

Making your ideas a reality

The Society's extensive grants programme offers an excellent route to the field

August is traditionally the time when people get the opportunity to discover a different part of the world, their own country, or even their home town. For the Society, the month is also significant, as many of the projects we've chosen to support are out in the field doing just that: expanding our base of geographical knowledge in a variety of exciting ways.

Each year, the Society makes more than 80 funding awards within its programme of 23 grants, with support for everything from scientific field researchers to independent travellers who boldly 'go beyond' their normal boundaries. This includes funding for fieldwork and expeditions – by undergraduates and teams from all backgrounds whose plans are grounded in strong geographical research, as well as by more established researchers and scientists. Projects address a broad variety of important topical issues, such as desertification, conservation, climate change, migration and urban regeneration. And, of course, we're open to ideas for projects anywhere in the world.

An investigation into the likelihood of a tsunami on the Caribbean island of Dominica, caused by landslides from volcanoes, is just one of the Society grant-funded projects in the middle of fieldwork investigations this month. Others include projects looking at the effects of climate change in the tropical Andes regions of Colombia and Ecuador; how family structures are changing in Cambodian villages; and the processes influencing

the increasingly rapid release of Greenland's glaciers into the Atlantic.

The deadline for the next round of Society grants for independent travellers is 25 September. These include the Neville Shulman Challenge Award, a single grant of up to £10,000 awarded to individuals or groups looking to push themselves through intellectual or physical challenges. This year's recipients, Will Millard and Callum Fester, set off in August along the course of an old trade route through the central mountain spine of the Papuan highlands, known locally as the 'Jalan Raya' (Great Road).

This year, the Land Rover 'Go Beyond' bursary, which offers £10,000 and the use of a Land Rover 110 Defender vehicle, was awarded to William Lorimer, Tim Bromfield and Lynn Morris's Atlantic Rising project. The team are following the future contours of the ocean according to the 1.5-metre sea-level rise predicted to take place over the next 100 years, exploring the places, people and histories that will be lost in the rising tide of global warming.

Finally, the Journey of a Lifetime award provides £4,000 for a journey anywhere in the world and the chance to record your experiences for a BBC Radio 4 documentary. Dan Box, this year's recipient, returned from Papua New Guinea's Carteret Islands in April. There he witnessed the

TOP AND ABOVE: Team Latitude, recipients of the 2008 Land Rover 'Go Beyond' bursary; **TOP RIGHT:** Simon King, who was awarded the Cherry Kearton Medal and Award for his study of natural history through photography; **ABOVE RIGHT:** Dr Alan Baker, winner of this year's Founder's Medal; **BELOW RIGHT:** Michael Palin, the Society's new president

world's first group of climate change refugees make a final voyage from their island home to escape rising sea levels. You can hear his account of his trip on BBC Radio 4 on 11 September. He will also be giving a lecture at the Society in autumn.

i If you would like to follow in the footsteps of Dan, Will and Callum, or the Atlantic Rising team, or are interested in undertaking geographical research independently or in a team, the Society would like to hear your plans, wherever they might take you. Please visit www.rgs.org/grants for more information and details of how to apply



Michael Palin elected as Society's new president

The Society's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in June saw the presentation of the prestigious annual medal and awards and the election of a new president to serve over the next three years, taking over from Professor Sir Gordon Conway as figurehead and chair of the Society's elected trustees.

The incoming president, Michael Palin CBE, will be familiar to the vast majority of *Geographical* readers and is certainly no stranger to the Society, where he has been a Fellow for more than 30 years.

Michael is perhaps best known for his popular BBC travel documentaries, which have seen him become a widely recognised champion for geography. His passion and enthusiasm for engaging people in the world and its many cultures and places shines through all of his programmes.

Speaking about his appointment, Michael said: 'To be asked to take over the presidency of such an internationally acclaimed and respected body is an almost unbelievable honour. I am only too aware of the great and distinguished figures whose boots I will have to try to fill. I can't bring a vast pool of expert knowledge to the Society, but I can bring curiosity, enthusiasm, a desire to learn and open-mindedness to promoting what I regard as the most important subject for the future: geography.'

One of Michael's first public activities as Society president has been to launch and lead the RGS-IBG's new appeal. This seeks to raise the funds needed to make essential repairs to the historic north face of Lowther Lodge, the Society's home in Kensington, and to create a much-needed members' room.

It's hoped that with Michael's support, the old library, the Nightingale Room, will be transformed by 2010 into a comfortable, well-equipped space for members to meet, talk, plan their travels, work or just relax over a cup of coffee.

'Lowther Lodge is one of the most striking and distinctive buildings in one of the most striking and distinctive locations in London,' Michael said. 'For almost 100 years, it has been the outward, visible and much-loved face of the Society's headquarters, and I feel very strongly that we must do all we can to ensure that it's as welcoming and accessible as possible.'

adding that he hoped the new members' room would encourage them to visit more often.

Michael's election wasn't the only good news to come from the AGM. A total of 17 people received the Society's annual medals and awards for outstanding contributions in many different areas of geography, including two royal medals approved by Her Majesty the Queen.

The Patron's and Founder's Medals, among the world's highest honours for the advancement of geography, were awarded to world-renowned economist Lord Nicolas Stern for his contribution to climate change policy, and to University of Cambridge Fellow Dr Alan Baker, for exceptional scholarship on the historical geography of England and France.

Other people recognised included Neil Oliver, presenter of the BBC2 hit television series *Coast*, who received the Ness Award for popularising geography, and fellow broadcaster and cinematographer Simon King, who was awarded the Cherry Kearton Medal and Award for his study of natural history through photography.

Commenting on the awards, Dr Rita Gardner CBE, the Society's director, said: 'This year's medal and award recipients have, through their respective contributions to geographical knowledge, policy-making, teaching and enthusing people through travel, succeeded in placing geography more firmly in the popular and political conscience. We are thrilled with their efforts to advance knowledge and to promote geography's relevance in creating a more informed world.'

i For a full list and further information on all of this year's medal and award winners, visit www.rgs.org/M&A

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