

## FOREWORD

**Oslo Science Conference, 8–12 June 2010: selected IPY papers**

Billed as “the largest polar gathering ever”, the Oslo Science Conference, held in June 2010, marked the conclusion of the fourth International Polar Year (IPY). As a country with management responsibilities for areas in both the Antarctic and the Arctic, Norway has been heavily involved in IPY activities and was proud to host the conference in Lillestrøm, outside of Oslo.

The science programme comprised six themes, each of which was subdivided into numerous sessions. Alongside these, there were side meetings (including a meeting of *Polar Research's* editorial board), workshops, exhibits, screenings of polar films throughout the five days of the conference, a polar festival in the centre of Oslo and other events and activities. Held in conjunction with the Oslo Science Conference was the international Polar Teachers conference, at which teachers from 20 countries grappled with the question, How to use polar science in your classroom?

The presentations at the conference spanned disciplines and issues that ranged from remote sensing to indigenous knowledge, from glaciology to tourism, from oceanography to Arctic marine transportation, from ecology to education, from atmospheric science to media relations, from geology to conservation—and much more. The natural sciences were strongly represented, but the meeting went beyond this: there was something for everyone, including educators, administrators, indigenous peoples and the general public. The gathering in Lillestrøm was arguably the largest expression to date of humankind's recognition of the importance of the polar regions and their interconnectedness with the rest of the world.

In his final address at the Oslo Science Conference, steering meeting chairman (and former director of the Norwegian Polar Institute) Olav Orheim summed up the event with some numbers that suggested the scale of the event. According to my notes, Orheim reported that there were 2323 registered participants representing 49 nations. He estimated that each participant walked an average of 3.2 km per day within the conference venue, dashing from session to side meeting to lunch to plenary lecture to session and so on. This would make the total distance covered within the conference building by everyone during the five-day event almost 30 000 km, which is just about three-quarters of the way around the Equator. To fuel all this physical and mental exertion, some 37 000 mini-quiches and 7500 wraps were eaten during the refreshment breaks, washed down by 1600 bottles of wine. There was a great deal more food and drink besides,

including about 25 reindeer that were consumed in the Saami lavvo just outside the main building.

I would like to thank the steering committee for supporting the idea of this special cluster of papers, and Lawson Brigham for his kind assistance. I would also like to express my gratitude to the session conveners—Hayley Hung, Nikolai Ostgaard, Giancarlo Spezie, Ad Huiskes, Lisbeth Lewander and Jean de Pomereu—who volunteered to participate in the preparation of this publication. They helped narrow down the selection from the vast pool of roughly 1050 oral presentations and 1000 posters to a number that could actually be handled by the limited manpower of *Polar Research's* editorial office. For a variety of reasons, not all of the papers that were initially considered for inclusion made it through to publication in the journal. Some were already earmarked for publication elsewhere and some simply could not be prepared in time for the submission deadline (or extensions to it).

Represented in this cluster are sessions T1-8: Contaminants in polar physical and biological environments, humans and climate influence (Barkay et al.), T2-6: Ocean physical and geochemical dynamics and processes (Trani et al.), T3-6: Impact of climate change on polar terrestrial change on polar terrestrial ecosystems (Ball et al. and Convey) and T6-4: Global learning: the impact of the media (Cheek et al. and Carry et al.), in addition to three special contributions (Dickson, Overland et al. and May et al.). Although not coming close to adequately representing the diverse work that was carried out under the IPY's umbrella, the papers nonetheless offer a sense of the spectacular range of this latest IPY—by far the largest and most ambitious ever undertaken.

As I write this, Norway is celebrating the centenary of the attainment of the South Pole by Roald Amundsen's party on 14 December 1911. A four-man Norwegian team, including the Norwegian Polar Institute's director, Jan-Gunnar Winther, marked the event by following in Amundsen's tracks, skiing from the edge of the continent to the South Pole along the same route that Amundsen's men took. Three IPYs have transpired since Amundsen “conquered” the pole. Perhaps people will start thinking about a date for the next IPY in Montreal at the From Knowledge to Action conference (in April 2012), which promises to be at least as large-scale—and no less exciting—than the conference in Lillestrøm.

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