

# DARE Newsletter

## Using *DARE* in the Systematic Study of Regional Variation

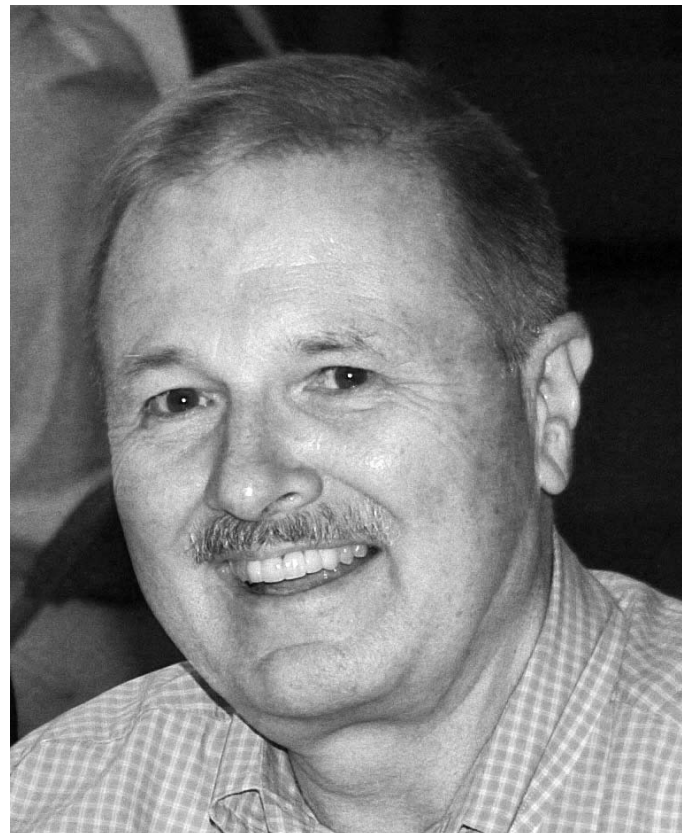
Ed Finegan

At the University of Southern California, I regularly teach a course called “Language, Society, and Culture.” It meets the university’s general education requirements in the “Social Issues” category, a category that requires concurrent registration for most students in a first-year writing course. My section typically enrolls 100 students, mostly freshmen newly arrived on campus from various parts of the United States, but also students from Asia, Europe, and elsewhere. Two linguistics department teaching assistants and several of the assistant lecturers who teach the same students in the writing courses attend the class lectures.

The syllabus typically opens with a couple of autobiographical books whose purpose is to raise general awareness of, and heighten sensitivity to, issues surrounding ethnic, racial, and socio-economic identity and the relationship between those identities and language variation. Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory* or *Days of Obligation* and Rebecca Walker’s *Black, White and Jewish* have worked well in this regard. We then tackle conversation, Gricean maxims, politeness, and related interactional matters. The students meanwhile, in their discussion sections, have been learning how to record a natural conversation among their friends and transcribe part of it as a sample of natural conversation; questions of methodology, theory, and ethics are part of that enterprise. In the course of the semester, they use their own transcripts as the basis for two of the required papers in the course.

Later in the semester, the syllabus returns to the theme of language variation, especially across

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“You didn’t need the ‘No Parking on Devil Strip’ photo to entice me to read the *DARE Newsletter*—I always read it—but I’m glad you included it [in the Spring/Summer 2008 issue]. My wife, a Wisconsin girl, calls that area a ‘tree lawn’ while I’ve always called it a ‘parking strip.’ (This was a source of some confusion early in our marriage.) It’s hard to tell what region my English is from—my father grew up in California, my mother in Massachusetts. I grew up in Massachusetts, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois and went to college in Ohio and Wisconsin.

On a recent trip to Maine I noticed some baffling road signs. Perhaps *DARE* could team up with AAA to publish a pamphlet titled *The Traveler’s Guide to American Road Signs*. Keep up the good work.”

Douglas W. Downey  
Northbrook, Illinois

“Wow! I just read the Spring/Summer [2008] edition of the *DARE Newsletter*, and was absolutely bowled over! For years I’ve been aware that *DARE*’s many uses far exceeded those of your ordinary dictionary. But the scope of it, as detailed in your [=Joan Hall’s] article, left me simply breathless.

It really was exciting to see the responses of people from all over, and especially their great variety. You and your staff, past and present, are to be thanked, as well as congratulated, for the fine resources you are giving the world. I look forward to Vol. V.”

Rosemary Dorney  
Madison, Wisconsin

“My go-to resource (the place I trust the most) for answering dialect questions is the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. The editors are now finishing the fifth and final volume of the work, which will complete what I believe to be one of the great feats of English-language dictionary-making. *DARE*, as it is abbreviated, tends always to have the answers I need.”

Grant Barrett  
Lexicographer and writer  
*Malaysia Star* column, dated September 10, 2008

## Using *DARE*

*Continued from page 1*

socioeconomic status groups, ethnic groups, and men and women. Because regional variation is very much on the minds of freshmen gathering in dorm rooms with peers from regions other than their own, my students are keen to learn about regional variation in a systematic fashion, and that opens several avenues to pursue, depending on the thrust of a particular course. Regional variation is less sensitive than variation across ethnic and socioeconomic groups, so it’s a good site to begin systematic study. Because the university requires its “Social Issues” courses to be explicit about methods of investigation and because in all my courses I point to the interrelatedness among scientific (and social scientific) inquiry and politics and economics and ethics, I treat three major inquiries into regional variation: the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, and the *Atlas of North American English*. Methods of collecting data are examined for each of the projects, and we discuss relationships among methods, ethics, and propagation of findings; closely allied with those items is general discussion of costs, funding sources, and research priorities.

As to language itself, we compare overall maps from the three projects, highlighting similarities and differences among them. We discuss the profiles of respondents in each project and some pros and cons of various approaches, as well as the ethics involved in gathering linguistic data. For the *DARE* section, we first inspect an ordinary map of the United States and a *DARE* map and, relying on *DARE* materials, discuss what a *DARE* map representing a word used in all *DARE* communities would look like and why it is that no such maps (other than for illustration) would be expected to appear in a dictionary of regional use. (For overall maps based on *DARE* research, I rely on Carver’s *American Regional Dialects* [University of Michigan Press, 1987]).

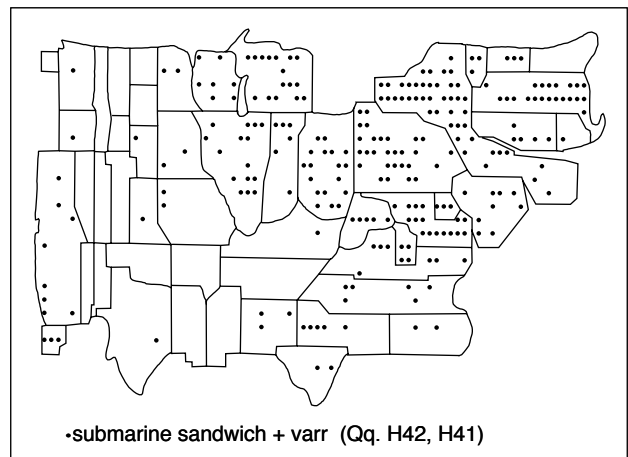
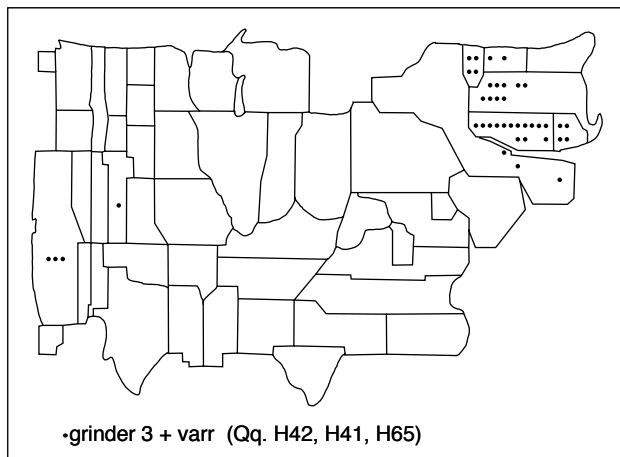
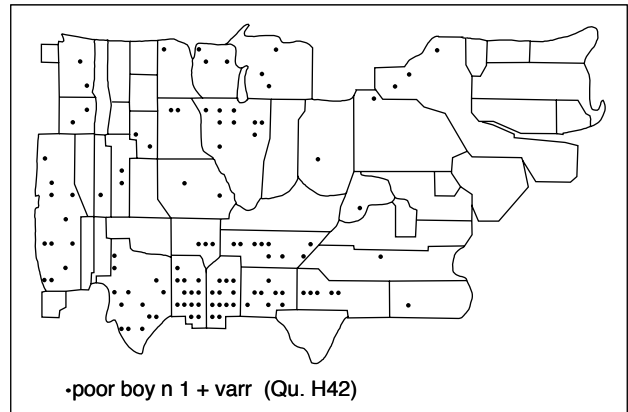
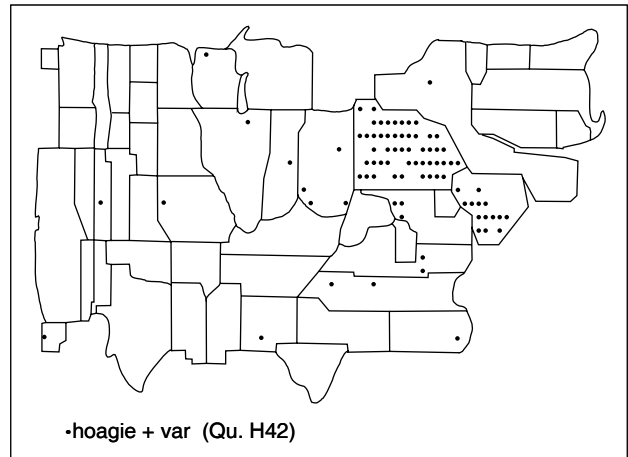
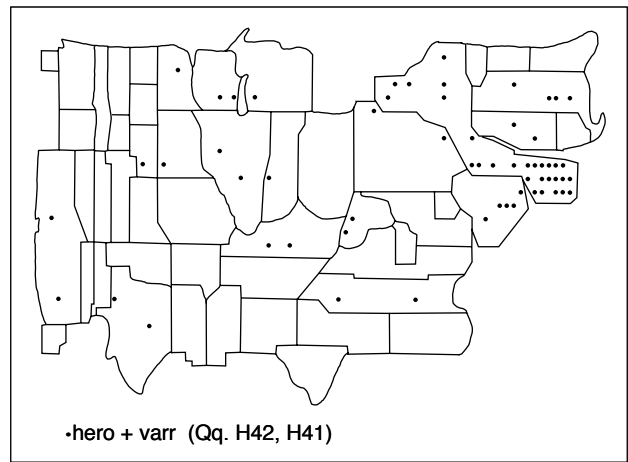
Pictures of the *Dictionary* itself represented on a PowerPoint slide complement other aspects of our discussion. I choose *DARE* terms I think likely to spark student interest, vocabulary being easier of access to freshmen than is pronunciation, and many *DARE* terms being more familiar than many Atlas terms. Among many examples that might work well for this purpose are *DARE* questions H41 (“Other kinds of roll or bun sandwiches favored around here—in a round bun or roll”) and H42 (“The kind in a much larger, longer bun, that’s a meal in itself”). Those questions appear on a

PowerPoint slide, and I elicit as many variants from students as I can, along with information about where the student who volunteered the term comes from. Once we've exhausted our own terms, a couple of students may report that a parent or other relative uses yet another term, and we hear what it is and where the relative is from. With various responses as a backdrop, we examine the *DARE* maps for *hero*, *grinder*, *poor boy*, and *hoagie*, relating the mapped distributions to what students have already reported about themselves and their relatives. I also elicit some likely reasons for distributions that represent a regional concentration coupled with scattered uses elsewhere, as with the maps for *grinder* and *hoagie*, which show concentrations respectively in western New England and in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, with scattered occurrences in other states for both words. The *grinder* map shows a narrow distribution, while *hero* and *hoagie* show narrow distributions with scattered uses elsewhere. With the map for *hoagie*, we talk about the Ohio River and the role played by natural channels of transportation and communication in spreading terms.

To a question about the distribution of *sub* or *submarine sandwich*, I remind students that *DARE* isn't completed and that its published volumes extend only to Sk-. But I've been anticipating precisely that question and take advantage of it to display the map for *submarine sandwich* from the yet-to-be-published Volume V, a map generously supplied by *DARE*'s staff. My students and I then discuss what a *DARE* map of today's college students would likely show, and we speculate briefly about possible effects of the Subway restaurant

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*The maps reproduced here appear in Volumes II (1991), IV (2002), and V (forthcoming) of the Dictionary of American Regional English, published by the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.*



## Using DARE

*Continued from page 4*

chain, founded in 1965, on the spread of one term over another. The discussion tends to be lively, everyone something of an expert on the matter. We then move on to other DARE maps, including that for *greazy*, which can be compared with Atlas materials if time allows.

To spark still further interest in the systematic study of regional dialects, we tackle other DARE questions, including earthier ones, such as “Words for breaking wind from the bowels” (X55b); “What words do you have for a woman who is very fond of men and is always trying to know more—if she’s not respectable about it?” (AA7b); and the immensely popular “A mark on the skin where somebody has sucked it hard and brought the blood to the surface” (X39). Students want to see the map for *hickey*, and I misleadingly gesture that it’s next in line among the slides but instead provide the call number for the *Dictionary of American Regional English* and urge students to visit the library’s reference room and to check out the map for *hickey* and other words offered in response to question X39. A further slide then excerpts items given in the matching columns quizzes on DARE’s Web site. Still another indicates that DARE remains incomplete and at its Web site solicits help from students and others for items to appear in Volume

V. Other aspects of regional variation are then addressed, including from the *Atlas of North American English* certain systematic patterns of variation and change, such as the Northern Cities Shift and the Southern Shift. Among generalizations that are easy to draw from such study is one about people speaking *like* those we speak *with*. And those concrete similarities of lexicon and pronunciation lay the groundwork for the importance of language in forming political and social views within discourse communities.

I take a similar, though not identical, approach to social and regional variation in another course I teach, an honors course designated “The Process of Change in Science.” While the emphasis of that course differs significantly from that of “Language, Society, and Culture,” the Atlas, DARE, and ANAE comparisons prove useful and engaging here as well. In neither course do I use my own textbook, *Language: Its Structure and Use*, 5th ed. (Thomson/Wadsworth, 2007), but some of the materials I discussed above are available in the dialect chapter of that book, including the DARE map for *hickey*. Undergraduate students can become excited with the systematic study of regional variation, and DARE’s focus on vocabulary proves particularly accessible and affords a wide range of choices for instructors. I’ve found it a gold mine in several kinds of courses and as entrée to a wide range of discussions. ♦

*Originally a New Yorker, Ed Finegan taught on Long Island and then at Ohio University and Case Western Reserve University before moving west in 1968. Besides a focus on the discourses of law, he has a scholarly interest in language variation and English usage, including its treatment in dictionaries. He has contributed chapters on usage to the Cambridge History of the English Language and on North American English to A History of the English Language (Cambridge University Press, 2006). He is the author of Attitudes toward English Usage: The History of a War of Words (Teachers College Press, 1980) and co-editor with John R. Rickford of Language in the USA (Cambridge, 2004). He has served on the editorial boards of American Speech, Discourse Analysis, English Language and Linguistics, and Corpora and is a member of the executive board of the Dictionary Society of North America. Ed hikes regularly in the San Gabriel Mountains, whose nine-to-ten-thousand-foot peaks in the Angeles National Forest can be seen (sometimes!) from the campus of the University of Southern California, where he is professor of linguistics and law.*

“I have the first four volumes [of DARE] and am eagerly awaiting publication of Volume V. . . . You, Frederic Cassidy, and your colleagues/graduate students have brought many hours of enjoyment to me and to my friends.”

Anne S. Nash  
Director of Publications, Office of Public  
Relations  
Lynchburg College, Lynchburg, Virginia

“I married a Kansan and we planted *Juneberries* in our garden. Last month in mountainous Virginia the *Juneberries* were fruiting in August and I remarked on this to a local botanist. A pungent silence—the mental wheels visibly turned—and he answered, ‘Oh! *Sarvisberries*! Yes, we have a lot of them!’ Back at the *Dictionary* I discovered that *shadbush* has a myriad of names . . . and all these years I’d thought they were all different plants! Always dependable—thanks, DARE!”

Claire Cassidy  
Bethesda, Maryland



## Funding Update

Jon E. Sorenson  
Director of Development

As the dust settles after the recent elections, the pundits have come out with theories as to why various candidates were successful in their fundraising efforts. One theme emerges over and over, and that is the power of many. Not everyone can attend the black-tie galas or VIP receptions that require large donations for entry, but many people chose to give small amounts that added up to big gifts that kept the airwaves buzzing with campaign slogans.

*DARE*'s fundraising efforts have been successful because of the power of many. Those consistent gifts, often given at year's end, help us keep this important work moving toward completion. When all of them are added up, they provide the support needed to bring this wonderful project to fruition as a lasting resource for generations to come.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation by check or credit card, please use the coupon that appears on page 8 of this *Newsletter*. I am happy to answer any questions about giving opportunities and hope you will consider *DARE* when planning your end-of-year contributions. Feel free to give me a call at (608) 262-7211 or e-mail me at <jon.sorenson@uwfoundation.wisc.edu>.

Thank you for your continued support of *DARE* and for being part of the many who have built this *Dictionary*, volume by volume. We are almost there! ♦

“*DARE* sounds like such a fascinating project and I congratulate you for bringing it into existence!”

Victoria Macy  
Administrator, Harvard University

“My family has used ‘Lasko trades’ as long as I can remember. I never knew where it came from, and nobody could spell it—it just was. . . . We thought [the expression] was ‘I’ll give you a Lasko trade!’ I’m fascinated to learn that it is a last-go-trade [*DARE* Ed: see Volume III]. My mom is from Kentucky and my dad was from Plant City, Florida. I can’t trace it further than that and nobody remembers where they got it from. Sorry I’m not much help, but I love the *DARE* project.”

Betty Miller

## Coming in Volume V

<i>stinkpot</i>	A trillium (here: <i>Trillium erectum</i> ). (Chiefly nNY)
<i>thunder dog</i>	Also <i>thunder puppy</i> : A salamander (here: <i>Necturus</i> spp). (sAppalachians)
<i>ticky</i>	Finicky, fussy; touchy. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>touse</i>	A commotion, disturbance; a state of agitation. (Chiefly NEng, esp ME)
<i>tree lawn</i>	The strip of grass and trees between the sidewalk and the curb. (Chiefly Gt Lakes, esp OH)
<i>tunnel</i>	A funnel. (Chiefly NEng, Upstate NY)
<i>turn in</i>	To apply oneself to a task, set to work. (Chiefly Midl)
<i>turn out</i>	To cease to cultivate (land), leave fallow. (Chiefly Sth)
<i>unlikely</i>	Of the weather: threatening. (Chiefly VA)
<i>warn</i>	To give official notice of (a town meeting). (Chiefly NEng)
<i>waste (of the moon)</i>	The period of the waning moon. (Sth, S Midl)
<i>water bar</i>	A diagonal ridge made on a hill road to divert water and prevent erosion. (NEng)
<i>wedge, wedgie</i>	A large sandwich. (seNY)
<i>wharfing</i>	An earthen bank (on dry land) supported by a retaining wall; now esp the bank or ramp that gives access to the mow of a barn. (NEng)
<i>whelp</i>	A bump or ridge on the surface of the skin. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>white bacon</i>	Salt pork. (Chiefly FL, GA)
<i>white-tailed hornet</i>	Also <i>white-assed hornet</i> : A wasp, <i>Vespilla maculata</i> , that is largely black with yellowish-white markings. (NEast, esp NEng)

## Staff Member Profile

In this continuing series, Beth Gardner interviews Project Assistant Nathan Carlson, who verifies the quotations cited in *DARE* by checking them against the original sources. Nathan is pursuing a Master's degree in the UW–Madison School of Library and Information Studies.

**Q:** How did you first become aware of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*?

**A:** I had the invaluable opportunity to work with the incomparable Anatoly Liberman at the University of Minnesota for four years, starting on *A Bibliography of English Etymology*. After a year I had finally conquered the backlog my predecessor had left, so naturally Prof. Liberman switched me to *An Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology*, which illuminates fifty-five of the *Oxford English Dictionary's* words of unknown origin; meanwhile, he continued adding more backlog for me to conquer. (We have triumphed, however, and the *Bibliography* will be out soon from University of Minnesota Press.)

*DARE* and Frederic Cassidy came up occasionally in the *Bibliography* work, but the fact that *DARE* is based in Wisconsin did not register with me until I applied for graduate school here. Only two days after I was informed my program would not be assisting my education financially, I read the ad for the *DARE* position and applied.

**Q:** What is the most enjoyable aspect of your work at *DARE*?

**A:** I am afflicted with the booklust, so a special pleasure for me is to spend an hour in Special Collections [in the UW–Madison Memorial Library], examining the eighteenth-century gardening dictionaries and collections of satirical newspapers. I don't think the SC librarians know my secret—yet.

Also, I have enjoyed working with a team toward a common goal. In academia we get very used to working alone in our respective cubes, but having colleagues has been quite nice.

**Q:** What part of your work do you find most challenging?

**A:** What would a new job be without a backlog? Fortunately, my predecessor at *DARE* made sure I would be well cared for, including a not inconspicuous heap labeled "Lost Causes."

**Q:** What is your primary area of academic specialization?

**A:** I wanted to make a fortune, so naturally I picked lexicography. I would like to focus my research on modes of scholarship and culture in the periodicals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Notes and Queries*, or *Salmagundi*, and especially the ways these have established paradigms for culture and scholarship in our era. All professors who like to bloviate once in a while owe a debt of gratitude to W.W. Skeat, who perfected the form.

**Q:** What would you like to do after finishing your current graduate program?

**A:** Some Victorian-era scholars were made entirely in the pages of *Notes and Queries* and *Athenaeum*, and I would like to tell this story. This touches history, to be sure, but also media criticism and epistemology, and also has implications for predicting where visual/print culture may be heading. Reports of the death of print culture are highly exaggerated. Perhaps I will be a print apologist and wage war against Jeff Jarvis.

**Q:** What is the most unusual thing you've come across in doing research for *DARE*?

**A:** Librarians like to think that they are in control of the libraries. In fact, I have found strange bibliographic and cataloging errors that flummoxed even the librarians. I imagine such peculiarities exist in every major library system, which suggests not so much a lack of quality review as a manifestation of entropy. Or perhaps it is sabotage.

Also, I read lots of words from all different eras, so I am continually confronted by the changes in the English language. Formalisms, slang, spelling norms: these are constantly in flux, not breaking down, exactly (as some language alarmists would have us believe), but changing inexorably. We can



now observe language shifts within a matter of months, rather than over a generation.

**Q:** When you have a rare moment of spare time away from your studies and your work, what are your interests?

**A:** Well, my daughter likes to play dollhouse and do puzzles, so between the homework and the home front, my free time is largely spoken for. Otherwise, my wife and I like to see movies and discuss them. I like to cook, too, so I learned how to make pie, and I try to spend time on the bicycle when I can. ♦



## Where Are They Now?

*We recently heard from former Project Assistant **Erin Meyer**, who worked at DARE while she was a graduate student in the School of Library and Information Studies at UW–Madison. After leaving the Dictionary in 2006, Erin moved to Colorado. She writes:*

At the end of May, I left Boulder Public Library to begin working as a faculty librarian at the University of Denver (DU). I wear the two hats of Research Center Coordinator and Outreach

Librarian. For the former, I manage the new Center, staffed by librarians, and supervise the graduate students who staff the reference desk. The Research Center is a new, dedicated space that showcases what reference librarians have done all along: work one-on-one with students and faculty to help them with research. It's nice to be part of a successful effort, building on the groundwork that was done before I arrived on the scene. As Outreach Librarian, I work directly with students to promote library services and gather feedback about the library and its collections. That's the most fun part of the job, and takes me out of the library to meet with students and represent the library at campus events.

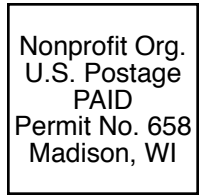
I have been very busy with work since fall classes began, but over the summer was able to keep active in the outdoors, hiking, rock climbing, and trying new activities such as multi-pitch climbing, technical mountaineering, and canyoneering. I'm trying to take full advantage of the outdoor paradise in my backyard. [DARE Ed: The accompanying photo certainly bears witness to that!]

It is hard to believe that *DARE* is so close to completion! . . . I hope that the work continues to be fulfilling for you during the final years of the momentous project that is *DARE*. ♦

*Hearing from former staffers and volunteers is always a treat! If you'd like to share memories of your time at the Dictionary or let us know what you've been up to since leaving Helen C. White Hall, please contact us by "snail mail" or through our Web site.*

## DARE Editor Attends Methods XIII Conference

Senior Editor Luanne von Schneidemesser attended the Thirteenth International Conference on Methods in Dialectology August 4–8 at the University of Leeds in England. This conference is held every three years, alternating between Europe and Canada. Luanne presented a paper entitled "Soda and Pop, Caught and Cot: Linguistic Outreach." Several other staunch supporters of *DARE* attended, including Bill Kretschmar, Bill Labov, and Dennis Preston, and *DARE* was mentioned in a number of presentations. "It was a fantastic conference," Luanne commented. "Very stimulating. And it made us aware of other lexicographical projects and some resources used for *DARE* that have been put online." ♦



*Postal Return Address:*  
Dictionary of American Regional English  
University of Wisconsin–Madison  
6125 Helen C. White Hall  
600 N. Park St., Madison WI 53706

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