

Finnish Canadians at Work

"The climate change is happening in front of our eyes"

Jens Ehn works amidst of melting ice

Text: **Mari Tiensuu**

Photos: **David Barber, Andrea Rossnagel Bjarnarson, Nicolas-Xavier Geilfus**

Doesn't it sometimes feel boring to work inside? Are you tired of just staring at the computer screen and breathing the dull air of the office room? That is kind of what happened to Dr. **Jens Ehn**.

"I was studying chemistry and physics at the University of Helsinki. I got bored being at the laboratories and that is why I started to look for other options too. I broadened the range of my studies for different fields from biology to philosophy to see, what feels good for me."

It was a risk worth taking, because those choices brought him to places where only few go. The change of scenery was drastic: from gray laboratories to the wide icy lands of arctic areas.

"I had a friend working for the ice service of the Finnish Institute of Marine Research. He was saying that a career in their field might suit me. I liked the idea of the interdisciplinary nature of the field: I had a chance to combine my strengths, chemistry, physics and biology, and work for the environment at the same time."

According to Ehn, being outside and having nature surrounding you beats work at the office.

Avoiding polar bears

Jens Ehn graduated from the University of Helsinki in 2001. After that he did his Ph.D. in Canada, at the University of Manitoba. He worked in France and in San Diego. The possibility of working as a professor brought him back to Winnipeg and Manitoba in 2011.

"As a researcher I am focused on the relations between the ice, the ocean and the atmosphere and the influence of the ice on the oceans. My latest work has been about how the light of the sun penetrates the ice and what it does in the water. The field is young, and only little is done. Therefore, though, we are making exciting new findings."

For his work, Ehn has to live under some extreme conditions in north. He was living, for example, in an icebreaker for 15 weeks. There they made

measurements on the ice.

Polar bears are something that cross Ehn's way every once a while.

"They show up when you least expect it. That is why I always carry a shot gun with me. Luckily they have never gotten too close, we have managed to scare them away. The other danger is ice itself: we work and sleep mainly in tents. The worst is, that ice might crack under us, or we might encounter a bad ice storm."

The culture in the arctic areas has had its transformations, too. As ice goes north, the companies get more interested on those areas. Oil and minerals raise investments, and that has an effect on the socio-economic structures.

"The traditional life of the people in the north will get more difficult to practice. Communities in the north are now more connected to each other, which makes them more viable. There are more professional people there, who are engaged to their own environment."

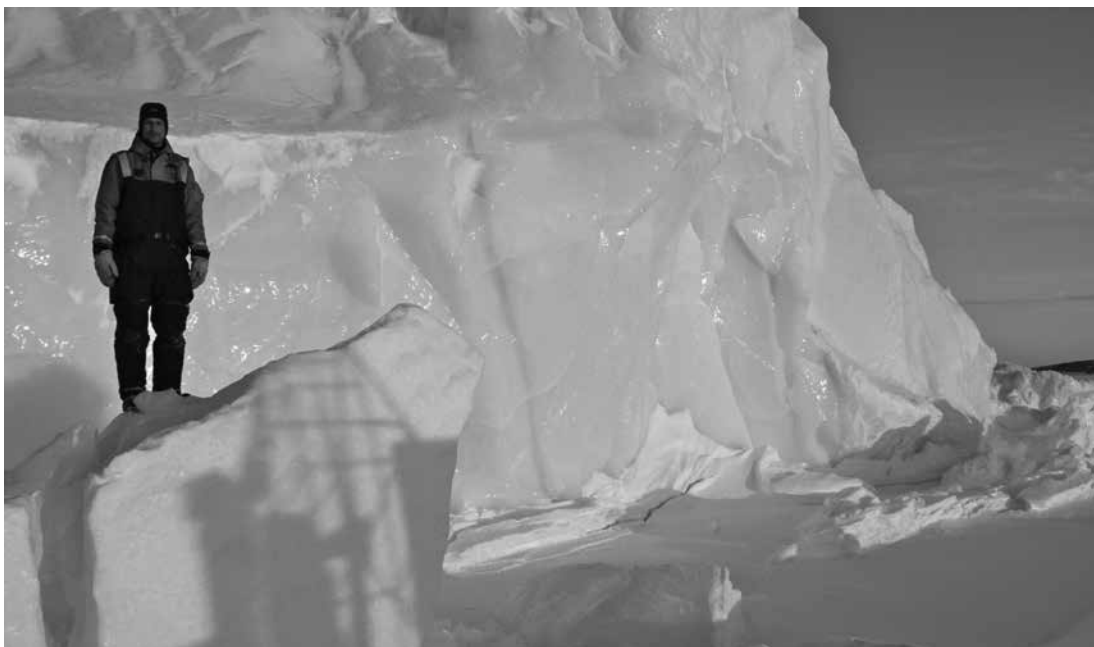
More cooperation is needed between the polar countries, too. The streams of the sea do not notice the boundaries between countries. In order to understand the whole process there should be large scale panarctic studies.

Seeing the climate change happening

As Ehn is working in the arctic areas and does research on the ice, he is on the central place to see the first effects of the climate change:

"It is striking how fast it is happening. Ice is a good indicator: it balances between the effects of the temperature, the sun and the water. Since I started the changes have been incontrovertible."

"This is really happening, the climate change is inevitable. There is overwhelming evidence that it is caused by humans. All the substantial seems to be done to prevent it. We now need to change our focus on learning to adapt to the costs of the change. Unfortunately it is difficult to predict, what will happen: we don't know well enough how the system works. Hopefully the changes won't be too sudden." ■



Jens Ehn was working in Greenland, in a place called Young Soung, at March 2012.



During a project in the summer of 2008, Jens Ehn's group of researchers had installed a meteorological station on landfast ice. While they were away the ice had broken underneath the machinery. As the group returned the station was floating towards them. They lucky to be able to save it before it sank to the bottom of the ocean.



Jens Ehn was working on IPY-CFL (International Polar Year - Circumpolar Flaw Lead Study) project during the summer of 2008.