

Bringing Research to LIFE

In Brief

Conference takes a close look at climate change

The University of Manitoba participated in a two-day conference on the subject of climate change.

Designed for educators who wish to embed the principles and practices of sustainable development in their teaching and program planning, Choose the Future, was presented at the Winnipeg Convention Centre on Nov. 27 and 28, and was geared towards educators, leaders of business, NGO's and government who wish to engage their employees and stakeholders in sustainable practices and operations.

David Barber, Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth and Resources associate dean of research and project leader of the IPY-Circumpolar Flaw Lead system study, was an active participant in the conference.

Also involved with the conference from the U of M were professor and project lead of STAR, John Hanesiak; head of the department of environment and geography Ronald Stewart; program coordinator of Schools on Board Lucette Barber; associate professor Tim Papakyriakou; research scientist Gary Stern; graduate student Natalie Asselin; and assistant program coordinator for Schools on Board Robin Gislason.

Upcoming

Public Lecture

Stimulating the Nervous System to Repair

Monday, December 15, 2008

7:00 PM

Samuel N. Cohen Auditorium,
351 Taché Ave

To pre-register, RSVP to:
kforund@sbr.ca
Phone: (204) 235-3939

Speaker Series

War in Outer Space

Wednesday, January 21, 2009

7:00 PM

Robert B. Schultz Lecture Theatre
St. John's College

Studying Christmas and its critics

BY SEAN MOORE

St. Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors and thieves and students and children and perfume makers and barrel makers and Belgium.

An impressive résumé, but his references raise questions. So much so, in the 1960's Pope Paul VI downgraded him from being a major saint on the Catholic calendar to a minor one due to his shadowy origins. He now resides in the category of mythical creatures.

He is, however, still popular and December 6 marks his feast day. Second only to the Virgin Mary, St. Nicholas had more churches named after him than any other saint during the Middle Ages, and one of the most popular of these churches dots the southern coast of Turkey in the town of Demre.

History Professor Gerry Bowler visited it this past May to do research for his book, which has the working title, *Christmas and its Critics*.

Bowler has written extensively on Christmas, and this latest book will examine how various groups throughout history have tried, and failed, to appropriate Christmas; how the world's most celebrated holiday is the subject of reform and how it has been used by particular government's that aren't Christian.

Such governments include Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and the Turkish Republic.

Turkey is a secular republic with a dominant Muslim culture, yet Demre has a tourist industry focusing on a Christian saint. The Turks call it "the home of Santa Claus" but most people are there not for the statue of Santa ringing a bell, but for a tomb ascribed to St. Nicholas.

"I went there because I wanted to know how much of the focus is on St. Nicholas and how much of it is on Santa Claus," Bowler said.

"It turns out, it's overwhelmingly St. Nicholas and the biggest icon store in town is run by a very happy family of Muslims. I looked around all the sites, but the important thing was talking to this family to see if they felt any sort of contradiction. They didn't. Yet everywhere I went in Turkey there was this sense that Turkey was changing. People who are in the tourist business are worried that at some point they are going to be pressured into cultural subservience."

But for now the money is good: in Demre, Russian pilgrims crowd the streets.

They arrive by the busload to visit the saint's small Byzantine building. One by one they reach over a Plexiglass barrier to press their handkerchiefs or icons against a tomb they believe is his. (It's not. If he did exist in the 300's he'd likely have been buried in the floor. Besides, St. Nicholas's bones were kidnapped in 1087 and taken to Italy. What's more, the currently revered



Submitted Photo

History professor Gerry Bowler stands inside a church ascribed to St. Nicholas in Turkey. Bowler went there in May to do research for his new book on Christmas and its critics.

tomb, Bowler notes, has an effigy of a married couple on it.)

"We're not even sure if St. Nicholas existed," he said. "When he was kicking there wasn't an official canonization process and there is no birth record. We only have legends, and we have a ton of them. And we've got this church ascribed to him where they say he was the bishop, and where he was buried."

That, evidently, is all a pilgrim needs to know. And so they flock to the town and buy icons of him from the Muslim family.

In interviewing the family Bowler learned that, even though they are from an anti-iconic religion, selling St. Nicholas paraphernalia is a point of pride for them.

"Their Turkishness comes first. They have a loyalty to St. Nicholas as a proto-Turk," he said. "It was almost an act of defiance against these waves of pressure that they felt from the government and the immigration from Eastern Turkey."

Rewind the film to Soviet controlled Eastern Europe and a similar *zeitgeist* is noticeable.

Under communist rule, Christmas was implicit anti-Soviet criticism, a sort of, "we're going to celebrate Christmas and there is nothing you can do about it," Bowler said.

In response, though, the Soviet Union put the emphasis on the New Year, made the gift giver a generic Grandfather Frost rather than Jesus or St. Nicholas

(who didn't become associated with gift-giving until the 1100's). Churches were burned, cathedrals converted to potato warehouses, Christmas trees banned, and priests imprisoned. But the people resisted and Christmas went underground.

In the 1940's, troubled on various fronts, Joseph Stalin "took his jackboot off the throat of Christmas and it was allowed out again," Bowler said.

"It was useful for Stalin to allow the celebration of Christmas – there was a link between Russianness and Christmas – and this move allowed him to emphasize that he might be a nasty tyrant but by golly he was Russian."

Many have tried to extinguish Christmas. None so far have succeeded. Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, John Calvin: all failures. Dr. Seuss's Grinch could not resist the magic, bountiful light and greenery that accompanies the celebration amid the coldest, darkest days of the year.

Cities have tried too. Like Pittsburgh years ago, and today in Oxford, England, officials have tried to push the celebration of Christmas from the public square. No doubt Oxford Professor and outspoken atheist Richard Dawkins is pleased, but as Stalin would attest, Christmas has to be accommodated. Try as you might, it will eventually resurface from any attempt to drown it. So sorry Dawkins, soon enough, Santa Claus is coming to town.

Meet the other Afghanistan

MacDonald proves that one person can make a difference

BY DALE BARBOUR
The Bulletin

We understand peacekeeping. And as a country we've done a good job of putting our troops on the frontline in Afghanistan in an effort to contain the Taliban insurgency.

But while we know how to fight an enemy on the field of battle, understanding how to rebuild a country from within represents a different challenge.

A former Canadian politician and founder of Future Generations Canada, Flora MacDonald delivered the sixth annual Sol Kanee Lecture on Peace and Justice entitled "Peacebuilding, Development, Hope The Other Afghanistan" at the University of Manitoba on Nov. 19. Her message? We need to take a broader approach if we really want to help Afghanistan.

"I support our troops," MacDonald said. "And we need the military presence to contain the Taliban insurgents in their heartland." Indeed, she argued that the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated this year as the Taliban have been slowly breaking out of the Kandahar district and moving towards Kabul.

But MacDonald said what the troops can't offer is long-term development for Afghanistan.

"They can help build a school, but they can't ensure that it's staffed on



Flora MacDonald

an ongoing basis," MacDonald said. If Canada wants to help Afghanistan on a long-term basis, MacDonald says we need to work with the Afghani people to discover what their needs are and how best to fulfill them.

Future Generations Canada focuses its work in Bamyan province, in Central Afghanistan. It's not a big operation. In fact it has exactly one staff member in Afghanistan: Abdullah Barat, an Afghani-Canadian, recruited by MacDonald to run operations in his home country. He looks after logistics in Bamyan while MacDonald attempts to raise funds and attention for the operation in Canada.

The projects are modest, but the impact can be spectacular. In areas where there is no electricity, MacDonald said they have focused on setting up wind powered pumps to get fresh water and solar-powered lights to light up houses. The solar cells charge up during the day providing power for the lights in the evening.

"Artificial light transforms the lives of villagers," MacDonald said. "Suddenly children can study in the evening and women can weave." In other words, light equals time.

Other projects are on an as needed basis, MacDonald said when a group of teens approached her and said they wanted the opportunity to go to school, MacDonald guaranteed them that if they could supply a building, she would link them to a teacher. They upheld their end of the bargain, building the school themselves, and she upheld her end.

"A form of government is emerging in Afghanistan but not necessarily one dictated by Western thinking," MacDonald added. In Bamyan province village councils have been formed and in some areas have grown into regional councils. The councils meet weekly to develop a work plan for their village or region and then go and make it happen. Significantly, 40 per cent of the council members are female.

MacDonald said the military's job isn't done in Afghanistan. If anything, she says the war in Iraq has distracted the United States from what is happening in Afghanistan.

"They need to be here where they started after 9-11. They've been ignoring it ever since," MacDonald said. "They need to get back to where it all began."

MacDonald said the West also has to recognize that not all Taliban supporters are insurgents bent on winning their battle through military means. Some of them desire peace. During her first trips to Afghanistan in 2001 prior to the NATO invasion, MacDonald was helping establish secret schools for females in private homes. During this period, females were not allowed to attend schools in Afghanistan. Her efforts did not go unnoticed and a couple of Taliban supporters approached her.

"They said, 'We know what you're doing. But we won't say anything about it if you allow our daughters to go to,'" MacDonald said.

And by helping developing other areas of Afghanistan such as the Bamyan province, MacDonald said the Western powers would be helping solidify support in the rest of the country.

"We have to realize that people in Afghanistan could do so much more," MacDonald said.

New restaurant opens in Smartpark

Smartpark is a community of innovators, a place where private sector know-how walks hand in hand with university research. And every community needs a cafe.

edna fedya opened its doors on Dec. 1 in One Research Road, joining DMT, BASE, Wolf Trax, MRAC and Monsanto. The new restaurant is expected to be open from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a week. While the name might not be familiar, the menu, service and character of the new restaurant should be because edna fedya is a subsidiary of Stella's Café and Bakery.

"We've always wanted to have a restaurant in Smartpark," Larry Paskaruk, Smartpark's director, property development and management said. "When we were doing the design work on One Research Road 3 1/2 years ago we set aside 1,100 square feet for a food service provider but we couldn't find one with all the right attributes until we talked to Stella's."

Gary Brownstone, director, the eureka project: Smartpark's Incubator, said the new restaurant will fill a definite need in the community.

"There's a 1,000 people working in Smartpark and up until now we've had no food service," Brownstone said. Sure, there are plenty of food options

on the Fort Garry campus, and Pembina Highway is just a short drive away, but the park needed somewhere that people could walk to on their own – a sort of town centre. Now people will have the option of grabbing a lunch or breakfast and, perhaps even more importantly, they can head over to edna fedya's during the day to talk business over some coffee and food.

"Everyone is welcome," Paskaruk added. "We're hoping people from the rest of the campus will join us and we've got the new indoor soccer stadium right next door."

Stella's co-general manager Brad Burrows said Smartpark was keen to have them join the community. While the edna fedya brand is new, the experience will be what regular Stella's customers have come to expect.

"We think it's going to turn out great," Burrows said. "It's a little bit of a different floor model from our usual style, but it will have the same hustle and bustle that people like and the menu will be almost exactly the same."

The restaurant's location fronts onto a patio – a neat little town square for the businesses at One Research Road – which means people will have the option of eating indoors and out during the summer months.



Photo by Dale Barbour

Gary Brownstone, director, the eureka project: Smartpark's Incubator, and Larry Paskaruk, Smartpark's director, property development and management, check out the new edna fedya location in Smartpark.

U of M helps in World Heritage Site research

The University of Manitoba is providing research support to Pimachiowin Aki Corporation in its efforts to have part of the Canadian boreal forest designated a World Heritage Site.

Researchers Iain Davidson-Hunt and Virginia Petch will lead the research (with graduate students Catie Burlando, Carlos Idrobo and Christin

Didora) at the Natural Resources Institute. The results of this work make an important contribution to the nomination document which will be submitted to Canada and ultimately the World Heritage Committee.

When completed in about a year, this research should help show that the boreal forest is outstanding not only

for its natural assets, but also for its cultural importance to the world, said Pimachiowin Aki spokesperson Sophia Rabliauskas.

"Most people know that the trees and animals in the forest are important to protect, but not everyone realizes that Anishinaabe people have been living on this land for 5,000 years. This study will

record that history and show why the area is valuable culturally and spiritually," says Rabliauskas, a member of the Poplar River First Nation located in the proposed World Heritage Site area.

The university's research will begin with an overview of other current World Heritage Sites designated as cultural landscapes.