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UNH Scientists Ready for an Expedition across Antarctica

Carmelle Druchniak
UNH Media Relations

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UNH Scientists Ready for an Expedition across Antarctica

By [Carmelle Druchniak](#)
UNH News Bureau

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For more information, contact Paul Mayewski at 603-862-3146, or 603-868-6970.

DURHAM, N.H. -- What better date to mark the start of an exploration than Columbus Day?

On Tuesday, Oct. 12, Boston's Museum of Science hosts a send-off for a series of expeditions that will traverse the frozen expanse of Antarctica. And leading the way will be a contingent of University of New Hampshire researchers.

The International Trans Antarctic Scientific Expedition (ITASE) is the most recent in a series of expeditions inspired by Paul Mayewski, director of the UNH Climate Change Research Center. ITASE is funded by the National Science Foundation's Office of Polar Programs. The center is located within the Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans and Space.

In 1989, Mayewski organized 15 nations under the ITASE banner with the aim of recovering records of changes in climate and atmospheric chemistry over the last 200 or more years.

"Little is known about this vast continent -- one and a half times larger than the United States -- despite its importance to global climate," explains Mayewski, who will lead the U.S. expedition. "Further, it is the last continent on Earth that has a relatively clean atmosphere."

He points out that the finding of an ozone hole over Antarctica startled the scientific community and prompted serious concern about its understanding of the atmosphere and human impact on the remote atmosphere. "And despite the importance of Antarctica, there are almost no existing records of either climate change or change in the chemistry of the atmosphere. ITASE plans to uncover these mysteries."

The Museum of Science celebration marks the official start of the United States component of the ITASE program. It will include researchers from UNH, Ohio State University, University of Arizona, St. Olaf's College, Cold Regions Research and Engineering

Laboratory in Hanover, University of Pennsylvania and University of Colorado.

Mayewski has led more than 30 expeditions to Antarctica, the Arctic, the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau. He was field leader and chief scientist for the Greenland Ice Sheet Project, a \$25-million National Science Foundation-sponsored project that changed scientists' views on the way climate operates, leading to dramatic advances in the field.

His leadership in science and expeditionary fieldwork resulted in his being elected a Fellow to the Explorers Club in 1978, recognition for outstanding achievements by the same organization in 1995 and election as Fellow in the American Geophysical Union in 1998.

ITASE associate leader Mark Twickler, associate director of the Climate Change Research Center, has accompanied Mayewski on many expeditions and served as international team member on the Swedish ITASE. Both Mayewski and Twickler have Antarctic geographical sites named in their honor.

The Museum of Science has become an active partner in the ITASE program through a series of initiatives designed for schools and the public. The unique partnership between ITASE and the museum includes a display at the museum, a web site, a high school lecture day, updates on the expedition's progress and the opportunity for school children to ask ITASE expedition members questions about their work and experiences.

Eleven people will comprise the ITASE team this year, four from UNH: Mayewski, Twickler, and graduate students Tyler Cruickshank and Joe Souney. Other members are Steve Arcone and Norbert Yankielun from the Cold Regions Research and Engineering Lab; Gordon Hamilton of Ohio State; Robert Kacobel from St. Olaf's; Tracy Dahl from Antarctic Support Associates; and Kevin Pusy and Michael Gerasimoff from Icefield Instruments.

"The expedition team members are a mixture of experienced Antarctic expeditioners and newcomers to Antarctic fieldwork." Mayewski also notes the Climate Change Research Center has a long tradition of student involvement in research.

"There are specific jobs for all members of the expedition," he continues. "Some will be involved in collecting scientific data, others will assure that the two Tucker SnoCats, sleds and four snowmobiles are in

working order, while others will drill into the ice to collect the icy records of the past."

He adds: "In true expeditionary style., however, tasks such as camp maintenance, cooking and general assistance will be shared by all."

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