

The Guardian (London) - Final Edition

June 16, 2005

Life: Far out: Going underground

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SECTION: Guardian Science Pages, Pg. 10

LENGTH: 385 words

Next summer sees the launch of a remarkable expedition led by Steve Currey of Povo, Utah. The 24-day trip begins on June 26, at Murmansk. Participants will board a Russian nuclear icebreaker and head to the geographic North Pole, from where they will travel 600 miles along meridian 141 east to their final destination - the north polar opening of the Hollow Earth.

The route comes from *The Smoky God* (1908) by Willis George Emmerson. This claims to be the truthful account of Norwegian fisherman Olaf Jansen's encounters with a race of ancient giants living inside the Earth. Most readers recognise the book as science-fiction - following earlier tales by Edgar Allen Poe and Jules Verne - yet for some Hollow Earth enthusiasts, it remains startling fact.

Modern Hollow Earth ideas originated with US Army captain John Cleves Symmes. In 1818 he proposed that large entrances to the Earth's interior lay at both poles. "I ask 100 brave

companions to start from Siberia . . . with reindeers and sleighs, on the ice of the frozen sea; I engage we find a warm, rich land, stocked with thrifty vegetables and animals, if not men, on reaching one degree north of latitude 82," he wrote in the first of his many pamphlets on the subject. Two years later "Captain Adam Seaborn" printed Symzonia: voyage of discovery, claiming to have followed Symmes' directions to the centre of the Earth.

Symmes gained many adherents, the most enthusiastic being Jeremiah Reynolds, who almost persuaded US President John Quincy Adams to approve an official expedition, but the project was scrapped by his successor, Andrew Jackson. Reynolds did eventually lead his own voyage, sailing to Antarctica in October 1829 - just months after Symmes' death - but they were unable to penetrate the ice surrounding the continent.

The late 19th century esoteric underground was well populated with Hollow Earth believers, most notably Cyrus Teed, whose theories would influence Nazi cosmology. Unverified rumours of Nazi Hollow Earth expeditions persist to this day.

Our current geophysical outlook doesn't leave much room for an inhabited interior, but there's only one way to find out for sure. \$ 19,000, delivered in cash to the Life offices, buys Far Out a place on the Currey expedition. See you at the pole!