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Portrait of a local climate skeptic

During the 12-day climate summit underway in Copenhagen, countries are trying to forge consensus on how best to protect the planet from global warming. An international all-star roster of academics is providing critical scientific data as the evidentiary backbone for the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which hopes to prod perceived green slackers like Canada into more aggressive environmental reforms.



COLIN MCCONNELL / TORONTO STAR [Order this photo](#)

Stephen McIntyre at his home near Broadview and Danforth. The 62-year-old grandfather is a gadfly, having prompted a congressional hearing in the U.S. after calling into question the math underlying climate change data.

By: Mary Ormsby Feature Writer, Published on Sat Dec 12 2009

During the 12-day climate summit underway in Copenhagen, countries are trying to forge consensus on how best to protect the planet from global warming. An international all-star roster of academics is providing critical scientific data as the evidentiary backbone for the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which hopes to prod perceived green slackers like Canada into more aggressive environmental reforms.

So why is a retired mining analyst living near Broadview and Danforth Aves. – a squash-playing grandfather who prompted a U.S. congressional hearing by crunching global warming research on his home computer – not invited to the party?

Because Stephen McIntyre is an enemy of climate change believers, a man who, essentially, double-checks the math behind research accepted as green gospel. Though his painstaking "hobby" has exposed flawed data supporting studies like the "hockey stick" graph – it claimed the 1990s was the millennium's hottest decade – he's considered a denier by those who fear the planet is burning up.

But the Toronto native won't stop asking the tough questions.

"We shouldn't give any thanks whatsoever to people who obstruct efforts to show that their particular theory was wrong," said McIntyre, whose own work is derided as bunk by the tight-knit academics he monitors.

Now, skeptics of climate change – and McIntyre is not alone – have new fodder to absorb from the University of East Anglia's Climate Research Unit scandal. Hacked

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emails have been made public, suggesting scientists may have manipulated data to offer more dramatic interpretations of global warming.

It's that kind of bad science, bolstered by peer-reviewed papers and protected by agenda-driven researchers, that McIntyre wants to expose. And no, he's not funded by the oil industry or big business – the Toronto native is unpaid, living off his savings as he tends to his blog www.climateaudit.org.

"One of the things that I don't get in the description of me by the climate scientists is they portray me as a truck driver *savant*," laughed McIntyre, who says his blog has been getting 50,000 daily hits over the last month.

"I am well-educated."

And curious. And offended by sloppy work. Which is why the University of Toronto mathematics grad – who also attended Oxford – began playing with numbers six years ago when scientific assertions were being made about the Earth's calamitous rising temperatures.

His technical approach to making the case for climate change sets him apart from other "deniers" who are more politically motivated – though he does lament that Al Gore's once calming voice has become more shrill and made him popular with international media. He's been interviewed by European publications, *The Wall Street Journal* and CNN but remains largely anonymous in Canada.

Not even his three children or two grandchildren seem to care about his policing. McIntyre says that before doing a recent CTV interview, he met a MuchMusic makeup artist who recently pancaked Canadian teen singing idol Justin Bieber – a way cooler topic for his 10-year-old granddaughter.

"That's a bigger deal than being on CNN, I think," he said.

For climate watchers, however, the Canadian's auditing of data is a very big deal.

McIntyre first questioned the accuracy of the "hockey stick" graph that tracked the earth's temperatures over the last 1,000 years. He said the length of the study conjured images of the Vikings landing in Labrador, and he wondered how lead scientist Michael Mann, head of Penn State's Earth System Science Centre, reconstructed the temperatures to produce such a detailed graph.

After retiring from Noranda in 1986, McIntyre began dealing in small mining stocks from a shared downtown office (\$700 rent, he recently packed it up), a business where "you had to pay attention to the design of your graphs (because it would) enhance your success of raising money for projects."

So he asked Mann for the data in an email – and was stunned by the answer. The climatologist wrote he'd "forgotten" where the data set was but would get an assistant to find it.

"Here's a guy in his mid-30s, this is his claim to fame, the biggest paper of his life, probably the biggest paper of his career, it's been used on the front page of a UN study and sent to every household in Canada – how the hell could he not know where the data was?" McIntyre said.

"Nobody had ever checked this stuff with any sort of due diligence," he said.

And here's where the business and academic worlds collide

Mann's study was peer-reviewed, a time-honoured method of academics – challenging another's work for substance and fault. McIntyre's business background told him a statistical audit was a better gauge, especially after reading the "overblown language to describe what, in mathematical terms, are very simple operations.

"What I find that is far too prevalent among climate scientists is that if they don't persuade somebody of something, they blame the audience, not the presentation," said McIntyre, who said mining investors would walk away if he couldn't recruit them with solid facts.

"I think part of that is being in the university environment where people are important in their departments – they're mostly dealing with graduate students (and) sympathetic audiences, by and large, or audiences that criticize them differently than in a business



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organizations."

His "puttering" suggested Mann's work was heavily spinning the "hockey stick" findings on too small a percentage of the data. McIntyre's work sparked a U.S. National Academy of Sciences investigation, along with U.S. congressional hearings in 2006.

In 2007, McIntyre's statistical sleuthing forced NASA to admit it mistakenly claimed 1998 was the warmest year on record on the continental United States – it was actually 1934. And in September, he questioned the data in another famous graph (using rings from 12 trees in Russia) to illustrate rapid 20th century warming. McIntyre, who works with University of Guelph economics professor Ross McKittrick to co-author papers, presented another data graph with 34 tree samples from a nearby Russian site – and the temperature spike vanished. The latter graph has prompted dispute among researchers as biased math.

But McIntyre is not finished. As the Copenhagen talks begin their second week, he will continue to watch for intellectual dishonesty. If he sees troubling number crunching, he will do his own accounting – and ask for accountability.

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