

From Antarctica to Mars in 100 years

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Tonight's gala dinner celebrating a century of The Explorers Club will feature exotic appetizers and distinguished guests.

NEW YORK -- In one of Manhattan's most anticipated social events of the year, 1,700 adventurers, explorers, field scientists, artists and celebrities from around the world will gather at the landmark Waldorf-Astoria hotel tonight to celebrate the 100th anniversary of The Explorers Club.

An annual event held since 1904, this year's dinner, to be attended by 40 Canadians, takes on the added significance of a centennial function at the dawn of a century when some may feel that there's nothing left to explore, nowhere we haven't been and nothing on earth that hasn't already been mapped. The 3,000 members of The Explorers Club, 94 of whom belong to its Canadian Chapter, are proof that the passion for discovery in all fields of exploration is alive and the future is a place that still holds the thrill of the unknown.

The club was founded during a time of intense personal and international competition to explore the planet's two polar regions. Roald Amundsen, Captain Robert Scott, Sir Ernest Shackleton and Admiral Robert Peary were the media stars of the era (all of them later became members). The Wright brothers had just flown their first plane and the White House was occupied by conservationist and adventurer Theodore Roosevelt, who later died from an illness contracted during an Explorers Club expedition to the Amazon. It was during these heady days in 1904 that Henry Collins Walsh, an author and war correspondent, pulled together a group of hardy gentlemen-adventurers whose stated goal was to "promote exploration by all possible means."

Some of the club's larger-than-life members have gone on to become legends. Lowell Thomas, an American explorer and journalist, ventured out into the Arabian Peninsula during the First World War and his reports made famous the heroic exploits of Lawrence of Arabia. While 1930s-era club president, Roy Chapman Andrews is cited by some as the inspiration for the Indiana Jones character.

Strictly limited in size, the club's history and membership reflect changes in society's scientific and geographic interest, the development of new fields of inquiry, and the growth in certain outdoor activities. "It started out as the Arctic Club," says Richard Wiese, president of The Explorers Club. "A short-lived organization. After it was established other disciplines began coming into play, such as anthropologists . . . These people were venturing into areas that were still unexplored jungles in South America and Africa.

"The organization began to branch out during the 20s, 30s and 40s and we started to get a lot of mountain climbers, such as our current honorary chairman Sir Edmund Hillary. During the 50s and 60s there are submariners, because nuclear submarines were coming into play and they began exploring on the Arctic Shelf and in the deep seas. By the mid-60s it evolves into space exploration. Both Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, the first two people on the moon, are members of the club, as are astronauts John Glenn and Sally Ride."

Today the club's members hail from around the world and include Austro-Italian alpine pioneer Reinhold Messner, British ethnologist Jane Goodall, Canadian wildlife artists Robert Bateman and Glen Loates, and American marine biologist Eugenie Clark. Within the last couple of month's British entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Music and Virgin Airlines, and a world-

class balloonist and adventurer, joined the club, as did Canadian-American movie and documentary producer James Cameron.

Members jetting in for tonight's dinner include Hillary and Aldrin Jetting in from around the world to tonight's dinner will be celebrity explorers and adventurers like Sir Edmund Hillary, the club's honorary chairman, who is flying in from his home in Auckland, New Zealand, as well as Buzz Aldrin, . "They'll be joined by Don Walsh, who co-piloted the Trieste down to the deepest part of Earth's oceans, and Bertrand Piccard, who a few years ago successfully completed the first around-the-world balloon flight," says Wiese.

Canadian members of the club include Phil Currie, Pushing the envelope of modern exploration the club's members, not surprisingly, have received accolades in the world's media. Time magazine's Canadian edition this past November proclaimed Phil Currie, a member of the club's Canadian Chapter, as one of Canada's top five explorers. Currie, an internationally recognized paleontologist at the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller, Alta. In the past year, and along with his partner and colleague Eva Koppelhus, Currie has headed off on expeditions to the remotest regions of Argentina and Mongolia. "This past December I joined an expedition in the Antarctic to collect the rest of the only known skeleton of an unusual crested theropod [meat-eating dinosaur] called the Cryolophosaurus elliotti," Currie says. "It was originally found in 1990 high on the flanks of Mount Kirkpatrick, less than 600 kilometers from the South Pole. The cloud-enshrouded mountain lashed by high winds and below freezing temperatures made extracting it a challenge."

It's in the polar regions where some of the newest members of the club's Canadian chapter have made a name for themselves. Kevin Hall, a high-altitude, polar field scientist at the University of Northern British Columbia, in Prince George, B.C., has ventured out on 23 expeditions to the Antarctic, Arctic and the high-altitude regions of southern Africa and the Himalayas. This year Hall will head off to the Drakensburg Mountains of southern Africa to conduct research on the weathering of San (Bushman) cave art. Canadian member Geoff Green's firm Students On Ice (SOI) has revolutionized polar and environmental education by taking high school and undergraduate university students on shipboard expeditions to the Antarctic and Arctic. Operating out of Chelsea, Que., Green was presented the 2003 Michael J. Smith Award for Science Promotion by the Canadian government. (There are six levels of club membership.)

Motivated by their concern for the environment Pat and Rosemarie Keough of Salt Spring Island, B.C., financed their own expedition to the Antarctic, where they spent two austral summers enduring the hardships of living in unheated tents, 24 hours of sunlight and sub-zero temperatures to produce 1,000 copies of their award-winning book Antarctica: Explorers Series, Volume 1. It sells for a cool \$2,900 (U.S.) a copy and proceeds will go to Bird Life International's Save the Albatross fund.

But it's not all snow and ice for members of the club's Canadian chapter. James Delgado, a noted underwater archaeologist and director of the Vancouver Maritime Museum, hosts The Sea Hunters on National Geographic International Television and has spent the last four seasons travelling the globe filming famous shipwrecks, while Dan Johnson, a grasslands ecosystem researcher and Canada Research Council chair at the University of Lethbridge, has ventured off to the most remote regions of western Africa on numerous field expeditions.

Exotic literally describes the appetizers served each year at the annual dinner. In an attempt to simulate what explorers in various parts of the world might have to survive on if things go badly, the club makes sure that its "exotics committee" develops appetizers that will be talked about for years. And this historic centennial year dinner will be no exception.

Tonight's selection of 30 different types of non-endangered hors d' oeuvres will include roasted scorpions and plump mealworms, basted with escargot butter and baked into a French pastry.

And if that doesn't leave your mouth watering, then you can always wolf down the bug canapés, tarantulas or rattlesnake meat. Picky eaters can opt for safer appetizers, such as grilled ostrich on yucca biscuits, alligator tail, wild boar or raccoon. (Oddly enough, having travelled to all seven continents, I've already eaten most of tonight's appetizers at some point in time, not wishing to offend my hosts, and you know most of them are pretty tasty.

As the evening progresses five honours for contributions to exploration will be awarded. This year's recipient of the club's Honorary Membership award will be presented to Canadian ethnobotanist Wade Davis. In The Explorers Club 100-year history only 20 individuals have been the recipients of this award, which is given to those who have demonstrated a "lifetime of exceptional achievement as an explorer and field scientist."

Fitting, two scientific breakthroughs will be announced: One by Stephen Squyres, the scientific director of the Mars lander Opportunity, and the second by Ken Lacovara of Drexel University regarding his research in Argentina in the field of paleontology.

Exploration of both the ocean floor and space is in its infancy, and field scientists are daily making new discoveries. What better place to unveil these than at the centennial dinner of The Explorers Club?

Joseph G. Frey is chairperson of the Explorers Club's Canadian Chapter. For more information, visit <http://www.explorersclub.ca>.