Landmark Project To Map How Humankind Populated Planet

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The National Geographic Society and IBM today launched a groundbreaking research initiative that will trace the migratory history of the human species.
The Genographic Project, a five-year research partnership, will use sophisticated laboratory and computer analysis of DNA contributed by hundreds of thousands of people, including indigenous peoples and members of the general public, to map how the Earth was populated. Led by National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Spencer Wells, Ph.D., a team of international scientists and IBM researchers will collect genetic samples, analyze results and report on the genetic roots of modern humans.

With funding from the Waitt Family Foundation, the scientists will establish 10 centers around the world and will study more than 100,000 DNA samples from indigenous populations. The project is expected to reveal rich details about global human migratory history and to drive new understanding about the connections and differences that make up the human species.

"We see this as the 'moon shot' of anthropology, using genetics to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of human history," said project leader Spencer Wells. "Our DNA carries a story that is shared by everyone. Over the next five years we'll be deciphering that story, which is now in danger of being lost as people migrate and mix to a much greater extent than they have in the past."

The resulting public database will house one of the largest collections of human population genetic information ever assembled and will serve as an unprecedented resource for geneticists, historians and anthropologists.

Members of the general public are able to participate in the Genographic Project by purchasing a kit and allowing their own results to be included in the database. Individuals will be able to follow the progress of their own migratory history as well as the global research by logging on to nationalgeographic.com.

"National Geographic has been exploring and mapping the world for 117 years," said John Fahey, President and CEO of the National Geographic Society. "Now, as a result of our remarkable partnership with IBM and Spencer Wells, we are deploying state-of-the-art science and technology to map our journey across the planet. We hope this ambitious and important project will increase our understanding and appreciation of our shared history. The field science work, so generously supported by the Waitt Family Foundation, will go into a virtual museum of human history." "IBM and National Geographic are embarking on a historic expedition into our collective past," said Samuel J. Palmisano, chairman and CEO of IBM. "Our two organizations have long contributed to scientific exploration and achievement, extending in different ways the boundaries of human knowledge and understanding. We continue this tradition of innovation that matters for the world and welcome the participation of the hundreds of thousands of people who will join in this amazing journey."

Scientists from IBM's Computational Biology Center, one of the world's foremost life sciences research facilities, will use advanced analytical technologies and data sorting techniques to interpret the samples and to discover new patterns and connections within the data they contain. IBM is also providing the core computational knowledge and infrastructure that will manage the hundreds of thousands of genotype codes being

analyzed by the Genographic Project.

"The more we can improve our understanding of the common origin and journey of humankind, the greater the possibility for all of us to see each other as members of the same family," said Ted Waitt, founder of the Waitt Family Foundation. "And with that awareness, we can find ways to live and work together on a global basis."