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## Assignment X

Science is not confined to an ivory tower. Researchers need to get close to their subject matter, and that can involve adventurous expeditions to inaccessible regions. These trips by land, sea or air are often journeys into the unknown with uncertain outcome. But whether the information gleaned supports the scientists' theories or renders them untenable – the results of these missions bring researchers closer to their fundamental goal: To increase human knowledge.

### 01 Utah – A Unique Quarry for Dinosaurs

At the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument, an almost uninhabited region in the US state of Utah, there is a treasure trove of fossils representing many different species of dinosaur. This is because layers of rock dating from various geological periods are exposed at the site. It is an eldorado for palaeontologists, despite the intense heat and rough terrain.

### 02 Sumatra – The Quest for a Mystery Lake

The Messel Pit in western Germany is famous for its abundance of fossils. 30–50 million years ago, this was where many different species of animal were submerged in the mud of a tropical acid lake. In order to shed more light on evolutionary processes, researchers looked for a lake with similar characteristics, and found one in Sumatra.

### 03 Eritrea – Tracing the Origins of the Human Race

The area which is today Eritrea was one of the hotspots in the development of mankind. In the Danakil Desert, researchers discovered the million-year-old skull of a highly developed specimen of early man. An Eritrean-Italian team of scientists is looking for further clues in this inhospitably hot and arid region.

### 04 Antarctic – Geology Studies under Ice and Snow

The Gondwana super-continent broke apart about 100 million years ago, producing India, Africa, South America, Madagascar and Australia. At its heart was Antarctica. During the bright but icy cold summer, German and Australian scientists in the Antarctic look for explanations for the emergence and the movements of today's continents.

### 05 Western Sahara – The Forgotten Desert

The Western Sahara is extremely hot, extremely dry – and very inaccessible. The disputed area borders three countries including Morocco, which now controls most of its territory. The rest is controlled by the Polisario Front. Working in this difficult environment, researchers are investigating climate phenomena, traces of mysterious cultures and fascinating flora.

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**06 Germany – In the Depths of Underwater Caves**

The Blautopf, or Blue Pot, is a large karst spring in southwestern Germany that's steeped in legend. A group of research divers has set itself the challenge of exploring the extensive system of caves beyond the spring and locating an entrance to the caves that is not underwater.

**07 Pamir Mountains – The Impact of Global Warming**

Snow-covered peaks, raging rivers, and extensive deserts: The Pamir Mountains in Central Asia are one of the most remote and uncharted regions of the world. An expedition of botanists and zoologists examines the effects of global warming at elevations in excess of 4,000 meters.