

Watching over our Northern wealth

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE Canadian Arctic and my freezer?

There are many very plausible answers to this joke, and most of them ("the Arctic is only frozen eleven months of the year"; "My ice trays aren't worth billions of dollars"; "The Russians never planted a flag on my frozen peas") aren't funny in the least. Nor should they be—after all, Arctic sovereignty is no laughing matter.

In response to a recent increase in foreign interest in the region—which was in turn caused by less recent discoveries of oil, gold, diamonds, and all the other goodies that make obscenely rich men's eyes light up like a 13-year-old who figured out his parents' NetNanny password—the Canadian government has announced plans to build a sophisticated, hi-tech fibre optic monitoring system in the Northwest Passage to keep track of both ship and submarine travel.

Now, this seems like a great idea, only we've already established that, other than the temperature, the Arctic is nothing like a freezer. If we, as a country, really care about these ice-covered rocks north of 60, we'd be much better off forgoing the warnings and simply packing our freezer so full of shit that any potential intruders couldn't find what they're looking for.

Canada's grip on the Arctic has been slipping ever since the downsizing of the military following the end of the Cold War. While there was certainly little need of continuing early-warning bases in the Arctic, the military presence in the region was necessary because it's otherwise largely devoid of people. According to the 2006 Census, about 70 000 residents live in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut combined, which puts about 0.037 people on every square kilometer in the former, and 0.016 in the later. With almost a third of those folks centred in Yellowknife, the spread is even thinner. The Arctic would be a lot more secure if there were actually a major economic centre consisting of people who strongly recognize themselves as Canadian.

Perhaps the government couldn't have been expected to maintain superfluous CAF bases up there just to keep a solid grip on the North, but they could've taken other measures to encourage more citizens to relocate up there—especially since people wouldn't of their own free will. The fact that there isn't a deepwater port in the Northwest Passage or in an Eastern Arctic centre like Iqaluit severely limits the economy almost year-round as the various bays and inlets that the towns are built on freeze up in the colder months.

Additionally, food, especially of the fresh variety, is difficult to come by since the land is so difficult to farm—attempts to do so in Rankin Inlet in the '60s and '70s only resulted in fatter polar bears. As a result, most of the remote towns are forced to pay double for milk and bread or survive on what the barge brings in when the ice finally melts enough for it to dock.

While the government offers enticing incentives to federal employees who agree to work in the North, those same incentives have yet to stretch to private companies. As such, while the population is steadily growing for both the NWT and Nunavut, neither has experienced the boom necessary to tighten Canada's hold on the region. And while more natural resources are discovered in the region all the time, older mines are shutting down, making that work even more unpredictable for potential relocaters.

If the government is serious about establishing dominance in the region, it's going to have to take a little more action than what boils down to a fancy sonar setup. Until they do, there's a serious risk of finding Yuri and Ivan in the kitchen, bogarting all the curly fries.

PAUL OWEN
Managing Editor

Smashing pumpkins... and heads

Dude dies while moshing
This never would have happened
if D'arcy were there

RYAN HEISE
Deputy News Editor



CONAL PIERSE

LETTERS

Hudema shames us all

(Re: "Former SU prez put on probation," 20 September). Having someone like Mike Hudema represent the environmental cause is an absolute embarrassment—he discredits the entire movement.

There are a great number of active students on campus trying to change cultural norms with respect to our environmental responsibilities who do it in a way that's meaningful; rather than playing pranks for shits and giggles. "Radical cheerleading" alienates important players who absolutely need to be part of the solution.

When Hudema steps in front of the oil industry—who are as much part of the problem as is every one of us who demands the goods of the industry—it makes students come off as self-serving, irresponsible fools. Most students are anything but that.

The Gateway perpetrates this kind of nonsense by writing a story of sympathy full of euphemistic language, which leads to reader to believe Hudema is an innocent lamb being slammed by the Man. That's bullshit. Do you think the University would kick someone off campus for simply "asking the organizers if he could listen to their speeches"? You expect us to buy such crap?

Let's make changes on a personal level that'll force industry to change. Let's change our own lifestyles and leave the pajamas at home.

DANIEL EGGERT
Economics IV

Activists willing to stand up, freak out Man

Jonn Kmech's article starts off with the assumption that "as students, we protest everything" (Re: "Get active against poor protesting," 25 September). This is an assumption often used to discredit activists by painting them as people who simply hate the world and will use any opportunity to try to put on a costume, rather than viewing activists as people who are willing to risk isolation, criticism, and other repercussions to try to bring about a progressive change.

I think it's fairly evident to everyone that Alberta is not a protest-rich environment and that the U of A is not a hub of vibrant resistance, and in my estimation, articles like Mr Kmech's serve only to further isolate those willing to stand up rather than encouraging it.

The second criticism given is that the style of protest—cheerleading—doesn't inform the viewer, and instead, is meant to simply cause a nuisance. Again, this is another well-worn criticism and assumption. As activists we use a variety of tactics.

In addition to the Shell disruption, the group has held public forums on the tar sands, met with government and industry officials, tabled at various events handing out literature, put together research fact sheets, gave government comment on issues relating to the tar sands, conducted trainings on a variety of topics, organized a petition to the provincial government, held a training camp with a panel of experts, written letters to

the editor, and basically organized a lot of activities designed to educate people on just how destructive the tar sands are.

The Shell event was just one activity in a much larger campaign and should be judged as such. Activists put in a lot of work that goes unnoticed, media are often unwilling to report on it, and, unfortunately, forums for debate and dialogue that CEOs will attend are few and far between.

In my [opinion] the Radical Cheerleaders are fun, engaging, and able to deliver a message in a way that exemplifies those qualities. Our message was partially to the students that attended, but most of it was to the director of operations of Shell himself.

The message—in addition to being about how we need to move from a petroleum-based economy, and that rather than digging up an area the size of Florida and potentially poisoning people downstream, we should switch to more sustainable means—was that he shouldn't be able to recruit on our campus for one of the world's most socially and environmentally devastating projects and do it completely unabated.

Now was it the most successful protest I've ever been to? No. Do I feel that, with time, it could've been improved? For sure. But do I feel that these people should be challenged, [and that they] shouldn't be able to recruit for such a damaging project without some [form of] opposition? Definitely.

MIKE HUDEMA
Alumnus-in-Exile

Cycling not so dangerous if you're careful about it

The recent tragic deaths of two city cyclists are indeed a partial product of the North American mindset—and its resulting policies—that bikes don't belong on the street (Re: "Cyclists second-rate citizens on Edmonton roadways," 20 September).

As Adam Gaumont suggested last week, the City of Edmonton has done very little to encourage its citizens to use bikes in order to get around in terms of providing infrastructure.

But though I applaud his concern for the well-being of cyclists, and agree that more should be done to ensure their safety, I disagree with his assertion that "bicycle-commuting in Edmonton has always been a risky business." Unsafe cycling is dangerous just like unsafe driving, unsafe skiing, or unsafe golfing are dangerous.

It's not hard to cycle safely, but unfortunately most of us either don't know how, or can't be bothered. I'm not suggesting that either of last week's victims are to blame—I don't know how they were behaving when they were hit—but what I do know is that statistically, cycling in Edmonton is no more dangerous than driving.

Accidents will always happen, and no matter how safely we try to bike or drive, there's always the risk of being hurt due to someone else's negligence or just sheer bad luck.

This is no reason to be scared of cycling.

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