



Members in Profile

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David Wadley

I studied geography in high school in North Sydney and entered Arts at the University of Sydney aged sixteen and a half. Having been placed in ancient rather than modern history, I opted instead for geography, adding German and psychology as undergraduate majors. By third year, I was able to drive and was also was motoring along agreeably enough with my chosen subjects. I was



offered a role as Research Assistant in the Department of Geography, situated in the Griffith Taylor Building. For two years, I assisted staff including George Dury, Phil Tilley, John Rutherford, Ray Matheson, Dennis Jeans and Jack Devery, gaining a broad overview of the discipline. Having simultaneously completed honours, I was accepted into the federal Department of Foreign Affairs diplomatic service but chose to take up a PhD scholarship at the Australian National University (A.N.U.)(1971-74). Here I researched the Australian farm machinery industry under Godfrey Linge and Peter Rimmer whom I continue to thank for the skills in logic, writing and editing which they imparted. Jim Walmsley, Dick Bedford, Bob Fagan, Elspeth Young and Mike Webber were contemporaries during those years. Farm machinery was a wonderful topic, blending agriculture, manufacturing and distribution and offering opportunities to see all around Australia.

In the final months at the A.N.U., the kindly Professor John Andrews invited me to the University of Melbourne where I lectured on contract from 1974-78 in the company of human geographers such as Victor Prescott, Tom Perry, Jack Massey and Geoff Missen. Then I was fortunate enough to be offered a tenured post at The University of Queensland, so my wife and I moved to Brisbane where we have lived now for over 35 years. In that time, I have directed the university's geography program, headed the former Department of Geographical Sciences and Planning and run postgraduate degrees in regional science and project management. I have had sabbaticals in Paris and Montreal, with intermittent travel to places such as Bahrain, Sri Lanka, throughout southeast Asia, many Pacific nations, Japan, western Europe and North America including Alaska. Along the way, I completed postgraduate qualifications in tertiary education, a MBA, and a Master of Economics by research, all of which complement my undergraduate portfolio and assist an encompassing view of contemporary human geography.

Neo-Marxist ideology in economic geography lacked appeal early in my career and, for a time, I engaged in extensive private and public sector consulting with colleagues in economics and commerce. One assignment was with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1984-86), another to edit the State Atlas of Queensland (1989-93) and,

yet another, for Colliers Jardine, researching property and business trends in 14 countries around the western Pacific basin (1997-98). Looking back, though, the most challenging undertaking has been a major solo futurology which I contributed to the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* in September 2008.

Happily, our present School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management in Brisbane is highly empiricist and quantitative in outlook. Within the Faculty of Science, it stresses the big picture which, from previous work in psychology and management, I interpret as asking whether humanity has the rationality, reason and will to deal with climate change, population growth, bio-diversity loss and so on. Contributions of great thinkers like Clive Hamilton, Paul Ehrlich, Lester Brown and Herman Daly are now augmented by the pointed works of Rob Dietz and Dan O'Neill, Gabor Zovanyi, Jeremy Leggett, Ross Goodrich and Diana Coyle. Apart from exposing the inevitable negative externalities, diseconomies of scale and diminishing returns characterising the current trajectory, we can only hope that the writing of a few good contrarians might help to check the mindless expansion and 'learned helplessness', and hold the planet's temperature at around plus two degrees Celsius. These aims seem fitting ones for geographers since, as Richard Heinberg of the (Washington D.C.) Post-Carbon Institute has written, Earth is 'our only home'.