

## OUTREACH EVENT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Attendee's and Report Writer's Name:  
**Joseph Kerski**

Event:  
**Geographical Association 2001 Annual Conference**

Location: University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom

Other USGS Attendees: None.

Event Dates: 8-11 April 2001

### ***Executive Summary:***

Why should the USGS participate in the annual conference of the Geographical Association (GA)? I believe it needed to do so because of our (1) increasing emphasis on international collaborative activities; and (2) our increasing emphasis on educational partnerships. The GA is the largest geography education association in the world, **and** it is an international organization. I sought our participation to meet both our international and our educational goals at once.

The Geographical Association (GA) is the international association centered in the UK for geography teachers, with a membership of 10,000, providing information and resources to teachers and students furthering the study and teaching of geography and promoting its contribution to education. The GA is dedicated to promoting the development of geography as a subject. It believes that geography makes both a distinctive and a wide contribution to education and that it is an essential component in preparing young people for life in the 21st century. The GA is also committed to providing support to all those who are engaged with it - whether out of

personal interest or professionally.



*The GA conference was held at the University of Sussex, founded in 1961, in the South Downs region of England, at Brighton, due south of London on the English Channel.*

### ***Reasons for Participating:***

(1) One of our goals in the outreach program is to form formal partnerships with geography education organizations around the world. Geography education in the USA has been subsumed in the social studies since the 1920s and has only since the 1980s emerged as a science that society recognizes as a real need. In the UK, geography education never lost its prominence from the days when the Royal Geographical Society was sending explorers to the South Pole and beyond.

There is a great deal of potential recognition

and publicity in educational outreach and partnerships that I sought at the GA conference, not just with the GA, but with other groups there such as the Ordnance Survey [see below].

(2) The GA's counterpart organization in the USA is the National Council Geographic Education (NCGE). Although I've conducted exhibits and workshops at every NCGE conference since 1995, I kept thinking that there was more we could be doing. I petitioned the NCGE board to be on the ballot and hope to be elected to the board for the 2001-2002 academic year. If I'm elected (by ballots cast by the 6,000 NCGE members), then I can work on a formal relationship between the NCGE and USGS, for example. I would also to pursue something between the GA and the NCGE, and between the GA and the USGS.

(3) Working in education is an excellent way of starting long-term relationships with people and organizations. For example, I've worked on a grant involving conservation biology that has links to the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the University of Colorado EPOB Department, and through that, perhaps to others and even to our own USGS BRD. These relationships could lead to our folks getting included in major research projects, for interns, or even funding for data production by one of these groups.

Similarly, I spoke with the Ordnance Survey, the UK's national mapping agency, about possibly working in the future on an educational mapping project. I also spoke with staff from the Royal Geographical Society, a geography professional society that is 200 years old, who invited me to London to their headquarters. RGS merged with the Institute of British Geographers a few years ago, forming a society that would be analogous to the National Geographic Society and the Association of American Geographers

in the USA. A company called Wildgoose produces local aerial photographs in digital form with special educational pricing I also spoke with university professors about GIS training for UK educators.



*The GA Conference is the largest gathering of geography educators in the world.*

(4) When Dr Groat spoke in building 25 in August, he stressed the building up of international partners and relationships. He mentioned this again at our educational team meeting in Reston in November 2000. I traveled to the University of Leeds UK last April and found out who the key players were in the UK in terms of GIS and education.

### ***About the GA***

The GA is highly respected as one of the leading subject teaching associations and regularly consulted on a wide range of issues concerning geography in education. It is a major provider of quality resources to the profession. Members receive journals on a regular basis and the GA publishes books and other resources to support geography teaching at every phase. It also provides curriculum advice, professional development, conferences and other networking opportunities. The journals include *Geography*, *Primary Geographer*, *Teaching Geography*, *Geography* and a quarterly

newsletter "GA News." I joined the GA as a member and look forward to sharing what I learn from these publications with you all.

I was impressed by the numbers of people who told me that they did some work for the GA. This volunteer effort is amazing, considering that teachers are among the busiest folks on earth. The GA is run by its members and its work is determined and monitored by a structure of committees that focus on and develop pieces of the subject. These committees are supported by a Headquarters staff based in Sheffield UK. The GA is a national association, but its regional and local structures provide a significant opportunity for the views of the geographical community to be heard and represented. The GA is locally active, maintaining over 40 branches that stimulate local activity throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Project-based activities include the Worldwise Quiz and Geography Action Week both of which enjoy high reputations for quality and school involvement. GAW was the basis for our own Geography Awareness Week in the USA!

### **Workshop at GA Conference**

I conducted a workshop on "Explore Your World with a GIS" at the conference. Over 70 people attended this workshop, held in a theatre-style room with raised flooring for the attendees. The Past President of the GA introduced me to the attendees, whom I met at the 2000 NCGE conference (Michael Bradford).

GIS software used in schools include a limited amount of MapInfo and ArcView, and more toward AEGIS, a specific GIS software marketed toward educators with a fairly reasonable price.

GIS and the use of digital data face a challenge not only in education, but everywhere in the UK, because of the fact that very little free government or other data exists.

This is the case with most other countries in Europe and around the world; the notable exception in Europe being The Netherlands.

The Remote Sensing Society (similar to the ASPRS) distributed free aerial photo CDs of the UK, but RSS and the USGS were the only 2 exhibits with free data. Most data is costly and requires yearly royalties on top of the cost. Nevertheless, the interest and the potential of GIS and remote sensing in the curriculum are high, because the National Curriculum emphasizes real-world data in a problem-solving, inquiry-based (except in the UK it is "enquiry!") environment.



*Joseph Kerski gives presentation on GIS in education at the GA Conference.*

### **Observations and Recommendations:**

(1) By participating in this meeting, we demonstrated the leadership that the USGS has in partnering with educational associations on teacher training, development of curricular resources, and in resources for Geography Education that are high quality, science-based, project-based, and interdisciplinary. The fact that the conference chair, the GA president, and other GA executives took time to talk with me about future partnership opportunities demonstrated

that their interest is genuine in doing so.

I recommend that the USGS form a MOU with the GA to work on publications and joint projects. The GA is non-partisan and unbiased, concerned with education and scientific literacy, just as the USGS is. This conference also opened the door with other organizations, such as with the OS, on educational and other projects. I made a great many contacts that will be useful for educational outreach in the future.

(2) The challenges facing geography education in the UK, despite their leadership in the world, are real. As in the USA, geography faces stiff competition. Therefore, I believe that the GA conference is a worthwhile one for the USGS to participate in, particularly as we seek to concentrate efforts on targeted audiences and de-emphasize "general public" events where the benefit is questionable for the resources expended.

I think it is worthwhile to note that the airfare to the UK from Denver dropped to \$350. The final price for airfare was cheaper to London than the 2 times I flew to Reston during FY 01! Therefore, the GA is affordable.

### ***USGS Exhibit at the Conference***



*Our USGS exhibit at the GA Conference.*  
The official "stand" spaces (they are called

"stands" over there, not "booths") were 2 meters by 1 meter. I negotiated with the GA to receive this stand space at cost, \$85, which would have cost \$550 at the regular price. RMMC authorized me to purchase 1 stand, but I considered this space too little to adequately display our resources and work effectively with the participants. Therefore, I purchased an additional stand with my own funds.

Fortunately, the conference was held in a university, thus avoiding the usual restrictions in convention centers about being "over the line" and extending our exhibit outside the allotted space. I had been wondering how to squeeze into a space that was only 1 meter wide, and so I borrowed Gene Jackson's flat display panel, which can be configured in multiple arrangements. This worked out wonderfully, as the curved backdrop I typically use would have been too wide.

Other exhibitors included the Ordnance Survey, the Royal Geographical Society, the Remote Sensing Society, as well as private aerial photo companies, curriculum developers, textbook companies such as Taylor and Francis, the meteorological agency, and the GA itself, which displayed a vast series of resources.

Our location was at the back of one of two main exhibit halls, probably being placed there because we were not paying full price, or perhaps because of the delays experienced in receiving authorization to proceed with this conference.

Despite this disadvantage of position, the word-of-mouth quickly spread about our exhibit, bringing people out of hall 1 and into Hall 2 and our exhibit. This is an understatement, as I have rarely witnessed the popularity of USGS resources at any event to this magnitude, including at the NCGE and NSTA conferences.

At least 30 people took time to personally thank me for our resources and exhibit at the conference. Approximately 700 people attended the conference; the attendance might have been low due to foot-and-mouth disease, as they were expecting 1000. Nevertheless, the attendees were very enthusiastic; the most often-heard term was, "brilliant!" I am now following up with these contacts and compiling them into an Excel spreadsheet.

#### *Publications:*

For obvious reasons, I downplayed North America data and resources at the conference, even though I learned that American Studies is a big part of the curriculum, particularly in universities. This was a good opportunity for me to discover that the USGS really does have a good selection of data and maps for other countries. I brought world, Europe, and Asia maps, and such items as the new South America digital data CD that will eventually cover the globe. I displayed USGS booklets, fact sheets, posters, and CDs that emphasized geography education. These included water education posters, aerial photograph, web information, fact sheets on educational resources, GIS in education papers I have authored, and GIPs, posters, and teachers packets. Scientists in Action was curiously unpopular. Everything else, however, was disbursed very rapidly, but as it was being taken, carefully looked at by the attendees, who in many cases returned to the exhibit two or three times.

#### ***Geography Education in the UK***

The UK has had a National Curriculum since 1991. The curriculum is analogous to national standards in the USA, but is somewhat stronger. The core subjects are English, science, and mathematics. These are taken by all students. Foundation subjects, such as

geography, are compulsory from Year (Grade) 1 to 9, after which they are optional. Nevertheless, geography is a popular option and is taken by approximately 60% of students. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination is taken at the age of 16 (Year 11), and students who pass in geography may go on to "A Levels" in Years 12 and 13. Local Education Authorities (LEAs)--the UK's equivalent to the USA's school districts--have curriculum advisor's in different subject matters. Because the GCSE is so important, the 2 vendors on either side of our exhibit marketed the test materials. This is roughly analogous to the ACT or SAT, but it is given during the middle, rather than at the end of, high school.

At age 11, students go to secondary school, which is from age 11 to age 16; these are the "O levels/O grades". The old terms were lower 6th form and then upper 6th which was age 17/18. Age 18 is when students in England go to University, which where tuition was free until just a few years ago, graduating when they are 21 (after a three year degree program ("programme").

In Scotland, 16 is the age when some students go to University. However, it is usually done after a further year when they have done higher secondary at age 17. They then do a 4 year degree.

#### ***Educational Observations***

1) *Physical Geography* is very strong in the UK, and thus our hazards and water resources information were incredibly popular. The UK geography curriculum is also much more focused on the world at large than seems USA geography. Still, local studies and data are still valued and important to educators.

2) *Field work* is required of all geography students, and 1/5 of the exhibitors were

private and nonprofit organizations that ran fieldwork centers. These, including a center in Wales featuring multi-language studies in the highlands, were fascinating programs that I'd love to share with anyone who is interested.

### ***International Conference Logistics***

Communicating overseas for a conference is a bit more difficult than in the USA, as I expected. I even experienced a few misinterpretations in our USGS mission statements and my workshop. The lights on our exhibit did not withstand 220V current, although the laptop and the connection with the projector worked flawlessly in the workshop. I bought plenty of surge suppressors and outlet converters to bring with me (some from *Magellan's Travel Incorporated*).

Internet access was available through Earthlink, but it would have meant a long distance call to London, and for budgetary reasons, I opted not to do it. I took the bus into Brighton to rent time at a cybercafe for Internet access [1 pound each way], as I was required to be a university student to be able to access the Internet at the library.

Shipping to an international conference was problematic both ways, to and from. The exhibit materials were late in arriving, making it all the more amazing that I handed out all of the materials in a shortened amount of time. At this writing, FedEx is still searching for half of our exhibit.

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the knowledge learned from international collaboration is fantastic and will no doubt contribute to our future USGS bureau education plan that is now forming.

### ***Acknowledgements:***

I would like to thank all those who helped me with international travel, including Doris Parks at HQ, Jean Parcher in Texas, and Jennifer Booras in Denver. I also thank those at RMMC who approved my travel to this event, including Tom Dinardo and Mark Eaton.



*I took this photograph in the fog of the famous White Chalk Cliffs on the English Channel, about 30km from conference site.*

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\*\*\* End of Geographical Association  
Conference Report \*\*\*