



# NABO General Meeting 2013

12-13 July 2013

Stefansson Arctic Institute, Akureyri

*NABO 2013 Akureyri Conference Report*

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The 2013 NABO general conference was hosted by the *Stefansson Arctic Institute* at the University of Akureyri July 12-13<sup>th</sup>. The weather was fine and the venue superb; special thanks are due to Jon Haukur Ingimundarson of SAI and the staff of the Borgir center for their outstanding logistic support, excellent catering, and warm hospitality. Participants and session chairs did an admirable job of keeping us all on schedule, and there was good time for questions and discussions and viewing of the many posters. Everyone had a good time, and the cash bar sold out completely both days (surely a positive metric). Most of the power points and posters presented are available for viewing here: [http://www.nabohome.org/cgi-bin/akureyri2013\\_2.pl](http://www.nabohome.org/cgi-bin/akureyri2013_2.pl)

The 2013 NABO Akureyri meeting was the largest since Copenhagen 2004, with 72 registered participants, 47 papers or posters, and an actual attendance of 128 on the day. There was a gratifyingly heavy turnout of students (both Icelandic and international) and scholars from Scandinavia, UK, US, Canada, France, and Germany. The two days were filled with high energy discussions, stimulating presentations, and many plans for further collaborative work. The two day general meeting was preceded and followed by smaller working group meetings including continued NABO collaboration in cross-regional comparisons with the *Long Term Vulnerabilities and Transformations Project* at Arizona State through the *Global Human Ecodynamics Alliance* (GHEA, [www.gheahome.org](http://www.gheahome.org)) and collaboration with a Swedish-led interdisciplinary project *Inscribing Environmental Memory in the Icelandic Sagas* (informally “sagas for sustainability”) with scholars from NIES, the Reykjavik Academy and Archaeological Institute Iceland. An immediate outcome of these interactive meetings has been formal participation by NABO in the *Integrated History of People on Earth* (IHOPE) *Circumpolar Networks* program (<http://ihopenet.org/circumpolarnetworks/>) and we are now cooperating closely with IHOPE in promoting engagement with the new *Future Earth* global change initiative (<http://www.futureearth.info/>).

The first day of the NABO 2013 General Meeting was opened by a full morning session of eleven papers highlighting different projects in current Icelandic archaeology. Chaired by Orri Vésteinsson, this session served to indicate how active Icelandic archaeology has become over the past decade, and to flag up a host of new findings that are changing many long held ideas about Iceland’s past. The afternoon session chaired by Jim Woollett started with six papers on recent work in Greenland and the Faroe Islands. These papers



provided overview of large scale projects funded through the recent International Polar Year initiative and two major Leverhulme Trust (UK) international collaborative efforts during the past decade. Particularly impressive was the integration of human bioarchaeology (stable isotopes and aDNA) with the extensive new evidence of archaeological survey and excavation in the Eastern Settlement backed by new laboratory work in Zooarchaeology and Archaeobotany. The first day closed with a session chaired by Ingrid Mainland called “Beyond Outreach to Community Engagement” and included some memorable presentations highlighting the expanding effort to integrate active community participation in northern science with place based heritage and education for sustainability efforts. This is a rapidly growing area, and the innovative use of GPS and digital technology to connect across disciplines and connect to the public was impressive. Follow up meetings stemming from this session are already being organized by the participants.

The second day opened with a wide -ranging session chaired by Astrid Ogilvie on new techniques and results, with papers providing both project specific reports and broad overviews of new approaches ranging from insects to sea ice. Human Bioarchaeology provided a recurring theme, and there is new talk of a NABO human bioarchaeology working group forming as a result. Synergistic combinations of saga scholarship, zooarchaeology and new aDNA research were evident in a new project identifying whales and seal bones from dated archaeological deposits- providing hope for a better understanding of the “pre-whale massacre” Viking Age and Medieval North Atlantic. Equally revolutionary was a new application of stable isotopes and aDNA to cod fish bones from excavated sites that indicate some startling changes in cod stocks prior to modern fisheries impacts. Volcanic tephra have long been invaluable for dating, but new high frequency sampling techniques are permitting detection of nearmisses as well as threshold crossing events in landscape change, providing some exciting potentials for understanding tipping points. New approaches to data management, agent based modeling, and Bayesian approaches to our growing C14 data store reflected the growing maturity of our region as a research area rich in multiple data sets and stimulating cross-disciplinary connections. The North Atlantic is clearly increasingly seen as a productive place for innovative applications requiring rich and well documented data sets.

The afternoon sessions (chaired by Andy Dugmore) included both broad overview papers and introductions to major new initiatives underway or planned in the N Atlantic region in the next few years. These included the NSF-funded NABO *Comparative Island Ecodynamics project* (2012-15), the *Harbors of the North Atlantic Project* (HANOA), the REMAINS project in Greenland, and the *Inscribing Environmental Memory* project. George Hambrecht closed the session with a stimulating discussion of the growing *Anthropocene* concept and the role of NABO scholarship in this debate. George will host a three day workshop sponsored by GHEA and NABO with the *Roots of the Anthropocene* as a theme (University of Maryland November 4-6 2013). The meeting closed with thanks all around, and the distribution of a questionnaire requesting feedback on major research questions, problems, and opportunities facing our community. It may be useful to close with a quick overview of the responses received (mostly via email) since the Akureyri meeting.

**Most Critical N Atlantic Research Questions:** Most respondents clustered their comments around prioritizing research resources to address multiple problems of coastal erosion & site destruction, community heritage conservation and public engagement while working to train and nurture the next



generations of N Atlantic scholars. There seems to be widespread interest in at least three major periods/processes in the region:

- *Landnám and first settlement*- processes of colonization, interaction with any earlier residents, impact on resources, origins of later settlement patterns and any discontinuities. The Viking Age remains popular.
- *Climate/History Conjunctions in the Middle Ages*- the sudden onset of cooling and sea ice ca. 1275-1300 at the same time as multiple transitions in governance, literature, artifacts, house form, subsistence, and trade patterns engages much interest. Investigating the late 13<sup>th</sup>-early 14<sup>th</sup> century as a critical transition point for the region combines with interest in 15<sup>th</sup> century collapse in Greenland and survival in Iceland as inter-related topics.
- *Onset of Modernity after 1500*- Post medieval archaeology and environmental history have been part of NABO since its beginning, but there are clear indications that a growing number of practitioners are being drawn into later time periods: nothing is “post-interesting”.

**Major Problems:** Respondents were nearly unanimous in flagging two major problems threatening North Atlantic heritage:

- *Accelerated erosion* (both coastal and inland) across the region and melting of seasonally frozen deposits in Greenland are irrevocably destroying the basic record at frightening speed. The next generation of scholars will have a seriously depleted record to study no matter what we do now. There is urgent need for well –considered and carefully prioritized collective rescue of endangered sites and deposits and many of the new initiatives discussed in the last day have rescue as a major objective. Even if we create major analytical backlogs, this generation has a clear duty to save as much as we can. Fieldwork needs priority, but we have to be strategic and collaborative in deploying our resources.
- *Continued economic problems* on all sides of the Atlantic place disproportionate burden on students and younger professionals. There has never been a brighter or more promising cohort of younger workers active in the North Atlantic than at present, and there is great need to nurture, promote, and preserve these invaluable human resources. Projects that provide student support, post-docs, and temporary employment now will have great dividends in the near future. We need to aid the next generation however we can.

**Needs & Opportunities:** More effective data management, expanded community engagement, cross – regional mobility for students and younger scholars, and expanded disciplinary and international cooperation were all flagged as important. Several respondents were encouraged by the clear trend to broaden the NABO interdisciplinary field to merge field and laboratory science with environmental humanities and saga studies. Everyone welcomes the integration of more fields and scholars to the teams, and all recognize the importance of maintaining the NABO traditions of ‘bringing the expert along with the data’ rather than conducting poorly informed cross-disciplinary data raids. NABO interdisciplinary papers







**Elisheva Charm**

**Laura Comeau**

**Brian Damiata**

**Tom Dawson**

**Alexis Dolphin**

**Andy Dugmore**

**Céline Dupont-Hébert**

**Ragnar Edvardsson**

**Níels Einarsson**

**Árni Einarsson**

**Frank Feeley**

**Véronique Forbes**

**Adolf Fridriksson.**

**Hildur Gestsdóttir**

**Donna Glowacki**

**George Hambrecht**

**Ramona Harrison**

**Steven Hartman**

**Reinhard Hennig**

**Megan Hicks**

**Viðar Hreinsson**

**Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir**



**Jon Haukur Ingimundarson**

**Scott Ingram**

**Anne Jensen**

**Árni Daníel Júlíusson**

**Aaron Kendal**

**Sant Mukh Khalsa**

**Tim Kohler**

**Liam Lanigan**

**Solveig Lecouturier**

**Paul Ledger**

**Karl-Johan Lindholm**

**Birna Lárusdóttir**

**Kenneth Mack**

**Christian Koch Madsen**

**Ingrid Mainland**

**Thomas McGovern**

**Natascha Mehler**

**Morten Meldgaard**

**Lukasz Mikolajczyk**

**Karen Milek**

**Dawn Elise Mooney**

**Anthony Newton**



**Astrid Ogilvie**

**Þóra Pétursdóttir**

**Marcy Rockman**

**Natasha Roy**

**Magdalena Schmid**

**Thomas L. Sever**

**Konrad Smiarowski**

**Kate Spielmann**

**John Steinberg**

**Colleen Strawhacker**

**Richard Streeter**

**Vicki Szabo**

**Nikola Trbojevic**

**Orri Vésteinsson**

**Emily Woolfenden**

**James Wylie**

**Guðbjörg Ólafsdóttir**

**Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir**

**Kristborg Þórsdóttir**