



## Learning Together: UW-UBC Workshop

By Gerry Pratt



*Attentive attendees at the inaugural UBC-UW PhD Proposal Workshop.*

On Friday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, thirteen of us (Jamie Peck and Gerry Pratt, and 11 PhD students) traveled to the San Juan Islands, to the University of Washington Friday Harbor Laboratories for the first UBC-UW PhD Proposal Workshop. Eleven PhD students from UBC : Sarah Brown, Lachlan Barber , Dawn Hoogeveen, Yolande Pottie-Sherman, Noah Quastel, Mark Lawrence Santiago, Elliot Siemiatycki, Michael Smith, Lindsay Turner, Tom Woodsworth and Sarah Zell, joined 2 faculty and 8 PhD students from University of Washington to spend the weekend reflecting upon and/or refining their research proposals. Jamie Peck and Steve Herbert organised several plenary sessions to get us thinking about methods and ethics, but much of the work was done in small groups of 5-6, in which we worked intensively on each student's research proposal/project. We worked hard, but there was time to play as well; the clouds broke for

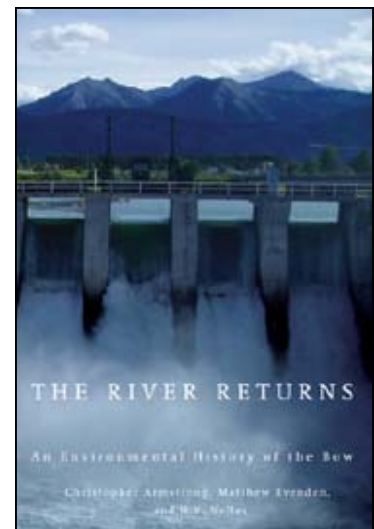
a couple of hours on Saturday afternoon and we headed out in small groups, to hike or use the facility's row boats. It was a great opportunity to get to know our colleagues at UW (and even to get to know each other!), and the plan is to repeat this workshop on an annual basis, extending the partnership to Simon Fraser University. Thanks so much to Jamie Peck for initiating this new venture.

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## New Book by Matthew Evenden

Millions of tourists and residents know the Bow River as it tumbles through Banff's spectacular scenery or carves an elegant arc through the city of Calgary. Fewer people know the Bow as a heavily engineered, hard-working river. Alberta's iconic river has been dammed

and plumbed, made to spin hydro-electric turbines, and used to cleanse Calgary. Artificial lakes in the mountains rearrange its flow; downstream weirs and ditches divert it to irrigate the parched prairie. Far from being wild, the Bow is now very much a human product: its fish are as manufactured as its altered flow, changed water quality, and newly stabilized and forested banks. *The River Returns* brings the story of the Bow River's transformation full circle through an exploration of the recent revolution in environmental thinking and regulation that has led to new limits on what might be done with and to the river. Rivers have been studied from many perspectives, but too often the relationship between nature and people, between rivers and the cultures that have grown up beside them, have been separated. *The River Returns* illuminates the ways in which humans, both inadvertently and consciously, have interacted with nature to make the Bow.



## Geography in Practice

By Jessi Lehman



*Tamil fisherman participates in a concept mapping activity on ocean changes.*

When I arrived in Vancouver to start my MA in August 2008, I was occupied with exploring my new home but also enraptured with a very different place. I dreamed every day of Ghana, of my friends in far-flung rural communities, bowls of spicy groundnut stew, and falling asleep under an African sky strewn with stars. I planned to return there for my fieldwork, where I had done undergraduate research over four field seasons.

In Vancouver, I met with whomever I could to discuss my interest in the association between environment and displacement in semi-arid West Africa. In conversation with Dr. Jennifer Hyndman, then of Simon Fraser University, I began to consider the implications of this relationship in a different context: eastern Sri Lanka, a region heavily affected by the 2004 tsunami and the 30-year conflict that had just drawn to a tenuous and controversial end, and threatened by environmental degradation. After a generous offer of support from Dr. Hyndman, and with a great deal of trepidation and excitement, I bought a plane ticket for Sri Lanka.

I didn't get what I'd been dreaming of, instead I got checkpoints. Endless

checkpoints where men with machine guns unzipped my luggage, examined my passport, and enquired into my purpose. I got a nation that can best be described as war-weary. I got the unease of hearing firecrackers many nights and wondering if they were gunshots.

But I also got incredibly lucky. With the (mostly remote) support of an amazing multinational group of professors, I got to find my feet in an utterly fascinating research setting, at a transitional time for a volatile nation. And I got spicy fresh seafood curries, gorgeous beaches, and dozens of new friends who shared their awe-inspiring stories with me. There were times when, seated in the sand with the fishermen with whom I worked, drinking strong sweet black tea and watching the setting sun turn the ocean a million shades of pink and blue, that I felt that life couldn't get much better.

Of course, it wasn't all beaches, nor was it all security hijinks – there were more traditional elements of research. In eastern Sri Lanka, I saw the relationship between environment and displacement as related to three major “frames” of interest: conflict, the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, and environmental change, especially as a consequence of climate change. Rather than study each of these things in their totality, I chose to approach them by looking at the ways they intersect; it doesn't take much time in Sri Lanka to realize that no one experiences any one of these effects in the absence of the others. I tried to stay close to these experiences throughout my research. Taking the ocean as an active entity that shapes and is shaped by these “frames,” I conducted semi-structured interviews with local fishermen and women about their experiences, their embodiment of the ocean,

and how they understand and deal with changes to do with the ocean and their relationship to it. Additionally, at the crux of my research was a concept mapping exercise where we explored some of these topics in a visual and collaborative manner. I also interviewed available government agents and NGO officers, went out on fishing boats, explored coral reefs, spoke with other researchers, hung out in NGO offices, visited a mangrove plantation, and shared countless cups of tea.

Now, back in Vancouver, I wrestle with the answers that I found, and even more with the questions, the silences, the discontinuities, the parts that still floor me with their depth and difficulty. I struggle with how to tell their stories, and in



*Ad hoc research team consisting of Tamil interpreter, NGO worker, local fishermen, and Jessi on a boat trip to explore fishing sites and coral*

doing so how to tell my story. In Sri Lanka I learned with my whole body, with all my senses, in moments when I was planning to learn but also in the in-between times. How do I translate this knowledge into academic language that will help me earn a degree? I think these are issues that many geographers face when they return from the field. To me, continuing to grapple with the messiness of the world and our frequent inadequacy in facing it as we'd like helps to make our discipline relevant and worthwhile. I am honoured to have had the opportunity to try to find my way.

## Feature Geographer: Andreas Christen

**Hails from:** I grew up and attended University in Switzerland. Before coming to UBC in 2006, I worked and lived in Berlin, Germany.

**Found Geography:** Firstly, during my childhood, I spent a lot of time outdoors, playing in my parent's forest or exploring the diverse landscape in and around our village. I am an observer, and I was always fascinated to read landscape as a result of nature, society, and technology and observe how it transforms constantly. Secondly, I love studying maps and building plans (although I know, this is not a popular statement as a geographer...). Thirdly, I was gifted with several chemists in my family who taught me scientific thinking and reasoning, passed on the belief in technological progress and a fascination for theoretical discussions and experimentation. As with most young people, I was unable to merge all my influences and interests in a single undergraduate degree, and after evaluating organic chemistry, architecture, and urban planning I decided to pursue a degree in Geography as it covered most of my interests. I had great mentors who enthusiastically taught me environmental chemistry, physics, and climatology and helped me discover urban climatology, which allowed me to bring together my fascination for experimentation with my interest in basic science and the history and design of cities.

**Strangest Geography experience:** A few years back, I was travelling home in a train with a Geography colleague from a conference in Italy. Shortly after leaving the terminal, I thought that the sun's position relative to the direction we were heading was slightly off, which led us to verify our frame of reference using a compass, and indeed the compass confirmed that we were traveling consistently N rather than the expected NW. A long scientific dispute started regarding



why the compass must be wrong as the train acts as a 'Faraday cage', which distracted the discussion to more fundamental topics of classic physics. Of course, after a full two hours we realized that we had jumped on the wrong train! The concerning part, however, was that we were both truly puzzled as to why neither of us had raised any concerns about this simple explanation before or asked other passengers. It was a good lesson for a scientist: gathering data is straightforward, as is being distracted, but putting your analysis in a context and drawing the right conclusions is the true challenge.

**Current research:** I consider myself an 'experimental micrometeorologist', with a strong interest in methodology applied to quantify turbulent exchange processes between land-surfaces and the atmosphere. In particular, I measure, analyze and model exchange of greenhouse gases, energy and water between cities and the atmosphere. My research group at UBC Geography establishes long-term measurements of greenhouse gas emissions between selected urban residential neighborhoods and the atmosphere, using flux measurements on towers, isotopic analysis, and collaboration with researchers in related fields (urban planning, urban climatology, remote sensing, weather forecasting, dispersion modeling). I am also interested in microclimates and biogeochemical cycling of

forests and am involved in research on exchange and dispersion processes in forest canopies.

**Favorite research destination:** Micro-meteorological field sites are typically unattractive and 'boring', as we look for conditions to simplify complex systems through experimental design. Because we cannot control the atmosphere, we must choose surface conditions and the timing of experiments to gain certain control over the experiment. If it comes to experimental design, my colleagues know that I am a purist. For example, when we were in search for a urban climate research site for a two-day experiment with a thermal scanner last summer, I evaluated hundreds of single-family home residential street-canyons in South-East Vancouver, to find one that fulfilled my criteria, which had 'no trees', flat terrain, short-grass on either side, and all identical Vancouver-Specials neatly arrayed on either side of the street. After the set-up of our instruments, a resident approached, asking why we had chosen her street, stating that 'this is an exceptionally untypical street for Vancouver...' Places I enjoyed working in the past include field campaigns in the Swiss Alps, Italy and Portugal. In particular, as rumors say, the location of at least one Italian field experiment was heavily biased based on the site proximity to a restaurant where you can have unbelievable dinners.

**Little known fact:** I love graphic design, art and photography, and I like to conceptualize and communicate information in neat and attractively drawn figures. This is based on my past when, as a student, I worked as a graphic designer and designed logos for small companies, software, orchestra, products etc. to secure income. I further worked as director of photography in a Swiss documentary on sustainable water resources and treatment.

## Sabbatical Stories: Brian Klinkenberg

Sabbatical years are always intriguing, they can mean travel, exploring new research topics, and finalizing works in progress. My sabbatical year was focused more on regional travels than exotic destinations, and allowed the wrapping up of some ongoing projects and expansion of existing ones. Part of my sabbatical year was focused on furthering my research in the area of medical geography, including the spread and prevalence of *Cryptococcus gattii* in British Columbia (a fungal pathogen) and predicting where West Nile virus (WNV) would appear in BC (both new and technically invasive species). In August 2009, WNV did appear in BC, in the locations we predicted--prompting warnings by the BCCDC to avoid mosquitoes in those areas. As well, research on the relation between changes to the Okanagan landscape and the presence of ticks continued.

I also spent time exploring regional biogeography. I was particularly interested in elevation-dependent variations in flowering times and lengths of flowering times for invasive species. This meant a lot of time spent exploring parts of Mount Baker to document flowering periods. In 2008 persistent snow cover at 5000 feet on Mt. Baker meant many summer flowering species had delayed seed production and seed set, and by August it was apparent

that some species and individuals at these elevations would not flower or reproduce. Variation in flowering times, and the built-in plasticity of species, has implications for species persistence and distributional shifts as the climate changes.

I also spent time documenting invasive plant populations in the Okanagan (and elsewhere), work which is tied to our current GEOIDE grant. Through this grant we are looking at predicting invasive plant species spread in the Okanagan, as well as ways to improve public participation in data gathering. The use of volunteered geographic information (VGI) is playing an increasingly important role in biodiversity studies and conservation biology, and we aim to encourage and expand this sort of data gathering. The GEOIDE work ties into the information we provide on E-Flora BC, where updated maps of plant species distributions, and new location reports, are showing range expansion of some species. One concern with invasive species relates to their extended flowering times, and the impacts this could have on native pollinators, which are 'enticed' to remain active much longer than they would be otherwise, and are therefore subject to succumbing to climatic conditions that they normally would not be exposed to (e.g., freezing weather). On E-Flora BC we are developing animated



*Yucca and rock formations in Sonoran Desert.*

mapping to help visualize invasive species spread, as well as increasingly detailed mapping of current distributions.

Of course, there were fun parts to the year too. After the AAG conference in Las Vegas last March I spent some time wandering the Sonoran desert, photographing birds, plants, and small mammals. I was also lucky enough to photograph herds of wild horses near Oliver, BC. These small bands of horses have much less influence on rangelands than the thousands of head of cattle that wander the region, but are none-the-less considered a far greater threat to the region's biodiversity by many range managers.



### You are invited to the 11th Annual Trim the Tree at the GIC!

December 4th 2009, 4:30-8:30 pm

Faculty, Staff, Grad Students and GSA Executives welcome!  
Please bring a non-perishable food item for the food bank.



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