

Garry McKenzie

My BPRC-related activities advanced on two fronts: in educational outreach and a developing collaboration with the ice-core group. My colleagues [Drs. Landis (BPRC – Linworth Alternative School) and Trisler (Wittenberg University)] and I assist The Bahamas Reef Environment Educational Foundation (BREEF) each summer on the Island of San Salvador. Now entering our 5th year, the objective here is to improve the Earth Systems understanding of Bahamian Teachers and government employees. The comment below about the latest institute from the director, Sir Nicholas Nuttall, captures the essence of our approach.

The Spirit of Discovery flourished in the Bahamian Field Station, BFS, San Salvador from the 1st to the 14th July 2000 when 27 Bahamian teachers, plus 11 presenters from the Bahamas and around the world gathered for the fourth annual two-week BREEF workshop. As always, it was a lot more “work” than “shop”, for our days began at 8:00 a.m. and ended after 9 at night. Our faculty consists of three Professors from Ohio, who specialize in Earth Systems Science. During the course both they and the teachers learn a lot from one another. This two way exchange is reflected in the way that the BREEF curriculum on our marine environment and global change improves every year.

Thanks to the excellence of The Ohio State University Earth Systems programs our teachers get accurate timely information contained in a huge tome, the BREEF “bible”. The first half is full of background information; the second suggested teaching plans and class activities, many suitable for use out of doors. From it and the lectures, the teachers find out how the various scientific disciplines are combining to solve difficult problems. They learn that the ocean, being the biggest component, is the most important part of the global life-support system and that the health of the Bahamian marine system has a key role to play in global terms. Most important, they see how they, and those they teach, can really make a difference.

We compared the coming increase in the human population to Noah’s flood in days gone by. This time, rather than building one ark, we suggested that we should prepare by reserving healthy habitats by land and sea for as many species as possible. That way the maximum number of species will survive into the 22nd and succeeding centuries. To further promote this policy, BREEF has allied itself with other NGO’s around the world to ask the UN to declare the 21st century, the century of restoration. On a more down-to-earth level we put these high-flying ideas into practice by building an element of an artificial reef, called a Reefball. This involved mixing and pouring several buggy loads of concrete by hand. Some of their pupils would have been amazed to see how much energy their teachers, especially the ladies, displayed on the working end of a spade. The resulting hollow perforated dome will become part of a reef in Grahams Harbour, a home for more fish and a convenient natural laboratory for the BFS scientists to study.

On the Alaskan front, I am planning a program with Lonnie Thompson to determine the glacial history of the area around Mts. Bona and Churchill where Lonnie expects to obtain the ice core to which we will correlate the behavior of the ice masses on and around these mountains. We have recruited a new graduate student in Geological Sciences in this venture. Amanda Cavin, a recent graduate from the University of Missouri – Columbia, will begin by assembling information on the current understanding of the glacial history and ongoing research in the area. We welcome her to the group.