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## Listening to the stories trees can tell

**MICHELLE PORTER**  
 TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

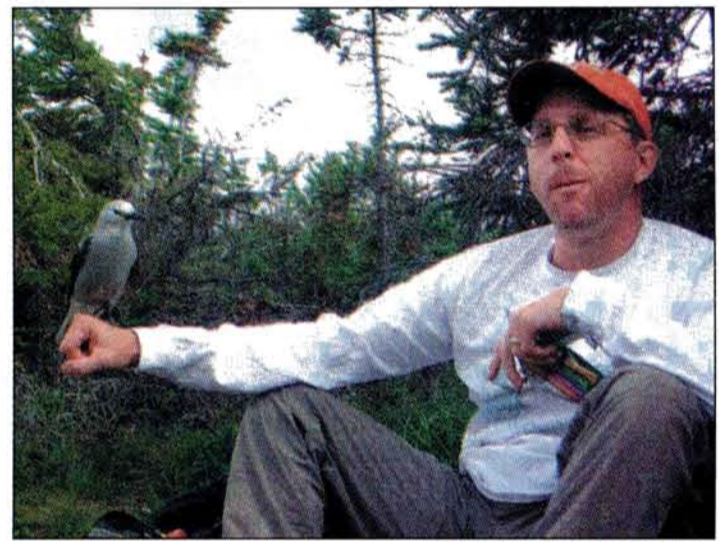
SAINT JOHN – A Mount Allison University professor is the only New Brunswick scientist involved in a two-year worldwide research project looking at climate change.

His contribution to world research: the stories that trees tell.

Geography professor Colin Laroque explained that tree rings have a lot to say about the how our ecosystem may thrive – or struggle – over the coming decades of warming weather and unusual climate patterns.

“By letting trees tell their story about climate changes that have occurred in the past we can learn how to predict what will happen in the future,” he said.

The information can be used by a wide variety of people: by foresters who decide which tree species to re-plant after harvesting, by trappers who need to know if the habitat of the animals they



MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY PHOTO

Mount Allison University geography professor Colin Laroque, seen here with some winged company during a break from research in the woods, has received a grant to examine climate change by studying tree rings.

trap will either expand or decline and climatologists as they put together ever more detailed models of our future climate.

The information will help

mate changes?

Originally from Saskatchewan, Laroque came to New Brunswick because there were very few old-growth trees left here. He wanted to read their stories before they all disappeared from the province.

Ironically, almost two years later it was one of his research students who let the world know that the planet’s oldest tree was a 450-year-old red spruce growing in an undisclosed location in Fundy Park.

Unlike Western Canada, where there are forests that have never been harvested or clear cut, most of New Brunswick’s forests are young, having re-grown after intensive forestry activity. But the climate information provided by studying the tree rings of older trees is invaluable in the scientific community, he said.

“I decided to move out here and collect this information before

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## Scientists to study impact of previous climate changes on tundra, tree-line ecosystems

**TREES** ← **A1**

it’s all gone,” he said.

The area’s oldest trees aren’t easy to find – and they aren’t the biggest trees either. The oldest trees that have survived in the province are usually smaller, having escaped harvesting because of their less-than-impressive size and their location in steep, rugged and remote areas. Researchers do not need to cut trees down to study tree rings. Instead they extract long, pencil-thin samples, leaving a small ‘incision’ from which the tree can easily heal.

Laroque’s unusual interest in tree rings resulted in the creation of the university’s MAD lab (Mount Allison Dendrochronology), the only facility dedicated to its study in Atlantic Canada. The lab has attracted some of the best researchers in the field.

And now, the centre will bring its tree-ring expertise to a two-year global research project formed during the In-

ternational Polar Year. Intended to contribute to the understanding about the world’s polar regions, there have been three polar years held in the past 125 years.

With a grant of nearly \$250,000, Laroque will travel to Labrador with a group of scientists from Memorial University. Together they will study the impact of previous climate changes on tundra and tree-line ecosystems. This information will then be used to predict what will happen in the face of accelerated climate change.

Much of the funding will be used to hire undergraduate and grad students from the Mount Allison and Memorial University.

International Polar Year was announced at the beginning of March. Projects will run over the next 24 months.

Other projects will examine the impact of climate change on social, economic and cultural factors in the north.