

# Annual Conference 2001

## Welcome from the chair of conference

**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning

The Department of Geographical Sciences and the University of Plymouth welcomes all delegates and guests to the Royal Geography Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) annual conference, the first time this meeting has taken place in Plymouth.

Geography has formed part of higher education provision in Plymouth since 1969 and was initially involved in teaching students who were registered for BSc and BA University of London External degrees. Like other former Polytechnics, expansion was rapid throughout the 1970s and Plymouth was soon designing and delivering its own purpose-built geography degree programmes initially under the stewardship of the Council for National Academic Awards, but later with degree awarding powers in its own right. Full departmental status was achieved in 1980 and Geography at Plymouth is now one of the largest centres of higher education in the geographical sciences in the UK, with over 500 undergraduates, 180 PhD students, 4 post-doctoral research fellows and a growing number of masters degree students. There are twenty-seven full academic staff covering a very broad range of the discipline and eleven specialist computing, cartographic and physical geography technicians servicing a suite of newly-refurbished laboratory facilities. Research in the Department is centred in four groups: Quaternary environments, Biogeography and environmental management, Developing areas and European social and economic change. Plymouth also hosts the National Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences.

The 2001 Annual Conference chose two themes: **Risk and Innovation** and **Society and the Sea** and many of the papers that have been put together by the convenors working on behalf of the RGS-IBG research and study groups reflect these broad topics. The programme is a very full one, with between eleven and fourteen parallel lecture sessions on each of the main days, interspersed with plenary and guest lecture slots together with a number of receptions. As always, with a programme as complex as this, there will be minor changes to the running order of lectures as we respond to the inevitable 'hiccups' – whatever these may be! Programme alterations and updates will be posted daily on information boards near to the registration desk in the Sherwell Centre foyer.

An addition to the 'standard' programme this year is the inclusion of a Progress in Physical Geography lecture, which some what unfortunately, has had to be placed in a 'parallel' guest lecture slot with the Antipode lecture due to a complication in the travelling arrangements of one of the speakers.

Another venture has been out intention to get all the abstracts available on the conference website. This was not meant to minimise the value of the conference handbook, but an attempt to provide a fuller information base to enabled detailed planning and to help you to 'navigate' your way through the conference sessions before arrival. We trust you have found this useful, despite the problems that some seem to face in accessing the depths of the electronic universe!

This is also the first time that conference accommodation has been totally in hotels and we hope that many delegates will find this satisfactory. It was a recognition that many attending these annual conferences disliked university halls, which can so often be cold and rather stark places, despite their relative economy. However, we had no option but to use hotels as no rooms in halls were available. All students using the University of Plymouth residences have year-long contracts. I know that this will not suit all tastes, but a brisk walk back to your hotel in the fresh January air will no doubt blow the cobwebs away!

It will come as no surprise to many that I have been 'living' with conference organisation for the best part of two years. Despite perceptions to the contrary, it has actually been a most enjoyable experience and I feel I've got to know a very large section of the geography community, if only by email. I certainly look forward to meeting many of you during the conference. Actually, the role of Local Secretary is impossible without support, particularly from previous organisers but especially from Lorraine Craig and the Research and Higher Education Division at RGS-IBG in London. They provide the knowledge base and continuity whilst the new recruits to the role of conference secretary make their way up the learning curve. Help also comes from more local sources and I am indebted to the hard work and support given

by my organising committee (which has now swelled to include most members of my department); to the University of Plymouth conference and hospitality administrators and to the Faculty of Technology and Science conference unit who have so ably handled general arrangements and booking/registration matters. Finally, may I thank you all for coming to the conference – its success depends entirely on your support. See you in Belfast in 2002, I hope.

*Peter Sims*  
*Local Secretary, RGS-IBG Annual Conference*  
*Plymouth 2001*