

British scientists dig in arctic mud

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A British research team from the University of Plymouth is developing a new method of tracking changes in Arctic sea ice over the past 1,000 years.

The scientists are using thin layers of sediment from the sea bed of the Northwest Passage, north of Canada, to glean information about the patterns of past conditions, the BBC reported Monday.

The researchers said they hope to cast light on historical questions, such as why so many expeditions to the passage failed, as well as benefit future climate forecasts.

"Our method for historical sea ice determination not only shows remarkable agreement with known historical events, but it has allowed us to provide some information for periods where records are scarce or absent," said research team member Guillaume Masse, of the University of Plymouth.

"Significantly, periods of sea ice cover frequently coincide with dramatic changes to human populations due to famines and illnesses."

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