

Annual Conference 2015

Welcome from the chair of conference

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Advancing geography
and geographical learning

Welcome to the RGS-IBG conference, and to Exeter! It is a real privilege to serve as the 2015 Conference Chair. One of the early pleasures was the opportunity to select a theme for the conference. In '*Geographies of the Anthropocene*' I hoped to have selected a theme that plays to the unique strengths of our discipline in combining the insights, skills and perspectives of geographers working across the spectrum of human and physical geography, and to bring the diversity of interdisciplinary debates and communities with which they engage to the fore, not least through the range of invited plenary speakers addressing the theme from many different perspectives. I am delighted that this ambition has born fruit in the rich programme that has taken shape around this theme and the intellectual enthusiasms and energies across the geographical community that have embraced it in such imaginative ways. I am particularly pleased to welcome the participation of the British Society for Geomorphology and the deeper engagement of natural scientists that their involvement represents.

The Anthropocene has been claimed to herald a new geological epoch in which human society is acknowledged as having become the greatest force shaping planet Earth. Although its recognition as a new age in geological history remains provisional, the idea of the Anthropocene has already captured the public imagination and that of scientists, social scientists and humanities scholars variously advancing new projects, agendas and critiques in its wake. For example, it has given rise to the 'post-disciplinary' ambitions of an Earth Systems Science that presents the integrative role of geography with new challenges; it marks a radical geo-political moment in which the Earth shapes new concerns and forms of public engaged in the contestation of planetary governance; and it heralds new demands on our habits of thought in which 'post-human' or 'more-than-human' modes of theorising and analysis are stretching familiar models of historical, cultural and economic analysis in new directions.

The conference opens on Tuesday evening with an opening plenary which brings together two leading scholars, Will Steffen and Kathy Willis. They will consider **the Anthropocene in terms of 'Towards a bright future or global collapse? and '4 degrees and beyond – what does this mean for biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides to humankind?'**. A panel will discuss these papers in session 2 (late morning) on Wednesday. The lunchtime Chair's plenary lectures that then follow are 'Feral geographies: life in capitalist ruins (Anna Tsing; Wednesday); 'Anthropocene or Anglocene? Debating Cause and Consequence in the Great Climacteric (Amita Baviskar, Thursday); and 'After Sexuality: Desert, Animist, Virus: Figures of Geontopower' (Elizabeth Povinelli, Friday). For each plenary lecture a panel discussion will follow. The Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers lecture this year will be given by Noel Castree 'Geographers and the discourse of an Earth transformed: influencing the intellectual weather or changing the intellectual climate?' These, though, are just a selection of highlights – we are expecting more than 1200 participants who will contribute to nearly 300 individual panels and sessions. It will be here, in these smaller and more intimate sessions, where interesting themes will be explored and debated.

I would like to thank all those involved in the organisation of the conference, particularly Sarah Evans and Stephanie Wyse, Eilidh Reed and Catherine Souch, but also all others at the RGS-IBG and at the University of Exeter who have been working so hard to arrange the event and ensure it runs smoothly. In addition, I am particularly grateful to all of you who have put in the work to convene and/or chair sessions, encourage presenters, develop displays, and more beyond. I wish all of you and all participants a stimulating and enjoyable conference.

Sarah Whatmore, University of Oxford
Chair of the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2015