

A Rocha Czech Appeal

In April 1993 we made our first Sage trip to a then almost unknown Christian field centre on the Alvor Estuary in Southern Portugal. The centre was the beginnings of a now international organization, A Rocha (Christians in Conservation), and Dave Steel and others in Sage became firm supporters and friends of many A Rocha staff workers.

It was therefore appropriate that one of the charities the Steel family has selected for donations in memory of Dave is A Rocha. The particular project they wish to support is in the Czech Republic, and involves the purchase and renovation of a former grain



Krupárna, the A Rocha Czech centre

mill. The mill is located in one half of a spacious old building (A Rocha already own the other half). Krupárna stands on 2.5 hectares of land that comprises meadows and forests. It is strategically located close to ecologically important sites, including the Special Protected Area of Eagle Mountains, Grandmother's Valley and the Rozkoš Reservoir. The current challenge is for A Rocha to complete the purchase of the other half of the Krupárna complex and finish its extensive renovations. See <http://en.arocha.org/czech/index.html> for more details of the project.

Dave would certainly approve of this choice - Pavel and Radka Svetlik, who lead the project, have the same vision for uniting Christian belief with environmental concern. Dave would have loved to meet them.

To make a donation please send a cheque or charity voucher (made payable to *A Rocha UK*) to: A Rocha UK (Attn: A Rocha Czech Appeal), 13 Avenue Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB1 3BL, UK.



Dave cleaning a pond at Cruzinha, A Rocha's Portuguese centre, April 1993.

David Steel 1951 - 2006

Many of you will have already heard the very sad news that Dave Steel, one of the founders of Sage, died on 20 November after a five-week battle with acute pancreatitis. It was Dave, together with his wife Caroline, who had the original idea to start the group which became Sage. Although Sage has never had an official "leader", Dave was the nearest we had to one, especially in the early years. Sage's considerable achievements

would not have happened without him. Important as that is, however, the main way many of us will remember him is as a great friend. Dave and Caroline's hospitality has been a major part of the glue that has kept Sage together over the years.

In this tribute a number of people who are or have been part of Sage share their thoughts and memories of Dave.

Karl Wallendzusz

A passion for the natural world

Dave Steel was a trained botanist, but he was also a brilliant field naturalist. Take a walk with him, and you had a walking encyclopaedia of birds, flowers, insects, and local history. In the 70s and 80s Dave was very active with the local Naturalist's Trust and was Chairman of the Upper Thames Region Conservation Committee for a few years. He published, with Peter Creed, three small books of local natural history interest and regularly wrote the *Badger* column for the Oxford Times. He was also a great help to the Oxford Conservation Volunteers when they first set up.

I first met Dave in 1990, when we were both attending St Aldate's. Dave had a vision for bringing together his passion for the natural world with his Christian faith. At the time this was considered a pretty radical thing to do, but Dave and Caroline wanted to form a group to do just that, and Sage was born. We were soon engaged in a whole variety of activities - walks in the countryside, writing Bible Studies, taking part in practical conservation projects, a prayer group, taking services on environmental

themes, writing articles. The group flourished under Dave's skilful leadership. We always called him our "kind of chairman", as he was the undoubted leader, but it never felt like it.

In time Sage spilled out from St Aldate's to many churches all over the Oxford area, and we steadily built a network of Christians who were concerned for the environment - we now have several hundred people. Dave was always there, often taking a very unassuming role. Only three days before he was taken into hospital in October, Dave was in our conservation work party at Boundary Brook Nature Park.

Things have changed very greatly since 1990. Now it is quite common for archbishops, bishops and other church luminaries to make speeches about the environment, but Dave was well ahead of them. Dave was a visionary, an inspiration, and a very humble man. His influence was far-reaching. We all loved him and will miss him very greatly.

Martin Hodson

Adapted from an appreciation given at Dave's funeral





At a Sage work party at Boundary Brook Nature Park, October 2006

Flight of the Plovers For Dave



Along the marshy flats amongst streaked sky of blue and orange rest a flock of plovers where a gentle man observes silently and still. In an instant the birds arose, flew noiselessly up and away swiftly turning here and there against the generous sky. Oh what winged joy! What celebration flight! A glance of sun's gold shone silently on their wings to catch the light, they tipped and fell then up, up to flood with golden radiance. The gentle man enrapt thought 'what precious light shines on these true creatures of God?' So free, towards this special glorious light this gentle man departs to join the plovers in the Lord's most glorious place, heaven.

Sarah Milrose

I shall remember discussing with Dave about gentleness and robustness during the Sage New Year walk.

Kaihsu Tai



Speaking at the Sage 10th anniversary dinner, September 2000

We met Dave on a few Sage walks and social events. We enjoyed hearing so much that we never knew about the trees around us. He had a great breadth of knowledge, and the ability to apply it in sound practical ways, and he always had time for people. Underlying this was a faith that touched and informed each part of his life. In future events we will miss his comforting presence, but our loss is nothing to that of Caroline, Jeremy and Dan.



Birdwatching at Otmoor, January 2005

Richard and Judy Riggs

A pioneer ahead of his time

My initial contact with Dave Steel was a result of joining St Aldate's in the late 80s and subsequent involvement with what was then a small Sage group. My personal interest in this arose from my work on renewable energy in overseas aid. I was working with many non-Christian environmentalists and I was looking to find support and fellowship. I enjoyed the Psalm 104 slide show that was then part of the Sage activity, and as it included a picture of a chimney stack I thought there was scope for my involvement as a chemical engineer!



My work took me to Kent soon after but not before enjoying one memorable week attending the course that David and Caroline led at Lee Abbey. In Kent, at the University of Greenwich, a few of us introduced the Sage Bible Study to some environmental science students and they then challenged

us in turn - with the result that we filled a bus together to attend the Jubilee 2000 rally in Birmingham. Sage was very much a pioneering activity to start with and it is hard to recognise now how little acceptance or credibility 'green Christians' received as a legitimate expression of shared Christian commitment. Seeing the recent video *Is God Green?*, showing the shift in recognition amongst evangelical Christian leaders in USA over the past year, was a reminder of how powerfully we are controlled by the religious norms at any given time.

Particularly in those early days, Dave had a boldness and balance that we admired and recognised. In that way he was ahead of his time, so I praise God for that and for what has come about and will continue through his witness.

Alec Hollingdale

A gentle friend

My greatest memory of Dave is as a very kind, lovely, gentle person and friend - how he guided me as a blind person with great care. He'd taken over from my wife Maggie who must have looked as though she needed a rest. This just showed Dave's utter selflessness and intuitive love. Both Dave and Caroline have been such an amazing support to me since Maggie died and often hugged and prayed me through many tears. I will miss him so much but I know that as he is received into heaven Jesus will be smiling at one of his greatest stars.

With love,

Franz Stevens, Yorkie & the late Annie



Left: Dave and Jeremy during the Sage trip to Iona, August 1994