



## In the News



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### MAD Lab opens at Mount Allison, Jan. 21

*Jan 17, 2005*

SACKVILLE, NB — The Mount Allison Dendrochronology Laboratory, affectionately known as the MAD Lab, will have its official opening on Friday, January 21 at 4 p.m. The lab is located in the Avard Dixon building, room G3. The facility will help maintain Canada's position as one of the leaders in climate change investigations. The only one of its kind in Atlantic Canada, the lab collects information that is used for analyzing and predicting long-term climate patterns. Dr. Colin Laroque, of the department of geography, heads up the lab working with colleague Dr. André Robichaud and a team of Mount Allison geography students.

Dendrochronology, or tree-ring analysis, allows Laroque and his team to travel back in time. Most people know that you can tell how old a tree is by counting the number of rings, but Laroque goes much further, using small core samples to gain insight into past climates, past glacier activity, past ecosystem dynamics, and even past human activities over hundreds of years.

Laroque says that it is only by studying past climates that you can truly understand what is currently happening with global warming. By looking back over the past 500 years, you can get a picture of the normal patterns of rainfall, temperature, and even wind. According to Laroque, "We still do not fully understand the natural rhythm of the earth. Over hundreds of years, temperatures have naturally risen and fallen. Understanding these patterns is crucial in helping us determine to what extent higher global temperatures are natural and how much is a man-made phenomenon."

The techniques used at the MAD Lab allow research into other important issues, many of which are pursued by students on Laroque's team. Fourth-year geography student Lanna Campbell is completing an analysis of the habitat of the endangered pine marten in an area of old-growth forest just outside Newfoundland's Gros Morne National Park. Lanna is one of the recipients of this year's Royal Canadian Geographical Society research grants and was recently featured in *Canadian Geographic* magazine. Student Zachary Vanthournout is trying to establish a connection between the ring patterns of wind-affected trees and local wind data, research that will have commercial applications for wind-energy power production. Mount Allison alumna Monik Richard, now doing her master's at Acadia University, is using the lab for her work on turtles. Richard is using principles of dendrochronology to study the rings on the belly of the Blanding turtle, an endangered species in Nova Scotia.

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Working in the Maritimes, Laroque and his students face a unique problem. Because there has been extensive logging throughout the region, most living trees are too young for Laroque's purposes. He points out, "There are no 800 year-old trees and very few 300 year-old trees left in the area." Well, there may not be old trees, but there are old buildings, many of which have beams with the bark still on them. A building constructed in 1840 with lumber from a 200 year-old tree contains a record of the climate from 1640 to 1840. The idea to pursue the record locked in these structures is one of the innovations that makes the MAD Lab one of Canada's leading contributors to dendrochronological research.

The owners of these old buildings also benefit, as the lab provides accurate dating (to within a year) and other information about the structures. In contrast, radio-carbon dating is accurate to within only 25 to 50 years. Laroque and his team have dated a number of buildings, including the Campbell Carriage Factory in Sackville, New Brunswick, and Doucet House in Rustico, Prince Edward Island.

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