Workshop Reports

A new PAGES Working Group: Arctic2k - Arctic climate during the last 2 millennia

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Nalan Koç
Norwegian Polar Institute, Tromsø; nalan.koc@npolar.no

Climate change in the Arctic is amplified, mostly due to ice- and snow-albedo feedback effects. Warming in the Arctic has occurred at about twice the rate of the global mean, both from the 19th to 21st centuries and from the late 1960s to present (Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, 2004). This trend has further accelerated during the past decade, as evidenced both by the dramatic decrease of summer sea ice cover and increased melt rates of glaciers (e.g., Kohler et al., 2007; Comiso et al., 2008). Observed increases in Arctic river discharge and freshening of Arctic water masses are consistent with human-induced Arctic moistening (Min et al., 2008). The effects of anthropogenic warming will continue to be superimposed on natural climate variability. Unfortunately, Arctic instrumental measurements only extend back to the mid-20th century, which limits our understanding of multi-decadal and -centennial spatial and temporal natural variability in this region.

In recent years, some high-resolution Arctic paleoclimate data have been obtained from ice cores (Figs. 1 and 2), and lake and ocean sediments. PAGES Working Group (WG) on Arctic climate during the last two millennia (Arctic2k) is a new initiative that will generate additional records and synthesize these high-resolution paleoclimate data to assess and elucidate both the timing and variability of Arctic climate change during this period. In particular, the group will contribute to regional reconstructions of the last 2 kyr, under the new PAGES Focus 2 “Regional Climate Dynamics”. Forty paleoclimatologists from both the data and modeling communities, gathered for the first Arctic2k workshop at NCAR, Boulder, USA on 8 March 2008, following the 38th International Arctic Workshop at INSTaar (5-7 March 2008).

During this one-day kick-off, workshop participants gave a preliminary overview of national and regional activities from the different paleocommunities. The future research issues for the Arctic 2k WG were discussed extensively. These included emphasizing the need to assess sensitivities and thresholds in the Arctic system, spatial and temporal modes of climate signals, persistence of anomalies, frequencies of extreme events, rates of change, and irreversibility and feedback mechanisms. Some central questions emerged:

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**Figure 1:** Drilling site at Lomonosovfonna, Svalbard.

**Figure 2:** Left axis: Annual mean deuterium excess anomalies for the Lomonosovfonna ice core (green); non-linear trend (red) and non-linear trend with superimposed centennial component (black), both retrieved using Singular Spectrum Analysis. Deuterium excess (d= δD-8*δ 18O) is a sensitive indicator of sea surface temperature (SST) of the area where the precipitated moisture originally evaporated. Right axis: Annual mean SST anomalies in mid-latitude North Atlantic between 20°-45°N (blue) (Divine et al., submitted).
a) Is the 20th century warming of the Arctic unprecedented in the last 2 kyr? b) What is the multi-decadal-to-century-scale variability in Arctic climate? c) What portion of the Arctic-wide and regional temperature changes during the last 2 kyr can be explained by changes in solar irradiance and volcanic activity, and what portion is related to internal adjustments of the climate system? In addition, improvement of our confidence in the interpretation of the proxies and the geochronology were identified as important underlying goals.

The group decided to limit the study area to north of 60°N latitude, which includes Greenland, Iceland and Alaska. A website for the WG has been launched, which lists the researchers and sub-projects involved (www.pages-igbp.org/science/arctic2k/). Furthermore, a metadata base is being developed there to assist the compilation of Arctic records. An immediate task is to map the available data and to assess regions with data gaps. The Arctic2k WG will be organizing three regional reconstruction workshops in 2009 (Scandinavia-Nordic Seas-Svalbard; Baffin Bay-Greenland-Iceland; Northern Pacific-Alaska). All paleoclimate scientists working in the Arctic with high-resolution data and/or modeling are welcome to join and contribute to the PAGES Arctic2k WG.

Reference


