



NPO: 2017/035104/08

Journal of Geography Education in Africa (JoGEA)

Journal of the Southern African Geography Teachers' Association - sagta.org.za

Obituary

Emeritus Professor Keith Beavon
(3rd June 1937 – 16th April 2021)



ISSN: 2517- 9861

Keith Beavon was said to be 'a born teacher'. Adding to his innate teaching ability were benefits from his unusual school education. As the son of a magistrate, he moved often and attended eight different schools! He was certainly exposed to a wide variety of teaching styles.

But why did he choose Geography specifically? He *had* planned to be a civil engineer. For that, his university course included Geology which, in turn required him to do Geography 1. In later years he often said that he was immediately excited by Geography's multi-faceted nature, drawing from the arts and sciences to address issues facing people living on planet Earth. *People* were always at the centre of his passion.

Thus started his long commitment to our discipline: honours at UCT. and, later, his masters on urban land-use in Port Elizabeth under the direction of Professor David Hywel-Davies.

I write with many years of friendship with Keith Beavon. Together, in 1959, we were the first students ever to opt for Geography Honours at UCT. Together, in 1960, we did the Secondary Teacher's Diploma course before setting out to teach in Britain. The best way to travel to Britain in those days was on a Union

Castle steamship. The fare for 13 days of travel, all meals and a tiny cabin was 91 pounds.

Keith's first geography teaching job was at a small school in Seaford, Sussex. His pupils loved having a Geography teacher from Africa, and affectionately called him Bwana. His second teaching post was at Queens College, Queenstown, South Africa, soon followed by a lectureship at Rhodes University. His upward path led through the Universities of Cape Town, the Witwatersrand and Pretoria. For six years after his retirement he was still asked to offer courses at all of these universities. Less widely known was that, in his retirement, Keith wrote poetry, some of which has been published.

South African Geography has been enriched by the work of Professor Keith Beavon. His contribution was especially significant in urban geography: on record, he produced 53 papers, 36 conference papers and eight urban reports. He edited a number of professional journals and monographs. Beyond these formal academic achievements, he generously responded to public requests for extra-mural lectures and public lectures.

Appropriately, Professor Beavon was elected Fellow of the South

African Geographical Society in 1979. His awards have included a University of the Witwatersrand overseas fellowship (University of Sheffield), a British Council study award, a British Academy visiting professorship (University of Keele), and a New York University visiting scholarship.

Between 1977 and 1998 he was the Professor of Human Geography of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. When he retired from that post he became the Professor and Head of Geography at the University of Pretoria (1999-2005).

At the end of his teaching career the titles of Professor Emeritus were conferred upon him by both the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Pretoria.

John Earle

johnearle70@gmail.com

