

● Postgraduate awards - Supporting research

As featured in the Summer 2011 Bulletin

A boat ride of 30 minutes separates postgraduate Tim Lane – recipient of one of the Society’s Postgraduate Research Awards - and his team of two researchers from the nearest village of just 50 people. They are gathering data on Greenland’s Uummannaq ice stream system when the silence is broken by a sound as explosive as a gunshot. An iceberg has just calved away and its dramatic rupturing echoes back and forth across the fjord. It may catch you off guard the first time you hear it, but it is a sound the team from Durham University have got used to as they spend an isolated month camping in the remote landscapes of south west Greenland.

Tim’s work will reveal the historical advance and retreat of the ice sheet and his findings will place recent changes in ice coverage and also sea level change in perspective. “Once we see how things changed over a longer time period, we can start assessing the causes and apply this analysis to the current retreat of ice,” Tim explains.



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The work is physically demanding and Tim and his colleagues are working tirelessly to gather data. Raising the necessary funds to enable this research to go ahead can be as challenging as carrying out the fieldwork. The project would not have gone ahead without funding from the Society’s Postgraduate Awards, generously supported by an individual donor. Now into its third year, the awards have filled an important niche in the funding of fieldwork across the breadth of geography and

have already supported more than 20 students on projects that tackle key geographical issues and challenges facing the world today.

The Society offers eight awards of £2,000 annually for PhD students undertaking fieldwork and/or data collection in the UK and overseas. They are awarded equally over three areas of study: society and economy; conservation and sustainability; and the physical environment. From indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon to the threat of natural hazards in western Sumatra, these awards, offered to individuals, fund exciting new studies and help researchers establish themselves in their particular field.

Due to report back in 2011, the projects supported last year encompass a diverse range of research topics. Sarah Owen at the University of Leicester examined the geological origins of sugar loaf peaks in eastern Brazil. Meanwhile, Leander Kandilige from Oxford University explored the Ghanaian Diaspora in the UK, and Anna Muir from the University of Glasgow investigated the impact of environmental change on amphibians in the Scottish Highlands.



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The Postgraduate Research Awards (next deadline 25 November) are just one part of the Society's grants programme. In 2010, the Society awarded more than £190,000 to enable more than 90 leading field research projects to take place. Teachers, senior researchers, undergraduates and postgraduates as well as independent travellers were all supported to head out into the field from Borneo to Brazil, Northern Tibet to South Africa.

For all grant deadlines see www.rgs.org/Grants