

Notes from the Icehouse



With this feature, we inaugurate a new collaboration between Global Environment/ The White Horse Press and the International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations. ‘The ICEHOUSE Society’ is a vehicle to further the reach and significance of ICEHO. Described succinctly, it is ‘a place’ for friends of ICEHO to come together, to allow us to reach out beyond our base of member organisations to individual environmental historians (and like-minded people) to better serve this important constituency.

As an acronym, ICEHOUSE represents an amorphous group of friends of our field characterised as the International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations’ Underwriters, Supporters and Enthusiasts. More than this, and incidentally, ‘icehouse’ is a term that should resonate with environmental historians. In one sense it refers to the igloo – the epitome of human adaptation to a harsh environment. In another it connotes the Australian rock band whose first US single release was ‘We Can Get Together’. More generally, it offers a euphonious reminder of the vulnerable ice that surrounds the poles of our planetary home. Icehouse is similarly the term applied to structures in which winter ice was stored, before the invention of the refrigerator, to allow the chilling of food and drink during summer months. Varied and imaginative in design, icehouses were expressions of human ingenuity. They were also of the earth: generally partly subterranean; walled with local brick or stone; often covered with a ‘living’ (i.e. vegetated) roof; and making use of straw or sawdust to help insulate and keep frozen ice from lakes and rivers. In modern day terms the icehouse offers a fine example of a low-impact, highly effective, sustainable adaptation that improved the human condition. Surely we can all raise an Icehouse Edge Beer [© Miller Brewing Company] to that and our own ICEHOUSE.

With this initiative, ICEHO will redouble its efforts to work with and alongside our established and well-beloved membership organisations (ASEH, ESEH, SOLCHA etc.) to enhance the visibility and allure of environmental history world-wide, and to engage the global community of environmental historians while assisting our other member organisations. Please declare your support (I am tempted to say be USEFUL) by becoming an Underwriter or Supporter of, or Enthusiast for, our efforts as indicated on page 242.

There are many reasons to do so. ICEHO will not flourish simply by convening two meetings a decade. We aim to fill the 'gaps' between World Conferences by adopting a three-pronged communication strategy. We will revamp the ICEHO website, making it more dynamic adding more robust intellectual content, and using it to disseminate information of interest to our community in a timely manner. We will also make fuller use of social media to serve our member organisations and the wider environmental history community. Finally, we plan to continue already established efforts to extend and enhance interest in environmental history, both in those parts of the world where it is less developed and more generally. All of this will require: a strong commitment from ICEHO leadership (already guaranteed); more robust financial foundations (which we will seek to bolster in various ways); and the enthusiastic support and engagement of environmental historians everywhere. Please endorse and support the cause by entering the Icehouse.

Graeme Wynn, President, ICEHO