



# NICHE

NOUVELLE INITIATIVE CANADIENNE EN HISTOIRE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

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## Launching EHTV

From the mist of Niagara Falls to the dust of the archives, EHTV: Live from the Field is a new group video project designed to showcase stories about environmental history research in Canada. This project explores the role of environmental historians in the field as they study and research across Canada through short video documentaries filmed with simple Flip videorecorders. Viewers can catch all of the episodes on the [NiCHE website](http://niche-canada.org) and subscribe to the whole series in [iTunes](#).

And we have a few more Flip videorecorders to give away! If you would like to make your own videos for the series, please contact series editors [Lauren Wheeler](#) or [Sean Kheraj](#).



## Looking Back, Looking Forward

Alan MacEachern

This past month, the NiCHE executive has had the nerve-racking, gratifying task of writing up a mid-term report for the SSHRC Clusters program. Nerve-racking because such reporting requires assessing one's efforts in somewhat foreign terms (Does that emerging output correspond to Knowledge Mobilization or Knowledge Synthesis objectives?). And, of course, nerve-racking because the Clusters program has been our main funding source and, we hope, will continue to be through 2014. But it's also been gratifying to tally up what work NiCHE has done to date and try to appraise honestly what that work means. It's gratifying to consider that we've now had 6 successful summer schools, that the annual Call for Projects alone have supported more than 30 environmental history / historical geography projects, or that we've partnered projects with groups as diverse as Eco-Kids and the Canadian Forest Service. It's gratifying, too, to note less tangible or at least quantifiable results, such as the growing international buzz about the Canadian field or the rise over the past few years of a vibrant New Scholars community.

Writing the midterm report has also served as a distinct reminder that, even if we're successful at this stage, the Clusters grant which has provided so much support will wind down in 2014 regardless. The Clusters program is no more – in fact, SSHRC has changed its program architecture altogether – so there is no chance of funding renewal as such. The present executive and I are committed to helping the network live on beyond 2014, although there's nothing to say NiCHE has to keep its present form or all its activities. Crucially, we recognize that those who pick up the torch have to know they'll have full freedom to act and full credit for doing so. Moving NiCHE beyond 2014 is going to require some creative thinking, some commitment, and some communication. We began that discussion at EH+ last month, but there's plenty of opportunity for more. If you want to talk NiCHE post-2014, please contact me at [amaceach@uwo.ca](mailto:amaceach@uwo.ca).

PS: Congratulations to Sean Kheraj – creator, developer, host of the Natures Past podcast series – for landing a tenure-track job this spring in the History department at York University!

## Two NiCHE Blogs: The Otter & Qu'est-ce qui se passe



<http://niche-canada.org/otter>



<http://niche-canada.org/francais>

The first half of 2011 has seen a significant increase in the number of posts published on two NiCHE blogs. The group blog is now called **The Otter** and the French language blog is called **Qu'est-ce qui se passé**.

In the months since we launched **The Otter** on the NiCHE website, we've published twenty-five essays by more than a dozen authors. These include a number of posts on National Parks ([Waiser](#), [Campbell](#), [Sandlos](#), [Rudin](#), [MacEachern](#)), others on the historical context for current events ([Rumiel](#), [Kheraj](#), [Stunden Bower](#)), a call for more attention to the Pacific Rim ([Tyner](#)), and reports on NiCHE events and projects ([Slack](#), [Clifford](#), [McLaughlin](#)). The readership has ranged between one hundred visits to over a thousand. (Hint: include "Whistler" in the title of a post if you'd like to attract a thousand readers). This early success suggests writing short articles for the internet is an important addition to other forms of academic publishing, as it allows historians to reach a wider audience more quickly than do other formats.

In the months ahead we would like to involve even more NiCHE members in our group blog. The website provides the opportunity to include videos, audio and colour photographs or maps. Do you have an idea for a short blog post using a great photo, map or video you found, but could never include in a book or journal article? Do you study an issue that is currently in the news? Do you have an idea you would like to share with fellow NiCHE members and our growing public readership? Please contact Jim Clifford ([jcliffo9@uwo.ca](mailto:jcliffo9@uwo.ca)) if you would like to write for **The Otter**.

**Qu'est-ce qui se passe** est un endroit pour l'information et des idées sur des activités et des développements en l'histoire l'environnementale, avec un accent sur le Québec et le Canada-Français en entier. Chaque semaine, et parfois en plus, j'affiche quelque chose d'autre sur le site web des causeries, de neuves publications, et des pensées; s'il y a un rapport avec l'histoire de l'environnement, vous trouverez d'information ici. En plus, si vous avez des événements, ou s'il y a quelque chose vous voudriez écrire pour le site web, n'hésitez pas à me contacter ([jvanhor2@uwo.ca](mailto:jvanhor2@uwo.ca)).

Follow **The Otter** with the dedicated [RSS Feed](#), the blog's [Twitter Account](#) or by visiting the main [NiCHE Website](#) frequently. Find the dedicated **Qu'est-ce qui se passe** [RSS here](#).

## Canadian History & Environment Summer School (CHESS) 2011



The 6th annual Canadian History and Environment Summer School (CHESS) saw fifty participants gather in foggy St. Andrews, New Brunswick. The theme of CHESS2011 was "Coastal Conundrums: Using Environmental History to Understand Coastal Communities," and the seaside resort town of St. Andrews was an ideal location for CHESS participants to learn about some of the many challenges that coastal communities have faced and the ways in which local populations have adapted to a variety of economic, social, and environmental changes.

CHESS 2011 launched with a public keynote address at the W. C. O'Neill Arena Complex Theatre on Friday evening, co-presented by NiCHE and the Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre. The keynote speaker was [Dr. Heike Lotze](#), Canada Research Chair in Marine Renewable Resources at Dalhousie University, speaking on "Food, Furs and Feathers: History of Human-induced Ecological Changes in Coastal Marine Ecosystems." The keynote address was well attended by the local community and provided CHESS participants with invaluable context for the remainder of the weekend.

The following day was a busy one, with all activities held at the Huntsman Marine Science Centre, a working marine research station and our "home base" for the weekend. On Saturday morning, Huntsman staff gave CHESS participants

tours of two of the station's research projects. Tracey Dean, Director - Education at the Huntsman, demonstrated how she bands and catalogues migratory birds, and Susan Fordham, Aquaculture Operations Supervisor, described some of the Huntsman's aquaculture research.

Sunday began at the historic Algonquin Hotel with the launch of the first Geospatial Workshop in Atlantic Canadian History (GeoWATCH). Dr. Joshua MacFadyen explained how the workshop introduces historical GIS to first-time users. In the latter part of the morning, participants had the choice of venturing off on one of six themed walking groups to do some "groundtruthing," or listening to a talk given by Dr. Bill Parienteau in the Van Horne ballroom on the "rest cure" and early forms of tourism in New Brunswick.

By all accounts, CHESS 2011 met the high standards of past events. The organizing committee would like to thank all of those who helped us make it such a great weekend, especially this year's participants. In the words of Dr. Ed MacDonald, who closed the weekend with a few remarks, a conference is only as good as those who attend.



Read a longer version of this recap on [The Otter](#) blog.

Feature:

# Snowbirds seeking sustainability: Canadians at the ASEH, Phoenix, April 2011

by Claire Campbell



Let me be completely honest, for those of you reading this from parts still soggy and cold\*: it was hot, it was sunny, the palo verde and cacti were in bloom, and margaritas were served in fishbowls. (\*Note: this was written in early May, when the Maritimes were soggy & cold, and before southern Ontario began its annual heat-wave marathon.)

But one of the most amazing things about Phoenix, for me, was simply being in the desert for the first time. Because you may be in a city, but you're really still in the desert. Phoenix isn't defined by where the sidewalk ends, but where the irrigation does. Squares of perfect lawn sit side by side with lots of dirt. The light rail lines run over and alongside the canals, the arteries of the entire southwest. And call me a tree snob, but cacti are pretty funny-looking trees.

There's a line in Elizabeth Hay's *Late Nights on Air*: "To have water on both sides, to know which way was north, to be walking towards it – this was comfort by any measure." Which may be why, despite loving the heat and the flowers, I felt oddly discomfited, disoriented by Phoenix. Lifting up your eyes to the hills around helped, but with roads that stretch straight out to the horizon in all directions, there is a sense that you are meant to head out, and just keep going. This is the land of Route 66, after all.

Arizonans are pretty familiar with Canadians, who winter in prosperous nearby Scottsdale and on the golf courses. But us (paler, slightly? more serious) academic types were there to discuss issues of sustainability – somewhat problematic, of course, given the groundwater overdraft and river diversion that allows for those golf courses in the first place. Hosting us in a city with longstanding unsustainable practices



and – perhaps not surprisingly, as a result – significant environmental innovations was definitely thought-provoking. At Arizona State University's massive Tempe campus, first for a day-long session on teaching sustainability and later to visit the high-tech Decision Center for Desert Cities, I was inspired by possibility, for concept and sustainable architecture, institutional reconfiguration, and curricular change. If the largest public research university in the United States can find the momentum to do it, can't we?

A few highlights from the conference proper:

- Lauren Wheeler has already [blogged](#) about William Cronon's keynote; despite – or because of – [what](#) everyone was trying to get Cronon to talk about, ASEH president Harriet Ritvo instead opted to talk about the survival of animals in the nineteenth century, rather than that of historians in the twenty-first.
- There was a noticeable emphasis on teaching, which was great to see, and not something we talk a lot about at conferences, even though it's so central to our work. Brian Donahue's final exam is to turn his class loose in a wood and get them to figure out what happened there!
- Some great papers on climate change in California's Great Central Valley, and the Lake Superior shoreline; a sustainability atlas for Scottsdale; the U.S. National Park Service's interest in a park on Antarctica in the 1960s.
- Hearing from scholars, like Nancy Langston, who have clearly established a sense of comfortable balance between their commitments to historical scholarship on the one hand and public engagement on the other. It is possible!

(ASEH Continued)



I was also struck by the visibility and coherence of the Canadian contingent. One morning I glanced at a name tag which read *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*; Elsa Devienne graciously overlooked my below-Trudeauian-standard French and, it turned out, had participated

in the first Place & Placelessness event. She was thrilled to come along to the Canadian cocktail hour that Alan MacEachern organized for the next night, where we (the Canadians collectively, not Elsa and me) took over the hotel bar. The unspoken question echoed through to EH+: in the past four years, NICHE has become the organizational force and international face of Canadian environmental history. How we will sustain it after 2014? Should we remain a distinct part of the (North) American environmental history community, or form our own?

We scattered, though, for the ASEH's signature field trips: to Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin, Tonto National Forest, cycling along the Salt River Project [SRP] canal. And after the conference ended some went south – to the Mexican border, a contentious issue in this part of the world, and environmental justice was a prominent theme at the conference. Others headed north, through the blissful pine forests of the Colorado Plateau, to the big gap in said Plateau: the Grand Canyon. Alan organized, and spoke for Canada at, a panel on national parks in North America, which also featured representatives from Mexico and the United States – and should be reprised, perhaps this time along the Canadian/US border. We hiked ourselves into exhaustion, and took a lot of photographs, before heading south again, back to the desert and the city.

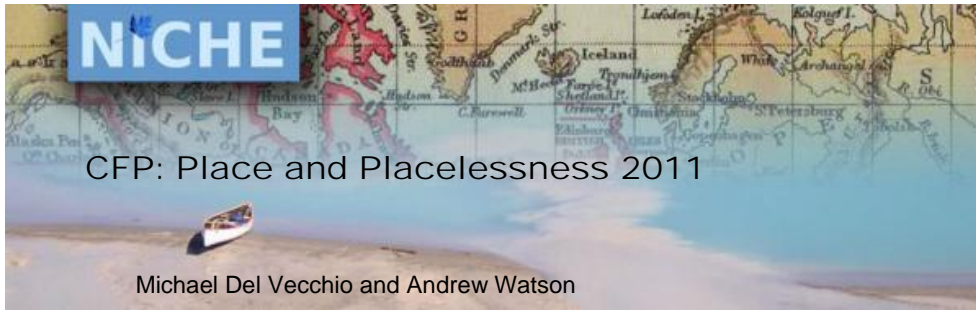
More than any other conference I've been to, the ASEH sends me away feeling that what I do is important, heartened that there are hundreds of other scholars doing great work with a similar spirit. And for all the challenges and frustrations (at the time of

writing, the [largest oil spill](#) in Alberta in my lifetime had just made the post-election news), Bill Cronon is right: the real value of the concept of "sustainability" is that it is fundamentally, a hopeful word.



Postscript: speaking of optimists, [next year's](#) ASEH takes its theme from Aldo Leopold's land ethic. See you in Madison.





## NiCHE On Twitter

The past few months has seen an increasing number of NiCHE members actively using Twitter.

Members have broadcast short reports from EH+, Environments of Mobility, CHES and the CHA.

This has allowed members not able to attend events to follow along from home. It has also helped build connections between members of the network, and between the network and the wider world. NiCHE members' use of the hashtag [#envhist](#) has helped it become a means of focusing environmental history communication on Twitter.

There have been some reservations, however, both from those actively experimenting with Twitter and others unfamiliar with the social network tool. The key question is whether live-blogging during talks is useful enough to justify the need to be wired in during a conference. Is Twitter a distraction — or even a passing fad — or is it a useful tool for academic communication?

To connect with the NiCHE community on Twitter follow on the [NiCHE Members Lists](#) or search for [#envhist](#).

For more information on using Twitter read this [blog post](#) by Jim Clifford.

This online symposium is intended for graduate students and recently-graduated scholars from all disciplines who seek to better understand the complex relationships between nature and culture. The workshop attempts to replicate the collegiate atmosphere of a shared-space meeting by using a variety of internet tools, including WordPress, Skype, Google Maps, Youtube, Facebook and Twitter to share ideas and participate in engaged discussion. This model should appeal especially to those who are eager for academic gatherings without the cost or carbon footprint of in-person meetings.

is loosely defined, and may include perspectives on:

- the four seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter)
- hunting and fishing seasons
- seasonal migration
- sporting or fashion seasons
- seasoned timber
- seasonal food
- or any other creative sub-category

All participants will receive a FREE Skype headset. The workshop has no registration fee, but only limited space, so sign up early.

All interested contributors should submit a CV, as well as a 200-300 word abstract outlining their topic, what format their contribution will take, and how their paper or project aims to broaden, illustrate or complicate the notion of 'seasons'. This theme

<http://virtualeh.wordpress.com/>

Ce congrès virtuel est pour des étudiants de troisième cycle et pour des érudites nouvelles de toutes les disciplines qui voudraient comprendre meilleur des rapports complexe entre la nature et la culture. L'atelier reproduira l'ambiance collégiale des colloques traditionnels avec une variété des outils d'internet, comme WordPress, Skype, Google Maps, YouTube, Facebook, et Twitter pour des participants partage leurs idées et participe dans des discussions concentrées. Ce genre d'atelier tentera à des personnes qui a l'intérêt dans des réunions scolaires sans les frais ou l'empreinte carbone des colloques traditionnels.

- les quatre saisons (le printemps, l'été, l'automne, l'hiver)
- les saisons de chasse et de la pêche
- la migration saisonnière
- les saisons sportives ou les saisons vêtements
- le bois bien séché ou la nourriture asaisonnée
- un autre sou catégorie

Tous les participants recevraient un casque -micro de Skype GRATUIT. Il n'y a pas des frais d'inscription, mais le nombre de places est limité, donc vous vous engagez bientôt.

Les participants intéressés doivent soumettre un CV et un résumé de 200-300 mots qu'expliquer le thème et le format de leur projet, et comment leur projet compliquera la notion des « saisons. » Ce thème est défini largement, y compris :

## Update: Canadian Forest History Preservation Project



In October 2010, the Canadian Forest Service, the Forest History Society, and NiCHE collaborated to create the Canadian Forest History Preservation Project. Our project's mandate is to ensure the survival of Canada's forest history by identifying, locating, and safeguarding primary sources in danger of being lost or destroyed. We seek to achieve this goal by facilitating the gift of written, visual, or sound records from private individuals, organizations, or businesses to the appropriate archival repositories.

Progress so far: A bilingual survey text, designed to establish the capacity and willingness of archives to receive new donations, is now ready. This survey will be distributed to institutions across the country, on a province-by-province basis, starting in Alberta, followed by British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, and finally to other provinces without local Forest History organizations.

We thank the executive members of the Forest History Society of Alberta, Peter Murphy and Bruce Mayer, and provincial archivist Tom Anderson, who, with the help of their organization's members, brought smaller, local repositories to our attention. If you would like to help in making sure that the list of polled archives for your province is complete, please get in touch.

Stay tuned for future updates. If you have any questions, or know of any forest history material in need of archival protection, please contact David Brownstein [dbrownst@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:dbrownst@interchange.ubc.ca)

## Scholars Profiles: A research snapshot of five Scholars



Foreword by Jim Clifford

Once or twice a month, the NiCHE Scholars Profiles blog — <http://niche-canada.org/ns-scholars> — focuses on a Canadian scholar working in the field of historical geography / environmental history.

The profiles offer an opportunity for scholars to share their research and introduce themselves to the community. Contributors are asked to explain their path of study and emphasize the relevance of their research.

Over the past months, we have presented eight profiles

from new scholars and three from professors. For those who missed them on the website, we're published five of them on the following pages. Due to limited space, you will need to visit our website to read the interviews with [Ruth Sandwell](#), [Michael Egan](#), and [Claire Campbell](#).

If you might be interested in contributing a research snapshot, contact Jim Clifford at [cljim22@gmail.com](mailto:cljim22@gmail.com).

Happy reading!

# The Great Divide

Sean Atkins

Poets and songwriters have romanticized it. Critics and commentators use its symbolism to simplify away differences. Moralists have used it as a metaphysical metaphor to proselytize—"The Great Divide." Making meaning out of frequently contentious social relations by imagining the physical world as proxy for these complex interactions is as old as humanity itself: Earth and fire come quickly to mind but so do bodies of water and wind directions. Some landscapes, however, are more readily available, and have proven to be quite durable, as models in the past two centuries. Heights of land are visibly accessible systematized landscapes, so little surprise they are not only one of the more imaginably conceived places but have also been more hotly contested. Among others, they have been used as boundary making devices in the Royal Proclamation (1763), Treaty of Paris (1783) and several of the numbered treaties (1871-1922). The seemingly natural process of water separation and downward flow may seem innocuous enough but when such a movement enters the social world of ideas, notions of inclusion and exclusion, possession and dislocation, are hardened while the lines between the physical and the conceptual blur.

Social-spatial relations are put into practice in many ways. I am particularly interested in those landscapes which have associative meaning across cultures and societies but are deemed more 'natural' to one group and hence, of more authoritative value. My dissertation, "A Century of Historicizing the Height of Land Idea in the Rocky Mountain Canadian West" considers the ways in which the places (and processes) where the separation of waters occurs at a transcontinental scale have been transformed from a localized watershed concept to one invested heavily in the notions of order, inclusion and possession from afar. Nowhere has this geographical abstraction been more evident than what eventually became formalized as "The Great Divide," the height of land (in the Canadian context) separating the Atlantic and Pacific watersheds starting at the US border and ending at the 120th meridian. The earliest attempts at "naturalizing the natural" occurred in the 1890s when the federal government attempted to put an end to Stoney (and, to a lesser degree Kuthnaxa) hunting practices across the British Columbia-Northwest Territories (later Alberta) boundary by imposing this singular and unbroken height of land that would not only encompass the documented places where the waters did indeed separate but also the vast spaces in be-



tween these areas. The formalization of the transcontinental-scale height of land as "The Great Divide" was complete with the Alberta-British Columbia Interprovincial Boundary Commission (1913-1924) and its scientific-cartographical methodology. Specific passes traversing the height of land, another significant associative landscape, became sites of authority.

One of the pleasures and challenges of this kind of research has been the need to relinquish one's comfort zone of study and traverse disciplinary boundaries. Exploring the enduring language of rhetoric inherent in "The Great Divide" idea has provided this chance. Between 1890 and 1930, "The Great Divide" idea was central to the nation building and nature subjugation process. "The Great Divide" became de rigueur for any rail or automobile tourist travelling through the Mountain Parks. Post cards, poems, travel guides and promotions all conveyed the symbolism of the intercontinental height of land. Almost every Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) Summer Camps between 1907-1930 was located astride the height of land. The eventual normalization of an idea also carries the seeds of its eventual re-interpretation, however, and by the end of the Second World War poets, writers and visual artists began to challenge the assumptions behind "The Great Divide" idea. Supporters of new ventures centering on the "Great Divide" traverse were rejected, while some questioned whether there were actually two intercontinental divides—one Atlantic/Pacific and another Arctic/Pacific. These questions mattered: The ongoing litigation over the western boundary of Treaty Eight attests to this.

Meanwhile, "The Great Divide" idea remains. Today one may experience "The Great Divide" in some highly unlikely places: Crossing the North Saskatchewan along the High Level Bridge in Edmonton (!) during the summer when "The Great Divide Waterfall" is on show, or more faithfully to its location, seated upon "The Continental Divide Chairlift" at Sunshine Village. Of course, there are literally hundreds of the more 'mundane' heights of land across the continent, many mapped as such and many many more others hidden away. Some are an easy stroll or accessible from the road while others, not so much. Just try not to think about which boundary you're crossing.

Sean Atkins is a PhD Candidate at the University of Alberta.

## THE OGASAWARA ISLANDS: FROM “TOKYO’S LARGEST NATURAL GREEN HOUSE” TO THE “GALAPAGOS OF THE ORIENT”



For the past five years, I have been researching the environmental history of the Ogasawara (Bonin) Islands, a group of subtropical oceanic islands located approximately 1000 km south of central Tokyo. Like many oceanic islands in the Pacific, the Ogasawara Islands today are valued for its white sandy beaches, moderate climate, and “biodiversity.” It is this last category that has been promoted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government since the early-2000s. Branded as Japan’s “Galapagos of the Orient,” the islands have been included in Japan’s growing list of UNESCO World Heritage sites since 2002.

This campaign hasn’t been successful. One of the things that is keeping the islands from making the grade is that endemic species of flora and fauna that the claim for inclusion is largely based on have a lot of company. For some time, the islands have been host to a substantial resident population of invasive species that were introduced to the islands in the over its nearly two hundred years of settlement. The islands are home to substantial populations of feral goats (*Capra hircus*), cats (*Felis catus*), anoles (*Anolis carolinensis*), and, my favorite, being a UCSC Banana Slug, giant African snails (*Achatina fulica*).

Many of these non-naturalized residents date back to 1830, when former whalers and Pacific Islanders settled the uninhabited Ogasawara Islands to profit from the whaling activity in in the “Japan Ground.” Others, like the giant African snails, were introduced through large-scale cultivation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when large amounts of flora and fauna were introduced to the islands through successive waves of Japanese settlement and government-initiated projects to render the islands profitable. From the Ogasawara Islands’ incorporation into the political boundaries of Japan in 1875, government officials and small-plot farmers established an agro-economy in the Ogasawara Islands, producing marketable and refined crops of fruits and vegetables which were sold in metropolitan markets in the Japanese empire. By the 1920s, the settlers produced enough cultivated space on the islands to earn the Ogasawara Islands the label of “Tokyo’s largest natural greenhouse.” The human and nonhuman traces left over from nearly 200 years of human occupation are enough to give the people at UNESCO pause.

### Colin Tyner

One of the historical problematic that drives my research on the islands is how the Ogasawara Islands have been transformed materially and imaginatively from “Tokyo’s largest natural greenhouse” to “the Galapagos of the Orient.” This process wasn’t always anthropogenic. In fact, much of the re-branding of the cultivated pasts of the Ogasawara Islands were undone, and the figuring of the islands as the “Galapagos of the Orient” was enabled, by the nearly unrestrained growth of invasive and endemic species that flourished during the nearly fifty years of absence of cultivators and scientific work from the island landscape during a period of intense militarization by the Japanese and American militaries between 1921 and 1968.

When I first started studying the Ogasawara Islands, I naively assumed that their small size would allow me bound my research project within a neat, manageable framework. I was wrong.

Despite their size and their distance from any metropolitan center, the Ogasawara Islands are an excellent example of how routed islands are to national and global histories of biotic exchange. From the late-nineteenth century, the expansion of intensive commercial agriculture and forestry on the Ogasawara Islands was dependent on global connections that were routed through the inter-colonial transfers of agro-science. In contrast to older patterns of biological exchanges, that may have been less planned, the types of exchanges that took place on the Ogasawara Islands were similar to other organized techno-scientific projects that were centrally planned and produced through intensive labor in the context of colonialism. Examining the making of the Ogasawara Islands as a space entangled in a colonized Pacific allows the landscape, along with structures of domination and exploitation that went into its production, to be understood as part of a much larger inter-colonial process that happened in the Pacific.

Colin Tyner is a PhD Candidate at the University of California Santa Cruz .

# History from the Urban Fringe



Toronto's Lower Don River slides unceremoniously along the eastern limits of the old city core, its muddied, placid channel host to the scattered wreckage of twenty-first-century urban living: plastic bags snagged at intervals along its length; a rusting shopping cart marooned on a broken tree limb; faint spirals of purple and blue motor oil caught in a back-eddy. Viewed most frequently through car windshields on the adjacent Don Valley Parkway, the river is often difficult to make out: a strip of grey-brown water among like-coloured strips of pavement, its moving surface barely distinguishable from the expressway exit ramps that criss-cross the bend near its mouth. Moving into the river valley on foot or bicycle, one is struck by the strange juxtapositions of a post-industrial landscape: a newly paved recreational path alongside an industrial brownfield bordered in chain-link; a recent planting of native vegetation; freight trains running down a still-active rail corridor. It is the kind of place that compels the question, what happened here? Or, as Claire Campbell has said of her own research into the environmental history of Canada's historic landscapes, "what once were you"?

My doctoral dissertation, completed in 2010, explored the social and environmental history of this changing urban landscape from the late eighteenth century to the present. I was particularly interested in investigating the river valley's relationship with the city as it grew and developed, charting not only the history of environmental and human-induced change in the watershed, but also the social history of this place at the urban fringe: who used the valley at different times, and for what purposes?

Environment, I found, played an important role in precipitating and perpetuating the valley's status as a place "at the margins." A yawning valley difficult to bridge, steep ravine slopes that impeded development, and miasmatic lowlands that fueled malaria outbreaks all contributed to perceptions of the area as a wasteland unfit for develop-

## Jennifer Bonnell

ment. Despite plans to locate the original town plot near the mouth of the river, Toronto consistently moved north and west as it developed, leaving in the area around the river mouth a vacuum to be filled by less desirable uses: breweries, packing houses, soap factories and tanneries. (For a geospatial representation of these developments, consult the [Don Valley Historical Mapping Project](#), developed with support from NiCHE and the University of Toronto Map and Data Library as a companion initiative to my doctoral research).

The river provided a convenient disposal mechanism for industrial wastes and later municipal sewage, with predictable results for ecological integrity and public health.

Following the logic of centres and peripheries, the valley absorbed not only the material wastes of the urbanizing centre, but also human "undesirables," people who for various reasons and circumstances found themselves pushed to the edges of society. In addition to the institutionalized "others" of the Don Jail, House of Refuge, and valley isolation hospitals, a small number of squatters, hoboos, gangsters, and Roma travellers sought refuge in the valley over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There they found not only respite from authorities, but also a place that provided the means for limited subsistence: water, sources of wood and plant materials for shelters, cast-away items from abandoned dump sites in the valley, and in some cases, fish and other sources of food. In this way, the Don Valley operated (and continues to operate) as a place where various kinds of marginality can be seen. A borderland between rural and urban, the valley also served as a liminal space within which "old" and "new" political economies, modern and pre-modern lifeways overlapped and asserted themselves. Cottagers who occupied the valley with "back-to-the-land" ambitions carried this sense of the valley as a space apart into the mid-twentieth century.

Jennifer Bonnell is a SSHRC Post-Doctoral Fellow in History at the University of Guelph

# Exploration is dead—long live exploration!

Christina Adcock

In his well-known, much-loved song “Northwest Passage,” the Canadian folk singer Stan Rogers testified to the enduring fascination of exploration. While travelling west over the prairies, the song’s modern protagonist recalls the storied journeys of early European explorers over the same spaces. He proclaims himself heir to their tradition of travel; he is the “tardiest explorer / driving hard across the plain.” This notion of tardiness well captures the way in which the language and imagery of exploration lingers throughout the twenty-first-century world. The Explorers’ Club of New York, once host to Cook, Peary, and Amundsen, now touts contemporary “explorers” and “expeditions” on Twitter (@ExplorersClub). Certain exploratory acts also retain rhetorical power, as several Russians realized when they “claimed” the North Pole at its seabed in 2007 by planting their country’s flag upon that “virgin” territory. Meanwhile, the Canadian government pursued another act of exploration: the mapping of Canada’s portion of the Arctic submarine continental shelf. This activity recalls the most uniquely modern facet to exploration—its equation with the ever-widening industrial search for lucrative minerals and fossil fuels buried in the earth’s crust and demanded for human consumption.



How and why does exploration continue to resonate in a supposedly post-exploratory age? This conundrum was as pertinent one hundred years ago, when the heroic age of exploration was thought to be drawing to a close, as it is today. It also lies at the heart of my doctoral dissertation, which examines the culture of northern Canadian exploration in the first half of the twentieth century. I focus on the writings and actions of four self-defined explorers: the mining engineer George Douglas (1875-1963), the surveyor Guy Blanchet (1884-1966), the ethnologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879-1962), and the photographer and filmmaker Richard Finnie (1906-1987). Arguing against the notion that northern exploration was unilaterally replaced by professional scientific fieldwork in this period, I demonstrate that these men developed and performed specifically explora-

tory identities throughout their lives. They adhered to an older, natural historical style of exploratory praxis, characterized by their wide networks of correspondence and their location of authority within their private libraries and archives. Exploration thus produced different kinds of knowledge about the North than that stemming from overtly scientific fieldwork. Far from being a nostalgic, anti-modern activity, as it is often figured, exploration also enabled these men to wrestle with and resolve specifically modern concerns about the role and agency of the individual in an increasingly homogeneous and mass-produced society. Discursive ideas of modernity in southern North America significantly influenced these men’s experiences in the North and shaped their representations of the northern environment.

Exploration was key to the early twentieth-century “opening” of the Canadian North, in which northern landscapes were made legible to southern government and industry and became entangled in related networks of power and capital. Yet a deep and heartfelt ambivalence about the region’s modernization pierces that era’s enthusiastic narratives of progress and development. Many

who worked and lived there—northerners and southerners, natives and non-natives alike—remained attached to older configurations of labour and material engagement with the land. That same dissonance still inflects current debates about local and regional development in the North. Exploration, after all, was never only about imperial knowledge and control. It was predicated also on serendipitous travel through unknown landscapes, through spaces of endless imaginative speculation and pleasure too vast to know or control. Exploration enralls us still because it inspires us, through contact with the new and unforeseen, to imagine different and better ways of being ourselves and living in the world with each other. We seem to need this optimistic desire for the betterment of human affairs as much in this century as ever.

Christina Adcock recently completed her doctoral degree at the Scott Polar Research Institute of the University of Cambridge. She is now a postdoctoral fellow at UBC.

## The Big Tree, Forestry in New Brunswick, and the Value of Nature

Mark J. McLaughlin



In Victoria County, New Brunswick, there is a certain tree which the locals refer to as the “Big Tree.” This particular tree sits atop a knoll alongside the Trans-Canada Highway, approximately 10 kilometres north of Perth-Andover and directly across from the Hamlet of Aroostook’s water tower. Hundreds of thousands of tourists, truckers, and regular folks going about their daily routines pass by this tree every year, but very few ever notice it. Surrounded by brush and many ordinary-looking trees, there is nothing spectacular about the tree on the knoll that would make it stand out to someone driving by on the highway. However, once you leave your car and actually walk to the base of the tree, then you can understand why locals have named it as they have. At more than two metres in diameter, ecologists estimate the Big Tree is no less than 500 years old. What is even more remarkable is that it is an eastern white pine, the tree species most valued by Eastern Canada’s forest industries in the 18th and 19th centuries. Luckily for the Big Tree, its trunk branches out in several directions a few metres above the ground, making it of little economic value for lumberers (not much “straight wood”).

The Big Tree is a reminder of how badly New Brunswick’s forests have been managed. Hardly any large white pines, or large examples of any other species of tree for that matter, have survived more than two hundred years of intensive forestry in New Brunswick. In a series of transitions starting in the late 18th century, the province’s forest industries shifted from the production of ship masts to square timber to long lumber and finally pulp and paper in the 1920s. Successive industries simply cut the biggest and the best trees they needed to supply a particular market, a process commonly known as “high-grading.” By the mid-20th century, this valuation of the forests in purely economic terms had prompted a debate about forest management policy in New Brunswick. My doctoral dissertation examines the competing visions of various forest stakeholders, including pulp and paper companies, lumber companies, woods workers, inde-

pendent woodlot owners, and environmentalists, as to how the provincial government should manage the Crown (public) forests after the Second World War. Each group valued the forests differently. The pulp and paper industry, for example, considered the Crown forests valuable solely as industrial landscapes, while the environmentalists were more concerned with the forests as vibrant natural ecosystems (their intrinsic value).

In the 1970s, the poor state of the province’s forests and a cyclical downturn in international pulp and paper markets provided an opportunity for the New Brunswick government to seriously consider alternatives to the dominant industrial model of forest management. In particular, the provincial government formally established the New Brunswick Forest Authority in October 1973, a Crown corporation that administered more than 400,000 hectares of forests near Bathurst as part of a massive forest management experiment. The Bathurst Pilot Project was unparalleled in the history of North American forestry. If it had been judged successful after the initial five years, all Crown land leases in New Brunswick would have been withdrawn and placed under the control of the Forest Authority. The Authority, as the sole harvester of wood on Crown lands, would have assured mills an annual “guaranteed volume” of wood. For a variety of reasons, the project failed by the end of the 1970s and the industrial forestry valuation of landscape/ideology of use became well implanted within government and industry circles. The industrial forestry model has informed Crown forest management policy in New Brunswick to the present day.

At the dawn of the new millennium, the Big Tree suddenly garnered a lot of attention at the local and provincial levels. The New Brunswick government was in the process of expanding the Trans-Canada Highway from two lanes to four, and the section of the new highway through Victoria County was projected to bisect the Big Tree. The potential loss of the tree sparked significant protest from ecologists, environmentalists, historians, and local residents. For them, the tree was valuable as an ecological specimen, as a symbol of what the province’s forests had once looked like, and as a possible tourist attraction (to this day, many claim that it is the largest tree in New Brunswick). This campaign to save the Big Tree was one of the reasons why the provincial government ultimately changed the highway’s course a couple of hundred metres to the east. In this instance, alternative valuations of nature challenged economic orthodoxy. It has yet to be seen if something similar will ever occur in the management of New Brunswick’s Crown forests.

Mark J. McLaughlin is a PhD Candidate in history at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton.

## Workshop Recap: Environments of Mobility in Canadian History, May 2011



Canada's past is full of moving nature. On May 13-14, more than twenty scholars gathered at the Glendon College campus of York University to share their research on the intersections of mobility and the environment in



the rise and fall of supply steamboats in Muskoka to the diverse kinds of mobility that were involved in the country's early golf landscapes.

Dr. Tom McCarthy, author of *Auto Mania: Cars,*

Consumers, the Environment (Yale University Press, 2007), attended and acted as an outside commentator. He provided useful insights on individual papers, as well as a North American perspective on the broader themes that emerged over the course of the weekend. The workshop had a web component, with the NiCHE website hosting images and a brief synopsis of each papers (see [niche-canada.org/mobility](http://niche-canada.org/mobility)), and several participants used Twitter to inform those unable to attend. The workshop was organized by Dr. Colin Coates, Ben Bradley, and Jay Young.

During the past spring a large number of Canadian environmental historians gathered together in Burlington to discuss the future of the field. Andrew Nikiforuk gave a rousing talk on the Canadian oil sands to open the workshop (watch the video on the [NiCHE website](#)).



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**EHTV**

Lauren Wheeler and Sean Kheraj also interviewed a number of participants for the first episode of EHTV. You can watch there video [here](#).



Finally, Sean also recorded a roundtable discussion on EH+ for the Nature's Past Podcast, which can also be found on the [website](#).

## Will Knight and the ASEH Graduate Student Caucus



**ASEH**

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

After two years as the NiCHE new scholars representative, I've taken on a similar position

with ASEH. I find myself talking a lot with colleagues who I met and collaborated with as the NiCHE rep, people like Sean Kheraj, Lauren Wheeler, Andrew Watson, and others we met during last year's online workshop Place and Placelessness. The circle has now widened to include more graduate students in the US and abroad and is the core for a new group in ASEH, the graduate student caucus.

The caucus, like the NiCHE New Scholars group, is an informal group that aims to

mobilize grad students for projects of common interest that meet their needs and foster a supportive community. The caucus is using the same techniques developed in the new scholars group, particularly the use of Skype to network and to conduct business. So far, the response has been strong. The caucus is currently working on a half-day graduate student workshop that will be delivered as part of next year's conference program in Madison.

We're also seeking your input on workshop planning, so please visit our survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/25QZ255> to add your two cents. You can also join the caucus or send comments about the workshop by emailing me at [wknight@connect.carleton.ca](mailto:wknight@connect.carleton.ca).



## Canadian History & Environment Book Series

A series of edited collections on Canadian environmental history / historical geography, published simultaneously in print form and free, open-access online form. If you're interested in developing a book for the series, here is the ["Guide for the Preparation of a Prospectus."](#)

## NICHE Projects Page

### Nature's Past Sean Kheraj



Over the past year, Nature's Past has experienced continued growth as a leading environmental history audio podcast series.

Since the series' launch in December 2008, listeners have downloaded Nature's Past podcast episodes nearly 10,000 times.

Please continue to support this great member-lead project by visiting the [web-site](#) and subscribing on [iTunes](#).

## 4th Annual Chiniki Lecture in First Nation's History



The University of Calgary's Chiniki Lecture series is

named after the Chiniki First Nation which sits just west of Calgary. Every spring, the History Graduate Students Union brings in a respected academic or community leader to present to faculty and students from the UofC and to any local residents who wish to participate.

This year, Grand Chief Sam Gargan spoke on a number of important subjects affecting the Dehcho nation and the Canadian North. One subject of great importance to the Dehcho remains the ongoing jurisdictional and self-governance process

with the Canadian government. Intimately tied to this

question of governance are the Dehcho's relations with the government and international oil companies and the future of the recently approved \$16 billion Mackenzie Valley pipeline project – which project developers hope to run across Dehcho land.

Grand Chief Gargan also discussed the expansion and protection of Nahanni National Park and his people's protected areas and land use strategy.