



## **New Zealand Geographical Society Distinguished Service Award Otago Branch NZGS**

Dr. Paul Sirota is being nominated by the Otago Branch of the NZGS for the Distinguished Service Award for his service to the branch over the last decade; in particular in his roles in the organisation of the branch activities/programme and leadership in the branch committee. Paul's contribution to the Otago branch has been at a high level over a sustained period of time and his period in office as President in particular saw a real revitalisation of the branch – especially in its outreach programme to local and regional secondary schools and secondary school teachers.

Paul joined the Otago branch as a committee member in 1998 when he entered into postgraduate studies within the Department of Geography at the University of Otago. Paul's first major contribution to the society was as a member of the organisation committee of the 2001 combined IAG and NZGS conference hosted in conjunction with the Department of Geography. Paul very successfully took charge of the difficult public relations task of finding and organising private sponsorship for the conference. Paul has also had an ongoing role in the annual branch seminar series and the hosting of the annual Maatangi Whenua secondary schools Geography Olympiad.

One of Paul's main contributions has been in the field of outreach between the branch and the geography department into secondary schools. Since 2001 he has taken on the role for outreach, organising and participating in presentations within local secondary schools that have outlined to prospective students what is on offer within physical and human geography at a tertiary level and specifically within the Department of Geography at Otago University. This annual series of presentations, under the auspices of the Otago Branch of the NZGS, have now become an integral part of the Geography Departments relationship with local secondary schools. As part of this now ongoing relationship Paul has also put into place several professional development workshops for teachers.

These included giving seminars at the Board of Geography Teacher professional development days on map reading and GPS technology to keep teachers up to date with map co-ordinates and GPS systems. An annual GPS geo-cache day was also instituted by Paul, with the help of Dr Sarah Mager, where up to 30 secondary school students visit the Geography Department, learn the basic operation of hand held GPS units in a workshop, then compete in a geo-caching course set up around the university campus. Paul has also taken these map reading, GPS presentations and workshops further afield to schools outside Otago in his own time to bring geography teachers up to date with map reading and introduce GPS technologies to secondary school students unable to make the trip to Dunedin.

Paul has been proactive within the outreach programme, but it is his sustained support for the branch over the last decade that he has made his greatest contribution. Throughout his time with the branch committee Paul has been hard working and dependable and he has personally driven many branch activities forward through his enthusiasm. As the first student branch president Paul personally revitalised the branch and gave it focus through his personal drive and organisational skills. Paul has since completed his time as a student within the Geography Department of the University of Otago but remains as part of the branch executive.