

Climate change warnings go beyond weather shifts

By Chris Mooney, Washington Post

ELEUTHERA, Bahamas – Standing atop a 60-foot cliff overlooking the Atlantic, James Hansen – the retired NASA scientist sometimes dubbed the “father of global warming” – examines two small rocks through a magnifying glass. Towering above him is the source of one of the shards: a huge boulder from a pair locals call “the Cow and the Bull,” the largest of which is estimated to weigh more than 1,000 tons.

The two giants have long been tourist attractions along this rocky coast. Perched not far from the edge of a steep cliff that plunges down into blue water, they raise an obvious question: How did they get up here?

Compounding the mystery, these two are among a series of giant boulders arranged in an almost perfect line across a narrow part of this 110-mile-long, wishbone-shaped island.

Hansen and Paul Hearty – a wiry, hammer-slinging geologist from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington who has joined him here as a guide – have a theory about these rocks. It’s so provocative – and, frankly, terrifying – that some critics wonder whether the man who helped spawn the whole debate about the dangers of climate change has finally gone too far.

The idea is that Earth’s climate went through a warming period just over 100,000 years ago that was similar in many ways to the warming now attributed to the actions of man. And the changes during that period were so catastrophic, they spawned massively powerful superstorms, causing violent ocean waves that simply lifted the boulders from below and deposited them atop this cliff.

If this is true, the effort kicking off in Paris this week to hold the world's nations to strict climate targets may be even more urgent than most people realize.

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