Though most undergrad students enjoy and well-deserved mid-year break, Geoscience students traditionally commit their break to fieldwork. This year is no exception with our students roaming across central Australia, South East Asia and Western China.

24 geography students joined Phil Hirsch on the 2013 Southeast Asia Field School in Cambodia, southern Laos and northeastern Thailand. A great group of students, but also more than the usual quota of glitches – two stolen passports in Phnom Penh, one case of Dengue fever contracted in Laos, hospitalised in Thailand, and recovered back in Sydney... All are safe, well and educated in the finer arts of eating red ant eggs, studying community-based natural resource management, writing essays on transboundary issues in exotic locations, and mud-wrestling in rice paddies.

Under the leadership of Jonathan Aitchison and Geoff Clarke, University of Sydney geology students enjoyed a rich scientific and cultural experience on a 12-day field excursion to the Qinghai Plateau (Western China), which was jointly run by the School of Geosciences, University of Sydney and Peking University.

Sydney students worked with peers from Peking University to identify and interpret a series of geological objects in Permian eclogites, blue schists, ophiolites and sedimentary mollase formed along a fossil convergent margin. Travel from Beijing to Xining by overnight train was substantially lengthened by the effects of a tragic earthquake in the Lanzhou area. Additionally, flooded rivers meant further changes to the planned itinerary. Fair weather eventually prevailed, and the group enjoyed several long walks at altitudes between 2500 and 4000 m. The return overnight journey to Beijing on the Lhasa train stayed on schedule and the group then spent a day seeing some of the city’s cultural highlights.

In one month's time the combined University group will reassemble in Sydney for another excursion to the New England area. We will keep you posted.
A deep-water, multibeam swath echosounder survey reveals an 800-metre cliff on the western edge of the Queensland Plateau. The top of the undersea cliff lies in about 1800 metres of water and drops nearly vertically into the Queensland Trough at 2600 metres. “Analysing these sediments will reveal a great deal about the effects of climate change on the reef,” Dr Webster said.

Doctorate news

From Phil Hirsch: I’m delighted to announce that Chem Phalla has successfully completed the emendations on his PhD thesis entitled "Integrated catchment management and irrigation development: the role of hydrological analysis in improved water governance in Cambodia" and has qualified for the award of his Doctorate. Congratulations, Dr Phalla!

PhD candidate (not for too long) Mattijs Smits has received his examiners’ reports, all of which recommend award of the degree of PhD subject to a small number of typographical corrections. Mattijs also successfully defended his thesis at Chiang Mai University on July 24th as part of his cotutelle arrangement with that University. Mattijs had the opportunity to present and get critical feedback from the 6 committee members, something we don’t do in Sydney! As a reward, Mattijs will be able to attend two graduations: one in Sydney in November and one in Thailand in January, where he will receive his degree directly from the Princess. Well done indeed!

In the News

From Phil McMannus our correspondent on Geographic affairs: Shi-Ling Kou, currently studying third year geography, has just had her article “Rio+20: Media representations of the green economy” published in GEOView – the Institute of Australian Geographers’ refereed journal for undergraduate research. Shi-Ling’s article can be found with other publications for 2013 at:


This article was developed from a GEOS2921 Environmental and Resource Management (Advanced) assignment in 2012. Another paper from this same unit of study, written by Natasha Livingstone, has also been accepted by this journal and will appear shortly. Well done students!

Jody Webster is involved in a German-Australian collaboration to map the Coral Sea. An underwater cliff recently discovered in the Coral Sea will help shed light on the ancient past, and could also prove to be a hotspot of marine life diversity. Read more at:

IN THE NEWS THIS month

News from the wards: Son Emrik Gouta Laqerqvist born on 27th July to Yayoi and Joakim. Mother and baby boy well. Welcome to this world Emrik!

EnergyNewsPremium reported on a recent paper from Müller, Dyksterhuis & Rey, published in the Australian Journal of Earth Sciences. Read more at: 
http://www.energynewspremium.net/StoryView.asp?StoryID=79853816

Patrice’s opal story still making ripples, this time in the US. 
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/14/australia-mars-dirt-red-planet-opal-study_n_3587162.html

Talented PhD

Wentworth Group Science Program Scholarship 2013: Erin Smith (PhD candidate, Human Geography) was selected for the Wentworth Group Science Program. The purpose of the program “is to give recipients access to the knowledge and networks of some of Australia’s leading practitioners in influencing public policy through their experience in the natural sciences, economics and public policy...to enable recipients to become active contributors at the interface of good decision making and world class science”. Last week, Erin attended the main event for the program – the three-day Master Class led by Professor Bruce Thom – with seven other PhD students, other professionals working in environmental policy and Wentworth Group members. Erin is, at least, the third Geoscience PhD candidate to participate in the program with Michael Kinsella and Gareth Edwards having participated in previous years. Congratulations Erin!

From Phil McMannus: The School of Geosciences was very prominent at the Institute of Australian Geographers Conference held in Perth (1-4 July). Staff and students were very active in sessions related to migration, rural geography, urban political ecology and human-animal relations, amongst others. Congratulations to all, particularly to Liping Yan who received an award for an Excellent Conference Presentation by a PhD student. It was a wonderful conference – for those people who could not attend you can see highlights of the conference and dozens of photographs from the conference on the IAG Facebook page, and you can see the full conference program and check out the presenters and abstracts on the IAG website at: https://www.iag.org.au/2013/07/16/iag-2013-perth-conference-abstracts-and-conference-program/

Don’t forget, the next IAG Conference is a joint conference with the New Zealand Geographical Society to be held mid-year at the University of Melbourne.
A warm welcome to Associate Professor Dale Dominey-Howes for his speedy move from UNSW to The University of Sydney. Dale is an expert in natural hazards, risk and vulnerability assessment, disaster and emergency management (we advise him not to read the first page of this edition of GEO.news). He is particularly interested in the interconnections between biophysical systems and the socio-economic contexts in which disasters unfold. Dale has worked on natural hazard processes such as earthquakes, river floods, tropical cyclones, tsunami, volcanic eruptions and bushfires in places as diverse as Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, India, Greece, Turkey, Ireland, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Thailand, Iceland and the Maldives. Welcome to our School.

Congratulations to Derek Wyman & Geoff Clarke on their successful ARC-Linkage grant!

Earth’s best-preserved Archean boninites: do they finally resolve the Archean mantle plume–plate tectonics controversy? where Dr Derek Wyman and Professor Geoffrey Clarke, both from the School of Geosciences, with Stephen Wyche, Dr Tim Ivanic and Dr Robert Smithies, all from the Geological Survey of Western Australia, will receive $180,000 over four years for their research.

Using the Oxford University open course entitled "An introduction to the science of climate and climate change", Prof Ian S F Jones University of Sydney will deliver a 4-week graduate course on Climate Change at Sun Yat Sen University during August and September. The aim of the course is to expose SYSU graduate students to the style of an International course prepared by a world leading University. Oxford will issue a certificate to those that pass the examination and students will be able to use this credit towards a Master of Science degree.

Best of luck to Dietmar Müller et al. for their Center of Excellence application bid!

Well that’s all from the GEO.news desk. Until next time...