

IAG conference report

General Comments

The Southern African Association of Geomorphologists (SAAG) biennial conference hosted by Gobabeb research and training centre, in Namibia, saw the gathering of students, researchers and consultants, all with a passion for geomorphology asking simple questions about different aspects of catchment systems. The topics varied from “Catchments and land cover”, “Antarctic Surface processes” to “African landscapes”. What stood out was how processes occur at the range of temporal and spatial scales and the various techniques used to understand and monitor these processes.

Techniques used to study catchment systems and for the monitoring of large scale landforms range from remote sensing e.g. used to map dust movement in a short time scale and identify the major source of emissions; GPR for large scale features to Quantitative Evaluation of Minerals of scanning (QEMSCAN) that produces a comprehensive dataset for mineral association in the finest sediments.

The journey to Gobabeb was a learning experience on its own. Travelling through Namibia by road and exploring the major differences between the upper and lower Kuiseb, supplemented the knowledge I had on this river. The organizers of the conference held field excursions; this allowed us to explore the landscape around the research centre. I was pleased to see the Homeb “silts”, having read literature on their controversial origin before the conference.

Practical Experience

British Society of Geomorphology (BSG) Working Group presented a workshop on the Differential GPS, Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). What was of interest to me were the OSL and the GPR. The BSG taught us how to operate a GPR to observe subsurface strata during the dune excursion. I now know that this device uses a long wave and shortwave and there comes a trade off with the depth covered and the resolution. The reflections produced on screen are caused by the changes in moisture as the conductivity of sand is affected by water. The technique has been used in the Namib dunes to view the strata beneath the surface. This has also been used to understand the formation of sand ramps such as those in Mojave Desert in California. The grant recipients were given an opportunity to gain practical experience with the various techniques and results were presented on the final day of the conference. Although a component of the OSL equipment was not working, the basic theoretical knowledge needed to understand it was taught during the workshop.

The Gobabeb staff was friendly and welcoming. They provided a guided tour of the weather station and the library, one of the interesting apparatus was the fog screen. Our guide claimed that a net or fog screen of about 1m^2 could collect on average 1 litre of fog water in

a day. Fog harvesting has been popularized in this desert area as the fog in some years accounts for the majority of the precipitation in this area. Talks with the staff, gave me insight on the area's water supply, previous floods and the working environment at the research centre. Overall I think it was a successful conference, beautiful location and pleasant group of people, it has certainly made my first international conference memorable.

I would like to thank the International Association of Geomorphologist (IAG) for the grant to attend the conference and the members of the SAAG committee who organized the event.

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