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GRANTS

The ring cycle

It was on a field trip for a biogeography class that Carolyn Reardon became enchanted by the mysteries of the bog. Reardon, a geography and environmental studies student at New Brunswick's Mount Allison University, was struck by the devastation of the wetlands she saw in rural New Brunswick that had been mined of their peat. "It became important for me," she says, "to find a method for restoring them."

Peat harvesting for the horticulture industry is big business in the province. The process removes all surface vegetation, turning once-thriving peatlands into fields of clay. But some companies have discovered dense layers of stumps and logs beneath the peat, indicating areas occupied by forests up to 3,000 years ago.

With a grant from The Royal Canadian Geographical Society, Reardon sampled larch and black spruce in ancient and modern bogs in the Shippagan-Lamèque region of northern New Brunswick last summer. She aims to provide insight that could one day help extraction companies return their bogs to forestland.

Her research is an example of the pioneering work being carried out in the Mount Allison Dendrochronology Laboratory (MAD Lab), formed in 2003 by biologist Colin Laroque to study tree-ring data. Research has ranged from analyzing dead trees in a Newfoundland old-growth forest in an attempt to save the threatened pine marten ("The inside story," Jan/Feb 2005) to studying the rings of wood turtle shells to determine how climate change affects growth patterns ("The inside story," May/June 2006).

Many of Laroque's students have received RCGS grants, continuing a relationship that began in 1991 when Laroque himself got a grant from the Society to measure the ice depth on Alberta's Rae Glacier.

"Fieldwork is an endangered activity in geography today," said Christopher Burn, chair of the research and grants committee, at the Society's Annual General Meeting in November. The value of an RCGS grant, echoes Laroque, is that, aside from furthering the work of the MAD Lab, it recognizes the importance of working in the field.

"There's such a chasm between book learning and going out and experiencing the environment," he says. "Getting chewed by bugs and seeing a deer in the early morning can be life-changing events."

Fieldwork made all the difference for Mount Allison

Carolyn Reardon (BELOW) is trying to return harvested bogs (ABOVE) to forestland.



student Ben Phillips, whose RCGS-funded research uncovered the world's oldest red spruce ("The inside story," Jan/Feb 2006).

"I struggled my first year at Mount Allison," said Phillips during a presentation to Society fellows at the AGM. "But the RCGS recognized that I could take my skills and go out in the field."

Patricia D'Souza