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Date: May 8, 2008
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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ARCTIC EXPLORATION MAY 21-23

Film festival May 24 and the conference are open to the public

PHILADELPHIA — As one of several contributions it is making to the International Polar Year, The Academy of Natural Sciences is hosting a conference May 21-23 and a rare-film festival May 24 on the fascinating, and sometimes controversial, history of Arctic exploration.

"North By Degree: An International Conference on Arctic Exploration, 1850-1940" will take a fresh look at the extraordinary feats of explorers who risked their lives to explore the vast frozen reaches at the top of the world. More than 20 established and emerging scholars from England, Canada and the U.S. will present the latest research on issues involving culture, race, gender, nationalism, science and technological advancements in the 90-year period covered by the conference.

The first day of the conference, Wednesday, May 21, will take place at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. The Academy will host the remaining days, Thursday and Friday, May 22 and 23, and the film festival on Saturday, May 24. The conference is open to the public for a fee; to register and for program details, see http://www.ansp.org/research/Arctic.

The film festival will be held from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Saturday in the Academy's auditorium. It also is open to the public and is free with regular museum admission. Filmgoers do not have to attend the conference. The festival will feature numerous short archival films made between the 1890s and the 1930s of the explorers and the equipment they used. This is the first time this real-life footage of more than a dozen Arctic explorers in action has been brought together for a public showing.

The Academy, the oldest natural science research institution and museum in the Americas, has been involved in Arctic exploration for more than 150 years. "Elisha Kent Kane, the Philadelphia physician who first fired America's interest in Arctic exploration in the 1850s, was a member of the Academy, and the specimens he collected are still housed in our museum," said Academy Senior Fellow Robert Peck, who is organizing the conference. "The Academy sponsored

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Robert Peary's first major Arctic expedition to Greenland in 1891 and ‘92. And the Academy continues to sponsor Arctic research to this day with the Arctic fossil work of world-renowned paleontologist Dr. Ted Daeschler.” In 2006, Daeschler announced the discovery of a 375-million year-old fossil with features of both fish and land-dwelling animals which he and colleagues unearthed during an expedition to the High Arctic.

One of the controversial subjects to be discussed at the conference will be whether Peary or Frederick Cook was the first person to reach the North Pole (or whether either of them did). Another paper will describe the extraordinary life and career of Matthew Henson, the African American explorer who accompanied Peary on all of his Arctic expeditions.

The conference is co-sponsored by The Academy of Natural Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, The Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, and the Philadelphia Area Center for the History of Science.

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The Academy is located at 1900 Benjamin Franklin Parkway and is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and weekends until 5 p.m. Admission is $10 for adults, $8 for children ages 3-12, seniors, college students and military personnel, and free for children under 3. There is an additional $2 fee for “Butterflies!”

Founded in 1812, The Academy of Natural Sciences is the oldest natural science research institution and museum in the Americas and a world leader in biodiversity and environmental research. The mission of the Academy is the encouragement and cultivation of the sciences.