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## MSU-led team gaining attention for Antarctic discovery

By MSU News Service Jan 26, 2019



SALSA Scientists lowered a gravity core to the bottom of the Mercer Subglacial Lake in Antarctica to retrieve mud from the bottom.

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Kathy Kasic, SALSA Science Team

An expedition led by a Montana State University polar scientist has made international headlines following the unexpected discovery of the remains of tiny animals in a lake beneath more than a half mile of Antarctic ice.

The discovery by scientists on the Subglacial Antarctic Lakes Scientific Access project, or SALSA, has been featured prominently in the international science journal *Nature*, as well as in the *Guardian* newspaper, *Axios*, *El País*, *New Scientist*, *Gizmodo* and *Smithsonian* magazine, among others.

The news attention focuses on what the scientists found in mud pulled up from the dark waters of Antarctica's Mercer Subglacial Lake on Dec. 30: the remains of tiny crustaceans and tardigrades, tiny animals also known as "water bears."

The 62-square-mile subglacial lake was discovered with satellite imagery more than a decade ago and had never been explored before. It's located about 370 miles from the South Pole.

The 45 SALSA scientists, drillers and support staff had bored a hole some 3,500 feet to the bottom of the ice sheet that covers the lake hoping to find mud samples full of living organisms. Indeed, the lake water was teeming with bacteria, but the remains of crustaceans and tardigrades were unexpected.

The researchers are examining how the creatures may have come to be where they were found and what that says about Antarctica's history, past periods of thawing or geological upheaval.

Project leader John Priscu, a Montana University System Regents Professor in the Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences, and MSU principal investigators John Dore, also from the LRES department, and Mark Skidmore, from the Department of Earth Sciences, were interviewed in several media outlets after the news of the discovery broke on Jan. 18.

In the SALSA field blog, Priscu noted that the data and samples collected provide yet another look at the subglacial world.

"We have no doubts that our results will transform the way we view Antarctica and pave the way for future national and international subglacial research efforts," he wrote.

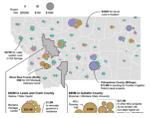
This was the second Antarctic subglacial lake expedition for both Priscu and Skidmore, who have been investigating icy ecosystems for 35 years and 25 years, respectively, in Antarctica, the Arctic and mountainous regions worldwide. In 2014, the pair, along with Dore and other MSU researchers, published the discovery of microscopic life in the Whillans Subglacial Lake in the journal *Nature* and received worldwide attention. The lake's exploration was named one of the top science stories of 2013 by *Discover* magazine.

The SALSA field blog can be found at <https://salsa-antarctica.org/blog/>.

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