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Secrets of the Earth Revealed

The reputation of this universal genius remains undiminished, even today. To Alexander von Humboldt, the Earth's surface was an ecological community, shaped by the concord of soil and climate with the plant, animal and human realms; the landscape was a sphere of interaction between differing elements of nature, and between mankind and nature.

Although his holistic approach has long since been replaced by fierce specialization, Humboldt's teachings are more relevant now than ever before. For without "inter-disciplinary thinking", the isolated branches of research find themselves at a dead end. That realization now drives teamwork among a wide range of disciplines around the world – on the trail of Alexander von Humboldt, and much he would have liked.

We accompany Humboldt's Heirs to some of the most obscure and mysterious corners of the Earth. We observe them as they work, often under the most extreme of conditions. Join us for a thrilling new look at the mysteries that make up our world.

01 On the Trail of the "Fire Mites"

Archaea are microbes that were only discovered a few years ago. Professor Karl Stetter fondly refers to archaea as "fire mites". He searches for them in glaciers, volcanoes, hot springs, and on the ocean floor at a depth of four thousand metres.

02 A Missive for all Eternity

In the year 616, in the Cloud Residence Temple some eighty kilometres south of Beijing, a Buddhist monk called Jing Wan embarked on one of the boldest projects in the history of mankind.

03 They Come From Outer Space

Lake Baikal in Siberia is the oldest and deepest freshwater lake on Earth. Here, too, "Humboldt's Heirs" feel a commitment to their great predecessor. In their search for volatile matter they are hoping to obtain information from the universe's black holes.

04 In the Valley of the Centenarians

Since 1997, the German research station "San Francisco" has served as a base for scientists from a wide range of fields who are studying the world of the Ecuadorian mountains.

05 The Hunter of the Killer Virus

In the rain forests of Central Africa lurks one of humanity's most dangerous enemies: the virus named 'Ebola'. The doctor and epidemiologist Matthias Borchert has taken up the killer's trail.

06 When the Gods Spit Fire

Two volcanologists from Munich explore the mountains of Japan on a quest to develop early warning systems that could help detect volcanic eruptions well in advance.

07 Atlantis of the Desert

Oases have defied the hellish climate for millennia. But how has such a wealth of culture been able to develop in a blisteringly hot region almost devoid of rainfall?

08 In the Kingdom of the Chagga

The story of water that flowed uphill, was ignored for centuries – until a group of scientists set out to investigate the claim. They enlisted the help of the Chagga, a people who live close to Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa.