



The future AT YOUR fingertips

Begin your physical and intellectual adventures at the touch of a button with our ever-expanding database of Society-funded expedition and fieldwork reports, the most up-to-date resources for researchers and schools, as well as unique ideas for the inquisitively minded traveller

THE SOCIETY IS committed to advancing geographical knowledge about the most important changes taking place in our world right now and sharing it with people, wherever they live. Whether that means discovering the polar regions through the first-hand experiences of individuals who live and work there; finding out more about the local, national and global implications of climate change; gaining access to the latest research from leading academics; or learning from the reports of Society-funded fieldwork and scientific expeditions, you can do it all online using our growing database of digital resources.

New for 2010 is Discovering the Arctic, an interactive educational website created by the Society in partnership with the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Antarctic Survey, and the Scottish Association for Marine Science. The site encourages visitors to consider what life is like for the inhabitants of some of the northernmost communities on the planet.

Combining vibrant photography and personal videos with downloadable activity packs and games that take you on a guided

tour across the 'end of the Earth', it builds on the success of its award-winning sister site for schools, Discovering Antarctica.

'The brilliant thing about Discovering the Arctic is that it's so up to date,' says Peter Mather, head of geography at Greenford High School in Southall, Middlesex. 'It allows teachers to demonstrate to pupils exactly what's happening in the Arctic today. This has really helped my class visualise the area's complexities and its important relationships with the rest of the world.'

Featuring commentaries from local residents such as Nancy, from Canada's Nunavut territory, Discovering the Arctic investigates how climate change affects the area's environments, indigenous people and wildlife; and explains how scientists have used the International Polar Year (2007-08) as an opportunity to examine the international impact of changes to shipping, governance and the exploitation of the region's resources.

'Climate change has to be understood both as a physical occurrence and as an idea that is changing society and the way people think of the future,' says Professor Mike Hulme,

editor-in-chief of *WIREs Climate Change*, another unique online resource launched by the Society this year. 'Researchers have to understand and illuminate for people the ways in which different aspects of this phenomenon are shaping each other.'

With contributions from physical and life scientists, geographers, economists, sociologists and policy-makers, *WIREs Climate Change* is an interdisciplinary journal that brings together a range of experts to provide a new forum for discussion on every aspect of climate change research. The first of two new collaborations between the Society and the Royal Meteorological Society, *WIREs Climate Change*, which is published by Wiley, will be joined online later this year by Climate4Classrooms, which is aimed at a younger audience and has been produced in association with the British Council.

Climate4Classrooms has been developed with climate scientists using data from the latest research, including that from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It explores the latest ideas about how climate change will affect different parts of China, Indonesia, Mexico and the UK, allowing young people to link up with their peers overseas to think about their shared futures.

With other online projects, such as Hidden Journeys – a series of interactive journeys that explore the fascinating places, people and environments that exist below popular international flight paths – about to take off, and new reports being added to the fieldwork and expeditions databases on a regular basis, the Society's web activities will be covering more ground than ever this year.

'The Society's online presence is integral to widening national and international participation in our activities,' says RGS-IBG director Dr Rita Gardner. 'Through the ongoing development of these rich web resources and databases, containing thousands of reports from projects we've supported over many years, we hope to connect people of all ages and interests in their desire to investigate and learn more about our rapidly changing world.'

— THE WORLD ON THE WEB —

www.rgs.org/expeditionreports
www.climate4classrooms.org
www.discoveringthearctic.org.uk
www.discoveringantarctica.org
<http://wires.wiley.com/climatechange>

Taking satellite technology to Africa

EVERY YEAR, THE RGS-IBG supports more than 80 geographical fieldwork and scientific expedition projects in all seven continents. For many of these, an important aspect is the involvement of scientists from the host countries and the provision of training and opportunities to local, early-career researchers.

With funding from the Society and a little help from some sturdy rickshaws, two scientists from the University of Bath's Department of Biology and Biochemistry have set up a specialist research laboratory in Madagascar, where they train local students in the use of the latest satellite technology for monitoring and protecting their environment.

Together with researchers from the University of Cardiff, Dr Peter Long and Professor Tamás Székely have spent several years studying the conservation of wetlands in Madagascar as part of a long-term project supported by the Leverhulme Trust. They added a new dimension to their work when they received the Society's 2009 Ralph Brown Expedition Award to map the benefits

provided by these wetlands in order to evaluate how they're likely to change in the future.

As part of their efforts to build capacity in the local community for the area's future conservation, they transformed a previously empty room at the University of Toliara into a geographical information science (GIS) lab, providing laptops, internet access and GPS receivers to teach local students how to analyse satellite images. 'We noticed that graduates have quite an old-fashioned education here,' Peter says. 'They don't develop the transferable skills they need to work in environmental-impact jobs such as park management, geographical planning and the mining industry, which means that companies end up employing foreign workers instead.'

Together with their colleagues in Toliara, Peter and Tamás have been running workshops to teach students these specialist skills, preparing them for the careers they really want to do in a country where, for many, scientific fieldwork costs are prohibitively expensive.

'It has been a brilliant opportunity for me to learn how to perform the latest GIS analysis, get into the field with all the equipment I need and improve my English by working so closely with British researchers', says post-graduate Kafosay Felestin, who was funded by the University of Bath to spend two months conducting fieldwork in the lower Mangoky region in order to understand how rural people use the wetlands.

Kafosay now hopes to undertake a PhD on the conservation of wetlands in Madagascar, and feels that the new skills he has learned have really helped him towards this goal. 'I now know how to plan scientific research and compete for grant funding from international agencies,' he says.

In order to create the lab, which initially didn't have any furniture or even a door, let alone internet access, the team had to transport all of the books, computers, printers and kit they needed using rickshaws. 'It was certainly a challenge at the start, but it's great to be leaving the legacy of a small library, laptops and field equipment so that, in future, Toliara students will be able to do high-quality field research in their local environment,' Peter says.

He's confident that the project has given valuable training to those with whom they worked. 'The local students' perspectives are a very valuable aspect of our research. It's possible to make a real difference to higher education in Madagascar by taking the time to understand their needs.'

■ The Society's Ralph Brown Expedition Award is a single annual grant worth up to £15,000, offered to the leader of a project working in a marine or wetland environment that should be of value to the host country and, where possible, the local community. This includes the study of coral reefs, rivers, lakes and shallow seas. Applicants must be fellows or members of the Society, but can be from any nation.

For more information about this and the range of other funding opportunities offered by the Society, visit www.rgs.org/grants



'It's possible to make a real difference to higher education in Madagascar by taking the time to understand their needs'

Join the SOCIETY get the MAGAZINE

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) promotes enjoyment and understanding of our world. Membership is open to all. You may use geography in your profession, have a thirst for geographical knowledge or a passion for travel. *Geographical* is the Society's magazine and is available as part of membership. To find out more, call the Membership Office on 020 7591 3080

