



GISCorps Newsletter

August 2007

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Other Organizations

URISA

GISCorps Partner Agencies

EWB

GSDI

MMEX

The World Bank

UNDP

UNHCR

UNJLC

VVAF

Volunteers for Prosperity

Relief Agency Links

Relief Web

global hub for time-critical humanitarian information on Complex Emergencies and Natural Disasters

A Message from the Core Committee

Volunteers and Friends of the GISCorps -

On behalf of the Core Committee of GISCorps, we would like to present you with our August Newsletter.

In this newsletter we are reporting on GISCorps activity since June, including new deployment and partnership news, GISCorps activities at the ESRI Users Group Conference in June, and the upcoming URISA International Conference in August. Please read on.

As always, we sincerely appreciate your support and are looking forward to meeting you at upcoming events.

Warm Regards,

GISCorps Core Committee Members,
Shoreh Elhami, Juna Papajorgji, Mark Salling, Dianne Haley

P.S. Please send an email to info@giscorps.org, if you want your name removed from this list.

Deployment and Partnership News

- GISCorps Volunteer Miguel Garriga recently completed a mentoring/advising project for a project in the Hunza Valley of Northern Pakistan. You can read Miguel's personal accounts of the project at <http://www.giscorps.org/pakistan.php> or in the articles titled Pakistan Mission and Pakistan Mission Thank You later in this newsletter.
- We are in various stages of several new projects. These projects are:
 - New Mission - with American Association for Advancement of Sciences (AAAS)
 - New Mission - with HealthCare Volunteers (HCV)
 - Mission in Progress - with International Center for Health and HIV/AIDS (ICHHA)
 - Mission in Progress - with Kabul Polytechnic University (KPU) via Engineers without Borders - International (EWB)
 - Mission in Progress - with the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio (GCCDS)
 - Two Missions in Progress - with Global Spatial Data Infrastructure Association (GSDI)

Data/Information Links

Earthwatch Institute

Earthwatch Institute is an international non-profit organization that brings science to life for people concerned about the Earth's future.

Service at Sea

Service at Sea is a ship-based technology assistance program that will begin a circumnavigation of the earth in August, 2007, with a goal to assist conservation organizations who are using GIS technology to meet goals of their communities.

Society for Conservation GIS

A non-profit organization supporting individuals using GIS and science for the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage

GISCorps Core Committee

Shoreh Elhami, Chairperson, Co-founder
Juna Papajorgji, Co-Chair, Co-founder
Mark Salling
Dianne Haley

Contact Us

<http://www.giscorps.org>

Email: info@giscorps.org

You can read more about these projects at:
http://www.giscorps.org/proj_opp.php

ESRI's 27th Users Conference

This year GISCorps had a booth at Ballroom 20 Foyer and on Monday night (the Map Gallery) many interested attendees visited our booth. We also held our annual Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting on Wednesday June 20th during which several of our volunteers shared their experiences with the audience.

- Chen Li shared his recent on-site volunteer experience with UNDP/AIMS in Kabul, Afghanistan. Rina Canserina, an ESRI staff who was also in Kabul shortly before Chen, showed some of the photos that she had taken while there.
- Lori Quinn, our UNHCR volunteer talked about her remote mission in Egypt.
- Leeanne Pacatte and Laura Horton, two of our Katrina volunteers who are helping Beni Patel with a K-12 initiative, gave a presentation about the merits of the idea. Their committee is organizing and planning now and already see a need for volunteers
 - to help form partnerships with similar organizations,
 - to develop teaching materials and curricula,
 - to coordinate volunteers and,
 - to go into classrooms and communities.

They are currently looking for volunteers to help them, and there are many possibilities on how each of us can contribute. Please contact us if you are interested in helping this committee.

To see photos of these events, please visit our website at:
http://www.giscorps.org/news/esri_07_photos.html

URISA Announcements

Upcoming Conferences

URISA's 45th Annual Conference

August 20-23, 2007 - Washington, DC

What's New

- [45th Annual URISA Conference Program, Exhibits and Registration Information](#)
- [June 15 - Decision Issued in MAPPS, et al. v. the United States of America -](#)
- [Call for Presentations for 12th Annual Integrating GIS & CAMA Conference Now Available - submission deadline September 17, 2007](#)
- [URISA's GIS in Public Health Conference a Success in New Orleans](#)

URISA's 45th Annual Conference

GISCorps will once again be an active participant at URISA's 45th Annual

Conference (Washington DC, August 20th to 23rd). For more information about the conference, please visit URISA's website at <http://urisa.org/conferences/annual/info>.

- A presentation on the activities of GISCorps in 2006-2007 will be held on Tuesday August 21st from 2:00 to 3:30 pm in the Lincoln West room. Join us and meet your fellow GISCorps volunteers and Core Committee members in a session where they will share their experiences with the audience.
- GISCorps' annual meeting (URISA GISCorps Volunteers & Friends Meeting) will be held on Wednesday, August 22, from 10:00 AM-12:00 Noon in the Adams Room, on the Terrace Level. We hope you can join us in Washington DC.

Shop for GISCorps Stuff!!

Do you find yourself in need of a new T-shirt, coffee mug, ball cap or tote bag? Do you want to advertise GISCorps and your association with the organization? Well, you are in luck! You can now find various GISCorps items at our online shop at: <http://www.cafepress.com/giscorps>

Pakistan Mission

GISCorps Volunteer Mentors/Advices in a Project in Hunza Valley in Northern Pakistan

By Miguel Garriga, Geographic Systems, LLC, GISCorps Volunteer

I originally joined GIS Corps in 2004, shortly after finding out more about the group at the ESRI Conference. I had just started my own consulting business, and the GISCorps seemed like a great opportunity to give back to the GIS and world community.

My first opportunity to work with GISCorps came in September 2005, though not as I had hoped. Katrina had hit, and EOCs in the strike zone were asking for volunteers. I had contractual obligations and was not able to take time off until three weeks after the hurricane. By this time, the EOCs were no longer asking GISCorps for volunteers. I was disappointed I was not able to contribute, but glad the EOCs got the help they needed when they needed it.

Finally, in May 2007 I got an email from Shoreh Elhami of GISCorps, saying I was short listed to help on a Cultural GIS project in the Hunza Valley in Northern Pakistan, mapping historical sites. They needed a volunteer to act as a mentor or advisor to another volunteer who would be working in the field. I would not need to travel, just provide technical support by email as needed. It sounded like a great opportunity. I had the skills they were looking for: training experience with ArcGIS and Geodatabase design, familiarity using CAD data with GIS, and knowledge of projections and Georeferencing.

To kick off the project, Shoreh sent me background emails from Bernadette Baird-Zars, the volunteer who would be doing the work in Pakistan over the next 3-4 weeks. This was followed by a Skype conference call between myself, Bernadette and Shoreh to discuss the project and make sure we were all on the same page. Bernadette had a lot of hands on experience using ArcGIS with shapefiles, but not much experience with Geodatabases.

Based on the user needs, as described in emails from Bernadette, I made a couple of suggestions about how the Geodatabase could be used to facilitate data collection. Creating Domains of valid values for a field would restrict data entry to just those values, ensuring data consistency and helping reduce errors in data entry. Subtypes would allow storing similar complementary features inside the same layer, with a single item to distinguish them, and the added benefit of automatically setting default values for fields based on subtypes.

Bernadette forwarded me an email with a preliminary database design from the client. Looking at this preliminary database design, even though it was for a non-spatial database, certain things popped out as logical candidates for subtypes and domains. I helped Bernadette with specific questions she had - questions about linking tables and working with normalized and de-normalized databases with GIS. We identified base map sources for Northern Pakistan, and talked about ESRI recommended hardware specifications and platforms. I advised Bernadette on how to create Geodatabases from scratch, and how to convert shapefiles and CAD files to Geodatabases.

Once Bernadette got to Pakistan, the project started to take shape and things moved more quickly. Bernadette's questions were now very specific, and I answered her questions as best I could on everything from layer organization, to projections and georeferencing CAD files, to loading and working with non-spatial tables.

When I next heard from Bernadette a week later, the project was well underway. The emails I got were more like status reports, with fewer questions. She sent me a layout of the Geodatabase design and layer organization, a hierarchy for uniquely identifying every cultural feature by location and type, and finally, finished maps showing the location of cultural sites in the villages of Northern Pakistan.

In terms of time, my commitment to the project was probably less than 20 hours over a four week period - a small commitment from me, but of great benefit to Bernadette in the field and the project overall. Our primary form of communication was email. There were about three one-hour Skype calls, at the beginning, middle, and end of the project.

Best of all, I was able to fit this in to my normal work schedule. I could answer most of Bernadette's questions at the end of my work day (and due to the time difference, the beginning of hers). From my perspective, it was a great experience because I was able to support someone in the field with information that was immediately put into practice. Although I could not take the time off work to go to Pakistan, I feel I was able to contribute in a meaningful way. It was great fun, and I look forward to doing it again.

Pakistan Mission Thank You

GISCorps Volunteer Mentors/Advisees in a Project in Hunza Valley in Northern Pakistan

By Bernadette Baird-Zars

As a Fulbright student associated with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Syria, I was asked to assist an AKTC sister project in Pakistan with mapping. We were charged with making a geodatabase for cultural heritage inventory data gathered on over 500 sites and dozens of small historic villages, as part of a larger initiative to document and promote local culture in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. The local team - almost all young women from the village in the Hunza Valley - had worked very hard and amassed a rich and interesting amount of data, including CAD and total station surveys of historic settlements, household surveys of residents and their home structures in tabular format, and the inventory in Microsoft word format.

Throughout the process, the guidance and support provided by GISCorps was wonderful. Initial conversations with Shoreh Elhami shed light on the spectrum of similar projects, and the possible outputs most appropriate for publicizing the data. Nestled in the high Karakorum mountains, the physical landscape of the area is unmatched and well-recognized, but the area also has a unique cultural heritage that is very little-known or visited, and one that the project hopes to make public for the local and international community soon. Once the geodatabase compilation is finished for the whole region (we finished the design and compiled one valley during my time there), it will likely be put on Google Earth as a layer, as well as having a CD-rom output that is more accessible for local users.

Miguel Garriga, the volunteer assigned to the project, must have answered hundreds of questions over the roughly month-long period of design and implementation, and did so with patience, timeliness, and detail. While remote assistance perhaps may not be a traditional volunteer approach, I can report from the field that it was immensely helpful and appreciated. Especially in remote locations, this application of GISCorps can be a great way to catalyze and give confidence to local capacity. From my perspective as a mildly-qualified GIS user, the ability to have access to a knowledgeable mentor to ask technical and theoretical questions of was truly invaluable. Thank you GISCorps!