

Real Geographers series



“Geography as a subject is able to bring together knowledge and skills that are able to offer insight and solutions to many of the most pressing issues in the world today – climate change, immigration, global trade, conflict to name just a few.”
- Nick Laphorn



Nick Laphorn,
Deputy Head of Group (South),
Field Studies Council

What is your occupation?

Deputy Head of Group for Field Studies Council. I manage the operations of a network of 11 centres that provide outdoor learning opportunities for children, enthusiastic adults and professionals.

What do you love about geography?

What's not to love?! The thing I value most about the subject is the perspective that it gives me on the whole of my life. Every time I look out of the window, go on a journey, read an article in a paper or magazine it is framed by my geographical knowledge and experience that adds value. Looking at a coastline and being able to appreciate the processes from previous millennia that have created the features I can now see, the processes acting now, and how it might change in the future all help me to appreciate and enjoy the world around me more.

Why does geography matter in the world?

It is very difficult – perhaps impossible – to spend a single minute in which we are not touched by 'geography' in some way. When you work on a computer, you are joined to a global network of interconnections linking the physical, human and virtual worlds; a keyboard from China; coffee from south America, but roasted and packaged just a few miles down the road; electricity from a mixture of geologies, dynamic physical process and complex nuclear process. When something gets delivered, your home is one of a number of stops in a carefully planned logistical route.

Geographers' skills are put to good use in many fields of employment from transport planners to surveyor, flood management to international aid to name but a few. Knowingly or not, geography is intrinsically woven into all of it.



Why do you think it's important to get students excited about geography as a subject?

Whether people realise it or not, we are all geographers. Geography as a subject is able to bring together knowledge and skills that are able to offer insight and solutions to many of the most pressing issues in the world today – climate change, immigration, global trade, conflict to name just a few.

Why do you think it's important that students carry out field work (whether that be within their school grounds, locally or on a residential basis)?

Geography is a subject that is embedded in the real world. One of the core skills of geographers is the ability to ask meaningful and relevant questions about the world around them. These may be physical or human but is best done through an intimate understanding of the location which can only be fully achieved by being in that location. It is hard to know what a place is truly like without being there. Seeing a picture of a place is not the same as being there. Data in the 'real world' is messy and complicated and being able to appreciate this helps to form considered and balanced opinions and conclusions.

What are your most pressing environmental concerns? / What environmental issues should we all care about?

Without doubt the impact of climate change. We have now hopefully moved far beyond the point where we are discussing whether it is 'a thing' to the point where we are genuinely and wholeheartedly looking at ways we can combat it. For some issues we are already looking at mitigating the impacts such as building in flood proofing measures with new housing developments, but there is still time to have a meaningful impact on some of the worst predicted scenarios.

Where is your favourite destination in the world from the point of view of a geographer?

I'm not sure I have found it yet. I have yet to go to Iceland, so that is definitely on my list. I have stood on a glacier, experienced an earthquake and been on a couple of volcanoes, but I would love to see an active eruption or lava flow.



Lava flows on active volcano Mount Fagradalsfjall, Iceland. (c) ImageBank4u

What would you say to students passionate about the world and thinking about taking their geography studies further?

Do it. I've yet to meet a geographer who thought taking the subject was the wrong choice for them. Even if you do not pursue a career that is obviously 'geography', the skills that you learn will almost certainly help you.

What field study tips do you have for schools, teachers and pupils on being more sustainable / eco-friendly?

Consider net benefit. For any visit that you do, draw up a list of the negative impacts that you think may occur as a result. This may be taking a coach to get to the site, lots of students in a town/village, wear and tear on the footpaths etc. See if there are ways you can reduce your impact or if possible give more back. Accept that you might be adding to trampling, but can you help by doing a litter pick whilst there? Could you offer some time to support a local conservation project? Can you give more back than you take?

To see where studying Geography could lead you take a look at other Real Geographers in the series.