

# Annual Conference 2003

## Welcome from the chair of conference

**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning

We extend a warm welcome to the delegates attending the first RGS-IBG Annual Conference to be held at the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British geographers, at Kensington Gore, London, in September 2003.

It is ten years since the Annual Conference was last held in London. Royal Holloway College hosted it in January 1993 since when the Conference has perambulated around the country ending up last years in Belfast. By 2000 it was clear that the traditional model, which had served the IBG and the RGS-IBG well over many years, was in need of a re-think. University departments were increasingly hesitant about taking on the very significant extra administrative load and the January slot seemed less and less attractive, especially when compounded with uncertainties about weather and transport.

Following detailed consultation with the Research Groups, the Research Committee of the RGS-IBG agreed to organise the 2003 Conference through the Research and Higher Education Office and to host the Conference in early September in the RGS-IBG's newly re-furbished accommodation in Kensington. Alas, as the Director explains in the accompanying welcome, the garden will still be a building site during conference. Well into the planning process a delay in commencing the refurbishment was triggered – fluvial geomorphology struck in the presence of a hitherto unknown old river course beneath the building! As a result of this, whilst much of the new accommodation will be available, the Conference has had to spill over into nearby Imperial College.

Having chanted the timing and the organisation of the Annual Conference, the Planning Committee decided to be even bolder and has introduced many new elements in this year's programme. The number of plenary sessions has increased and plenaries now occupy all the pre- and after lunch sessions enabling us to explore themes that lie at or across more specialist agendas. These plenaries have also been used to introduce more speakers who are not academic geographers into the heart of the programme. It is hoped that this will stimulate more debate within and across the discipline and with those who use geography. We have also sought to timetable parallel Research Group sessions alongside relevant plenaries to give a stronger thematic identity for each day.

The theme of the Conference is *Geography, Serving Society and the Environment*, and we hope that by holding the meeting in London and explicitly inviting many non-academics and non-geographers to join us, we can trigger a debate on the value of geography not only within the academy but also further afield in terms of policy and public affairs. The London venue certainly gives us an opportunity to showcase the best of British geography to a critical and influential audience. Ready access to London from abroad has also helped to make this a more international conference. Registrations to date from Europe and North America already suggest a much higher attendance this year than before. The Planning Committee certainly sees this Annual Conference as the first in a series which will strive to be truly international in scope.

It will be clear to you by now that 2003 is a pilot year for the Annual Conference. We have tried many new ideas realising that some will work better than others:

- Plenary sessions running across the middle of each day's programme
- Inclusion of more non-academics and non-geographers in the programme
- 24-hour registration to facilitate cheaper travelling for delegates
- Accommodation largely based in hotels with cheaper up-market hotel types for those who wish to make use of it
- 20 parallel sessions planned at any one time and over 750 individual presentations
- A new style Conference Handbook with abstracts now available on CD but with facilities to interrogate the CD at the conference

There will be plenty of opportunities to talk about what works and what hasn't worked. Please let us have your feedback. If the sun shines, we might even see some networking and lunches moving into Hyde Park. Now that would be a first!

We hope that you will enjoy the three day event and leave exhausted, but enriched. Having seen the new accommodation and facilities, we hope you will be enthusiastic to come back to the RGS-IBG in London to support the heart of your discipline.

*Alan Werrity (Chair of Conference)*

*Lorrain Craig (Executive Secretary to the Conference)*