

### From the President's desk

In 2007, The European Union will launch the 7th Framework Programme for Research. We know now that the budget will not increase significantly but as far as environmental studies are concerned, indications are that there will be more room for interdisciplinary studies, including also historical approaches. This is indeed a timely change.

With the triumph of social engineering and science in the second half of the twentieth century, history was widely considered to be irrelevant to the practical concerns of modern society. Why bother with historical remains if we can just redesign and create a new and better world? Today, however, the need for historical insight seems as pressing as ever for our understanding and management of the environment.

The comeback for history is based on the recognition that our world is finite. In the last two or three decades we – citizens and politicians in rich and poor countries – have come to recognize that our planet is small and vulnerable. This recognition necessitates a historical perspective on modern existence. One of the most important themes of this revitalization of history is the relation between humankind and nature. Global climate changes and scarcities of resources are again and again put on the public agenda, and as this happens our understanding of the changes of nature has become a major problem to society. The history of nature itself – and the dependency and impact of human society on nature – is the basis for a meeting between science and history.

These considerations provide a sinister justification for my fundamental optimism on behalf of environmental history. We are in this field not only because it is fascinating and embellishes our understanding of the past and present – we are also in the field because of the urgency of our research results. It is incumbent on us not only to study well but also to reach out and share our results with managers and the public.

But we cannot do everything as individual researchers. We need to team up, in organisations like ESEH, and in research centres in universities. Unfortunately, I have learnt that one or two of the European research centres in environmental history may be in for a hard time. Let me therefore finish on a personal note. As of 1 March I shall take up the position of Rector (or 'Vice-Chancellor' in the British system) of the University of Roskilde in Denmark. I am happy to tell you that one of my first tasks will be to institute a new centre for environmental history

at Roskilde. The new institute will have a broad research agenda for both the terrestrial and aquatic environments and will make room for researchers coming from all relevant disciplines. I hope the new centre will be a valuable asset to all environmental historians in Europe – and indeed engage with the rest of the world.

Poul Holm  
President ESEH

### **New Regional Representative for the British Isles**

David Moon has agreed to become the Regional Representative (RR) for the British Isles. At the beginning of February 2006 he will replace Fiona Watson and he will serve as a provisional RR until the next elections.

David joined the ESEH in September 2001. He graduated with a B.A. in History from the University of Newcastle in 1982 and a Ph.D. in Russian and East European Studies from the University of Birmingham in 1987. He has held teaching posts at the Universities of Texas at Austin, Newcastle and Strathclyde in Glasgow. In October 2005 he took up his current post as Reader in Modern European History at the University of Durham in the northeast of England.

His original research into the social history of the Russian peasantry led him to his current work on the environmental history of the Russian steppes. The main focus is on contemporary perceptions of the impact of arable farming on the steppe environment between the mid-eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Research has been carried out in libraries and archives in St Petersburg, Moscow, Rostov-on-Don, Stavropol' and Samara in Russia, as well as the Slavonic library in Helsinki, Finland. David has travelled widely in the steppe region and visited several nature reserves.

He has presented papers at all three ESEH conferences and at other conferences in several European countries, including Russia, Germany and Britain, and in North America. His publications include: *The Russian Peasantry 1600-1930: The World the Peasants Made* (London and New York, 1999); 'Peasant Migration and the Settlement of Russia's Frontiers 1550-1897', *Historical Journal*, vol.30 (1997), pp. 859-93; 'Predstavleniya o vozdeistvii khlebopashestva na prirodu stepei yugo-vostoka Evropeiskoi chasti Rossii, 1850-1900', *Izvestiya Vysshikh Uchebnykh Zavedenii. Severo-Kavkazskii region. Yubileinyi vypusk* (2002), pp. 30-8; 'The Environmental History of the Russian Steppes: Vasili Dokuchaev and the Harvest Failure of 1891', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (2005); 'Peasants and Agriculture', in D. Lieven (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia, vol.2 Imperial Russia, 1689-1917* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

### **Chair for Environmental History in Bern becomes permanent**

A professorship for Economic, Social and Environmental History *ad personam* was established at the University of Bern in 1997 for Christian Pfister. Recently, the rector of the university, the Institute of History and the Faculty of the Humanities agreed to make this chair permanent. This step contributes to further strengthening the institutional framework of Environmental History in Europe. The board of ESEH congratulates Christian on this success.

### **Environmental History on VL-History**

Since September the Virtual Library VL-History, hosted by the European University institute in Florence, has hosted a page presenting environmental history resources. From January 2006 the page will be maintained by Fred Milton on behalf of ESEH. Fred Milton is a postgraduate student at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and works on a dissertation about the development of children's environmental societies in Britain between 1870 and 1914.

WWW-VL Environmental History can be accessed at <<http://vlib.iue.it/history/topical/environmental.html>>. If you have an item that should be added to this page email the URL plus a short description of the resource to <[F.S.Milton@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:F.S.Milton@newcastle.ac.uk)>.

### **2005 publications for Bibliography**

The bibliography of European environmental history will be updated at the beginning of 2006. We invite scholars to send new publications on or related to European environmental history to Bibliography editor, Jan Oosthoek. You can find the submission guidelines on the ESEH website on the tab resources. Direct any queries about submission or the bibliography to Jan Oosthoek at <[k.j.w.oosthoek@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:k.j.w.oosthoek@ncl.ac.uk)>.

### **European Society for Environmental History**

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ESEH aims to promote environmental history in Europe, by encouraging and supporting research, teaching and publications in the field. The ESEH maintain their web site at <[www.eseh.org](http://www.eseh.org)>.

**Notepad Editor:** Lenka Uhlířová

**Items for the next Notepad should be sent by 1 April, 2006 to the address shown below.**

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