



# SAGTA Members' Newsletter

## Theme: The importance of attending Conferences

### Message from the outgoing Chairperson

As I step down as Chairperson of SAGTA, I reflect on the incredible journey we have shared. I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve, lead, and learn alongside such a passionate group of geographers. Our successes are a testament to your dedication and commitment. I am excited to see the association continue to grow and thrive. Thank you for your support and I wish the incoming chairperson all the best.

Zama Shabalala



**Zama Shabalala**  
**Chair 2024-2025**

### Why is it important to attend conferences?

Your Head of School must ask you this every time you budget for an annual conference in your department planning. You will respond with a variety of answers to motivate for this budget item.

“Geographical fieldwork sets the subject apart!” This must be the winning catch phrase. If we look at experiential learning then the phrase that fits is “Seeing is believing”.

At our recent Namibian Conference, two key note speakers gave us much food for thought. Dr Tiani Wepener (SPU & a SAGTA member) spoke about the learned experiences that we should be reflecting on in the classroom with our learners. We should encourage them to share their experiences on a topic with the class.

Dr Surene Botha, a hydrogeologist, spoke to us about the water saving strategies that give life to an arid country such as Namibia. This idea can be shared with our learners when discussing water management.

Be sure to budget for and plan to attend the SAGTA Academic Conference to be hosted at Kingsmead in June 2026. Further details on pages 2 and 3 of the Newsletter. In 2027, the field conference will be hosted in Makhanda, Eastern Cape. The learned experiences you take away from these conferences, allow you to share and bring best practice into your daily teaching.

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### Origin of the Field Conferences

These field conferences started 1992, in association with ISASA, where a group of geography teachers would organise a biennial field conference of about 4-6 days. At these conferences the traditional South African Map “Teacher Award” was handed to the worthy recipient, with the inscription: “In recognition of your dedication, creativity and enthusiasm as a geography teacher”.

In 2014, at the Hermanus Conference a group of geographers, met to discuss the formation of SAGTA, especially as ISASA would not be able to further support these conferences. In August 2015, the first inaugural SAGTA Conference was hosted in Pietermaritzburg. A 4-hour planning meeting took place on the Friday afternoon; an Academic Conference was hosted on the Saturday, and then an optional trip to Sani Pass with Thabo Tours took place on the Sunday. This conference was significant as it was the last time Tony Hambly presented, on a topic called “Thinking Skills in Geography”.

Most of the academic conferences have used the theme: “Think Geography”; “Change” or “Mitigating climate change: Lessons from recent disasters”.

Pam Esterhuysen

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*What is the name of the bus (above)? She was the trusted transport in Namibia. Submit your answer on the google link:*

<https://forms.gle/KqrkqvM9RKHNJQ2J9>

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## 2026 Webinars

Here is the link to the recordings:

### Peatlands in South Africa:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLSFk1etXx0&t=10s>

### Geospatial analytics (McDonalds)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpDSTMkpWpw&t=1s>

## Academic Conference at Kingsmead College

We invite you to attend the 2026 SAGTA Biennial Academic Conference hosted by Kingsmead College 26 & 27 June 2026.

SAGTA is committed to representing both DBE and IEB Geography teachers across Southern Africa, and we’re excited to make this conference accessible to all.

With flexible options designed to suit your school’s budget and calendar, this event is the perfect opportunity to grow engagement, collaboration, and professional development.

Please join us by completing the registration form using the link on the attached invite. Registration closes 30<sup>th</sup> April, with payments due 6 May 2026.

[2026 SAGTA Academic Conference Registration](#)

# SAGTA

## Biennial Academic Conference

HOSTED BY



KINGSMEAD  
COLLEGE



**Friday 26 June**  
**Academic Conference**  
**Cocktail Networking Party**  
**Saturday 27 June**  
**Fieldwork (limited to 60 pax)**

- **Rosebank Urban Renewal Walking Tour**
- **Redbus Tour**

**Full Package R2200**  
Attendance Options Available  
on the Registration Link

Registration closes 30<sup>th</sup> April  
(click here)



NPO: 2017/035104/08

# GEOGRAPHY IS EVERYWHERE

**GEOAWARENESS  
DAYS - 2nd Quarter  
2026**

**April**  
**22 Earth Day**  
**24-27 City**  
**Nature**  
**Challenge**

12 South African cities, towns or municipalities are part of this challenge.

Find out how you can join in these cities and contribute to Citizen Science.

**May**  
**16 Endangered Species Day**  
**22 International Day for Biodiversity**

**June**  
**5 World Environment Day**  
**8 World Oceans Day**

## **GEOGRAPHY AWARDS 2023**

### **CONTRIBUTION TO GEOGRAPHY 2023**

Celia Sauerman has been actively involved in promoting Geography since she started teaching. She started out being a committee member of APEK Geography, which then became NAPTOSA Geography. (under the auspice of the Teacher Union).

Celia joined the SAGTA committee in 2014 (a founding member).

For many years Celia taught in Government schools and played an important role in resource sharing and networking with teachers. She continues to do this today.

Celia is passionate about the use of IT in the subject and has upskilled herself in many areas to make sure that IT is successfully integrated in the Geography classroom.

Celia is a deserving recipient of this award.



# HOW MANY FIELD CONFERENCES HAVE YOU ATTENDED?

Originally we did a survey at the SAGTA BERG to BEACH conference in 2021, to see who has attended the most Geography Conferences. We are extending that survey to all SAGTA members and also teachers who are on the South African Geography Teachers Google group emailing list, or anyone you may know who has attended one or more of these field conferences. We are looking for the Geography Teacher who has attended the most ISASA and SAGTA conferences! Our records go back until 1992, and if you include the Namibia Conference (2025), the most conferences attended will be 17!

We awarded certificates at the Mpumalanga conference to those teachers who were present. But we do have a few other teachers who would qualify for a certificate. **Please take time to complete the form, if you have not done so previously.** Link to the google form is below. It has been updated to include the 2025 Namibia Field Conference.

We have updated our records if you have already completed the form.

<https://forms.gle/RXRL6PjDth6uqfax8>



## Categories for certificates:

- Bronze**      5-6 conferences
- Silver**      7-8 conferences
- Gold**        9-10 conferences
- Platinum**    More than 10 conferences

Sizwe was awarded the “mentor of the Conference” award for the time and care he took of our bus driver, even explaining some of the geology of the Makhonjwa Mountains.



## List of Field Conferences

- 1992 Phalaborwa
- 1994 MHS
- 1996 PE
- 1998 CT
- 2000 JHB
- 2002 FS and Lesotho
- 2004 PMB
- 2006 St Lucia
- 2008 CT
- 2010 Knysna
- 2012 Mpumalanga (White River)
- 2014 Franschoek
- 2016 EL
- 2018 N Cape (Kimberley)
- 2021 Midlands (Howick)
- 2023 Mpumalanga
- 2025 Namibia

## CITIZEN SCIENCE

Citizen Science is simply scientific research that may be conducted by concerned citizens. Many school groups contribute to this research and the databases. The learners use computers, cellular phones, gardens, rivers and the outdoors to observe, monitor and submit their findings. The use of web-based platforms is becoming important in developing local citizen science groups. Results may be recorded and verified on these platforms and schools can build up secondary data (Graham & Taylor, 2018).

Many schools also use environmental agencies or groups to assist with fieldwork studies. An example would be The Wildlife and Environment Society of Southern Africa ([WESSA](#)). This society has many trained field officers at their environmental centres across the provinces, who work with school groups to ensure a hands-on, enquiry-based and experiential learning environment for the development of geographical and life-skills to be accessed.

## Teachers in Action at Kaapschehoop (2023)

On Saturday (30 September 2023) the conference group explored the Kaapschehoop Nature Reserve.



The group then carried out **active field studies**:

- **Settlement function analysis**
- **Fluvial data collection**: consisting of three different tasks.

The group divided into three smaller groups to carry out their task. Minimal expensive equipment was used. We used simple, tried and tested methods to collect data. Each task took about 1-1,5 hours to complete.

The relevant field documents may be accessed using the following link:

Each Task group then had a brief to share their findings with ONE presentation slide only and 3 minutes to pitch their evaluation. The conference group then voted on the best presentation of the evening.

*Disclaimer: The spelling of Kaapschehoop varies from platform to platform/ source to source.*

*Kaapschehoop (from Dutch) is the registered name. However, on the topographic map, the spelling is Kaapsehoop (from Afrikaans). The original name of the settlement was Duiwels se Kantoer.*

# Best Presentation: a MiniSASS study of the Battery Creek Tributary, just above the waterfall

Winning presentation: Trudy Vermeulen, Stembele Matotie, Dale King and Sine



## Citizen Science continued

The collaboration with Citizen Science Agencies in local field studies highlights the value of working together as part of a larger network of scientists, academic institutions and environmental groups, to monitor and address environmental and social issues.

Graham, M., & Taylor, J. (2018). *Development of citizen science water resource monitoring tools and communities of practice for South Africa, Africa and the world.* Water Research Commission.

**Biomonitoring** – checking for macroinvertebrates which are seen as indicators of poor or good water quality. [MiniSASS](https://watercan.org.za/)

**Chemical quality of water**  
Use a WaterCAN testing kit  
<https://watercan.org.za/>

**miniSASS: Assessment of Battery Creek tributary.**

Dale King  
Sanelisiwe Mahlangeni  
Trudie Vermeulen  
Stembele Matotie

- Used to monitor river water quality and health.
- Uses the count of macro-invertebrates to score river health.
- NOT used to determine drinkability (viruses and bacteria).

GROUPS	SENSITIVITY SCORE
Flat worms	2
Worms	2
Leeches	7
Crabs or shrimps	6
Stoneflies	10
Minnow mayflies	5
Other mayflies	11
Damselflies	4
Dragonflies	12
Bugs or beetles	5
Caddisflies (cased & uncased)	9
True flies	2
Snails	4
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>NUMBER OF GROUPS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>AVERAGE SCORE (miniSASS Score)</b>	<b>7.5</b>
Average Score = Total Score ÷ Number of groups	

Co-ords: 25°35'36"S, 30°45'36"E

Ecological category (Condition)	River Category	
	Sandy Type	Rocky Type
<b>NATURAL CONDITION</b> (Unchanged/untouched – Blue)	> 6.9	<b>&gt; 7.2</b>
<b>GOOD CONDITION</b> (Few modifications – Green)	5.9 to 6.8	6.2 to 7.2
<b>FAIR CONDITION</b> (Some modifications – Orange)	5.4 to 5.8	5.7 to 6.1
<b>POOR CONDITION</b> (Lots of modifications – Red)	4.8 to 5.3	5.3 to 5.6
<b>VERY POOR CONDITION</b> (Critically modified – Purple)	< 4.8	< 5.3

## Teachers in Action at the Michaelhouse Academic Conference June 2024

On Saturday 23 June we had a number of presenters share their resources, expertise and assist in conducting practical fieldwork tasks around the campus.

One of the field studies was looking at the water quality of the local stream using the miniSASS materials and equipment. Thank you to GroundTruth for making the equipment available and for guiding the delegates through the tasks.

Winners of the 3 slides\* 3 mins presentations was: Microclimate—looking at aspect





## Presentation

**Front Row:**

- Mzwandile Khumalo
- Lindo Xulu
- Bernard Whitaker

**Second Row:**

- Paula Oosthuizen
- Clinton van der Merwe
- Aranka Mennen

## NAMIBIAN CONFERENCE 2025 - Awards

### TRUDIE VERMEULEN

For her decades of dedicated service at Leeuwenhof and Helpmekaar, where her passion for geography and commitment to excellence have inspired generations.

Her matric students consistently achieve outstanding results, a testament to her exceptional teaching. She has broadened horizons—literally and figuratively—through international field trips and continual professional development, including her regular participation in SAGTA conferences. Her love for the Earth is matched only by her devotion to sharing it with others.

### ARANKA MENNEN

For her nearly 4 decades of loving service at Assumption Convent, where she has instilled a love of Geography in her students and a passion for fieldwork. Aranka has been a consistent supporter of SAGTA, and Geography Gauteng Her quiet support and kindness are relied on by many people in the Geography community.

Both Aranka and Trudie have attended 12 ISASA and SAGTA field conferences.

Credits: Heather Auchterlonie



## NAMIBIAN CONFERENCE 2025 - Awards



### Christie de Wet and Elize van Niekerk

These thoughts come to mind.....

- stalwarts
- loyal, reliable, get on with the job at hand without fuss
- hardworking, don't shirk when given various responsibilities
- part of the founding ISC team - contributed positively to ensuring the success of the new exam.



I first met Elize in 2007 at marking. She was living in Tsumeb then, and moved in 2008 to Stampriet, where she and her husband still farm.

Christe is a reliable Senior Sub Marker for the ISC Paper II examination.

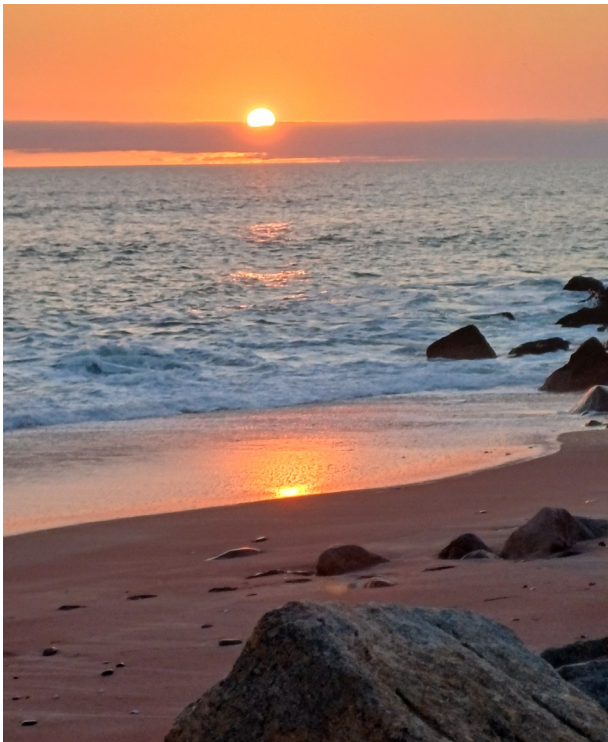
Winner of the Mergin Map Quiz Competition

Mathew Pantland, with Gavin Fleming

# NAMIBIAN CONFERENCE CAMEOS



Photo credits: P Esterhuysen (2025)



## IGU-CGE Conference @ Stias 27-31 October, 2025

Co-hosted by the [Southern African Geography Teachers' Association \(SAGTA\)](#), the 2025 annual conference of the [International Geographical Union's Commission on Geographical Education \(IGU-CGE\)](#) took place in Stellenbosch, South Africa, from the 27th to the 31st of October 2025. Around 90 educators, teacher trainers, and researchers from countries including China, the USA, various European nations, South Africa, Singapore, India, and Brazil gathered to share ideas and experiences in geographical education.

The event focused on “Geographical Learning Today for Tomorrow,” with discussions centred on how geography teaching can respond to current global challenges and prepare learners for the future. [Prof. Clinton van der Merwe](#) chaired the Local Organising Committee, which consisted of: [Emeritus Prof. Di Wilmot](#) (RU); [Dr Paul Goldschagg](#) (WSoE); [Prof. Mary Evans](#) (Wits); [Mrs Bridget Fleming](#) (SAGTA & ThinkTeacher); Mr Graham Keats (Reddam House); [Ms Tess Uren](#) (retired teacher & SAGTA); Ms Amanda Louw ([SAGTA](#)); Dr [Muofhe Thenga](#) (WSoE) and [Prof. Sadhana Manik](#) (UKZN).

### Key Themes and Sessions

The conference programme featured two parallel streams of presentations, highlighting forward looking issues in geographical education. A major emphasis was on Education for Sustainable Development, transformative education, and climate change education, with many contributions exploring how geography can foster responsible and critical global citizenship.

Another strong theme was research into teacher professionalism and the improvement of teacher education programmes. Several sessions specifically addressed geographical education in the African context, reflecting the conference's South African setting and the local realities of teaching geography on the continent.

A further strand examined how geography education can be developed in the digital age, covering topics such as the use of AI, GIS, and augmented reality in the classroom, as well as strategies for addressing geographical disinformation and fake news. Selected papers from the conference will be published in a forthcoming issue of the [Journal of Geography Education in Africa \(JoGEA\)](#).

## Notable Keynotes

A standout moment was the keynote address by [Professor Heila Lotz-Sisitka](#) from Rhodes University, titled “T-learning in Times of Climate Change”. She challenged participants to critically examine how learning is understood in the Anthropocene, urging them to “UnTHINK” familiar patterns and “ReTHINK” educational approaches.

Drawing on Sfard’s (1998) metaphors of learning as acquisition and learning as participation, she argued that these models need to be expanded to meet today’s complex societal and environmental challenges. As an alternative, she presented T-learning: an approach that is transformative, transgressive, transdisciplinary, and together (collaborative). She concluded by stressing the vital role of teachers, noting that they are the single most important factor in enabling quality education world-wide.

The conference dinner, held at [Glen Carlo](#) (a local winery), provided a relaxed setting for networking, set against the beautiful backdrop of the Cape region. The evening and conference closed with an engaging keynote by [Professor Jonathan Jansen](#) (Stellenbosch), who shared insights on science (geography is a science, too) teaching in schools facing complex social and contextual conditions.

## Regional Insights and Next Steps

The programme included well-organised field excursions to locations such as Hermanus and the vibrant township of Kayamandi, where local guides shared the community’s history and everyday life, providing participants with valuable on-the-ground perspectives. Thanks Bridget Fleming for a stunning day out!

Those interested in keeping up with international developments in geographical education can sign up for the free IGU-CGE newsletter at [www.igu-cge.org](http://www.igu-cge.org)

Prof. van der Merwe is the African Representative on the IGU-CGE Steering Committee (2024 to 2028). The next IGU-CGE conference is scheduled for summer 2026 in Bangkok, offering another opportunity for global exchange on geography teaching and learning.

Clinton van der Merwe

**Save the date!**

**SAGTA FIELD  
CONFERENCE  
2027**

**Makhanda**

**June-July 2027**

**Date TBC**



Hermanus pre-conference field trip 27 October 2025



Delegates who attended the Conference at Stias, Stellenbosch