SERIES B:
Perils in Paradise: The Clash of Nature and Culture on Oceanic Islands

Fridays, 10.00 – Noon, September 23 to November 25, 2016

Innis College, Town Hall

Lecturer: Professor Emeritus Tony Davis, U of T. Tony is a physical geographer. His research focuses on the reconstruction of past environments using pollen analysis. His teaching included courses in biogeography and field methods. LLL members know Tony from his popular 2015 series Fire & Ice, Drought & Flood: Humans & the Environment.

In this series we examine the origins of oceanic islands and their distinctive biota (animal and plant life). We also explore the social, cultural, biological and economic consequences of human settlement. Islands have been exploited for their natural resources and have served as prisons, places of exile, and, more recently, as tourism magnets. Some face bleak futures as a consequence of global warming.

Lecture 1 (September 23): Islands – Real, Mythical and Metaphorical. Islands as special places, as sanctuaries, etc. Habitat islands. Artificial islands (Dubai, the Spratlys). Islands in literature - Robinson Crusoe and other ‘Robinsonades’. Atlantis and other lost continents real and imagined.


Lecture 3 (October 7): The Peculiar Floras and Faunas of Oceanic Islands. Islands have low species diversity, high endemism (species found only there) and high vulnerability - largely a function of island size and degree of isolation - and peculiar evolutionary responses (dwarfism, gigantism, flightlessness, etc.). New Zealand and the Galapagos.


Lecture 6 (October 28): Post-settlement impacts. Genocide, disease, slavery, indentured labour and other legacies – the Caribbean, Hawaii, Fiji, etc.

Lecture 7 (November 4): Islands as Prisons for Plants, Animals and People. Isolation has its attractions and problems. Islands as utopia, sanctuary and places of incarceration – St. Helena to Norfolk Island. Biological globalization and its impact on island plants and animals.

Lecture 8 (November 11): Islands at War and In Peace. Islands as strategic locations (Midway, Okinawa, Diego Garcia, etc.). Testing of nuclear and biological weapons and human displacement (Bikini and Enewetak Atolls).

Lecture 9 (November 18): Paradise Lost and Preserved (For Now). The use and abuse of island resources and the myth of sustainability. Disasters and success stories (Madagascar, Galapagos, Nauru, Rapa Nui).