

IAG/AIG Grant Holder to the SAAG 2012 Biennial Conference

8th – 12th September, Gobabeb Namibia

I would like to express my gratitude to the IAG/AIG for awarding me a travel grant to attend the SAAG (Southern African Association of Geomorphologists) conference held in Gobabeb, Namibia from the 8th-12th September 2012. It was an incredibly rewarding and educational experience, made better by the stunning setting of Gobabeb in the Namib. The conference coincided with celebrating 50 years of Namib Desert research at Gobabeb, making this a very special conference to all those that attended. Gobabeb has produced interesting research on the Namib Desert for decades and is a research station I've been wishing to go to ever since I was a child growing up in Namibia. It was, therefore, wonderful to not only be able to attend a conference covering my field but also having this conference take place at a research station I greatly respect.

The conference covered a wide variety of topics and specialisations within geomorphology and generated many thought-provoking discussions. Topics ranged from the Namib Sand Sea, to Southern African dust, Antarctic surface processes, weathering and erosional processes, rivers, catchments, land cover and African landscapes. The variety of topics showed the diversity of geomorphology as a field and provided insight into the research done by academics and professionals from all over the world. In particular, it was fascinating to see work done on Namib, for example the presentation introducing the Namib Digital Dune Atlas, given the setting of the conference in the Namib Desert. It was also a privilege to be present at the book launch of *'Southern African Geomorphology-Recent trends and new directions'* and to be able to interact with some of the authors attending the conference.

The various sessions (oral and poster) were complemented by a number of workshops and field trips. These workshops were widely beneficial to all that attended, as they exposed us to tools and techniques we might not yet have been familiar with. It was valuable to see techniques, spoken about in presentations, in the field and how these are applied. The field trip to the Kuiseb River put erosion, weathering and depositional processes into context of the broader landscape. It showed the power of water and how the river and its channel restrict the northward movement of the dunes. The workshop on Dryland Geomorphology, comprising of dune survey techniques, was of particular interest to me. Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL), differential GPS and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) are tools that have a wide application in geomorphology and I was very keen to learn more about these techniques/tools. The workshop greatly improved my theoretical and practical understanding of the GPR and OSL and where I may apply these in my own research. The pre-excursion information session was instructive and explained the use of the OSL, DGPS and GPR well, preparing us for the use of these instruments in the field, although maybe not quite on how to dig a hole in a dune!

Once in the dunes, the other two grant holders and myself were given the opportunity to take part in the workshop. Remote sensing techniques have long been of interest to me and I was glad to be offered the opportunity to work with the GPR, making this workshop one of the highlights of the conference for me. It was also interesting to see the result of our work in the dunes on the last day of the conference, after data post-processing had been done. A special

thank-you goes out to the British Society of Geomorphology (BSG) Working Group on Sand Seas and Dune Fields, the IAG and the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) for supporting this workshop and giving me the opportunity to learn about these techniques.

The conference showcased the high academic standard required to be successful in this field. Nevertheless, it was held in an informal setting, making it a very relaxing, pleasant yet academically stimulating experience. It allowed for an unparalleled opportunity to network with specialists, academics, professionals and fellow students active within geomorphological research. It broadened my knowledge base on research areas, current themes/topics of interest and applications of geomorphology. To me personally, it was a valuable and constructive learning experience and I believe that I learned much that I can apply to my field of work and research.

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