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MAD Lab tree ring analysis will help chronicle climate change during IPY

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SACKVILLE, NB — Mount Allison geography professor Dr. Colin Laroque has been invited to become part of one of the largest global research networks formed during the International Polar Year (IPY). Laroque received funding for two major research projects, which will examine the effects of climate change in the Canadian Arctic, focusing on Labrador. He will be working primarily with colleagues at Memorial and Dalhousie Universities.

Dr. Laroque heads up the University's MAD (Mount Allison Dendrochronology) Lab, the only facility of its kind in Atlantic Canada and will bring his expertise on tree ring analysis to the projects. He explains, "Dendrochronology is the study of tree rings, and allows one to travel back in time. Using core samples of both living and deceased trees, researchers are able to gain insight into past climates, past glacier activity, past ecosystem dynamics, and even past human activities over hundreds of years. This analysis will be beneficial in our understanding of remote areas of northern Labrador. This is research that has not been studied in such detail before."

Dr. Laroque's research will focus on two projects in Labrador. The first is part of the International Tundra Experiment, in conjunction with Memorial University's Labrador Highlights Research Group. This group studies the sensitivity of tundra and tree line ecosystems to climate change in order to understand better these systems, determine how they have evolved, and predict what will happen to them in a future, perhaps under a very different climate. Dr. Laroque's expertise in dendrochronology will help provide a better picture of climate change patterns and effects on the region's trees. While this type of analysis is being used by researchers around the world, Mount Allison's MAD Lab is the only facility in Atlantic Canada able to provide these resources for tree-ring analysis for projects in this region.

The second project Dr. Laroque will be working on will involve analyzing core samples from just below the tree line in the sub arctic region of Labrador. Working with researchers from as far away as the University of British Columbia and as close as Dalhousie University, Colin will be the lead researcher again for tree ring analysis. He explains, "We will be looking at the ecological

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structure of the sub arctic region and changes in it over the last 300 to 400 years. Because the region is so isolated, this has not been done before in any detail. Our research will allow us to see what effects climate change has had on the region and what changes we can expect in the future, based on past trends.”

Both of Dr. Laroque’s projects include a significant amount of remote field work, which will potentially employ several undergraduate and post-secondary students from the universities involved, allowing them to engage in exciting field research and extend their learning outside the classroom.

Along with research focusing on environmental and climate changes, IPY projects will also look at social, economic, and cultural factors and trends in the north. Researchers will be studying trends in community and economic development in Labrador and across the north and south Polar regions.

The Canadian Government announced funding for several projects in support of International Polar Year on March 1 in Ottawa. International Polar Year was officially launched world-wide this week and involves researchers from over 60 countries studying the arctic and antarctic regions.

About International Polar Year and Canada’s Involvement

International Polar Year (IPY) is an intensive research program in the polar regions that will take place over a 24-month period, beginning March 2007, and is expected to involve as many as 60 countries and 20,000 people or more from around the world. IPY is hosted internationally by the International Council of Science (ICSU) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Three International Polar Years have been held in the past 125 years in 1882-1883, 1932-1933, and 1957-1958. Previous IPYs have contributed to enormous advances in knowledge and understanding about the polar regions, including research on telecommunications, atmospheric and ocean science, and the aurora borealis, as well the negotiation of the Antarctic Treaty. As the 2007-08 International Polar Year will be the first event of its kind in 50 years, it will capitalize on modern technology to advance our knowledge of arctic and antarctic regions in ways that were not possible during previous IPYs.

To prepare for and facilitate Canada’s involvement in this important event, the Government of Canada has dedicated \$150 million over six years to IPY. This funding will be used to carry out an innovative and interdisciplinary Canadian IPY program. On behalf of the Government of Canada, this IPY program will be jointly managed by the departments of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Environment, Fisheries and Oceans, Health, Industry, and Natural Resources Canada.

For further information please visit www.ipy-api.gc.ca

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