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Chris Devereux (1946-2020): An Appreciation

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I first met Chris Devereux when he was teaching at Kingsway College of Further Education in London. His geography lessons were inspirational: an energetic flurry of enthusiastically described examples, colourful overhead projector sheets and varied and engaging field trips. He stimulated my interest in the subject to the extent where I was soon signed up for a geography degree.

I really got to know Chris when he invited my friend George Andruszkiewicz and I to travel with him to Portugal as field assistants for his doctoral research. Chris was doing his PhD part-time, managing to squeeze his geomorphology fieldwork between his full-time teaching and taking care of his young family. To make one final push to finish his thesis he needed support in the field, and George and I were happy with the prospect of a summer in southern Portugal. As research funding was lacking and money was tight, Chris drove the 2,400km from his home in Cheam, south London to the Algarve in his 1964 Morris 1100 car. Luckily, the car made it there and back with only a couple of visits to the garage, thanks to Chris' skill in running repairs. The major challenge was overtaking the many large trucks when Chris was driving on the 'wrong' side of the road – and couldn't see what was coming the other way. George and I soon became skilled at judging the chances of being flattened by oncoming Spanish juggernauts.

In the Algarve we spent most of the time wild camping. Our flimsy tents offered little protection from the sun, so we were not too worried that Chris got us up at the crack of dawn to start surveying river valleys or searching for sediment samples. Chris' research focussed on erosion and sedimentation episodes in river valleys in the region, providing empirical testing of the work of his supervisor, Professor Claudio Vita-Finzi. Claudio was convinced that much geological change was of relatively recent origin, and Chris' work in the Algarve seemed to support this. He found evidence of substantial changes in the landscape during Roman times. Today this would probably be

interpreted as evidence of human-induced climate change linked to de-forestation, but back then Chris was simply happy to find evidence of the two periods of valley sedimentation predicted by his supervisor.

In Portugal we spent almost all our time together, with moments of shared joy and petty frustration forging an enduring friendship. We also learned a lot more about the human side of Chris, in particular his devotion to his family and his religious faith. For me and George, Sunday morning was our one chance to have a lie-in in our sweltering tent, but Chris would often seek out a service at a local church. Although he couldn't follow the words of the Portuguese mass, he gained comfort from the spirituality and community of the ritual. His faith, together with liberal doses of sheer bloody-mindedness, helped to see him through the PhD, which he successfully defended in 1983. But such was his generosity of spirit that he even found time in his busy schedule to help with my PhD fieldwork in Mallorca. Chris was the driver and official photographer of the expedition, and he took great pleasure in observing the strange rituals of mass tourism from the 11th floor balcony of our high-rise hotel. Watching hundreds of people dancing to the Birdie Song around a hotel pool was another important lesson in the power of ritual.

As a development of his teaching, Chris had also become increasingly interested in how young people learn and acquire skills. He was increasingly convinced that traditional teaching methods were inadequate, and his observation of kids being failed by the system rankled with his innate sense of fairness. He started to work with the Institute of Education at the University of London, producing a series of studies and position papers on skill acquisition and assessment. He became a pioneer in the assessment of work-based skills. His research helped to develop new methods for recognising and validating skills in vocational education. He realised that giving credibility to non-academic qualifications depended on

devising innovative and dependable ways of measuring skills. He was also keenly aware that skill development was also dependent on the cultural context. His work on cross-cultural skills also led to him getting involved with the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and Research (ATLAS), which in the mid-1990s was developing comparative research on tourism education programmes in Europe. He produced the 'Little Black Book' for ATLAS (Devereux, 1999) that developed tools for the cross-cultural assessment of competences in tourism. This publication also reflected his conviction that the best way to assess learning was to trust students and value their input to the learning process, which also help to improve the quality of teaching. As he later commented (Devereux, 2012):

Combining formative assessment with summative assessment develops relationships between learners and trainers and supports learners' reflective capacity. It improves the performance of trainers and, most importantly, their learners.

His work with ATLAS also brought him into contact with other tourism educators, including Carlos Fernandes, who organised the ATLAS Conference in Viana do Castelo in 1997. Chris attended that conference to present his paper on tourism skills, even though his wife Jane was undergoing chemotherapy at the time. Chris, as ever the concerned family man, spent a lot of his time during the conference checking how things were going on the home front. When Carlos Fernandes organised the first ATLAS Expert Meeting on religious tourism a few years later, Chris returned to Portugal to present a paper on 'Spirituality, pilgrimage and the road to Santiago'. Again, Chris's research reflected his own experience, as well as his faith. He became a founder member of the ATLAS Special Interest Group on Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage, and together with other group members he helped lay the foundations for what became the *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*.

The paper he published in 2006 together with Liz Carnegie on 'Pilgrimage: Journeying beyond self' illustrates how skilful Chris had become at integrating his own experience with his professional and academic work. The research was based on narratives from individuals who had followed the Camino de Santiago or who had participated in charity treks. Chris himself was a regular participant in charity walks and cycling events,

so the design of the research was drawn largely from personal experience. The paper asks the question: what is spirituality? The authors argued to answer this question,

an understanding of the spiritual (in its widest sense) as well as the temporal needs of the pilgrim are crucial (Devereux & Carnegie, 2006:50).

They note that against a background of declining church attendance in Europe, belief persists, but increasingly on an individual rather than an institutional level. Pilgrimage is therefore presented as a journey within which

The physical and emotional and spiritual challenges the individual encounters whilst on the journey offer time for reflection and renewal, and recognition of both the immanent and the transcendent in the course of the journey (p. 50).

The paper explores how the difficulties of the journey to Santiago produce reflection, transformation and a sense of community. They compare the pilgrimage with charity treks, which, although not religious, have important parallels. Chris and Liz noted that charity treks are undertaken for the benefit of others, and that trekkers join a community that goes beyond the immediate reaching of a destination, and shows 'how people are prepared to look beyond the immediate in their lives and explore ideas and possibilities in community' (p. 54), which reflects the pilgrimage experience as well.

Looking beyond the immediate in life was certainly one of Chris's defining qualities. In 2001 he joined his brother Tim to cycle the Camino de Santiago. They wanted to make the pilgrimage in memory of their mother, and Chris also wanted to raise money for cancer research to give thanks for the recent recovery of his wife Jane. His brother kept a blog of the journey, which included typical contributions from Chris:

Mon 27th May, 2001

Over the Pyrenees and into Spain

I am writing this as I try to dry out my wet clothes in a small Spanish 'hostal' just over the top of the Ibaneta pass which separates the French and Spanish sections of my journey. The pilgrim route is simply called the 'Camino' here in Spain. It has rained all but one and a half days since 21st of May and it is cold and windy. I am therefore mildly surprised that I have done 487 miles of my journey and have climbed a total height of nearly 30000 feet. The

2 and a half hour slog up the 22 kilometres of the Ibaneta pass this morning only represented about a tenth of the total height climbed.

My journey would have been much more difficult had it not been for four friends- Martin, Joe, Mike and John - who joined me for three days in France. They rode with me from near Conques to beyond Lectoure and then returned by train to where they started, driving home from there. But what a three days. Torrential rain the first day for 3 hours made them wonder what they had let themselves in for as we floated into Cahors. But the meal we had there was a truly magnificent French affair. The sodden start the next day gave way to sun and a happy sharing as we migrated south. I found the whole experience both energising and humbling as the four had made great efforts to be with me and had helped raise over £1500 for the Marsden children's cancer fund.

Now they are gone I miss them. But the strange part of this journey is that the 1000 years of other pilgrims doing just what I am doing (admittedly not on a bike), serves to give an added dimension to my own efforts. I never feel alone. I don't worry about getting food or accommodation, or distances or the hills or the rain. Instead I spend hours of time thinking about those I have met on the road and those at home in England. Apparently, the Camino does that to you.

(<http://www.timdevereux.co.uk/cycling/santiago/day1.html>)

Friendships were also built through the legendary hospitality that Chris and his family offered to others, as the chronicles of Cheam's Clarendon Cycling Club attest. On one trip to France:

...we arrived in Chris's village about 1.30pm to a warm welcome. After a cup of tea we went out for an excellent 25 mile ride and cracked the 13 mph barrier for the first time this week. Then we made a trip into medieval Villeneuve for an aperitif before returning to the estate Devereux for a fine barbecue which went on into the evening. The grilled duck with spinach, mushrooms, potatoes and baked leeks together with the fine selection of cheeses and 4 bottles of Laurent-Jalabert-endorsed Gaillac wines were particularly appreciated by our young athletes.

Chris would not only provide hospitality, but also a wealth of information:

For those of you who don't know about Karst hills ask Chris Devereux, he'll bore the pants off you with all that geological stuff he knows about.

His concern for others was so great that he learned Portuguese so he could help rural communities in Brazil. Chris's knowledge of geology came in useful in an area beset by soil erosion. But he was surprised to learn that the local priest he was helping owned a gun. Apparently, he needed protection from the big landowners who didn't appreciate his efforts to educate the poor and improve their living standards. Chris and Jane also set up the Nomntu Project in the Eastern Cape, the poorest region in South Africa. This charity provided educational, social and practical support to those suffering from poverty, abuse, and HIV/AIDS in small communities.

In summary, Chris combined all the qualities of a good Christian, as well as the fortitude, perseverance and reflectiveness of the pilgrim. He showed a generosity of spirit and a concern for others that shone through in his teaching and research, which as Chris put it was about

enabling sensitivity towards those trying to give meaning to their lives that lies somewhere beyond themselves.

All those lucky enough to know him will have been enriched by the experience, and he also left a legacy of engaging scholarship to enrich humanity as a whole.

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