

Richard Branson headed to 'center of Earth'

March 30 2012

British tycoon Richard Branson may have lost his race to the bottom of the ocean, but not his sense of humor, declaring Friday a faux plan to top his rivals by voyaging to the center of the Earth.

The impossible adventure was announced, tongue jammed in cheek, with the seriousness of a real campaign.

"Sir Richard Branson to launch journeys to the center of the Earth through Virgin Volcanic" the website virginvolcanic.com claims, in one of two teasingly-timed announcements ahead of this weekend.

An early clue that this was a joke was that a press release from Branson's PR people cannot be published until April 1.

The announcement came days after Hollywood director James Cameron grabbed headlines by making history's first solo -- and real -- trip by submarine to the deepest point of the world's oceans: the Mariana Trench in the Pacific.

It was an exploit that Branson, known for his pursuit of ballooning and sailing records, had had his eye on too.

Never mind: Cameron will eat his heart out hearing that Branson says he'll take trendy singer will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas in a special capsule down into a volcano and from there to the molten center of the planet.

"I have long held a fascination with volcanoes having read Jules Verne's 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth' as a young boy," Branson said on the website.

"Volcanoes are the next great unexplored terrain. What can I say, I lava challenge!"

At the same time as the relatively subtle volcanic spoof announcement, Branson also unveiled a more straightforwardly crackpot plan on his blog -- for a Virgin-branded time machine.

"We've had a slightly frightening breakthrough with a time machine. I've found that we can now go backwards in time but not forwards. Fortunately we can get back to the present," he wrote.

Underneath a picture of him dressed in a white coat inside a cubicle-style machine labeled "Virgin Time Travel," he added: "This could be one of the greatest breakthroughs Virgin have ever worked on.

"Even more exciting than Virgin Galactic or Virgin Oceanic."

Below that was a photo of him emerging from the machine four decades ago, in full 1970s flares and roll-top sweater with a copy of "Tubular Bells" -- the debut hit record of Branson's career-starting Virgin Records -- under his arm.

"As you can see from the photos, I went back to 1972. How far backwards would you like to time travel? Where would you like to go?"

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