

# THE Primary Geographer INTERVIEW



David Hicks



### What does geography mean to you?

Geography is where I began. It was my favourite subject when I was at Northgate Grammar School, Ipswich, in the 1950s. It inspired me then and led to my becoming a geography teacher in the 60s and 70s. It inspires me now and if I had to begin my professional career all over again I would still want to start as a geographer. It's the only subject which has the beauty of planet Earth and the lives of its inhabitants as its central focus.

### What's your most memorable experience of school geography?

Firstly, it was my two excellent geography teachers, Dennis Walshaw and Peter Underwood, an inimitable duo who helped give me such a love for the subject that I later trained to teach it. Secondly, it was that we had the option at A-level to carry out an individual field study of our own choice. I chose to map and analyse the land-use of a rural Suffolk parish not far from town and this was a seminal experience in my development as a young geographer.

### Where's your favourite place?

Unquestionably it's the Lake District where I once lived for fifteen years. In particular it is a house I used to live in by Whitemoss Tarn which is just outside Grasmere. A great oak tree stood by the five-barred gate, irises

grew by the side of the tarn and yellow tormentil on the nearby common – a spot that Wordsworth's sister Dorothy referred to in her journal. In the summer there was the scent of azaleas in the garden and long evening shadows on the flank of Loughrigg across Rydal Water to the south.

### What's your favourite geographical activity?

Exploring somewhere new with the appropriate 1:25,000 OS map at hand – footpaths, trails, hills, valleys, woods and coast. Being able to interpret what I see and make some sense of the relationship between people and the environment. Knowing that you can never get lost (well not for long) with a good map. In particular, because I live in the south-west, I enjoy doing this on the Quantocks, the Somerset levels, the Forest of Dean, Exmoor and Dartmoor.

### How important do you think geography is today?

A good grasp of geography is essential for any understanding of this planet and what our relationship should be to it. I cannot understand why anyone would not want to study the subject! It has frequently occurred

to me that if geography was compulsory at GCSE people would understand what happens on flood plains. This would then make it more likely that property developers would avoid building on them and that house buyers would choose somewhere more appropriate to live.

### What has geography taught you?

It has taught me a deep love for this planet and the need to work both locally and globally for a more sustainable future. It constantly reminds me that I personally have a responsibility to care for the biosphere and also for my fellow citizens. It has taught me that, for better or worse, we are all spatially and temporally interdependent. I have also learnt that such a love can be passed across the generations in different ways – one of my sons has taken up fell running, an excellent navigator by night or day in fair weather or foul, he now knows the Lake District tops much better than his father does.

*David Hicks is Professor in the School of Education at Bath Spa University and internationally recognised for his work on the need for a global and futures dimension in the curriculum. He gave the keynote address at the 2007 Geographical Association Conference on 'geographical futures'. He hopes that teachers will find the classroom activities in his two books, Teaching the Global Dimension (with Cathie Holden, Routledge, 2007) and Citizenship for the Future (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2001), both useful and exciting in their work.*

