

POLAR WEB SITES—MOST FREQUENTLY CONSULTED FOR REFERENCE

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ABSTRACT: Web sites are a vital information resource in our polar network. This presentation is the result of a survey of librarians and users identifying the most useful polar web sites in the sciences and social sciences. The goal was to identify the most frequently consulted web sites for reference rather than the most exhaustive or best designed.

The survey was distributed electronically to the polar-lib listserv and in print to selected polar libraries identified in the World of Learning (1997).

During the presentation, the ten most frequently used sites in the sciences and social sciences will be reviewed. A handout will identify these web sites with a brief annotation about the reference questions answered from each source.

KEYWORDS: Websites

What polar resources are out on the World Wide Web? Are there many? Do the searchers find the same sites? What kind of polar information exists?

As the librarian at the Keith Mather Library of the University of Alaska's Geophysical Institute, Judie Triplehorn was interested in websites that would be of assistance to her scientists and graduate students. As an indexer with the UAF Rasmuson Library's online "Bibliography of Alaska and Polar Regions," Ron Inouye was more interested in the social sciences.

The purpose of our study was to identify the most useful and frequently consulted 1) science, and 2) non-science polar websites for reference. We were not interested in the best designed nor most exhaustive, but rather the sites which librarians find the best for responding to reference questions.

Our procedure was to design a simple questionnaire that was distributed in hard copy and electronically. Those receiving the 100 hard copies were selected from the international, public university, and research libraries with polar interests listed in the *World of Learning* (1994). The electronic version was distributed to listservers for the Polar Libraries Colloquy, the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States, etc.

We received 40 responses, most electronically. Our response rate was less than expected, perhaps due to computer-related technical problems for receiving the completed electronic forms, and most recently to delayed mail service perhaps related to the labor strike of airline personnel. However, based upon the responses to date, we have some observations, examples, and recommendations that might be of particular interest to this audience.

Survey Results

The survey results appear as an appendix for the paper as Selected Polar Websites. This composite list is a valuable tool for the identification of polar information and will appear on the Geophysical Institute website by October 1, 1998.
<http://www.gi.edu/services/library/>

Ideal Websites

Another part of the survey dealt with ideal websites. Here are the results of the query respondents. Their primary concerns follow:

1. *Limited Graphics*

Ideal websites should have limited graphics. Users are interested in reducing the time it takes to load the graphics and commented that the graphics were often peripheral to the mission of the text. Frequently the images are window dressing. There was a recommended website address from Bandwidth Conservation Society for making images and graphics load faster – this is included in the handout of polar websites. With Netscape there is a way to turn off image loading which might also be used.

2. *Site Map*

A good table of contents with clearly defined topics is considered essential. Websites with short descriptions were much easier to use than the ones with a brief title or the ones with only acronyms. Because it is difficult to keep up on all the worldwide Arctic abbreviations and acronyms, it should be standard policy to write out the organization or agency title at the beginning of each listing. Reliable, well documented information will encourage students and new users.

3. *Updates*

Websites should be regularly updated with the date of the last change visible to the user. In the brief time we have been working on this project, some of the addresses

have changed. Links to websites should be regularly checked for accuracy. Also, the update intervals for the data sets should be plainly visible to the user.

4. *Website Manager*

A website manager is needed to maintain the site and be available to respond to questions or problems.

5. *Additional Comments*

Java should be used to run programs.

One user was interested in real data sets, not gif files.

Exciting Polar Information

The survey questions yielded a list of website ideas for future development. Some of these have been developed and the responders were not aware of the sites. This is a common problem.

Some of the suggestions were:

1. Near real-time data for sea ice and snow worldwide.
2. Polar meeting and workshop information with individual names to contact.
3. List of Arctic and Antarctic expeditions in this century.
4. Websites for SHEBA, SCICEX, etc.
5. Polar press releases.
6. Arctic facts and figures – almanac type information.
7. Current research projects and cruises.
8. Job announcements.
9. Upcoming funding opportunities.
10. Data links to agencies where data can be obtained.

Charges for Website Access

The overwhelming response to this question was NO.

Conclusions

This paper has been a survey of polar websites with the intent to discover some new ones. Individually our mission was accomplished and we hope that this discussion has led you to some new sites and web information as well. Lots of books and journal articles are available on the development of websites. The survey pointed out comments by polar colleagues about their concerns for image loading, tables of contents, site updates, and website management. These issues are food for thought for future web developers. Some interesting ideas were also proposed for future topics to be included on websites.

