

GoNorth! Beringia 2011: Week 06 Chat Transcript

Background: Are you a New Yorker? A European expatriate? A refugee? An exchange student? However you define yourself, chances are at least one of the “frames” involves where you are from, or the place that you find yourself today. Culture—the clothes you wear, the language you speak, even traits like your personality and worldview—are defined at least in part by your sense of place. And this fact is part of what makes each of us a unique member of the human race.

In turn, our cultural practices have an impact on our natural surroundings. As humans build their homes, clear land for their crops, extract minerals for their iPods, and mine coal to burn for their electricity, they leave an indelible mark upon the environment. Slowly, this interrelationship evolves: Place defines culture, culture redefines place, and that redefinition requires cultural adjustment.

Today, with 6.8 billion people on the planet, this action and reaction is global in scale. Hence, the worldwide changes that are emerging in the environment, such as global climate change. Today, the scope and speed of environmental change exceeds the ability of cultures to adapt. If climate change is not checked immediately, we stand to face a wave of “cultural extinctions” as entire groups of people lose their connection to the local frames that define their culture. Some of these displaced peoples, like the Inupiaq of Shishmaref, will become literal refugees, as their regions become uninhabitable.

A teenager in Ohio leaves her computer on all night, burning another few ounces of coal. A teenager in Brazil cuts an acre of cropland out of the rainforest, reducing the rainforest carbon sink, to provide for his new family. A generation ago, such actions were both isolated and easily overlooked. But that’s no longer the case. In our shrinking world, the relationships between place, culture, and change are rapidly cohering into a single mandate for action.

In light of this new understanding of global interconnection—and the dramatic risks of widespread cultural extinction—what is the role of the individual? How are individuals and cultures accountable—or even culpable—for their impact on the global community? What steps can each of us and all humans take to insert positive change in the evolution of culture, place, and change?

Some questions to possibly open the chat with or discuss prior to the LIVE chat!

How is your culture defined by place? Has your culture changed your place?

What is our responsibility toward other cultures? If our cultural practices end up changing another place/culture, what should (or can) we do to reverse that change? Or should we not?

We live in a shrinking world in which all cultures are interconnected. How does this help or hurt our attempts to acknowledge and preserve cultural heritage and our sense of place?

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Education Basecamp: Welcome to the week 6 chat on The Human Connection. We are so glad you could join us today. Mille is here and ready for your questions.

Education Basecamp: We are going to adjust the screen a bit so that it displays properly for everyone. If you have any trouble, please send an email to bark@polarhusky.com

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Hi! I am very excited to be here today - You have to excuse me but I am not on a very fast connection, so I will do my best to answer quickly! We just moved the dogs from the airport hangar by Northern Air Cargo to the tundra!

Education Basecamp: **question submitted by Jake Beau and Eli:** What do you guys eat when you are on the expedition?

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Well, we eat a very high fat diet -- each expedition team member, whether it is a dog or a person gets about 5 - 6000 calories a day, whether it is in milk that we put in our tea or chocolate that we eat! Or in the case of the dogs, fat, kibble, chicken meat or in Chukotka it will be walrus meat!

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Now as far as what we eat -- its a lot of butter and cheese. Each one of us eat "a stick of butter" and about 4 oz of cheese a day

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Besides from... for breakfast we eat oatmeal or granola, a bagel fried in butter, and 2 sausages

GoNorth! Chat Expert: for lunch its soup or ramen noodles, salami, gorp, chocolate, energy bars, nuts and dried fruit

GoNorth! Chat Expert: for dinner its pasta, rice or mashed potatoes with "stuff" maybe chicken from a pouch, or tuna or when we are really lucky we have meat that we have been given in communities

GoNorth! Chat Expert: like moose or caribou meat

GoNorth! Chat Expert: We just saw a moose yesterday - a live one that is - really cool!

GoNorth! Chat Expert: So, as you can see we do not hunt on the land as we travel to get food - instead we carry all the food with us.

GoNorth! Chat Expert: We do so because we have to cover so many miles a day (we do not know the areas we travel in so we would not know much about where is best hunting) and also the resources of the land where ever we go - well that is for the locals to take and manage.

Education Basecamp: **question submitted by Jake Beau & Eli:** Have you guys ever had a close encounter with a polar bear?

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Yes, we sure have! Many many times actually. The good thing for us is that polar bears do not care much for sled dogs

GoNorth! Chat Expert: So, they may be following us or coming into camp, but once they realize the dogs are there they usually take off. This question very much goes with the one before...

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Because it is important for us to always remember that we are the visitors on the land; When we meet a polar bear we will do everything we can to not have a prolonged encounter - and our goal is to never have to harm the polar bear.

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GoNorth! Chat Expert: It is actually not legal for us to shoot a polar bear unless it is in self-defense.

GoNorth! Chat Expert: We carry these smart little things, they are almost like a pencil - you pull back on a small trigger and it shoots off a flare or a banger which is likely enough to make the polar bear change direction to get away from us.

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Most often it is the mighty Polar Huskies that do the job: they start making a lot of noise and most polar bears take off.

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Now, this morning -- guess what, huuuuuge bear tracks!

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Not polar bear though. Turns out that here in Nome the grizzly bears are already out. And let me tell you, that have to be the biggest grizzly tracks I have ever been shown. At least 10 inches long!!

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Its a little early for them to be out - but the weather here is also milder than usual.

Education Basecamp: **question submitted by Joey:** Why is it important to study and use traditional knowledge?

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Well, first, before I answer your question from an "Arctic perspective" -- I think in general within all cultures it is extremely important we consider and learn from history and knowledge of the past

GoNorth! Chat Expert: By taking this knowledge into account we are in the best possible position to adjust for change

GoNorth! Chat Expert: As for the Arctic -- the records, hard core data, only goes back some 100 years tops (and in many Arctic regions even less)

GoNorth! Chat Expert: That means that it is very hard for scientists to come to any conclusions simply because they do not have much data to trend on -- Now traditional knowledge about the land and seasons etc Well that goes back thousands of years -- so that gives us a whole lot more to work with

GoNorth! Chat Expert: So for example -- the case of the bear being out early. May be that there was a scientist that came to Nome some 15-20 years ago and started looking at when bears normally come out of their den in the spring - as a sign of changing seasons

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Now that scientist may be saying, hmm, looks like they are coming out earlier and that this could be a sign of a changing climate

GoNorth! Chat Expert: but then it could be argues, how does the scientist really know much with only data going back 15-20 years!

GoNorth! Chat Expert: On the other hand, if tradition amongst the Inupiat in Nome is that you go to a certain spot in the hillside every spring in late April to see the bears out, then likely hood is, that that is when the bears normally come out and have for eons

GoNorth! Chat Expert: And when the hunter now says already end of March that he is having issues with the bears breaking his traps, well that is something that is valuable to the scientist looking to learn about climate from study of bears...

Education Basecamp: **question submitted by Nick:** What interests you most about other cultures?

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Great question! I think what interest me about cultures is that I

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learn about humans, our way of live, and thus about the land and the region they live in - I find that really fascinating!

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Yesterday in the plane I sat next to an Elder from Nome. I asked a lot of questions :) not least about the sea ice, teh conditions the land, animals, whaling and so on

GoNorth! Chat Expert: He was so kind to share a lot of amazing knowledge about how tehly traditionally hunt seals, what kind of seals at what time of the year and the same for walrus. By him telling me about the traditions of hunting, I learned about what is important to him and to the people that live here -- and how they have been able to survive off the land - and still do today. One of the things I learned I never knew was how they go out in teh spring to pick greens!

GoNorth! Chat Expert: So... I was like, greens!? Like berries?

GoNorth! Chat Expert: He laughed at me :) and said, no greens

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Turns out they pick the new spring as it comes out of the ground or grows, for examplly the willow 'buds' ...

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Then they take it and put it in seal oil to preserve it for the summer!

Education Basecamp: WOW! Time flies when you are having fun!! We have a little more than 5 minutes left. Just enough time for a few more questions.

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Now that right there just opens up my mind to the importance of seal hunting for example - whereas if one knew nothing about how Inupiat people have so many uses for the seal and that it is so vital in the way that they live, maybe one could have a problem with seal hunting.. but by learning about the traditions and customs of others and how they live, what is important to them - we learn to appreciate and understand and be open minded for other perspectives... to not be judgmental -- and I think that is key in a world where we live together in harmony --- sharing the resources that we have here on earth!

Education Basecamp: **question submitted by Katelin:** What can we do to help preserve traditions and customs?

GoNorth! Chat Expert: That is an excellent question! I think we can do two things... Ok, make that three :) First of all, we can make an effort to learn about other cultures -- so that we stay open minded to them and can take them into consideration.. Which takes me to the second one: be thoughtful and respectful towards other cultures traditions and values, even if we don't really get it - and by that I mean also in our everyday living, far far removed from these other cultures. That we think about that we (and our way of life) is not the only way and that we all share the resources here on earth - the space. That how I act and the choices I make in life affect people in other cultures elsewhere.

GoNorth! Chat Expert: So... one reason to really make effort to address climate change around the world, is that there are people and cultures that are already being hugely affected.. and whose traditions depend on all the rest of us making an effort to make it

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possible for them to keep their way of life -- even 'where they live' ...

GoNorth! Chat Expert: And now, I am sorry, but I can not remember what my third answer was !!!!

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Its been a long week already :)

GoNorth! Chat Expert: Ok, I think we are out of time! Thank you for the great questions. As always I enjoyed being here today.

GoNorth! Chat Expert: On with the adventure - and I hope many of you out there will join our chat over the next weeks to come

Thank You!

Be sure to join us again next week for our first chat on the topic of World Resources. Check the Chat Calendar at polarhusky.com/explore/chat for details!