

# 2013 Conference Report: San Luis Obispo, California

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THE 67<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL California Geographical Society Conference was held in San Luis Obispo from April 26<sup>th</sup> through the 28<sup>th</sup>, with more than 340 geographers from the academic, government, private, and nonprofit sectors making the trek to the wonderful central coast of California. The event was hosted by the geographers in the Social Sciences Department at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly). Special thanks are extended to the student volunteers from Cal Poly who worked extremely hard to make the conference a success, particularly Hannah Panno, who coordinated the volunteers and should be considered a conference co-organizer. Cal Poly Geography faculty who lent a helping hand include James Keese, Greg Bohr, William Preston, and myself. Of course we cannot forget to thank our former CGS President, Steve Graves, for his Herculean efforts. While we will miss his stewardship of the society, it has been left in great hands with James Wanket. Jim, along with the other board members, also put forth great effort at the conference and are deserving of praise.

The conference kicked off on Friday, April 26<sup>th</sup>, with four field trips. The first was led by Steve Graves and included a private tour of Hearst Castle, lunch in old San Simeon, and a nature hike of coastal open space recently acquired by the State of California. One participant stated, "Outstanding tour! Experiencing Hearst Castle in that exclusive setting was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity." To extend our gratitude, the CGS donated \$300 to the Friends of Hearst Castle foundation, to be used for site restoration and maintenance.

The Edna Valley Wine Tour was led by Cal Poly geography professor Benjamin Timms and visited three wineries with vineyard tours. A highlight was touring Tolosa Winery's solar array, which provides 104 percent of their energy needs (with the extra 4 percent going back to the electrical grid) and learning about other sustainability measures the winery has undertaken. The tour also included visits to Talley Vineyards and the boutique winery Claiborne & Churchill, which many of the participants claimed as their favorite.

In contrast to solar-powered wineries, the third tour was Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, led by Cal Poly geography professor Gregory Bohr. While security was tight, participants found the fieldtrip to be fascinating and informative. One stated, “Most of all, visiting the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant was a unique opportunity. Its uniqueness was perhaps the primary motivating factor for my attendance at CGS this year.” Regardless of viewpoints on the nuclear industry, the ability to tour such a facility was indeed unique.

The fourth tour on Friday was related to the Morro Bay Watershed. Led by Cal Poly professors James Keese and William Preston, the tour addressed estuary and watershed issues. One participant claimed, “The Morro Bay Watershed: Fantastic. I think I read the description wrong and was expecting something different but it didn’t matter because it was so good. Each stop, each guest speaker, was amazing!” Special thanks go to Cal Poly professor of animal sciences Bob Rutherford, also a rancher, who met with the tour and gave the participants an opportunity to engage in a discussion about sustainable ranching. His contribution was noteworthy, as one tour member stated (paraphrased from personal conversation), “I’ve never actually talked to a rancher, and his insights on sustainability were mind opening.”

After the field trips, we had our opening barbeque at the historic Jack House in downtown San Luis Obispo. Santa Maria-style BBQ was served with vegetarian options, and one of our former Cal Poly geography students, Jordan Traub, provided musical entertainment. Afterwards, William Bowen delivered an excellent presentation, “Seeing California and Planet Earth: Little Data and Big Data.” We are very grateful to Bill and his wife Marilyn for their contributions to the conference and the CGS in general. They are true gems and wonderful resources for geographers in California and beyond.

On Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, the conference presentations began on the Cal Poly campus. The poster session had twenty-six participants, and nineteen presented in either the analog or digital cartography sessions. Throughout the day there were seventy-six paper presentations, with more than half of them delivered by undergraduates—exemplifying the CGS service toward undergraduate research. In addition, four workshops were provided: Comparing and Standardizing SLOs and Assessment Tools, hosted by Robin Lyons; Best Practices in Teaching GIS, hosted by Vanessa Engstrom; Learning Outcomes for Field Trips in Introductory Geoscience Classes, hosted by K. Al-

lison Lenkeit Meezan; and The Joys and Challenges of Fieldwork in Geography, hosted by Tiffany Seeley and Jennifer McHenry. Carol Cox presented the Presidential Plenary, titled “Myanmar: The New Crossroads of Asia.” It was a fascinating talk about recent events in Myanmar, particularly in relation to its increasing openness to the world, for better and worse. The tour she gave us through this amazing place was illuminating.

Saturday evening we held our Awards Dinner at the Ludwick Community Center. Two hundred twenty participants filled the room to capacity, and Steve Graves entertainingly oversaw the presentation of awards. We are extremely grateful to Bill and Marilyn Bowen for sponsoring all the student presenters for the dinner, and to Robert and Bobbe Christopherson for their endowed Geosystems Award, which exemplifies their generosity and outstanding dedication to student research. Additional gratitude is extended to all the donors for the student presentation, travel, and scholarship awards. Dan Walsh of Saddleback College was awarded the Outstanding Educator Award; Eugen Turner of CSU Northridge was presented the Friend of Geography Award; and Robin Lyons earned the Distinguished Service Award.

On Sunday four more field trips were offered. Cal Poly professor James Keese and former Cal Poly professor, local businessman, and all-around city guru Pierre Rademaker led a San Luis Obispo urban tour. By all accounts it was excellent, covering slow urban-growth policies, from limits on extent and height of growth, to open-space acquisition, to no drive-through restaurants! One participant commented, “SLO Smart Growth: Fantastic!!! Pierre was amazing and everywhere we went was so good.” The second field trip was a physical geography hike of Valencia Peak in Montaña de Oro State Park, led by Cal Poly professor Tony Garcia. Garcia augmented the amazing views and great lunch with a talk highlighting the geomorphology of the area. Participants loved the hike and emphasized they would like more physical geography field trips in the future.

The Paso Robles Wine Tour was led by Dr. Tom Rice, a Cal Poly professor of soil sciences who has been working for more than twenty years in the Paso Robles wine region. The group visited two wineries, with in-depth vineyard visits of locales in which Rice is currently collecting soil samples and GIS mapping of vineyards. One respondent stated, “This was a great mix of both learning and wine tasting! I really enjoyed getting to know two wineries very well

rather than many quick stops. It was fantastic to get the insiders perspective and very unique to other wine tours I've been on. Was great learning about the science as well."

Finally, we put forth a fun and informative Santa Margarita Ranch zipline tour, led by former CSUN geography professor James Hayes, who was a wealth of information on oak trees. We zipped through the old Estrada family Spanish land grant, with 13,000 acres of old-growth oak forests, and learned about their sustainable vineyard growing practices and ranching activities. We finished with a wine tasting and ordered hamburgers, which we ate in my backyard with a bit more wine.

In summary, we had a wonderful and successful 67<sup>th</sup> annual California Geographical Society Conference in San Luis Obispo. Cal Poly was grateful for hosting the event. The CGS is a great community of geographers, and I hope you all continue to participate. Onward and upward; see you all in Los Angeles!