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Horizons in Physical Geography

Edited by

**Michael J. Clark, Kenneth J. Gregory and
Angela M. Gurnell**

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Preface

It is now more than twenty years since Richard Chorley and Peter Haggett compiled their path-breaking survey of *Frontiers in Geographical Teaching* (1965), which, together with *Models in Geography* published just two years later (1967), did so much to consolidate the foundations of what had come to be called the 'New Geography'. The intervening two decades have seen further (and, on occasion, dramatically different) developments in the discipline. Indeed, one of the lasting contributions of both *Frontiers* and *Models* was to recognise and welcome change as the very life-blood of intellectual inquiry. To be sure, many of these changes collided awkwardly with individuals, institutions and even governments which, in their various ways, sought to impose some sort of stability or direction – a semblance of order – on the shifting kaleidoscope of discovery and debate. But there can be no doubt that since 1965 geography has continued (and is continuing) to change, and *Horizons in Human Geography* and *Horizons in Physical Geography* are intended to introduce some of the most exciting challenges of the contemporary subject to a wider audience. Like *Frontiers*, the *Horizons* volumes are directed primarily at teachers, although we naturally hope for a wider readership. We regard geography in the schools and geography in the colleges, polytechnics and universities as parts of a corporate project. Their aims and audiences are of course different, and it would be quite wrong to think of school geography as no more than a conveyor belt into further and higher education. But each has a measure of responsibility for the other, and we hope that the contributions to these volumes will help to promote a sustained dialogue between them.

For all that they have in common, however, these two books depart from the original volumes in a number of ways which we want to signpost in advance. In the first place, we have accepted that geography is a bipolar subject – like so many others – and we have therefore divided the contributions into human geography and physical geography. Some will no doubt regard this as a betrayal of the integrity of the subject, others as a mere convenience which reflects little more than the conventions of teaching and research. We see it, rather, as a way of drawing attention to the substantial differences between a human geography modelled on the humanities and the social sciences and a physical geography modelled on the natural sciences. This is not to say that there are no contacts or connections between the two,

and we have attempted to chart some of the most important in both volumes. But we believe that the differences which remain – between a human geography which, as one of its central tasks, has to make sense of a ‘preinterpreted’ world which is intrinsically meaningful to the people who live within it, and a physical geography which seeks to explain a shifting, changing but none the less ‘object’ world – are of vital significance to the future development of both human and physical geographies. That some of the most exciting developments in geography lie now, as they have for the past century, at the point where these two worlds and their different intellectual traditions intersect strengthens rather than weakens the case for a bipolar approach. The integrities of each must be respected, not erased by the casual translation of one into the other.

In the second place, and in addition to these differences between the two volumes, there are differences within them. Neither has been conceived as a manifesto for some new orthodoxy. Each essay is of its author’s making, and although we have drawn contributors’ attention to cross-references and cross-connections, we have deliberately made no attempt to ensure uniformity of viewpoint. Common threads do emerge, but these have not been imposed by editorial design. One of the hall-marks of geography today, and a sign of its maturity, is its diversity. For this reason we have not aimed at an encyclopaedic coverage, but have preferred instead to identify a series of key topics and themes to be approached by different authors from different perspectives. These themes, and the structures that they create, are of course editorial artifacts, and should not be taken to represent a fixed or self-evident map of geography’s intellectual landscape. It is, after all, a characteristic of a kaleidoscope that its component parts can build an infinite number of different but often equally satisfying patterns. The result, we believe, is thought-provoking testimony to the continuing power of that deep-rooted ‘concern’ for geography which Haggett and Chorley accentuated in the 1960s, and of their own reminder that ‘to stand still is to retreat’.

Cambridge and Southampton

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