

NEW ZEALAND GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

Chris Davidson

Distinguished New Zealand Geographer

Chris Davidson was born and raised in Gisborne on the east coast of the North Island of New Zealand. He studied at the University of Canterbury then at Christchurch Teachers' Training College, graduating MA(Hons) in 1966 and Diploma of Teaching the following year. He was on the staff of Karamu High School, Hastings from 1966 to 1972 then moved to Freyberg High School in Palmerston North.

As early as 1974 his abilities as a teacher and vision for geography as a teaching subject were evident to the Inspectorate and resulted in his appointment to an expert group that included staff of the Department of Education, members of the Inspectorate, high school teachers, university and college lecturers, and invited experts from abroad. Their task was to review the current state of geography teaching in the country's high schools and advise the Minister on its further development. In 1978 he was appointed to a one-year teaching fellowship in the Department of Geography at Victoria University of Wellington. That arrangement was fruitful and he was awarded a further secondment to the Department of Education. His experience there became the basis for a Ministry of Education publication, *G3 Geography Field Studies, Forms 5-7*. In 1981 he left classroom teaching to take up the position of Education Officer in the Department of Education, where his responsibilities for curriculum and syllabus development included agriculture, geography and environmental education. In 1989 he was employed as an Education Officer (Curriculum Functions) with the Ministry of Education, and from July 1990 to May 1998 served as Assessment and Moderation Officer with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority before returning to the Ministry of Education as Curriculum Facilitator. He took early retirement in December 2000.

More than for many professionals, such a brief summary of a long career masks significant achievements. For many years he was closely involved with curriculum development, and his activities enhanced the teaching and standing of geography in New Zealand high schools. His work also strengthened links between schools and the universities, ensuring that problem solving and communication skills became part of the geography student's basic training.

Many teachers and educational administrators will recall his work with a large team of Ministry staff, high school teachers, and university representatives during the mid-1980s, when the integrated Forms 5 to 7 syllabus for geography was developed. That document became the model for other high school teaching subjects because of its formal recognition of internally assessed work and innovative grade-related criteria at the Form 6 Certificate level. Another measure of his success in curriculum development was his appointment by the World Bank as Team Leader to report on the primary and secondary curricula statements then in use in Vanuatu schools. From 1985 to 1991 he coordinated that country's Forms 1-4 Curriculum Project funded by the New Zealand Aid programme. That project concerned the unification of eight

subjects, and involved English as well as French speaking teachers. He maintained a formal association with it until 1995.

Throughout his career in education he has left his mark on many areas of geographical education: as a classroom teacher, through his work with groups of officials and teachers, and in the development and implementation of educational policy. For eight years he managed the assessment of University Bursaries and Scholarships candidates, including a period as Moderator. In 1987 and 1988 he worked closely with 16 schools on an investigation into standards-based assessment in Form 6 geography, where his experience as a teacher, subject knowledge, administrative skills, and leadership proved critical in ensuring its success. From June 1998 he was closely involved with subject teams assembled to draft National Certificate of Educational Achievement standards for geography, history, and social studies. Towards the end of his time with the Ministry he grew to feel that while curriculum issues are important so too are systems that can support and enhance the continuing professional development of high school teachers, something the New Zealand Geographical Society, its Board of Geography Teachers and branches appreciate and are putting into effect.

Throughout his career he recognised the importance of publication. This began with a paper written with Roger McLean on their coastal geomorphological research, and is evident in several papers published since then by the *New Zealand Journal of Geography* as well as a report with Michael Steer on moderation of teacher panels and the use of grade-related criteria for Form 6 geography, the latter of which was published by the Department of Education in 1989.

One person consulted during the preparation of this citation described him as a person who argued powerfully, maintained a judicious balance between listening and speaking, knew how to leaven his message with a wry sense of humour, understood the underlying concepts of geography, and had the experienced teacher's sense about which case studies will best convey subtle concepts to young learners.

He has had an exemplary career as a classroom teacher, as an analyst, developer, and promoter of educational policy in national agencies, and as an advocate for the study of geography. His impact upon geographical education in this country, and his contributions to the teaching of geography in high schools, are recognised and appreciated in New Zealand and abroad. Chris Davidson is a worthy recipient of the Distinguished New Zealand Geographer Medal of the New Zealand Geographical Society.

Peter Holland
President
New Zealand Geographical Society