

U3A CAMBRIDGE AFRICA FORUM 2023-2024
FRIDAYS 3:00pm to 4:15pm U3AC Pink Room
Autumn Term
Week 4 Friday 3rd November 2023

Remembering former Forum member Dick Grove

I noticed an obituary written by Bill Adams in the Guardian newspaper on 21st October 2023:
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/aug/22/dick-grove-obituary>

A fuller obituary is on the Geography Department's website:
<https://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/people/grove/>

Dick was born on 1924 and died in July this year. I knew he was seriously ill when I last met Bill Adams and his wife Francine Hughes at my open studios on the first Saturday in July, as they were off to see him straight afterwards.

Dick was a geographer and climatologist, particularly on the long term (i.e. in geological terms, the last 20,000 years) changes in climate, particularly in the desert regions of Africa including Lake Chad and the Kalahari.

Dick gave presentations to us about his work on Lake Chad, the hovercraft expedition in 1969/70 along the Senegal, Niger, Benue and Shari rivers to Lake Chad and also one on St Helena.

I had first met Dick at the Geography Department when I was visiting Bill Adams whose PhD was supervised by Dick during which Bill was attached to me when I was working in North West Nigeria between 1979 and 1981.

I had not realised that Dick was a keen pilot and was in the RAF during the Second World War, primarily training pilots in Canada. It was his observations from the air that led him to study the historical limits of Lake Chad using air photography.

He studied Geography at St Catherine's College, Cambridge from the age of 17. His studies were disrupted by the Second World War but he returned to Cambridge and graduated with a first. He was in Nigeria between 1947 and 1949 studying soil erosion for the Colonial Office.

He then took up a position at the Geography Department in Cambridge and was made a lecturer in 1954. He was made a fellow of Downing College in 1963 and eventually became Director of Studies in Geography. He retired from lecturing in 1982 but remained Director of the Centre for African Studies until 1986.

He supervised many PhD students which allowed him to continue fieldwork in Africa. He mapped dune fields in Katsina, northern Nigeria in 1952 and was a member of an expedition to the Sahara in 1957. He also worked in the Kalahari, Ethiopia, Malawi and on Lake Turkana.

Outside Africa he worked on the East Anglian coast, particularly after the 1953 floods and also in 1978. Later in life he expanded his work into the Mediterranean.

When he died he was the longest serving member of the Royal Geographical Society having joined in 1947 (76 years).

He was a very modest person but was important in the study of historical climate change in Africa.