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Climategate: A Battlefield Perspective

Notes for Presentation to Trinity College (University of Toronto)

SCR-JCR Combination Room

The Climategate Scandal – A Battlefield Perspective

Thanks to John Sipe and Derek Allen for inviting me here. Derek and I were in the same high school class at UTS, we both attended Trinity at the same time but in quite different courses and even went to Oxford at the same time. Derek reminded me that I attended his first philosophy lecture at U of T in 1971 or so and now many years later, he's doing the same for me.

Climategate is the name for the controversy that started last November when a dossier of several thousand emails from the extremely influential Climatic Research Unit in the UK was placed on the internet, a controversy that has led to a Parliamentary Inquiry in the UK, misconduct inquiries at two universities and today an inquiry into the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC).. There have been hundreds of newspaper articles, especially in the UK media. It's been covered by television networks all over the world: CNN, CBS, Fox News, BBC,... It's been blamed (or credited) for the apparent failure of US cap-and-trade and even Copenhagen.

There have been all sorts of different reactions to the affair.

[SLIDE] Here is a clip from CBS news which showed a savage spoof on Michael Mann, one of the key Climategate correspondents. This spoof itself went viral on youtube last year and to date has over 600,000 views.



Slide 1. Clip from CBS News. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTuf3eC3eIE>

[SLIDE] Clive Crook, former deputy editor of the Economist and now an Atlantic Monthly columnist, not a partisan in the debate, described the “stink of intellectual corruption” as overpowering¹.

The closed-mindedness of these supposed men of science, their willingness to go to any lengths to defend a preconceived message, is surprising even to me. The stink of intellectual corruption is overpowering. .. this scandal is not at the margins of the politicised IPCC process... It goes to the core of that process.

One theme, in addition to those already mentioned about the suppression of dissent, the suppression of data and methods, and the suppression of the unvarnished truth, comes through especially strongly: plain statistical incompetence. ... it is an ongoing issue in Steve McIntyre's campaign to get hold of data and methods. I had given it insufficient weight. . Some of the correspondents in these emails appear to be out of their depth. This would explain their anxiety about having statisticians, rather than their climate-science buddies, crawl over their work...

¹ <http://blogs.ft.com/crookblog/2009/11/more-on-climategate>

[SLIDE] He described himself as “reeling” from the emails and warned that **“Once scientists set out to mislead the public, they can no longer expect to be trusted. End of story.”**²

.. Can I read these emails and feel that the scientists involved deserve to be trusted? No, I cannot. These people are willing to subvert the very methods—notably, peer review—that underwrite the integrity of their discipline. Is this really business as usual in science these days? If it is, we should demand higher standards—at least whenever “the science” calls for a wholesale transformation of the world economy.

Leaving the realm of **epistemic** speculation, what many climate scientists do actually say is that the Climategate correspondents were true to their justified conviction about the larger picture, and did not want to confuse the public with their little local difficulty with tree-rings, or whatever. Some are happy to go even further than that, and tell you, on or off the record, that the main thing is to get the public scared enough to act. Exaggerate for the public good. Propaganda becomes the responsible scientist's duty. Whatever it takes, including cooking the books... **Still reeling over what is in those emails, I can't say that question interests me much. Once scientists set out to mislead the public, they can no longer expect to be trusted. End of story.**

[SLIDE] On the other hand, realclimate, a highly influential climate blog, described the emails as merely “a peek into how scientists actually interact” and “people working constructively to improve joint publications”. Nothing to see here, move along.³

As people are also no doubt aware the breaking into of computers and releasing private information is illegal, and regardless of how they were obtained, posting private correspondence without permission is unethical...

there is a peek into how scientists actually interact and the conflicts show that the community is a far cry from the monolith that is sometimes imagined. People working constructively to improve joint publications; scientists who are friendly and agree on many of the big picture issues, disagreeing at times about details and engaging in ‘robust’ discussions; Scientists expressing frustration at the misrepresentation of their work in politicized arenas and complaining when media reports get it wrong; Scientists resenting the time they have to take out of their research to deal with over-hyped nonsense. None of this should be shocking...

Since emails are normally intended to be private, people writing them are, shall we say, somewhat freer in expressing themselves than they would in a public statement. For instance, we are sure it comes as no shock to know that many scientists do not hold Steve McIntyre in high regard...

[SLIDE] One of the most acute comments came, interestingly enough, from Jon Stewart’s Daily Show. Stewart neatly cuts through posturing on both sides – posturing from US right-wingers that the emails put an end to worries about global warming and posturing from climate scientists that the entire matter is a tempest in a teapot – for the public, it isn’t.⁴

² <http://blogs.ft.com/crookblog/2009/11/more-on-climategate>

³ <http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2009/11/the-cru-hack/>

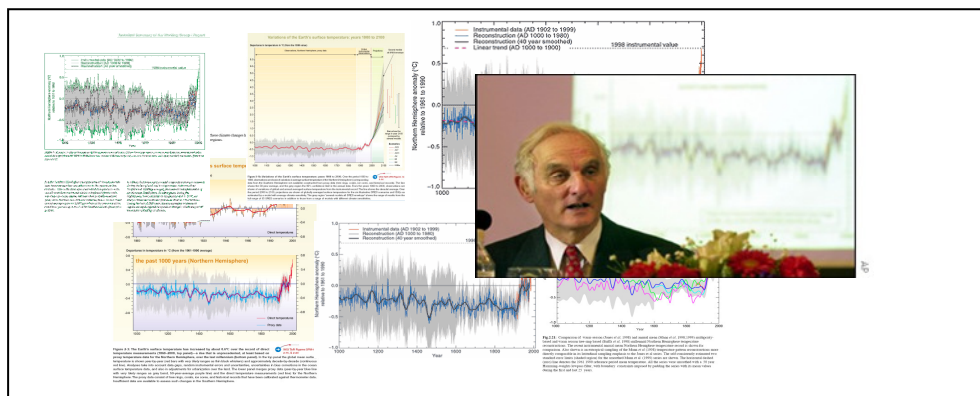
⁴ <http://www.vidivodo.com/329554/jon-stewart-talks-climategate>



Slide 4. Clip from Jon Stewart, Daily Show

You may have noticed that both I'm mentioned by both Clive Crook and realclimate, one favourably and one unfavourably. As I advertised in the title of my presentation, I have a 'battlefield perspective' - a perspective that will become a little clearer through my talk.

[SLIDE] I've spent most of my career in speculative mining stocks. I got interested in climate science several years ago in the run-up to Canada's adoption of the Kyoto treaty in late 2002 and early 2003, which frequently used the slogan that '1990s was the warmest decade of the millennium and 1998 the warmest year'. The slogan derived from the Hockey Stick temperature reconstruction by Michael Mann and associates and was prominently featured in the 2001 assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – the IPCC - and subsequently in Al Gore's Inconvenient Truth.



Slide 5. Excerpts from IPCC 2001. Inset: John Houghton at IPCC 2001 WG1 Press Conference in front of Hockey Stick graph.

[SLIDE] I wondered in the most casual possible way how they knew this – I suppose that I had some latent memory of the Vikings and Greenland from Grade 5 history – and started reading some of the technical literature on proxy reconstructions, which I found interesting on both a scientific and statistical basis. In April 2003, I read an article by Keith Briffa of CRU, which mentioned what is now famous as the 'decline' – a decrease in ring widths over a large sample of 387 tree ring sites chosen on a priori grounds of latitude or altitude as being temperature sensitive.⁵

In the absence of a substantiated explanation for the decline, we make the assumption that it is likely to be a response to some kind of recent anthropogenic forcing. On the basis of this

⁵ See www.climateaudit.org/?p=529, [570](http://www.climateaudit.org/?p=570), [2506](http://www.climateaudit.org/?p=2506), [1530](http://www.climateaudit.org/?p=1530)

assumption, the pre-twentieth century part of the reconstructions can be considered to be free from similar events and thus accurately represent past temperature variability.⁶

I could scarcely believe that that this sort of argument could be advanced by serious scientists.

[SLIDE]The big dog among proxy reconstructions was Michael Mann's, which also relied heavily on tree ring data. The divergence problem in Briffa's study raised a serious problem – given that there was a decline in average ring widths over such a large sample, how did Mann's "novel" methodology get such a different result. I innocently assumed that there would be some sort of due diligence package that had been prepared for his auditors – at the time, I knew virtually nothing about academic journals and processes. Unable to locate such a package on the internet, I wrote Mann out of the blue – then being merely a private Canadian citizen with a casual interest in the topic. To my astonishment, Mann said that he had forgotten where the data was. It seemed that nobody had verified the study in the way that I was used to things being verified. I thought – well, if nobody else has done this, I will. I wasn't expecting any particular fame or notoriety. I wasn't even planning to write an academic article. It was more like doing a big crossword puzzle.



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[SLIDE] This becomes a very long story. Together with Ross McKittrick of the University of Guelph, I ended up writing several academic articles. Our second article in Geophysical Research Letters (GRL) in 2005 really attracted a lot of interest. Both Nature and Science ran news stories; I got my picture on the front page of the Wall St Journal –something that was far more validating in my world than getting published in Nature would have been.



Left: Front page, Wall Street Journal, Feb 2005; **Right:** House Energy and Commerce Committee, Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee: Mann, Ralph Cicerone (NAS), me, Jay Gullledge, Ed Wegman.

⁶ Briffa, K. Holocene (2002)

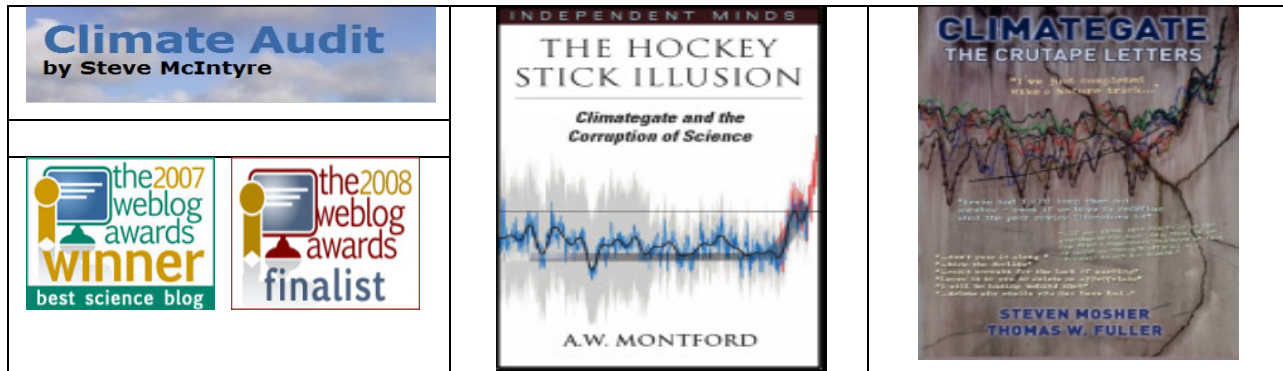
Our findings led to two blue-ribbon reports – one by a US National Academy of Sciences panel led by Gerald North, a prominent climate scientist, and one by a panel of statisticians led by Ed Wegman, then Chairman of the NAS Committee on Theoretical and Applied Statistics. Ross and I presented to the NAS panel in March 2006. In July 2006, a subcommittee of the US House Energy and Commerce committee held hearings on the topic – here I am in the well of the hearing room sitting beside Ralph Cicerone, President of the US National Academy of Sciences. They were puzzled as to how to affiliate me and I was introduced as Stephen McIntyre of 25 Playter Blvd. In retrospect, I think that I should have used the Badminton and Racquet Club.

[SLIDE] Blogs play an important role in the controversy. In December 2004, Mann and his associates, most notably Gavin Schmidt of NASA GISS, started the realclimate blog, which immediately became popular and influential. Much of its early energy was spent in a series of 5 preemptive attacks on our forthcoming GRL article. While climate scientists say that they rely on peer reviewed material, they were quite content to derive their view of our articles, not from the peer reviewed literature, but from realclimate. Mann himself never published a reply other than at the realclimate blog. In the scientific community, they'd tried to run us out of town before we even published a word at GRL.



[SLIDE] One day in January 2005, a computer consultant from England suggested that I needed to set up my own blog if I wanted to have any chance of our ideas being considered. I wasn't sure whether I'd have a whole lot to say. I soon found that I liked writing a blog and gradually found an audience that eventually surpassed realclimate. Four years later, I've written about 2,000 posts; the blog contains nearly 200,000 comments; it's run over 6 million hits per year. It's also spawned new technical blogs from people who started as Climate Audit readers – Jeff "Id" and Lucia Lindgren started as Climate Audit posters and then started their own blogs. Likewise, encouraged by Climate Audit, Anthony Watts started up his own blog and now gets an amazing 2 million hits per month. realclimate also spawned its own progeny. Climate blogs form an amazing proportion of the blogosphere – climate stories are much bigger on the blogosphere than in mainstream media. Climate Audit had been voted Best Science blog in

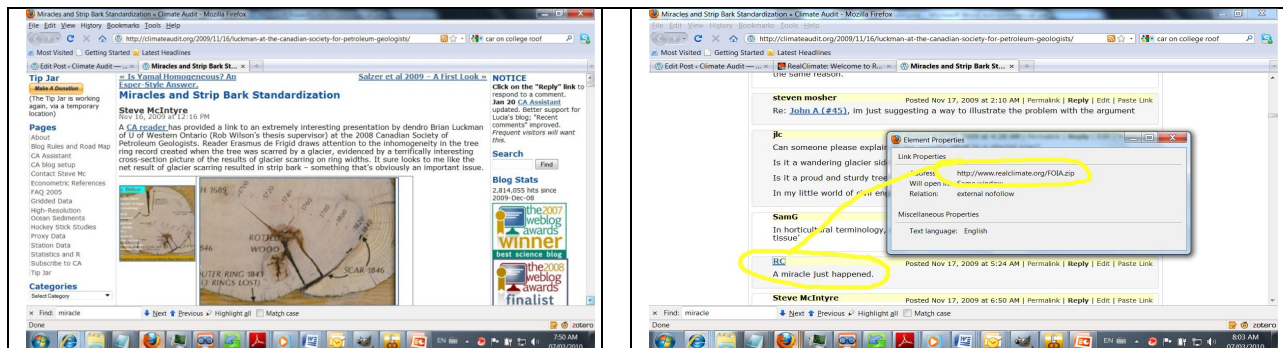
2007, Anthony Watts won in 2008. One of my readers, Andrew Montford, had completed a book (well written in my opinion) that was mostly completed just before Climategate. Another book was written BY Steve Mosher and Tom Fuller just after Climategate broke.



Climategate

Thus, Climategate arrived in a context where there was already a large public audience attuned not only to nuances of bristlecone pines, Yamal larches and principal components, but to issues of data obstruction and the use of freedom of Information to overcome data obstruction. And while Mann, Jones and Briffa were somewhat important within their IPCC chapters, because of the internet controversies over the past few years, they were far more prominent to the general public than pretty much any other climate scientist other than James Hansen. This is not a situation that the broader community should have been very comfortable with – as there was obvious evidence of problems with this group long before Climategate.

[SLIDE] The first public notice of the Climategate letters was on my blog on November 17 last year, a subtle hyperlink to the dossier which had then been uploaded to the most prominent climate activist blog, realclimate. This subtle reference wasn't noticed until a few days later. The dossier that went viral was uploaded to a Russian FTP server through anonymous proxies, with links to the FTP site placed in comments at several climate blogs in the evening of November 17. Within two days, it became clear that the emails were genuine and on November 19, it was all over the internet.



Climate scientists and the university have put out a variety of lurid stories blaming the Russian secret service, the Chinese secret service, US fossil fuel interests or some unholy combination set on derailing Copenhagen. Another theory – one held by several computer specialists familiar with the debate – is that it was someone from the university, maybe even a student. The initial posting of the dossier at realclimate has a student prank aspect to it – sort of like parking a car on a college roof – a famous student prank at Cambridge that remained unsolved for 50 years.



The matter has been investigated for the past 3 ½ months by the UK police – I was interviewed by a Counter-Terrorism Officer. Right now, no one seems to know who prepared the dossier or why.

The Emails

There are thousands of emails and it will take time to digest them all.

[SLIDE] Emails discussing data obstruction have attracted much attention. A Feb 2004 Mann email warned Jones that they gave data to me “at their own peril”. A February 2005 Jones email says that that he would delete station data rather than send it to Ross and me. A few weeks later, Jones refused station data to another scientist, Warwick Hughes, saying: We have 25 or so years invested in the work. Why should I make the data available to you, when your aim is to try and find something wrong with it?

Mann to Osborn, July 2003: I'm providing these [MBH residuals] for your own personal use, since you're a **trusted colleague**... This is the sort of "**dirty laundry**" one doesn't want to fall into the hands of those who might potentially try to distort things.

Mann to Jones, Feb 2004: I wouldn't send him anything. I have no idea what he's up to, but you can be sure it falls into the "no good" category... I would not give them ***anything***. I would not respond or even acknowledge receipt of their emails. There is no reason to give them any data, in my opinion, and I think we do so at our own peril!

Jones to Mann, Feb 2005: The two MMs have been after the CRU station data for years. If they ever hear there is a Freedom of Information Act now in the UK, I think I'll delete the file rather than send to anyone.

Jones to Hughes, Feb 2005: We have 25 or so years invested in the work. Why should I make the data available to you, when your aim is to try and find something wrong with it?

Last week, Jones ran into heavy weather over these comments at a UK parliamentary inquiry, where his only defence was to say that he'd sent some "awful" emails. A 2003 Mann email describes his residuals as 'dirty laundry' provided to Osborn on a top secret basis as a 'trusted colleague'. Later Mann would refuse the same data to me – a refusal that was supported by both the US National Science Foundation and Nature. While climate scientists now try to blame their data obstruction on harassment by blogs, note that these refusals precede the start-up of Climate Audit – the blogs publicized the data obstruction, they didn't cause it.

[SLIDE] A second class of emails attracting attention concern peer review. A 2005 Jones email undertakes to keep one of McKittrick's papers out of IPCC even if he had to "redefine" peer review. It was kept out of the First and Second drafts and grudgingly mentioned in the final report, together with a damning editorial comment that had not been submitted to external reviewers. After our 2005 GRL paper, Tom Wigley, a former CRU director, wrote to Mann, discussing the possibility of removing James Saiers of Yale as editor of our file. About six months later, a new editor-in-chief of GRL took personal carriage of our file, replacing Saiers as editor, reinstating two rejected comments. A later Climategate email expressed satisfaction that the GRL leak had been plugged. Other emails show Jones suppressing articles critical of CRU station data in Siberia. Another shows Cook and Briffa trying to keep a potentially "damaging" article on dendro out of the literature. Seven years later the authors are still trying to get the article published.

Jones to Trenberth: I can't see either of these papers being in the next IPCC report. Kevin [Trenberth] and I will keep them out somehow – even if we have to redefine what the peer-review literature is!

Wigley to Mann: If you think that Saiers is in the greenhouse skeptics camp, then, if we can find documentary evidence of this, we could go through official AGU channels to get him ousted.... **Mann** (eight months later): The GRL leak may have been plugged up now w/ new editorial leadership there

Jones: Recently rejected two papers (one for JGR and for GRL) from people saying CRU has it wrong over Siberia. Went to town in both reviews, hopefully successfully. If either appears I will be very surprised

Cook to Briffa: It is written by a Korean guy and someone from Berkeley, that claims that the method of reconstruction that we use in dendroclimatology (reverse regression) is wrong, biased, lousy, horrible, etc ... If published as is, this paper could really do some damage. It is also an ugly paper to review because it is rather mathematical, with a lot of Box-Jenkins stuff in it. It won't be easy to dismiss out of hand as the math appears to be correct theoretically

Briffa to Cook: I am really sorry but I have to nag about that review – Confidentially I now need a hard and if required extensive case for rejecting.

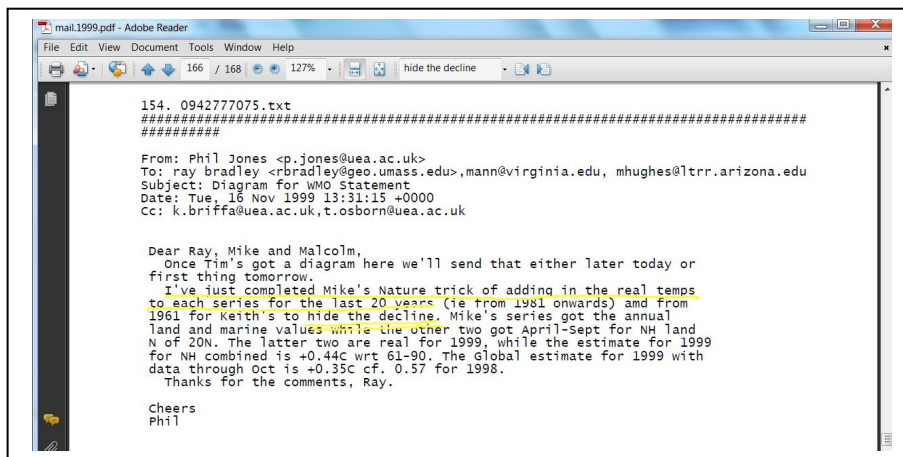
[SLIDE] Perhaps the second-most notorious email was sent by Jones to Mann a couple of days after CRU had received an FOI request for supposedly open and transparent IPCC correspondence.

Jones to Mann 2008: Mike, Can you delete any emails you may have had with Keith re AR4? Keith will do likewise. .. Can you also email Gene [Wahl] and get him to do the same? I don't have his new email address. We will be getting Caspar to do likewise. Cheers, Phil **Mann to Jones:** I'll contact Gene about this ASAP.

Related emails show that Briffa had breached IPCC procedures by involving one of Mann's close associates in the final editing of the IPCC report. The possibility of such a breach had been hypothesized a few days earlier at Climate Audit. One of my readers submitted an FOI request to CRU for the supposedly open and transparent IPCC comments at CRU prompting Jones to ask his coauthors to delete their emails. Another email shows Jones misleading the university FOI officer on the nature of the contact. The UK FOI Commissioner opined that this was the 'most cogent prima facie breach imaginable' but that, through a quirk in the law, prosecution was time-barred before the offence was even discovered. This has occasioned much discussion in the UK.

The Trick

[SLIDE] The most notorious email thus far is of course the trick to hide the decline. This has been discussed at considerable length – with climate scientists going to some pains to misrepresent exactly what happened.



[SLIDE] The context of the trick email was the aftermath of an IPCC Authors Meeting prepping for the Third Assessment Report. Mann, then just a post-doc, had been installed by IPCC leadership as the section author responsible for the assessment of proxy temperature histories. The Climategate emails show a remarkable vignette of an IPCC authors meeting. The Briffa reconstruction – with its late 20th century decline – was viewed by IPCC leadership as 'diluting the message' and being a potential 'distraction/ detracting from the reasonably consensus viewpoint' that they wanted to show. Briffa expressed reservations about the failure of the proxies to behave as expected and weakly urged that the issues not be ignored.⁷

Folland: A proxy diagram of temperature change is a clear favourite for the Policy Makers summary....

But the current diagram with the tree ring only data [i.e. the Briffa reconstruction] somewhat contradicts the multiproxy curve and **dilutes the message rather significantly...**

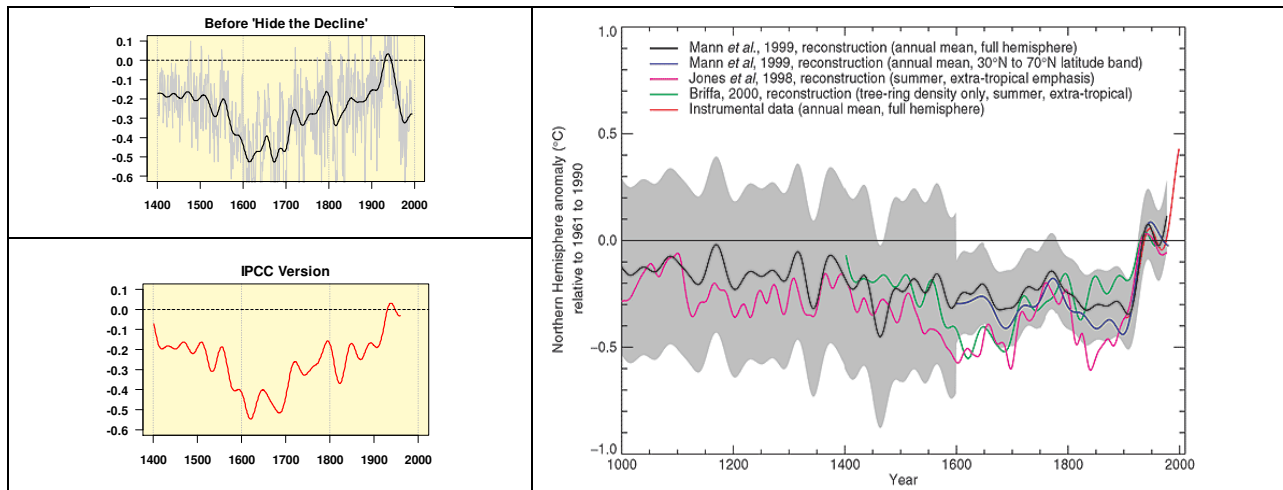
Mann: Keith's series... differs in large part in exactly the opposite direction that Phil's does from ours.

⁷ A student observed that the complete text of Folland's email also stated that they wanted to show the "truth". In my answer, I observed that the net result was the deletion of inconvenient data.

This is the problem we all picked up on (everyone in the room at IPCC was in agreement that this was a problem and a potential distraction/ detractor from the reasonably consensus viewpoint we'd like to show w/ the Jones et al and Mann et al series.

Briffa: I know there is pressure to present a nice tidy story as regards 'apparent unprecedented warming in a thousand years or more in the proxy data' but in reality the situation is not quite so simple... [There are] some unexpected changes in response that do not match the recent warming. I do not think it wise that this issue be ignored in the chapter.

IPCC section author Mann resolved the conundrum. He chopped off the inconvenient portion of the Briffa tree ring data – the portion where it goes down – and tucked the end point under other data, giving a rhetorical impression of consistency. To make matters worse, the deletion of data wasn't mentioned in the IPCC report and post-1960 values of the Briffa reconstruction were excluded from the archived digital version.



Top left – Briffa reconstruction re-plotted from data in Climategate email; bottom left – digitized Briffa reconstruction in IPCC 2001 (where it is the green reconstruction.). Right – IPCC Figure 2-21.

As a reviewer of the Fourth Assessment Report, I asked that the deleted data be shown and explained as best they could. They refused. Jones' version of the trick was even more simplistic – he simply spliced temperature data onto tree ring data, removing the real data – a technique that Mann later denied had ever been used.

This is what climate scientists are now trying to pass off as a “sophisticated statistical technique”. It isn't. Other members of the climate science “community” should think hard about how much they really wish to involve their own credibility in defence of the “trick”.

IPCC

One would have expected IPCC, most influential advisory body on climate change, to take a leadership role on the Climategate controversy but it hasn't.

In recent weeks, the IPCC has become rocked by its own problems. These started with a strange series of gaffes involving Working Group 2. Claims about the rate of disappearance of Himalayan glaciers, and climate impacts on African crops and Amazon forests were found not to be based on peer reviewed literature, however precarious that might be, but on NGO reports and worse, NGO reports that themselves lacked any foundation. The particular assertions proved to be unfounded.

Concurrently questions began to be raised, especially by Richard North, about the finances of Rajendra Pachauri, the IPCC chair – wondering how Pachauri had parlayed climate science into a 10 million dollar estate in the best neighbourhood of New Delhi and wondering why Pachauri’s climate research institute had its own nine-hole golf course.

Making matters worse, in early January, Pachauri published a novel, which can only be described as a cross between a Harlequin romance and soft porn – sexual reminiscences of an aging climate scientist named Sanjay, with much talk about heaving breasts. Not exactly what the beleaguered climate community wanted to hear from its chairman right then. Earlier today, an Interacademy panel investigating IPCC was announced.

Elsewhere

Elsewhere things have been moving right along.

Ralph Cicerone, President of NAS, who had more or less torpedoed any consideration of data obstruction by the 2006 NAS panel, published an editorial in Science worrying about the public perception that scientists may ‘withhold data and try to manipulate some aspects of peer review to prevent dissent’ and worrying that ‘the perceived misbehavior of even a few scientists can diminish the credibility of science as a whole’.



HACKED ELECTRONIC RECORDS OF CLIMATE SCIENTISTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA'S CLIMATE Research Unit (UEA/CRU) led to worldwide publicity during the December 2009 Copenhagen climate change convention. UEA is conducting a formal investigation to determine whether UEA scientists manipulated or suppressed data or otherwise acted unprofessionally. My reading of the vast scientific literature on climate change is that our understanding is undiminished by this incident; but it has raised concern about the standards of science and has damaged public trust in what scientists do.

In the wake of the UEA controversy, I have been contacted by many U.S. and world leaders in science, business, and government. Their assessments and those from various editorials, added to results from scattered public opinion polls, suggest that public opinion has moved toward the view that scientists often try to suppress alternative hypotheses and ideas and that scientists will withhold data and try to manipulate some aspects of peer review to prevent dissent. This view reflects the fragile nature of trust between science and society, demonstrating that the perceived misbehavior of even a few scientists can diminish the credibility of science as a whole. ...

The outcome of this special [AAAS] session must be explicit actions, as scientists must do much

In the UK, Jones appeared last week at the UK Parliamentary Inquiry to harsh reviews from parliamentary reporters, a far different breed than relatively tame environmental reporters.

Quentin Letts of the Daily Mail, after savaging the comic Vice-Chancellor Acton – grandson of the famous historian – opined that Jones ‘may be right about man-made climate change.’ But his evidence was so unsatisfactory that Letts concluded that he ‘hoped that politicians sought second, third, even 20th opinions before swallowing his theories and trying to change the world’s industrial output.’⁸

Jones was accompanied by his university’s vice-chancellor, Professor Edward Acton, who provided much-needed comic relief. Professor Acton, a younger version of Professor Calculus from the Tintin books, beamed and nodded at everything Professor Jones said. ‘I think that answer was spot-on,’ he cried, after listening to one response from the terror-stricken Jones.

Professor Acton’s left eyebrow started doing a little jiggle of its own. His eyeballs bulged with admiration for the climate-change supremo. His lips were pulled so wide in wonderment they must nearly have split down the seams like banana skins.

Others, watching the tremulous Professor Jones, will have been less impressed. He may be right about man-made climate change. **But you do rather hope that politicians sought second, third, even 20th opinions before swallowing his theories** and trying to change the world’s industrial output.

Anne Treneman of The Times: observed that Jones ‘seemed, like a dead calm sea, almost glassy. And, like ships in the Bermuda Triangle, questions that got near him just seemed to disappear.’

“Professor Jones’s face was immobile, eyes steady behind wire specs. He seemed, like a dead calm sea, almost glassy. And, like ships in the Bermuda Triangle, questions that got near him just seemed to disappear. ..

Graham Stringer, a Labour MP, asked why [codes were not public]. “Because it hasn’t been standard practice to do that.”

Well, protested Mr Stringer, how could science be tested? Professor Jones didn’t have much of an answer for that, or much else.

Only once did he admit to anything and that was about an e-mail. “Uh. Yes. I have obviously written some very awful e-mails,” he murmured.

Oh dear. It seems the planet is in more trouble than I thought”.

Simon Carr of The Independent said: “by the sound of it there was considerable data smoothing and oiling and homogenising and substituting and standardising... I don’t know much about statistics but I know what I like. And when a scientist says: “We couldn’t keep the original data, only the added-value data,” all sorts of sirens and alarms go off.”

⁸ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1254763/Lord-Lawson-labelled-climate-alarmists.html>

Meanwhile a clique of the most eminent climate scientists in the United States began corresponding about what one scientist involved said needs to be "an outlandishly aggressively partisan approach" to gut the credibility of skeptics. Their proposed tactic was to collect \$1,000 from each of 50 scientists and run an ad in the New York Times.



One of the most nuanced responses was by George Monbiot, environmental columnist for the Guardian, who was in Toronto for the Munk Debates in early December. He is one of the few climate activists to speak out against CRU and to distinguish between the question of public trust and the "big scientific picture". He said that he had "seldom felt so alone" and told activists and climate scientists 'The response of the greens and most of the scientists I know is profoundly ironic, as we spend so much of our time confronting other people's denial. Pretending that this isn't a real crisis isn't going to make it go away. Nor is an attempt to justify the emails with technicalities. We'll be able to get past this only by grasping reality, apologising where appropriate and demonstrating that it cannot happen again.'

It's no use pretending that this isn't a major blow. The emails extracted by a hacker from the climatic research unit at the University of East Anglia could scarcely be more damaging. I am now convinced that they are genuine, and I'm dismayed and deeply shaken by them. ... there are some messages that require no spin to make them look bad. (Nov. 23)

I have seldom felt so alone. Confronted with crisis, most of the environmentalists I know have gone into denial. The emails..., they say, are a storm in a tea cup, no big deal, exaggerated out of all recognition. It is true that climate change deniers have made wild claims which the material can't possibly support (the end of global warming, the death of climate science). But it is also true that the [emails are very damaging](#).

The response of the greens and most of the scientists I know is profoundly ironic, as we spend so much of our time confronting other people's denial. Pretending that this isn't a real crisis isn't going to make it go away. Nor is an attempt to justify the emails with technicalities. We'll be able to get past this only by grasping reality, apologising where appropriate and demonstrating that it cannot happen again. (Nov 25)

Jon Stewart had a similar take.