

Nicholas James Preston 1965 –2010

Nicholas (Nick) James Preston, great geomorphologist and dedicated teacher, died December 29, 2010 after a long and brave struggle against cancer. Nick leaves behind his lovely family: his wife Anja and his two children Lucie (3 years) and Jannik (1 year).

Born in New Zealand on 17 December 1965, Nick was brought up together with his sister Bridget by their mother Eileen in Korokoro, a small but beautiful suburb in the hills of Lower Hutt, Wellington. After having finished primary and secondary education, he went to Australia and worked in Sydney, ultimately completing training as a chef. During this time, he realized that his curiosity wasn't yet satisfied and he wanted to learn more of life. He returned to New Zealand, where he enrolled at Victoria University of Wellington for a Geography degree. During his studies, he became enthusiastic about landscapes and, subsequently focused his efforts on geomorphology, particularly on landslide research. His Masters thesis, supervised by Prof. Mike Crozier, investigated the change in geotechnical slope resistance to shallow landsliding with time. This research provided the first quantitative demonstration of how certain catchments may become increasingly resistant to failure as a result of successive landslide events. His outstanding scientific achievements have been recognized internationally. Encouraged by his mentor Mike and colleagues, he went to Bonn in Germany to do a PhD under supervision of Prof. Richard Dikau, where he spent the next four years. While there he met Anja Feise, a Geography student who he later married. Scientifically, he moved towards soil erosion and sediment budgets and again, submitted an outstanding PhD thesis on using radiocaesium to determine sediment distributions in a small catchment in Germany.

In 2001, Anja and Nick went back to NZ and Nick started working at Landcare Research in Palmerston North. Two years later he obtained a lecturing position at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. Here he worked with Prof. Gary Brierley and Dr. Kirstie Fryirs on the interconnected nature of drainage basins. Besides scientific research he very much enjoyed working with students. In 2005 Nick returned to Wellington to take up a lectureship at the School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, Victoria University. This position allowed him to continue his research on landslides and erosion and to excel in teaching. Just before the cancer was diagnosed in early 2009, he was awarded the Outstanding Graduate Supervisor Award by Victoria University.

Nick was greatly liked and well respected by his colleagues in the scientific community, but also and in particular by his friends. He was a quiet and thoughtful person, who took opportunities when they arose and accomplished them with rigour and modesty. If he accepted tasks and duties, one could always be sure that he fulfilled all the expectations – because his own standards were so high. In professional and personal situations, he behaved with the highest integrity, discretion and loyalty. He familiarized himself quickly with new challenges and demands. As a critical observer with a considered, clear and focused judgement, he was a key player in many research projects. He also dedicated much time to his PhD and Masters students. During his illness, he displayed a very positive and highly admirable attitude, never complaining, but addressing his illness with great honesty and openness, trying to ease the burden on those around him, and sheltering his family and friends as much as he could.

His colleagues and friends have lost a great and loyal mate. He will be missed very much.

The memorial celebration is scheduled for 2 January 2011 at 11 a.m. at Korokoro School Hall in Lower Hutt, Wellington, New Zealand. Messages and tributes may be left in Nick's tribute book (Nicholas Preston) at <http://www.tributes.co.nz>.

If you want to support his family and in particular his two very young children Lucie and Jannik, a donations account (in German: "Spendenkonto") has been established with the purpose of supporting the education of both children. Any donations are most welcome. This trust will be available until the children have finished their education, thus if you wish, contributions can be made as one-off donations or through continuous support. Details of the trust fund are:

Hypo Tirol Bank AG
Tegetthoffstraße 4
A-1010 Wien
AUSTRIA

Account holder: "Univ. Prof. Dr. Thomas Glade Spendenkonto Nicholas Preston"

Within Austria:
Account-Number: 30053217203
BLZ: 57000