Something for Everyone

This summer, the Jamaican Geographer took an unplanned hiatus — but only on paper. On the ground, Jamaican geographers were more active than ever. This dual-themed issue chronicles the Jamaican Geographical Society’s (JGS) ongoing adventures, and highlights two topical issues central to the JGS’s core interests: hazard vulnerability and education. If “hazard vulnerability” only brings hurricanes to mind, it may seem an odd choice for a December issue. But it extends far beyond that, and recent climatic changes mean that Jamaican people can no longer afford to stop thinking about hurricanes in December. So turn the pages, take a few vicarious trips, discover the connections between climate change and dengue fever, and just how many people still think it’s perfectly safe to live in Harbour View, and be inspired by geography success stories and developments in geography education. Overall, this issue is in keeping with the true spirit of geography — it has something for everyone.

Soyini Ashby, Editor

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Landscape Location and Vulnerability

In a summary statement of findings on the macroeconomic and environmental impact of events of 2004 in several Caribbean territories, UNECLAC reiterated that the vulnerability of infrastructure is exacerbated by poor environmental management and environmental degradation, “leading to high productive risks and huge human suffering.” The summary further noted that the cost of environmental impact is generally understated, and the experience of 2004 reinforced the key lesson that the sustainability of economic and social development is closely interlinked with the environment. Development and poverty reduction are conditioned to a large extent by the ability to reduce vulnerability (ECLAC, 2004).

The Two Faces of Japan

Japan: the land of contrast, the meeting place of the ancient and the modern. It is a country of rich tradition, steeped in history, lauded for its adherence to the customs of yesteryear. Yet, it is a place where, according to travel writer David Scott “the future arrives early,” as is evident in the efficiency of its communication and digital technologies, advanced transportation systems, and futuristic architecture. A journey from the coast to the interior of Japan takes you across a landscape of intricate highway networks, whose surfaces seem to glisten in the antipodean sun, hemmed in by imposing edifices of chrome and steel boasting the latest in environmental technology. Exiting onto the local roads means leaving the gleam behind for a vast countryside, dotted by clusters of low wooden structures, surrounded by well kept vegetable

(Continued on page 4)
News from the Jamaican Geographical Society (JGS)

Annual General Meeting
The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Jamaican Geographical Society was held on Saturday, March 14, 2009. There was lively discussion on a range of issues including the JGS logo, and the frequency of general meetings, but the most important item on the agenda was the election of a new council. The ‘new’ council bears a strong resemblance to the old one, with Prof. David Barker remaining as President and Mr. Kevon Rhiney as Vice President (see page 8). Thus, the JGS continues in very capable hands. Members decided to retain the current JGS logo, and review the design in the future. Members also agreed to meet more regularly, on a quarterly basis rather than an AGM only. It was felt this would give members a greater opportunity to interact.

Earth Day Film Presentation
In recognition of Earth Day (April 22, 2009), the JGS staged a showing of the documentary film *The Eleventh Hour*, narrated by Leonardo DiCaprio. The film explored impending environmental crises and the possibilities for human intervention, providing a timely reminder of Earth Day’s importance. By the time the film started at 6:30 pm, the room was filled to capacity. The film was well received by the audience, many of whom lingered to discuss their thoughts with others.

Urban Archaeology: Downtown Kingston
On Saturday June 13, 2009, approximately 20 JGS members and non-members set out on a very informative walking tour of Downtown Kingston. For many, it was their first candid look at the relics of Kingston’s past and the promise that downtown holds for the future. Persons gathered at the Department of Geography and Geology at 7:30 am, and we made our way to the Kingston Waterfront. We then headed to the Institute of Jamaica, where we toured exhibits on the *Spanish in Jamaica* and *Port Royal*. The group then walked to Kingston Parish Church, visiting the Secret Garden—a monument to children killed in violent crime—on the way. Other stops included the Coke Methodist Church, Ward Theatre, and “Headquarters House,” site of Jamaica’s first parliament, and current home of the Jamaica National Heritage Trust. We ended with a fascinating tour of the Jewish Synagogue. All those present expressed their awe at the treasures hidden in Downtown Kingston.

Japan through the Eyes of a Jamaican
Our next field excursion, on Wednesday, October 21, 2009, was a virtual one—thanks to Ayesha Constable’s riveting presentation on her experience of life in Japan. This took place under the distinguished patronage of the Japanese ambassador, His Excellency Hiroshi Yamaguchi. An extended sample of the “voyage” is included in this issue.

*Reel to Real*: *Slumdog Millionaire*
Following the highly successful “trip” to Japan, the JGS “travelled” to India, on Wednesday November 11, when it screened (for free!) the Academy Award winning film *Slumdog Millionaire*. This was part of what the JGS hopes will be an ongoing “Reel to Real” series highlighting the real life geographical knowledge in feature films. *Slumdog Millionaire* was a relatively unknown film until late 2008, but went on to win 8 Oscars at the 2009 Academy Awards, including the coveted “Best Picture” and “Best Director.” Set in the Dharavi slum of Mumbai, India, it recounts the life of Jamal (the protagonist) as he appears on the Indian version of the show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. The entertaining film addresses several key geographical themes: poverty, power, access to space, development, globalization and tourism, shown through insights into life in one of Asia’s largest slums, depictions of tourism at one of the world’s most iconic sites, and scenes of a rapidly developing megalopolis.

The film screening was prefaced by a brief introduction by JGS council member Carlos Michel, and a “viewing guide” was provided, which included a commentary on the film and questions for the audience to consider while watching. After the film, the audience was treated to tasty Indian samosas complements of Pushpa’s Restaurant. The experience was moving and informative—and delicious—for everyone.

Fieldtrip: Gourie Forest Estate & Cave
Continuing the event-filled semester, the JGS journeyed (physically, this time) to Gourie Forest Estate, just north of Christiana, Manchester, on Saturday, November 21. Gourie is managed by the
News from the Department of Geography and Geology, UWI

Departmental Movements

There has been a lot of movement in the Department of Geography and Geology since our last issue, with six members of staff moving on to other endeavours. Ms. Lisa Williams, the diligent map curator, left the department to pursue studies in Law. Ms. Meisha Forrest, one of the department’s hardest working secretaries, took up a new post in the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The department then said goodbye to two members of its teaching staff: long-time lecturer of climatology and environmental management, Dr. Balfour Spence, and Dr. Savitha Ganapathy, lecturer in biogeography. In October, the department lost two of its longest serving staff members to retirement: Mr. Alfred Rose and Mrs. Isolene Riley. Each of these individuals has left their own unique mark in the department and will surely be missed.

Amidst the departures, the DoGG ushered in a new member of staff and welcomed home two very familiar faces. Dr. Michael Burn officially began teaching duties in January 2009, lecturing in Climatology. In April, Dr. Sherene James-Williamson a former postgraduate student returned to the department and began duties as the new curator of the UWI Geology Museum. She impressed the department with her ambitious ten-year plan for rejuvenating the Museum, which she outlined at one of the DoGG’s traditional lunch hour “Brown Bag” seminars. Postgraduate student Channelle Fingal also returned to the department in March after a six month stay in the United Kingdom as part of the Commonwealth Split-Site Scholarship. The department gladly welcomed all new and returning members.

Association of American Geographers (AAG)

Six members of the DoGG attended the annual meeting of the AAG, which was held this year in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. In attendance were lecturers Prof. David Barker, Dr. David Miller, Dr. Susan Mains, and Mr. Kevon Rhiney; and postgraduate students Soyini Ashby, Donavan Campbell, and Junior Darman. News from the conference was that the department was well represented with everyone making excellent presentations. However, the only news, as we all know, “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.”

Achievements

Three postgraduates successfully upgraded their status from MPhil students to PhD students since the start of the 2009. Geology student Richard Coutou, supervised by Prof. Simon Mitchell, gave a PhD upgrade seminar in February entitled “Provenance Analysis of Tide-dominated Sand Facies of Central Jamaica and Southern Trinidad.” Richard’s presentation was well received by all those in attendance. In July, two Geography postgraduates made PhD upgrade presentations: Joyelle Clarke, supervised by Prof. David Barker, and Carlos Michel supervised by Dr. Susan Mains. Joyelle’s presentation was entitled “Land and Livelihood in St. Kitts: Global Change and Local Vulnerability,” while Carlos presented “Negotiating Tourism Development in a World Heritage Site: Perspectives from the Pitons Management Area in Saint Lucia.” Both presentations were delivered well and received excellent feedback from the audience.

In September, the department welcomed three new postgraduates: Ayesha Constable, Rose Williams (both geographers), and Anuradha Maharaj (geology). The Department also celebrated the successes of Shiva Mohan and Soyini Ashby, who won scholarships to attend Canadian universities as visiting researchers.

Carlos Michel and Soyini Ashby, Council Members, JGS

News from the Jamaican Geographical Society (JGS) (cont’d)

(Continued from page 2)

Forestry Department and boasts beautiful tree and bird species.

Twenty-four daring souls gathered bright and early at the Department of Geography and Geology and set off on the 2 hour drive to Manchester before 8 am. Upon arrival at Gourie, we were warmly greeted by Mr. Otway Elliot of the Forestry Department, who ably guided us along the pine tree covered trails of the forest. Hiking along the trails gave us all an excuse to skip the gym for the week — the trek was rigorous.

The highlight of the excursion was the underground voyage into Gourie Cave, on the eastern boundary of the estate. The yellow limestone cave runs east to west for about 3 kilometres, and is traversed by a river, which is said to be the overflow from an underground lake at Suceed District near Christiana. Mr. Elliott, and Mr. Jan Pauel from the Jamaican Caves Organization, guided the intrepid adventurers who chose to brave it through the wet, dark, low-ceilinged passageways. At some points the voyagers were neck-deep in water (some nearly had to swim!). The less daring waited outside for the daring band to re-emerge, drenched and scratched, and proclaiming they had had the time of their lives!

After the cave, we broke for snacks, and then embarked upon an arduous trek back to the bus. Winded and tired, we headed back to Kingston, but no JGS trip is complete without a food stop. This time we had some of the best jerk in Clarendon at Murray’s, and were treated to an impromptu tour of Murray’s Farm.

Carlos Michel and Soyini Ashby, Council Members, JGS
Dengue Fever and Climate Change

Dengue fever is a potentially serious vector borne viral disease transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. It is generally associated with common viral symptoms, but may progress to the more severe dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF), which can be fatal, particularly for children and young adults. It is endemic in Trinidad and Tobago, and the likelihood of an outbreak of epidemic proportion in Jamaica is high, as all four serotypes of dengue are present.

Events such as the outbreak of DHF among half the population of Cuba in 1981 must be prevented. However, in both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago present prevention or adaptation measures are not sufficient due to budgetary constraints, overall resource problems and the need by governments and Ministries of Health to establish priorities. In other words, there is an adaptation deficit in the light of present risks. The situation is compounded by elevated risks due to current and future climate change. The extrinsic incubation period of the virus in the mosquito shortens under warmer conditions, whilst drier or wetter conditions can lead to increased vector abundance due to increased water storage or pools of stagnant water respectively. Therefore, under a global warming scenario there is a danger of increased incidences of dengue fever and DHF due to temperature increases and more variable rainfall patterns.

It is this increased risk that is examined in the AIACC SIS06 project coordinated by the Climate Studies Group, Mona (CSGM). The project identifies a clear need to reorient the current dengue prevention programme to take into account the present adaptation deficit and the elevated risk due to climate change. To offset the future risk a number of adaptation options are proposed in the SIS06 project, including an early warning system for dengue outbreaks. The early warning system is in part premised on a climate index developed by the CSGM under the project called the moving average temperature (MAT) index. MAT helps to determine the times of the year when the potential for dengue epidemic is high. When risk is high, the monitoring of other epidemiological indices then becomes important (e.g. the Breaux index) as well as coordination between Ministries of Health and other government and non-governmental agencies. As also seen from the project, buy-in at the community level and commitments from the key governmental players are also critical for the success of the early warning system.

*Dr. Michael Taylor, Climate Studies Group - Mona (CSGM)*

Opinion Poll — Perceived Vulnerabilities

Thirty-six residents of the Harbour View area were asked questions about how vulnerable to natural disasters they feel in their homes.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Responses to the question: Do you feel Harbour View is a safe place to live in relation to the impact of natural disasters?</th>
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<td>□ yes</td>
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<td>19%</td>
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The majority of the residents indicated that Caribbean Terrace was the only area under major threat in Harbour View.

*Mellissa Raymond and Robert Kinlocke, JGS*
Landscape, Location and Vulnerability (cont’d)

(Continued from page 1)

Location and vulnerability are inextricably bound with respect to shelter and settlement in Jamaica. Shelter is a basic human need which both the formal and informal sectors have set out to meet. Regrettably, the state, private development and individuals, all pay inadequate attention to the physical characteristics of a proposed location for housing. In some instances options are limited for citizens who occupy marginal areas when a “house spot” is either found or “made available”. In other cases, land may be acquired through purchase by the state or by private enterprise for housing units. It is to this category that we are best positioned to make an input.

Development plans for the more formal sector must consider not only the site, but also the supporting infrastructure for roads, water and sanitation, as important components of the development plan. These too must be subject to due diligence with respect to hazard vulnerability. Currently, in Jamaica, these considerations are pursued only in exceptional circumstances.

The consequences of these omissions can be dire. Flooding and erosion have become increasingly frequent in urban as well as rural areas of Jamaica, and the costs to affected individuals and households as well as the state, are generally underestimated. Victims fade from view as the glare of the media disappears. Speeches are made with respect to what should not have been allowed, scapegoats are found for permits or lack thereof, and individuals may be blamed for their choice of a “house spot”.

Recent scenes presented by Tropical Storm Gustav in 2008, portrayed piles of mud, degraded hillsides, debris stuck in gullies, basins flooded from blocked sinkholes, and roads washed out by debris laden flood flows - all speaking volumes to chronic environmental degradation which is exacerbating the effects of natural hazards.

This is a complex issue and there are many strands to this tangled web of relationships between housing, settlements, public infrastructure, livelihoods, health, and safety. Populations and their respective housing areas are physically, socially and geographically diverse. Our people live in denial, or they generally lack the holistic understanding and knowledge required to inform decisions. Advice from technical experts is sometimes not forthcoming, or else may be ignored or overturned.

An issue of Governance
The State cannot continue to build on vulnerable sites, and state policy and enforcement should also prevent the private individual from doing so. So many individuals, totally oblivious to the risk, have purchased houses in vulnerable locations. Others have created risk without any sanction and with inadequate understanding of the consequences of their actions. We are seeing increasing incidence and intensity of climate triggered events, and therefore living with hazards requires awareness and understanding of the hazards relevant to the particular location, and the application of resources to protect natural and built assets and to build resilience.

What role for the geographer?
We need to find practical ways to help increase understanding and acceptance at the level of the State and the individual, that our natural surroundings comprise natural systems as assets that provide protective services, life support systems, living and recreational space. These natural systems include some environmental processes, which are considered natural hazards. These natural hazards can be unpredictable in time, space, intensity and impact.

Eleanor Jones, Environmental Solutions Ltd, adapted from an article published in On Housing, National Housing Trust, 2008

CXC Refines CAPE Geography Syllabus

For years, many held the view that the Caribbean nations should break away from the Cambridge A-Level examinations. In 1997, the CARICOM Heads of Government agreed on the creation of an indigenous advanced level examination, whose purpose would be to improve the level of access to tertiary education. Thus the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) was born.

As expected, there were some teething pains, and some CAPE syllabi have been under informal and formal scrutiny since the examination’s inception. Geographers, in particular, had much to say about their syllabus when more than 50 teachers, students and other interested persons gathered on Wednesday, September 24, 2008, to discuss the efficacy of CAPE geography.

Assistant Registrar and Geography Syllabus Officer at the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), Mrs. Cheryl Stephens, opened the discussion by outlining the design of the CAPE geography syllabus. Teacher and student perspectives on the examination were then presented by Mrs. Phyllis Jones and Ms. Amanda McKenzie respectively. The Jamaican Geographical Society (JGS) presented the results of a survey of students and examination markers, which it had conducted during the summer of 2008. The Geographical Association of Trinidad and Tobago (GATT) also contributed through a message read on its behalf. The floor was then opened to the audience.

The CXC invited the JGS to submit a summary of its survey findings and comments from the panel discussion for inclusion in the syllabus review process. Prof. Barker, JGS President, formally tabled the report and the GATT's message at a meeting to complete the syllabus revision held November 10-13, 2008 in Bridgetown Barbados.

The review of the syllabus was already at an advanced stage, and a further three drafts were drawn up during the four-day meeting. The contributions of the JGS and the GATT were discussed, echoing the key themes that the syllabus was perceived to be too broad, not detailed enough, and needed to include more fieldwork. The participants at the meeting also discussed the need to have students write essays at the CAPE level in geography. Consequently, the syllabus was trimmed down slightly, but the CXC still held to the view that the syllabus should be all-embracing. Changes were, however, made to clarify the objectives written in the syllabus. The most significant changes were to Modules I to III of Unit I, which were reorganised with modified objectives and new sections. Another key change will allow students to carry Internal Assessment (IA) marks from Unit I into Unit II, so that two IA projects are no longer necessary.

As the 2009-2010 academic year continues, the JGS looks forward to hearing feedback from teachers and students about the changes to the syllabus, and remains committed to playing a role in providing a forum for teachers and students to express their views and exchange ideas.

Soyini Ashby, JGS Secretary
gardens, and backed by majestic mountains. Hi-tech toilets and squat pots, monorails and tramcars, shinkansens (bullet trains) and lowly local trains: such is the dichotomy between the old and the new in Japan.

It is a country well known for being synonymous with technology, but far less acknowledged is the huge effort invested in maintaining the traditional aspects of this highly developed society. This level of appreciation is innate - it is taught in the formative years of early childhood and vigorously honed throughout adulthood.

Upon arrival at Narita Airport you are greeted by low rising, yet distinctive buildings equipped with an array of features that render mobility a breeze, and these welcome you to the ‘Land of the Rising Sun’ even before you see the sign Yokoso Japan. The journey from the airport transports you to another world, and prompts you to question Japan’s “modernity.” The extensive stretches of lush vegetation that run parallel to the seemingly brand-new highway are overhung by a web of electric wires. The uniformity is disturbed solely by the omnipresent vending machines humming steadily in the background. The scene in the countryside is a sharp contrast. Nocturnal quietude is disturbed only by the occasional squeal of a child or the steady buzz of conversation as families sit down to dinner on their tatami mats. In busier sections of town, the croaking of frogs may be drowned out by the croaks of old men trying to outdo each other at karaoke, with all the latest songs from Bob Marley to Beyoncé. On a summer night, the thick darkness is pierced only by the hotaro (firefly) or when the sky is illuminated by an amazing display of hanabi (fireworks).

The perfectly sculpted curved roofs, massive wooden doors, and the golden statues of Buddha evoke the religious significance of this architectural wonder.

The modern architecture of Japan is like the rising sun heralding the dawn of a new day. However those buildings on which the sun has set are not merely of historical significance, they are proof that the old and the new can coexist in harmony.

Ayesha Constable, postgraduate geography student, UWI-Mona

The busy shopping streets in Ginza District, Tokyo (left) contrast with the nearby Asakusa temple (right). (Photos: Steve Cotier and www.nanoda.com)

Ayesha, dressed in yukata for her presentation on Japan. (Photo: S. Ashby)
Where Are They Now? Paul Morris

Pedagogue and Christian missionary, Paul Morris declares that it was geography that chose him. In his early childhood years, he was fascinated with aspects of physical geography, and with maps and countries that he saw in his older siblings’ books. This continued through to high school. There, being a cadet further stimulated his interest in how map reading concepts are used in reality. His excellence in the discipline at the secondary level made him the envy of his peers and, with this growing passion and the encouragement of his geography teacher, studying at the tertiary level at the University of the West Indies (UWI) - Mona was the natural thing to do.

Riveted by the discipline at this institution from 1992 to 1995, his interest widened to geomorphology, particularly karst topography and fluvial systems, as he was captivated by the power of water to carve landforms and its resultant impact on the physical and human landscape. Another mentor of his in geography was Prof. David Barker, who he says was patient, helpful and always found time for his students’ ideas.

Over all, the undergraduate courses equipped him to teach geography and give his students a wider perspective of various concepts, first at the William Knibb High School from 1995 to 1998, then at the Montego Bay Community College from 1998 to 2001. He takes pride in the academic achievement of his students who continued geography at the tertiary level, for example Kevon Rhiney, who is now a staff member in the Department of Geography and Geology at the UWI.

His current occupation engages him in the human branch of geography, taking him across the international boundaries through his involvement in cross-cultural missions. As a missionary, he has had the privilege of interacting with people in various countries (China, the USA, Mexico, and other Caribbean countries), gaining an appreciation of people’s sense of place and how they connect to their surroundings. Locally, he is involved in the Student Christian Fellowship and Scripture Union (SCFSU).

In general, his interest in the discipline has allowed him to see the interconnectedness between things physical and human through his involvement in the Northern Trelawny Environmental Association, and his innate appreciation for art and photography. He is also in the process of developing an outdoor initiative programme designed to use the environment and nature to teach leadership, resilience, and empathy. In addition, he is completing an MPhil in Missiology (missionary theology) at the International University of the Caribbean. This has enabled him, from the position of one who serves, to develop an appreciation of order in nature, of cultures and religion, and of God’s divine plan.

At this stage in his life, he encourages students at the secondary and tertiary levels to take geographic thought seriously, as it provides the tools for understanding life and their world. To not know geography, he says, is to be spatially illiterate, and man cannot live outside of space and place. He also advised having clear interests, a career path and selecting courses that are applicable despite their level of difficulty.

Kimoya Rennie, first year geography student, UWI-Mona
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University of the West Indies
Mona, Kingston 7
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Editor: Soyini Ashby
Editorial Committee:
Seema Kadir Robert Kinlocke
Carlos Michel Mellissa Raymond
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