Time, change and landscape

5 sessions:

1. The Timeless and Restless Highlands

Session organiser: Árni Daníel Júlíusson, University of Iceland, Iceland, **E-mail**: arnidan@akademia.is

Highlands and mountainous communities have received increasing scholarly attention in recent years. They are often situated on the fringe of society and are thus sensitive to any environmental or social change. This makes them ideal case studies for archaeologists, geographers, palaeoecologists, historians, and other disciplines interested in human-environment dynamics.

The Icelandic highlands have, for instance, long been considered 'marginal' for human settlement with most farms located in the lowlands along the coast. From the 18th century onwards, Icelanders appear to have re-discovered the highlands, and from there we see an increase in the number of travel diaries along with detailed maps. Despite a small-scale return of settlement in the 19th and 20th centuries, the area has, in the last hundred years or so, been defined as *afréttur,* a common grazing area. Further, in recent decades, more people have started to see the highlands as timeless or rather more specifically as anachronistic, and a place of adventure where nature dominates. Yet, over a longer-view this notion can, and should, be challenged.

The story of the Icelandic highlands *is* one of change and transformation. Whilst there was a short-lived settlement in the highlands between the 9th-12th centuries, the area has mostly been used for grazing or travel in a variety of forms. Indeed, grazing has proven to be a driving factor for erosion and environmental degradation in the highlands. A large part of it is also either a desert or covered by glaciers.

This session seeks to challenge the notion of the 'timeless highlands' and rather consider it a *restless space*. Papers in the session will discuss the ever-changing human-environment interaction in the highlands in Iceland or elsewhere. We welcome papers that will discuss a raft of issues, such as settlement patterns or ideas of ownership (or lack thereof). We also welcome papers exploring human-environment transformation connected to changes in activities and land use. Papers may also examine perceptions of spaces that bring other meanings to the table or challenge the dominant 'static' view of the highlands from an historical viewpoint.

2. Geographies of unruly natures

Session organiser: Eija Meriläinen, Örebro University, Sweden, **E-mail**: eija.merilainen@oru.se

Natures are considered to be increasingly unruly by IPCC and lay people alike, as environmental change beckons a less hospitable earth. Disasters exacerbated by climate change and the volatile winters in the high latitudes are illustrations of phenomena that challenge our societal sense of control. Collard (2024) describes unruly natures as the product of capitalist and colonial expectations of discipline colliding with the agencies of natures/non-humans. This unrulyness might be represented by, for instance, rivers flowing beyond their allotted confines, animals disregarding fences, or viruses adapting to our attempts to control them (see e.g., Krishnan et al. 2015; Pohl Harrison & Eilenberg 2025). Breaking away from ways of ordering natures that rest on assumptions of human domination over passive natures is challenging, and these dominant logics are relied upon even to address the very issues they have wrought. For example, constructing flood protection walls may reduce immediate risk but can also encourage new development in vulnerable areas, ultimately increasing overall exposure and dependence on technical solutions. There could, however, be other ways for societies to live with "unruly" natures that entail bending with nature's agencies rather than resisting them (Collard 2024). In this era of restless geographies, with climate change-related disasters and ecological collapse at our doorstep (or already in

the hallway), our session brings together scholars who grapple with unruly natures in their research in various ways. We welcome:

- Diverse perspectives on nature-society relations

- Stories of unruly natures unfolding in diverse geographies

- More-than-human curiosities

- Spatialities, temporalities and rhythms of unruly natures

Your work might explore unruly natures in the context of spatial planning, disaster governance, ecosystem restoration, and beyond. The phenomenon you study might be set in air, land or water, unfold in rural or urban spaces, or exceed and challenge the boundaries between them. We look forward to your unruly contribution!

References

Collard, R. (2024). Unruly Nature: Non-human Intractability and Multispecies Endurance. In Doing Political Ecology. Routledge.

Krishnan, S., Pastore, C. L., & Temple, S. (2015). Unruly Environments. Rachel Carson Centre.

Pohl Harrisson, A., & Eilenberg, M. (Eds.). (2025). Fences and Biosecurity: The Politics of Governing Unruly Nature. Helsinki University Press.

3. People and Woods of the North; past, present and future

Session organiser: Scott J. Riddell, Geography University of Iceland, Iceland, **E-mail**: sjr@hi.is

Birch (*Betula pubescens*) dominated woodlands can be found across the North Atlantic; from Qinngua in Kalaallit Nunaat, throughout Iceland, to Norway's western seaboard, and south to Berriedale in the Orkney Isles. Contributors are invited to present findings on any aspect of native woodlands in the North Atlantic region in relation to climatic, volcanic, and particularly, anthropogenic impacts. This can entail a consideration of past woodland based upon palaeoecological, archaeological or historical data, or any combination of these different data sources. Current ecological and conservation evaluations of existing woodland are also welcomed; especially where current conditions can be related to past influences e.g. pestilence, wildfire, land use and climate. Fundamentally, what can an understanding of the past and present tell us regarding the prospects of woodlands in the North Atlantic? How will the alteration of the prevailing climate regime, and the human response to it, affect them? Are extant woodlands resilient to such change? Is there scope for native woodland expansion? Is it desirable, and what are the anticipated pros and cons in terms of biodiversity, the mitigation of climate change, and the potential for timber and non-timber woodland products? Ultimately, this interdisciplinary reflection of the past, present and future of North Atlantic woodlands intends to acknowledge that they have always been, and always will be, restless and dynamic, subject to the ebb and flow of climate regimes, environmental and ecological processes, and of course, human interaction.

4. Nordic Peatlands: Perspectives of People, Science, and Restoration

Session organiser: Susanne Claudia Möckel, Agricultural University of Iceland, Iceland, **E-mail**: susanne@lbhi.is

In many countries where mires or peatlands are widespread, they have had a profound impact on the daily life of people, particularly in pre-industrial societies. While they may have formed a tedious obstacle to travellers, or even dangerous and potentially deadly terrain, the livelihoods of people also depended on this vital resource. Wetlands served as important sources of hay and winter grazing grounds, and peatlands provided fuel, building material, and food for humans and livestock. Beyond their material value, peatlands have carried cultural meaning, inspired mythical stories, and preserved information of human activity and environmental history through their capacity to store palaeoecological and archaeological records.

During the twentieth century widespread drainage and land conversion led to the degradation of large areas of peatlands across the Nordic region. The perception of peatlands as wastelands rendered them an easy target for agricultural expansion, forestry, and infrastructure development. Despite the growing recognition of their ecological and climatic importance, many peatlands continue to face pressure from land use and resource exploitation.

Nevertheless, recent decades have seen a shift in perception. Increasing awareness of peatlands as key carbon stores and biodiversity hotspots has led to a growing emphasis on their protection and restoration. Peatlands are now increasingly recognized for their various functions, e.g. in climate regulation, water management, and landscape connectivity, but also for their social and cultural significance.

This session aims to bring together researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders working on all aspects of peatland ecosystems - from restoration efforts to studies of peatland ecology and hydrology, palaeoecology, and history. By inviting contributions from geography, ecology, soil science, hydrology, botany, biogeochemistry, and related disciplines, as well as from those working with local communities, landowners, and peatland conservation or restoration projects, we aim to provide an interdisciplinary perspective on peatlands in the Nordic region.

Topics of interest include (but are not limited to):

- Restoration of degraded peatlands

- Biogeochemical cycling in peatlands

- Historical, archaeological, and palaeoecological studies

- Stakeholder collaboration and participatory approaches in restoration projects

- Mapping, monitoring, and modelling of peatlands

5. Life on New Ground: Vegetation Succession and Soil Development on Emerging Nordic Landscapes

Session organiser: Susanne Claudia Möckel, Agricultural University of Iceland, Iceland, **E-mail**: susanne@lbhi.is

New land emerges across the Nordic region, for instance where glaciers retreat or where volcanic eruptions reshape the landscape. These young surfaces provide a unique opportunity to study various processes, such as the establishment and early succession of life, the development of young soils, and how these processes shape

landscapes through time. Where human interference is limited, such environments offer invaluable insights into how biotic, abiotic, geological, and climatic processes interact.

Yet, “new land” may also appear where traditional land use ceases, like in areas formerly used for grazing or cultivation. Such landscapes can reveal whether and how ecosystems recover once human pressure is reduced. The variety of these newly formed environments provides the opportuniy to examine how vegetation and soils develop over time, and how ecosystems respond to climatic variation, changing environmental conditions, and shifts in land use pressure.

This session is aimed at researchers working on all aspects and processes of emerging land. We invite contributions from a range of disciplines, including ecology, soil science, geomorphology, microbiology, and palaeoecology. While the focus is on scientific research, contributions linking these processes to restoration, conservation, or climate adaptation are also welcome. By bringing together people across disciplines, this session seeks to deepen our understanding of the establishment and development of life on emerging Nordic landscapes in a warming environment.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Primary succession of life and early soil formation on recently emerged land

- Vegetation and soil development following land-use change

- Palaeoecological research on succession of life