" students and general audience through presenting more serious research

in a manner that is aimed at a broader audience, thereby initially stimulating interest for the neophyte while satisfying the deeper hunger of advanced students and faculty. The answer then becomes not "what" is presented, but "how" a topic is presented. Almost any topic can be presented in an engaging manner with pictures, illustrations, stories, examples and all the tools that a true teacher uses to engage and develop his or her students. Geography is also storytelling and it is most exciting when told and shown well.

Therefore, I am a believer in the "big tent" school of Geography being for everyone. I have attempted to cross some boundaries in the consideration of topics and invitation of presenters for the 2008-2009 Lecture Series, in inviting both teachers and advanced researchers from the entire spectrum of colleges and universities, while staying true to the continuing role of the LA Geographical Society to spread geographical knowledge to the widest possible audience. Although this new "stretching" beyond former boundaries may result in some presentations being less interesting for some individuals, there is also a great diversity that may interest others. We live in a diverse and complex World and I hope you will also enjoy a geographical journey with us during the next presentation year.

"Whose Geography for the 21st Century?" I may be older but perhaps I too can be new again. And I invite everyone to join us, as we together advance geographical knowledge in Southern California. May our journey continue in the 21st Century to new vistas of our planet and its people.

Historic Downtown Los Angeles Field Trip

Saturday, May 10, 2008

\$10 – General
\$5 – LAGS Members
\$5 – Students with ID

Tour by Richard Raskoff

Meet at Red Line Stations:
11:00 a.m. – North Hollywood OR
11:30 a.m. – Union Station

The Field Trip will be a walking tour of three miles, plus using the subway several times. Bring approximately \$10.00 for lunch at Philippe's which will be our first stop. Bring camera, bottled water, back pack, hat, sun glasses, and flashlight. There will be several bathroom stops.



Los Angeles Geographical Society

Free public lectures on geographical topics are offered once a month from September through May (except for January). Invited guest speakers, featuring students and faculty, present research topics, travelogues, and other interesting geographical topics from the U.S. and around the World.

Lectures are usually held on the first Friday of each month at 8:00 PM in Franklin Hall, Room 101, at Los Angeles City College.

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