

Dr Shelley MacDonell – Lead Researcher from Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Zonas Áridas (CEAZA) (La Serena, Chile)

Semester 1 2021



Dr Shelley MacDonell, currently a lead researcher at CEAZA in Chile, is hosted by Dr Heather Purdie of the School of Earth and Environment. At CEAZA, she leads a research group covering glaciology, climate change, hydrology, and water resources. The group primarily works in the semiarid Andes and Antarctica. Their work has also been used to advise public policy in areas such as glacier protection, water resources and climate change in Chile.

Shelley is a University of Otago alumna, holding a BSc(Hons) in Geography (2004) and a PhD in Geography (2009). She originally arrived back to NZ in early March 2020 to undertake an Erskine Fellowship at UC, however, she and her husband got caught in the NZ lockdown and have been working remotely from her mother's house in the Manawatū ever since.

“We took the opportunity to come back to UC this year for a variety of reasons. Firstly to fulfil the commitment we ran out on last year! Also, I really enjoyed working within the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, and so also jumped at the chance to come back to work with the great team here. It's also a great feeling to be back in the lecture theatre after a year of zoom meetings and presentations!”

Shelley is currently teaching into two courses this semester, GEOG201: Environmental Processes: Principles and Applications, and ANTA102: Antarctic Studies.



The Erskine opportunity also brings benefits to her ongoing research programmes. Together with Dr Heather Purdie they have recently been funded by the Chilean science agency to begin a large scale research project focused on the impacts of climate change in semiarid Chile.

“I lead the line focused on understanding mountain processes, and physically being together with Heather gives us the benefit of envisaging similarities and differences between mountain environments in both countries, and paired experiments we can engage in.”

Shelley says **“I cannot speak highly enough of the Erskine programme. Not only does it bring together an interesting group of academics to provide students with a different perspective, but it also enables spontaneous opportunities to emerge, such as new research ideas and connections.”**