

Environmental History of northwestern Europe from 10,000 BP to the present

**University of Newcastle
School of Historical Studies**

Semester one, 2006

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Introduction

This course is an introduction to the interactions between human culture and the environment of northwestern Europe from the end of the last Ice Age to modern times. Throughout history, humans have affected the natural environment, sometimes in a sustainable manner, but often in a destructive manner. This module explores the ways in which environmental changes, often the result of human actions, have caused historical trends in human societies. This process has happened in every historical period since the end of the last Ice Age around 10,000 years ago.

The twenty lectures chart in a chronological way the history of the peoples of northwestern Europe, and their relationship to their environment. Each lecture focuses on a general period in European history, which has been characterised by large-scale changes in the relationship between human societies and the natural world.

This course is extremely unusual within the university curriculum since it combines traditional historical study with environmental science, ecology, archaeology and other sciences. The implications of the concept of environmental change, natural and human induced, as a historical process, rather than as static backdrop to human affairs, will be discussed throughout the course.

No environmental or scientific knowledge is assumed or required from the students attending this course.

Pre-requisite

This is a freestanding unit and has no pre-requisite.

Teaching

The module will be taught by means of 20 lectures of one hour, usually 2 per week.

Assessment

Students are required to write 2 essays of *circa* 2000 words (each essay counts for 50%).

Course structure

The lecture series will be divided into four sections covering pre-history and antiquity, the Middle Ages, early modern period and the modern era. The first three lectures are concerned with the long period between end of the last Ice Age and the early Middle Ages. The next six lectures are concerned with the medieval and early modern period. The last ten lectures will be devoted to the two centuries of industrialisation. During these 200 years humans have caused more changes in the environment than in the 9,800 years preceding it. This division is intended to show how exceptional the 20th century was in terms of population growth, the consumption of resources and the resulting human impact on the environment.

Lecture titles

1. What is Environmental history?

A. Pre-history & antiquity

2. The environment at the end of the last Ice Age, 10,000 BP (=Before Present)
3. From hunting and gathering to agriculture, 10,000 - 2,000 BP
4. The Roman environment

B. The Middle Ages

5. Environmental crisis and climate optimum, 500 - 1350 AD
6. The fate of the Vikings in the North Atlantic, 1000 – 1500
7. The Black Death: environmental causes and consequences

C. The early modern period, 1500 – 1750

8. The Little Ice Age
9. The Dutch Republic: an engineered environment
10. Landscape change and energy transformation: wood, peat and coal *6 Nov*)

D. The modern era

11. The Industrial Revolution: energy and natural resources
12. Naturalists and Conservation in Britain 1780-1910
13. Naturalists and Conservation in Britain 1910-2000
14. Population growth and the environment
15. Urban growth and environment
16. Changes in the atmosphere, 1880-2000
17. Water use, water pollution and water management, 1880-2000
18. Agriculture and forestry, 1880-2000
19. Energy and environment, 1900-2000

20. The exceptional 20th century