Arctic researcher shares 50 years of watching climate change happen

John England has been accumulating Arctic knowledge for five decades.

And the University of Alberta professor emeritus in earth and atmospheric sciences wishes more Canadians would do some Arctic exploration of their own.

"The exquisite beauty of the North is something we underappreciate," he tells The Current's Anna Maria Tremonti.

"This is a heritage we should be safeguarding and cherishing in an increasingly industrialized world. We have a landscape that offers a place of renewal, a place of recharging. It’s fragments of the original Earth that are still left.”

England describes his first trip to the Arctic in 1965.

"I was an 18-year-old typical Torontonian ... struggling to move into adulthood and overcome all the mysteries of that," says England.

"I was just overwhelmed by the beauty, the silence, the timelessness... You first fall in love with the land, then you fall in love with the science.“

The Arctic changed John England over his years working there — and he watched the Arctic change as well.

"We were up there probably at the tail end of what it was like when the [19th century] explorers were there," says England.

"In the mid-1960s, sea ice diminishment hadn't really progressed." He points to the Ellesmere Ice Shelf, which in the past spanned 10,000 square kilometres, but has now shrunk down to 300.

England describes his adventures over decades of research — from having to live for a month in a broken tent only 75- cm high, to looking down at his foot on a remote island, and finding a canister containing a letter from an explorer dated March 10, 1876.

And these adventures are part and parcel of learning about the Arctic.

"The science in the Arctic," says England, "is the camp, is the storms, is the stories, is the everyday adventures, is the human interaction."

"There's no way you can parse those multiple things apart. It's one and the same."

Source: CBC Radio