



Members in Profile

April 2014

Jo Gillespie

I've always had a passion for geography; my interest stems from a very early age, in fact, I often wonder if it isn't a little biological as my mother also has a degree in geography. My secondary school interest saw me take geography through to Year 12 – and I loved every minute of it. Once at University, I continued this interest and took out an Honours degree in Geography. Growing up on the very far outskirts of Melbourne in the 1970s and 80s, on a small family farm, I saw first hand the suburbs slowly creeping into the countryside.

With the rose-tinted glasses of hindsight my somewhat idyllic childhood of riding horses and tramping through the bush brought me into close connection with the human/environment relationship of Australia, from droughts and bushfires to the inevitable flooding rains, that is the essential fodder of the geographer. Watching the transformation of the urban/rural transition zone triggered my fascination with the way we shape and change landscapes; and the uneven impacts of this phenomenon fascinated me. My passion for social justice was evident in my Honours thesis, supervised under the tutelage of the very consummate geographer, Professor Gordon Clark, about whether infrastructure service fees delivered equitable solutions for providers and consumers alike.

After Honours I took another turn, and completed my Bachelor of Laws. I qualified as a Lawyer in the 1990s and spent a number of years working in the legal profession. Somewhat unexpectedly, I ended up working in litigation environments in civil and family law for a number of years! As is so often the case, one day at work I sat wondering whether this sort of work was really what I had intended for myself. Then, as fate would have it, I chanced upon an advertisement for a PhD scholarship to investigate the connection between environmental/heritage global regimes and local living conditions at Angkor, Cambodia. I grabbed the chance to move sideways – out of the courtroom and into the world of the academic geographer.

My PhD and subsequent research has taken me around the world; from the villages of remote Cambodia in Southeast Asia to the halls of UNESCO in Paris to spending time in some of our most venerable universities – a highlight was time spent as a Visiting Fellow at Yale University in 2012. I work in the tradition of legal geography – by



exploring the connections between the legal realm and our built and natural environments. I continue to be fascinated by the ways in which people and places connect, and viewing these connections through a legal geography lens enables me to bring new and fascinating insights into the way I, as a geographer (and ex-lawyer), explain the world in which we live. Increasing our understanding of the ways in which laws and regulatory frameworks influence us is essential to my work as both a lecturer and researcher. I continue this work in my current role as a Lecturer at Sydney University on a daily basis.

As a member of the NSW Geographical Society I relish the opportunity to further foster collaborations between those of us interested in geography in all its forms. In the tradition of eminent geographers who have gone before me and in the words of Halford Mckinder I celebrate the work of geography for it bridges "... the greatest of all gaps ... between the natural sciences and the study of humanity. It is the duty of the geographer to build one bridge over an abyss which in the opinion of many is upsetting the equilibrium of our culture." (H.J. Mackinder, 1887, *On the Scope and Methods of Geography*, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, New Monthly Series, 9(3), pp. 141 – 174).