

The world at your feet

We want you to explore the UK through new eyes as part of London 2012. The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is challenging Britons to discover more about their local environment by finding links to all 206 nations competing in the Olympic and Paralympic games.

The project, Walk the World, is part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad's Discovering Places campaign, which aims to inspire people in the UK to discover their local built, historic and natural environments. Walk the World offers everyone an easy and exciting way to get involved in the Cultural Olympiad, no matter where they live.

We're challenging people to walk around their neighbourhoods and identify features that connect with one or more of the participating nations; to explore the digital map on our special website and find out which places have the most links so far and where the biggest gaps are; and to create their own walks.

Buildings, place names, plants and animals, monuments, people and communities all have a geographical and historical context. Look around and you can find unusual links in the most surprising places: the white lines in the road, for instance, are linked to Sierra Leone and Australia, which between them account for half of the world's supply of rutile, a mineral composed primarily of titanium dioxide, which is used as a paint pigment.

We're asking *Geographical* readers to find at least five links in their own areas and share them with us. We'll then add the links to the map on the Walk the World website for all to see. To find out what links have already been found in your area, have a look at the map or just put in your postcode.

The links should be things that you can see. Most will be outdoors, but some may be inside public buildings, although we aren't looking for objects in museums, libraries or galleries.

There are already several example walks on the website to give you ideas, as well as tips for doing your own walk if you would like to showcase your local area.

LEFT: the weather vane on the Indian Institute in Oxford. RIGHT: the National Monument in Edinburgh



The Society is delivering Walk the World in partnership with Discovering Places and the Heritage Alliance; the project is funded principally by the National Lottery through the Olympic Lottery Distributor.

The Society's director, Dr Rita Gardner, is delighted that the RGS-IBG is playing such a major role in the project. 'It's part of our long-term push to engage the public with geography, the understanding of places and how and why they're different,' she says. 'So be inquisitive – encourage your friends or local groups to walk. We want everybody out and about looking at their local geography and history; the UK has been globalised for thousands of years, so there's a lot out there to discover.'

In rural Suffolk, for example, we found more than 50 connections to other nations. The wheat grown in East Anglia originated in Jordan and Syria, and reached the UK some 5,000 years ago; the pantiles – curved roof tiles common in the area – arrived there as ballast in ships from the Netherlands.

Dr Jenny Lunn is the Society's manager for the project. Going out on some of the sample walks herself, she has been amazed by just how much you can find out about an area and its links to other nations. 'Discover the unexpected,' she says, 'and prepare to be surprised; you never know what you might find around the next corner.'

On the Liverpool walk, for instance, Jenny found links to nearly 70 Olympic and Paralympic nations. And in a walk of a little more than three kilometres around the Society's headquarters in Kensington, we found a record 113 links to other nations. Can you beat that?

As we went to press, we had discovered links to 170 of the participating nations. Help us to reach the golden 206! ■ For more information, and to see the digital map, visit www.walktheworld.org.uk. And you can send your links to us by emailing walktheworld@rgs.org



The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) promotes enjoyment and understanding of our world. Membership is open to all. You may use geography in your profession, have a thirst for geographical knowledge or a passion for travel. *Geographical* is the Society's magazine and is available as part of membership. To find out more, call the Membership Office on 020 7591 3080



ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY (WITH IBG) SELECTION OF EVENTS FOR FEBRUARY

2 February, 7.30pm

The heart of darkness
(Lecture, Norwich)

The Congo River is the world's largest after the Amazon. Its course runs for 4,700 kilometres, cutting through the planet's second largest area of primary rainforest. Robert Chalmers describes his recent incident-filled river journey into this troubled area of deepest Africa.

For further details, visit www.rgs.org/eastanglia



8 February, 7.30pm

Northabout
(Lecture, Belfast)

Jarlath Cunnane and Paddy Barry will talk about their Arctic polar circumnavigation aboard the purpose-built sailing vessel *Northabout*, including building the boat and their transit of the demanding Northwest and Northeast passages.

For further details, visit www.rgs.org/northernireland



9 February, 7.15pm

Waking the giant: looking at the link between climate change and geological hazards
(Lecture, York)

Professor Bill McGuire, director of the Benfield Hazard Research Centre at University College London, describes his new, soon-to-be-published research on the connections between the changing climate and geological hazards. Joint event with York Geographical Association.

For further details, visit www.rgs.org/yorkshireandnortheast

13 February, 6.30pm

The human future
(Lecture, London)

Humans have changed the face of the Earth. Sir Crispin Tickell considers the future of the human race in an overpopulated, globalised world with increasingly degraded natural resources.

Open to RGS-IBG members only. Please bring your membership card for entry



22 February, 7pm

Michael Palin meets... Michael Katakis
(Discussion, London)

In conversation with the Society's president, Michael Katakis – photographer, writer and author of *Traveller: Observations from an American in Exile* – talks about the many people and places he has encountered and photographed over the past 30 years.

Bookings are essential. RGS-IBG members are entitled to two free tickets. Please email events@rgs.org or call 0207 591 3100. Non-members can purchase tickets online (up to five per booking) at £5 each at www.rgs.org/michaelmeets or by calling 020 7591 3100

February, various dates and times

Explore!
(Lecture, various locations)

BBC presenter Paul Rose talks about a lifetime of remarkable adventures from Antarctica to Mount Everest via the planet's last true remaining wilderness – its vast oceans. Paul will be speaking at venues in Taunton, Brecon, Keswick, Southampton, Stamford and Darlington.

For further details, visit www.rgs.org/regionalevents



The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is a leading world centre for geographers and geographical learning. One of our aims is to stimulate the awareness and enjoyment of the subject to a diverse range of people.

Geography is about the understanding of the people, places and environments of our world, the processes by which they are changing, and the interconnections between them – both locally and globally.

The Society carries out a wide range of activities to support these aims. We support research groups; promote geography within the national curriculum; produce scholarly publications; provide training in scientific field techniques and expeditions; offer information through our large map collection, library and picture library, and engage the wider public through our popular national lecture series.

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