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Mount Allison students to represent New Brunswick at Climate Change Conference

Sep 21, 2006



SACKVILLE, NB — Two fourth-year Mount Allison students are leaving next week to represent New Brunswick undergraduate researchers at the Atlantic Centre for Global Change and Ecosystem Research Conference (ACGCER) in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Environmental science major Sarah Hart and environmental studies and geography double major student Natasha

O'Neill, have been selected to deliver oral presentations of their research findings at the ACGCER conference on Monday, September 25.

"My research in the MAD (Mount Allison Dendrochronology) Lab has tried to locate the oldest trees in Nova Scotia", said Hart a Haddon Heights, New Jersey native. "With all of the current industrial logging and the historical uses of the forests in the past, finding a tree older than 100 years in Nova Scotia has proven to be quite a challenge." Hart searched all summer, in collaboration with Rob Cameron and Leif Helmer, members of the Protected Areas Division of the provincial Environment department, to locate and sample the few old trees remaining in Nova Scotia. "The goals of my project were two fold," she said, "I first wanted to help the province find and protect the few remaining old trees left in Nova Scotia, and I also wanted to find out the past growing environments under which these trees grew. Once we find out this information from the tree-ring patterns, we can begin to unravel how past temperature and precipitation regimes have changed in Nova Scotia during the lifetime of the trees."

Natasha O'Neill, a resident of Sarnia Ontario, has studied a different facet of old growth trees. "Since most old trees have been cut down in the province, I decided to find well preserved logs that were cut hundreds of years ago, and then sample them. I pinpointed that old churches provided me with the best preserved raw timbers that were cut by some of the first inhabitants of each region. In essence, sampling old church attic beams, was like sampling a native forest that grew 150-200 years ago," she said. The information collected by both students will go a long way into providing annual environmental information for the entire region and for specific communities. "Both Sarah's and my project could not have been completed without a lot of generous support by local individuals and community groups" said O'Neill. " We were able to

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generate interest in the local communities this summer, and often were able to deliver information back to the historical and natural history groups that helped us find our targeted forests," she said.

Mount Allison environmental studies program co-ordinator Dr. Brad Walters commented "I am very impressed at the level of initiative that these students are able to generate for the good of the environment. Generating information about past environments, or providing information to save a patch of original old growth forest, even if it is a small patch, will pay dividends for our society in years to come."

The ACGCER research group initiates research into climate change concerns in the Atlantic region. Areas of study such as rising sea levels, warming temperatures, volatile weather patterns and resultant impacts on agricultural, fisheries and forestry industries are but a few of the topics under study. The annual meeting next Monday is open to members of the climate change group and any interested members of the public, and will be held at Acadia University's K.C Irving Centre.

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