

Bernard J. Smith

(1951–2012)

In the 1980s Hungarian physical geography much profited from the assistance of the British Geomorphological Research Group, its members visited us on several occasions. The British–Hungarian Geographical Seminars also provided an excellent framework for getting new information on international research trends, consultations on various topics and also field trips to interesting sites. To the trip to the Giant’s Causeway (Northern Ireland) in 1982 our Bernie Smith from the Queen’s University of Belfast accompanied us. He proved to be a knowledgeable guide with humour and kindness. He remained to be associated with Hungary and included Budapest among the study sites of his urban stone weathering experiments (along with Rio de Janeiro, Venice, Prague, Dublin). With his students he also did field work in the loess and granite regions of Hungary.



The first disturbing news of his serious illness reached me when he did not respond to my Christmas card last year. And now a sad message came that he passed away on 31 October 2012 – exactly on my birthday. He was only 61 years old.

Bernie was a geographer, enthusiastic about geography both as a scientific discipline and a school subject. This means that he could not separate the researcher in himself from the teacher. As a geographer always hungry for new experience, he travelled widely in the world to gather first-hand information and impression on as many spectacular landscapes of the globe as he could.

On completing his university education at Reading in 1975, he chose to start his career in northern Nigeria, at the Ahmadou Bello University of Zaria and spent four years there. Grasping an opportunity to work in the United Kingdom, he joined the staff of Queen’s and settled in Belfast. When I asked him in the late eighties whether living in this city of constant turmoil or even street fighting involved some danger for him, his reply was that he had never ever seen any religious clashes during his stay there. Working with Professor Brian WHALLEY, he became head of the Department of Tropical Geomorphology and held this position from 1979 to 2011, when he had to retire early because of his illness.

Within geomorphology Bernie’s interests ranged on a wide scale: he fell in love with the arid environments at an early age, and to this were added his curiosity in desert processes (granite weathering, dust and loess formation) but also deep weathering in the humid tropics and similar processes under Mediterranean climate. Within the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology in the early 1990s he established a specialized research unit, the Weathering Research Group. This allowed him to start international investigations embracing many countries and numerous links to human geography, since the study of building stones decay involves aspects of architecture, urban planning, cultural heritage, archaeology, history and many others. The interdisciplinary contacts brought him

many friends in all parts of Europe and – through his participation at conferences – also in other continents. He also became associated with the UNESCO's Natural World Heritage programme and worked as an evaluator. Among his achievements is the inscription of the Giant's Causeway on the list of the heritage sites.

Along with the members of his family, his wife, Dorothy, and children, Daniel and Catherine, Bernie must be best remembered by his students, who follow in his steps and teach with great enthusiasm not only at Queen's but also at the various universities of the United Kingdom and the world. The older generation of Hungarian geomorphologists will also keep him in good memory and feel gratitude for the conversations with him on both academic and every-day topics, which gave us insight into his modest but wise, somewhat secluded but kind personality. May you rest in peace, Bernie.

Dénes Lóczy