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# Researcher links major events to climate change

BY JANET FRENCH

SASKATOON — A University of Saskatchewan professor says treachery, deceit and drama detailed in Icelandic sagas are linked to changes in climate over the last 2,000 years — a theory based on clam shells off the coast of the island nation.

Bill Patterson, an associate professor in geological sciences, examined tiny slices from the clam shells found in seabed sediment to determine the surrounding weather conditions about 1,200 years ago.

He then analyzed the samples for the ratio of oxygen molecules that have slightly different masses. That ratio allows researchers to calculate the temperature at the time.

He found climate change in Iceland over the last 1,000 years was the norm, not the exception. Temperatures were lower between 1300 AD and 1850 AD, a period some describe as the Little Ice Age.

“People talk about global warming today and freak out about it, like this has never happened before,” Patterson said. “Well, that’s a lie.”

Patterson presented his results Thursday at the 35th Annual International Arctic Workshop in Edmonton.

Clam data in hand, Patterson

searched bookstores in the Icelandic capital, Reykjavik, for English translations of Icelandic sagas and it turned out social chaos often correlated with unseasonable heat, cold, moisture or dryness.

“[Climate] drives cycles of feast and famine, good times, bad times, war and peace,” Patterson said. “Even the origins of the great religions — Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, all come about under certain climate conditions. People seek some higher order when they’re having a bad time.”

Patterson’s stance on global warming is unorthodox, since data collected over the last 1,000 years shows that it’s only been during the last 100 years that the average temperature across the globe has started to climb.

“The consensus of the evidence is that most of these regional fluctuations you see are counter-balanced by fluctuations by opposite signs somewhere else,” said Danny Harvey, a University of Toronto geography professor who specializes in climate change.

“What’s different is the warming of the last 100 years is really systematic in nature. It does stand out when you look at the global average, it does stand out compared to what has happened before 1900.”

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