

Scientists dig toward center of the earth

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A Japanese ship is setting sail on a mission to reveal the origin of life on earth.

The Chikyu intends to drill 4.3 miles below the sea bed and raise to the surface a cylinder that could contain science's first glimpse of a "living" sample of the Earth's mantle, the Times of London reported.

Plans also call for the ship to sink sensors beneath the Earth's crust to provide Japan and East Asia with the first effective earthquake prediction system.

Some scientists theorize life may have originated beneath the Earth's crust at temperatures and pressures unknown on land or sea, the newspaper said. The energy that provoked the first semblance of life may also have been geothermal rather than solar.

By drilling to record-breaking depths below areas where tectonic plates overlap, the ship may have its sensors in place as an earthquake begins and significantly advance the science of seismology, the newspaper said.

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