

SCAR History of Antarctic Research Action Group

Report on the 6th SCAR History Workshop “Polar History and Institutionalization of Polar Research The International Polar Years”

SCAR/IASC Open Science Conference, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 5 August, 2010

The SCAR history session on “Polar History and Institutionalization of Polar Research The International Polar Years” took place on 5 August 2010. It focussed on the time before the Antarctic Treaty came into force, when expeditions sailed south in hopes of earning much money from whaling, sealing or exploiting other resources in Antarctic regions. Science too was the driver behind many expeditions to explore the white continent, sometimes also with the intent of laying claim to a good part of it for one's own nation in the event of a division of the territory. The interrelationship of various types of motives behind and aspects relating to exploration and research were discussed in historical context.

María Ximena Senatore (Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentine) opened the session with her keynote speech on pre-industrial whaling in the South Shetland Islands, Antarctica. Systematic analyses are based on documents of the New England Historic Archives related to the activity of whaling and sealing ships in the early and mid nineteenth century as well as on archaeological information. The results contribute in setting much earlier dates for whaling incursions in the South Shetland Islands.

The second keynote was given by Adrian Howkins (Colorado State University, USA) on regulating the frozen El Dorado in respect to environment, science and politics in the Antarctic minerals negotiations, 1973-1991. He argued that the unique confluence of environmental, scientific, and political factors that came together by the late 1980s made a complete ban on mineral exploitation an expedient solution to the minerals question that supported the political goals of the Antarctic Treaty System.

Thierry Rousset (University of Cape Town, South Africa) analyzed the Cape involvement in the sea elephant oil trade at the Crozet and prince Edward Islands (1822-1872). The main protagonist in this trade was John Jearey who had a monopoly in the sea elephant oil trade for a large portion of the thirty years (1838-1869). The paper discussed how he was able to pursue this venture almost uninterrupted over such a long period of time.

Brandon Luedtke (Colorado State University, USA) talked about Antarctic research and imperial ambition when assessing the 7th International Geographical Congress in Berlin 1899, when participants formulated an Antarctic research program structured around a strict demarcation of national zones of activity Great Britain and Germany

Erki Tammisaar (Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonia) explained the history and future of Estonian Antarctic research, going back to Baltic German expedition leader Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen. The Estonian members of Soviet Antarctic expeditions laid the foundation of Estonian polar research, which now aims to establish a legal and financial basis for the participation of Estonians in Arctic and Antarctic research.

Then Consuelo León (Center for Hemispheric and Polar Studies, Chile) introduced scientific

activities carried out at Base O'Higgins from its creation in 1948 through the tragic fire Base Luis Risopatrón in March 1958 in using the daily logs kept by the base commanders as well as their annual reports.

Lisbeth Lewander (Gothenburg University, Sweden) worked on Swedish deliberations facing the pre-negotiation period of the Antarctic Treaty (1954-1958). Archival material showed that Sweden had a high degree of sensitivity both towards internal political-economic interest groups as well as towards external partners of foreign- and security political cooperation. Foreign political concerns complemented the former understandings of why Sweden chose to abstain from the International Geophysical Year and therefore possibly the later involvement in the negotiations of the Antarctic Treaty.

In the end Xiaolinang Ling (Polar Research Institute of China, China) discussed a perspective analysis on Antarctic affairs based on papers and recommendations of the 32th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. The paper showed that the original signatory parties such as New Zealand, United Kingdom, Australia, USA and Chile are the most active and influential nations in ATCM, thus strengthen their leadership in Antarctic affairs. Russia, Argentina, Norway and Japan follow them, while the influences of the other consultative parties are not relatively obvious. Besides, the interests of some organizations on Antarctic issue and participation in ATCM are rising rapidly in the recent years.

In an additional poster Alan Cooper and Julianne Stafford (U.S. Geological Survey USA) described music of Antarctic expeditions from Capt. Cook to the Antarctic Treaty and its roles in exploration, science and geopolitics. This poster stimulated a music and cultural arts programme for the next SCAR OSC in Portland, Oregon, in 2012.