

## DOING FIELDWORK: EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

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*Field-work is essentially personal observation and recording; it brings reality to geographical study; it helps the geographer to acquire his all-important understanding "eye for country"; and thus it enriches his descriptive and explanatory powers. I would say that an essential part of the training of a young geographer is for him to choose some small accessible unit area that attracts him; acquire a pair of stout boots, perhaps the geographer's first item of equipment; study in the area itself the association of physical and human conditions which there prevail, and in fact give the area its individuality; and record the information which he collects in a series of original maps.*

—E. J. Monkhouse, 1955

Geographical fieldwork, as the following collection suggests, has roamed well beyond Monkhouse's avowedly stout-booted past. Fieldwork in geography is just not like that any more (Rose 1993; PG 1994; Katz 1996; Sparke 1996; Driver 2001). Interviews and children, laptops and urban settings, local collaborators and researcher reflexivity—and of course *women*—are integral to the world of geographical field studies. We can nowadays relish more nuanced strains of field behavior, and with reason: The realm of geography is broader, and that makes the study of field practice itself an interesting task. This thematic issue of the *Geographical Review*, in part a sesquicentennial celebration of the 1851 founding of the American Geographical Society, lauds fieldwork as an undertaking while also examining its varieties and its sometimes-suspect practices.

The vehicle for this tour d'horizon is a series of short articles—truthfully, personal essays—highlighting the diverse array that is contemporary fieldwork in geography. Together they capture a range of work from established to emerging scholars, in academic geography and well beyond, and the authors present us with challenging and interesting situations that bear on practices and experiences of the field. Here colleagues share insights and trials, and relate lessons and advice we all wish we might have had before decamping to the field. The collection is not intended as the kind of rollicking self-excoriation that anthropology and other disciplines have put themselves through and that has tended to constrain, if not actively bottleneck, fieldwork in those disciplines. For various reasons, geographers have concentrated on different problems, done so critically only relatively recently, and been perhaps less inclined to identify behavior that other disciplines might find exceptional. Evident in these fifty-six essays is the breadth and depth of geographers' engagement with fieldwork in all its forms, showcasing a diversity of geographical viewpoints

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and experiences along with bountiful creativity and demonstrating to the broader community the strength of geographers' commitment to fieldwork.

Collected by invitation from a working roster of considerably more than one hundred active scholars, this series of essays, or indeed any finite list, despite our concerted attempts to make it otherwise, cannot truly be inclusive of all that is fieldwork in contemporary geography. Representing mainly North American (and to a lesser degree British and Continental) geography, most of the authors here (like most of those who attend meetings of the Association of American Geographers) are white and North American; nearly half are women. Yet the ambit of these scholars' work is global: Spain to India, Sri Lanka to Kenya, Russia to Peru, Morocco to Macedonia, Canada to Thailand, China to Montserrat, the United States to the United Kingdom. Others outside the academy make use of fieldwork practices, in literature and journalism, marketing and government. The line between truly accomplished fieldwork in academia and these other fields can be porous.

The essayists range from midstage graduate students to senior scholars. They bring views from different points: students striving to make first sense of field data, emerging academics grappling with challenging issues, teachers contemplating instruction in the practice of fieldwork, established scholars broaching new topics, senior colleagues reflecting on lengthy field careers. Each essay reveals its author's voice (or voices) and style of fieldwork and writing. Though most are human geographers, physical and technical geographers are present too, working down in the mud, summiting peaks, descending well shafts, circling in light airplanes, or looking down from high up in Earth orbit. Some of the contributors work alone; some with a partner, a team, or a class; others work closely with local collaborators.

Contributors review geographical fieldwork in divergent circumstances. The authors' writing, photographing, data collecting, and mapping describe research that is not just Third World and rural, defying academic geography's long-held countryside bias. Indeed, although some chronicle fieldwork in western metropolises and others portray work in rural areas worldwide, taken together any simplistic distinction between the exotic and the mundane is overturned. Some travel far from a North American university to study their home place on another continent, others study their familiar North American home places with, as John van Maanen has written, "the slightly ironic intention of making them strange" (1988, 126). The individual voices of authors in this collection are hardly irrelevant; Clifford Geertz warns, "The gap between engaging others where they are and representing them where they aren't, always immense but not much noticed, has suddenly become extremely visible. What once seemed only technically difficult, getting 'their' lives into 'our' works, has turned morally, politically, even epistemologically, delicate" (1988, 130).

Arranged not by region, similarity, or seniority, articles are presented simply in reverse alphabetical order. Each author addresses one topic or issue in the main, and each essay can be read, by itself, for a substantive point or two. Asked to keep the essays short and tightly focused, authors have had to limit their discussions of

related issues, but readers will find that where one author leaves off, another author farther along in the issue—or at the very start—will often pick up. Using this special issue as a guiding or teaching text, readers will find essays that can be combined and recombined in almost endless ways; we considered specifying various sortings, only to realize that the topics addressed kept growing. There are essays on teaching the field, on interviewing and oral history, on photography and its use, on covert or overt fieldwork, on long-term versus short-term research, on violence and threats and accusations in the field, on tape recording and transcribing and field notes, on intellectual property and indigenous knowledge, on insiders and outsiders, on fieldwork undertaken alone, with family, or with local collaborators.

Authors tackle topics that range from using new (and old) technology in the field (sophisticated GPS equipment to simple notepads), to the complex power relationships brokered between field-workers and “informants.” Together, the essays demonstrate a broad view of what constitutes the field for geographers: from the kitchen to the archive, from “home” research and the playgrounds (literally) of Southern California to the more distant lands traditionally envisioned as “the field.” Indeed, in assembling this special issue, our concept of the field has been a generous one, agreeing with Felix Driver that the field “is not just ‘there’; it is produced and reproduced through both physical movement across a landscape and other sorts of cultural work in a variety of sites” (2000, 267).

Work afield is sometimes painted in mythic proportions, constituting a rite of passage that has brought no small share of sorrows. Yet only the fewest departments set a formal “field problem” as an element of graduate course work; many seem to assume that field knowledge is a geographical birthright perfectible only through solo struggle (Rundstrom and Kenzer 1989). As geographers, many of us come to identify ourselves in large part through our fieldwork (Parsons 1977, 1986): It lends us a regional, methodological, and/or topical expertise that can even be difficult to escape. Although most of us likely took preparatory courses to gird us with regional information, methodological training, foreign-language skills, or topical proficiency, we spend comparatively little time learning about or talking about doing fieldwork. If the accounts published here draw on past experiences, the lessons are for current and future field-workers. For fieldwork is not innate but learned—and those lessons can and should be shared. In this collection, authors show themselves not only as successful scholars but also as fallible field-workers, negotiating challenging circumstances, not always with equal success and grace. Passing on such hard-learned lessons—and exploring the often-complicated struggles with which good field-workers contend—is more than kindness, it is necessary if we geographers and our skills are to continue to be relevant in the twenty-first century.

Why is work in the field important, and not just for teaching geographers? Field investigation is a mainstay in many an endeavor. The frontline professions in which field study are important are hugely diverse, from spy to actuary, diplomat to marketer, broker to missionary, veteran to veterinarian. Yet the constituent elements—the periodic table—of fieldwork are hardly beyond number; this body of essays raises

themes that are recognizable and significant across the range of fields, disciplines, and occupations. And the essential reasons for doing field research haven't changed much through the ages: We learn about others the better to understand them and ourselves. Benefiting from that personally, and professionally, we can make the world a less strange and difficult place by telling of what we learn and shedding light on the world's complex and interwoven realities. In fact, not to do field-based research is to foreclose on visions of the world, shading our prisms and shuttering our senses. Fieldwork is a process of investigation, vital for learning and key to the triumphal survival of humans on this planet. That applies whether the physical or human earth is involved. Fieldwork is often the face of geography that the general public sees, if the public ever comes to think about geography—and the events of the last months of 2001 are reminder enough of just how central geography should be, how it should matter to everyone, with fieldwork most important of all.

Across the ages, certainly from the Age of Exploration through the Age of Information, geographers who bring fresh insights into places and situations have earned respect. Sites studied can range from the home hearth to the most exotic of dominions. Field-workers develop, individually and collectively, commitments to the places they work. But there is also a reciprocal for that equation: When places are forgotten by geographers, neglected by scholarly analysis, allowed to become a curiosity or cultural lacuna, that's partly our fault. Geographers know things that many other people do not. We learn about ourselves in the field; we learn about places from doing fieldwork there. Whatever our degree of theoretical engagement, it is what we know about a part of the world—or all of it—that is our first fact. And there fieldwork commences.

With this special issue of the *Geographical Review* we aim to reveal something of how geographers really work in the field. Each essay provides a vivid portrait, in miniature, of the processes of one person's geographical fieldwork—its politics, practices, and looming possibilities. As the authors share the challenges, pitfalls, and rewards of their own fieldwork, we hope that readers may be compelled to engage with issues presented and stories told. Most of us embrace personal experience as a mediating agent in our learning processes. But, as examples of broader issues, such personal experiences can also engage us and others in important methodological, theoretical, and analytical discussions. We hope that, like other volumes and special issues devoted to fieldwork in geography (Davis 1954; Platt 1959; Mikesell 1978; Bladen and Karan 1983; PG 1994; Geoforum 1999; Rice and Bulman 2001) this one will stimulate further discussion—in seminars, at conferences, and in the pages of this and other journals. Even a hefty collection, after all, can only be a beginning. Many more issues, ideas, places, and people could be presented, and we hope they will be.

Finally, we thank the authors for candidly sharing their experiences and insights. In assembling this special issue about the work of geographers urban and rural, physical and human, First World and Fourth, we have come closer to our own understandings of the geographer's commitment to fieldwork—something that presented itself during production as, under deadline, one author reviewed PDF page

proofs via e-mail from an Internet café in La Paz, Bolivia. In reflecting on this collection, we hope that, like us, readers will see how much fieldwork in geography has changed since F. J. Monkhouse penned his words on the subject in an inaugural lecture nearly fifty years ago. If Monkhouse could write that fieldwork “brings reality to geographical study” (1955, 27), the authors whose work follows show how fieldwork, rather than just providing straightforward answers, raises more and ever-richer questions. In offering ample evidence of departure from the ways in which a field-worker was once portrayed—laconic, stoic, in mufti, and male, we have tried to see into print a collection that poses both questions and answers. No one need bemoan the solitary field—we now know that field researchers are rarely truly alone, and we hope that these essays further the dialogue of which you readers are now a part.

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