

## Trip proposed to centre of Earth via Arctic hole

### HOLLOW PLANET THEORY; U.S. scientist, believers to sail on icebreaker

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CanWest News Service

*Wednesday, May 30, 2007*

A U.S. scientist and a small band of believers are planning a journey to the Canadian Arctic for what they call "the greatest geological expedition in history."

Are they searching for Arctic oil reserves? Documenting evidence of climate change?

Not quite. They're looking for a fog-shrouded hole in the Arctic Ocean that leads -- they say -- to the centre of the Earth, where an unknown civilization is lurking inside the hollow core of the planet.

This time next year, Kentucky based physicist and futurist Brooks Agnew hopes to board the commercially owned Russian icebreaker Yamal in the port of Murmansk, and to sail into the polar sea just beyond Canada's Arctic islands.

"Everest has been climbed a hundred times," Mr. Agnew says. "The Titanic has been scanned from stem to stern. [But] this is the first and only expedition to the North Pole opening ever attempted."

Mr. Agnew is the latest in a long line of people to peddle the nutty, yet persistent, theory that humans live on the surface of a hollow planet, in which two undiscovered openings, near the North and South poles, connect the outer Earth with an interior realm.

In the 17th century, English astronomer and mathematician Sir Edmond Halley, who calculated the orbit of Halley's Comet, advanced hollow-Earth theories, as did German scientist Athanasius Kircher.

More recently the myth has experienced a slight revival, thanks in part to a 2006 book, by American author David Standish, titled *Hollow Earth: The long and curious history of imagining strange lands, fantastical creatures, advanced civilizations, and marvellous machines below the Earth's surface.*

A year before the book was published, a Utah adventure guide named Steve Currey also tried to cash in on the hollow- Earth legend, by organizing an expedition to locate the North polar opening.

Mr. Currey made a living organizing rafting trips to the world's wildest rivers. He knew how to hype exotic destinations and recruit would-be explorers on trips of a lifetime.

It's not clear whether Mr. Currey was a true hollow-Earth believer, or if he could simply see a good business opportunity. Whatever his beliefs, Mr. Currey somehow pinpointed the Arctic portal at 84.4 degrees north and 41 degrees east, roughly 400 kilometres northwest of Ellesmere Island.

The North Pole inner Earth expedition was scheduled for the summer of 2006, with spaces offered to anyone with US\$20,000 to spare.

"There are no guarantees that this expedition will reach inner Earth," Mr. Currey cautioned on his Web site.

"The expedition will make a good-faith effort to locate the North Polar opening and enter therein, but worst-case scenario is that we visit the geographic North Pole, explore the region, and continue on..."

When Mr. Currey died suddenly of brain cancer last summer, Mr. Agnew stepped in to take his place. The trip was postponed to 2008.

While he insists the journey has a genuine scientific purpose, Mr. Agnew also says the expedition will include several experts in meditation, mythology and UFOs, as well as a team of documentary filmmakers.

Randy Freeman, a Yellowknife writer commenting in the current issue of Up Here magazine, warns that "besides heaps of throwaway cash, prospective cruisers should bring along enough gullibility to swallow an outlandish theory that, despite centuries of scorn, refuses to die."

But Mr. Agnew is unfazed by such criticism, promising a grand polar adventure, no matter what the outcome.

If the polar opening isn't there, the voyage "will still make an outstanding documentary," he promises.

"But if we do find something, this will be the greatest geological discovery in the history of the world."

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