

**RELEASED AT 20:00 GMT ON TUESDAY JANUARY 9 2007**

## **Compelling new evidence announced today about the location of Homer's Ithaca**

- **New scientific evidence closes in on western Kefallinia as Homer's Ithaca**
- **Catastrophic rockfalls and landslides triggered by earthquakes believed to have filled in ancient sea channel and created a landlocked isthmus**
- **122 metre (400 foot) borehole at isthmus meets no solid limestone bedrock**
- **Greek Geological Institute survey pinpoints submerged marine valley**
- **Bulgarian scientists locate microscopic marine fossils caught up in the rockfall**
- **American ground-penetrating radar confirms channel contours**
- **Ancient roads interrupted by landslides still visible on the surface**
- **Detailed scientific findings and supporting photographs provided**
- **Channel 4 News film update broadcast at 19:00 GMT on January 9**

**London, January 9 2007.** Results were announced today of new geological work which supports the dramatic theory about the location of Homer's Ithaca put forward by British businessman Robert Bittlestone, Cambridge classicist Professor James Diggle and Edinburgh geologist Professor John Underhill. In 2005 they proposed that the Ithaca described in Homer's *Odyssey* is to be found on western Kefallinia, not the Greek island that is today called Ithaki. Within 24 hours the news had been relayed by over 100 newspapers, TV and radio stations world-wide.



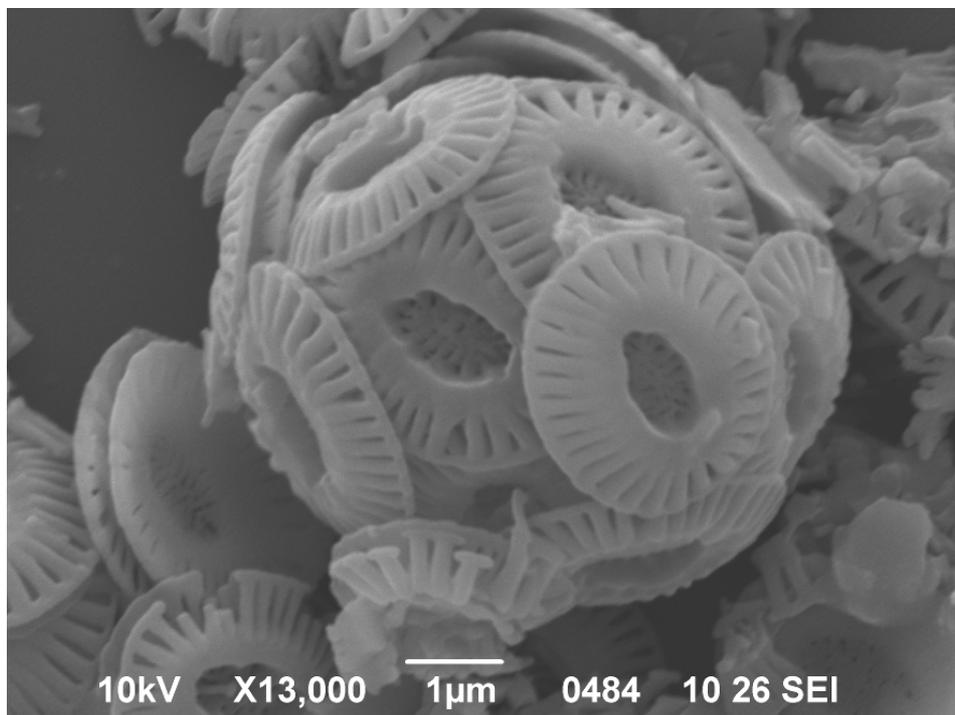
**Figure 1: Drilling the 122 metre (400 foot) test borehole**  
*No solid limestone bedrock was encountered between the surface and sea level*

Their Cambridge University Press book '*Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca*' has been an academic publishing sensation, with sales approaching 10,000 copies and a Greek translation now under way. Geologists and classical scholars increasingly support the proposal because it provides a simple but radical answer to a historical enigma that has evaded solution for over 2,500 years.

The theory predicts that the western peninsula of Kefallinia (Paliki) was a separate island at the time of the Trojan War over 3,000 years ago, fitting Homer's description of ancient Ithaca as the furthest west of the Ionian Islands off western Greece. Catastrophic rockfalls and landslides triggered by earthquakes are believed to have filled in the ancient sea channel and created a landlocked isthmus.

The new geological work, the results of which are announced today, involved the drilling of a 122 metre (400 foot) borehole at the southern end of the isthmus between Kefallinia and Paliki, to see whether the drill-bit would encounter solid limestone bedrock or loose rockfall and landslide material (Fig. 1). The borehole penetrated to well below sea level and as the theory predicted, no solid limestone bedrock was encountered.

A marine survey of the bays at each end of the isthmus has been conducted by a joint team led by Dr Constantine Perissoratis from the Greek Geological Institute (IGME) and Professor Underhill. This has revealed a distinctive offshore marine valley of about 28 metres in depth that lines up exactly with the diagnosed south-western exit of the buried onshore channel, providing strong support for the proposal that this was the site of a former marine seaway.



**Figure 2: Microscopic marine fossils caught up in the borehole**  
*Scanning electron microscope image of material from the test borehole, captured at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (scale bar is a micron, one-thousandth of a millimetre)*

A detailed analysis of the borehole drill cuttings has been performed by an expert team from the Bulgarian Geological Institute led by Associate Professor Kristina Stoykova. She has identified microscopic marine fossils caught up in the borehole at an elevation well above sea level (Fig. 2). These are consistent with the impact of a catastrophic rockfall on this enclosed body of water, which would have ejected a large volume of water out of the channel and saturated the infilling material.

A state-of-the-art ground penetrating radar unit was provided by Geophysical Survey Systems (GSSI) in the USA. Senior geophysicist Dan Welch identified at the northern bay of the isthmus a steeply sloping bedrock contact that descended to 6 metres and below. A second, weaker signal of the same type was identified about 120 metres inland. These bedrock profiles are consistent with the diagnosis of a former channel exit at this second location but further work is required to confirm this.

Satellite images of the landscape have identified roads that have been cut off by surface rockfall and landslides. These provide direct visual evidence that catastrophic earthquake-triggered events of this nature have impacted this area during relatively recent periods of human occupation. An inland gravity survey also supports this conclusion. Commenting on these new results, Professor Underhill said:

*“We have spent a considerable amount of time mapping the surface geology of this isthmus and this has helped us to predict what we might find underneath it. The location of the borehole was deliberately chosen to represent a demanding test of the theory. It is about 350 metres inland from where we have diagnosed the likely southern exit of the buried sea channel and to its east and west there is solid limestone mountainside.*

*Significantly, we drilled down to a depth of 122 metres, which is almost 15 metres below today’s sea level, and we didn’t meet any solid limestone strata at all. Although this is only a first step in testing whether or not this whole isthmus was once under the sea, it is a very encouraging confirmation of our geological diagnosis.”*

The project team’s next priority is to conduct geological tests along the entire 6 kilometre length of the isthmus. These will involve further land-based geophysical techniques such as seismic and gravitational imaging. Additional boreholes will also need to be drilled and core samples analysed at key locations. It is anticipated that this major programme of forthcoming work will be supported by industry-scale geo-exploration resources.

If these tests prove conclusively that Paliki was a separate island 3,200 years ago then the case for identifying it as Homer’s Ithaca will be overwhelming. This outcome would then pave the way for a refocussed search for the lost city and palace of Odysseus. Over the last 200 years or more, several proposed Homeric sites have been excavated on the neighbouring island of Ithaki. However, if the next geological steps confirm the present results, this will mean that the archaeological searches have to date been conducted in the wrong place. By contrast, there has been comparatively little exploration in Paliki itself, which represents an almost green-field site for future archaeological research.

*Odysseus Unbound* author Robert Bittlestone comments:

*“Unlike many historical speculations, our answer to the age-old mystery of Ithaca’s location makes a specific prediction that can be scientifically tested by geological techniques. The results of John Underhill’s latest tests are very encouraging: they have given us the confidence to move forward with the next stage of major geological diagnostics.*

*It will be a stunning outcome if these confirm the solution proposed in *Odysseus Unbound*: we shall literally have been given the chance to rewrite the book of history. But this enigma has been with us for over 2,500 years so we must await the next set of results with due patience.”*

The drilling operation was filmed by a Channel 4 News team led by science correspondent Julian Rush. The resulting 10-minute news item was broadcast on the UK Channel 4 network between 19:00 and 20:00 GMT on Tuesday January 9 2007. The film is available for licensed transmission by overseas broadcasters and after transmission a small-screen version will be provided on the Channel 4 website, accessible from <http://www.odysseus-unbound.org/news.html>.

Also posted to the website at that time are the Detailed Results of the geological tests on Kefallinia, which explain these findings at greater length and contain additional photographs of the new evidence.

\*\*\* ENDS \*\*\*

## **Notes to editors**

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the oldest texts in Western literature. They describe the Trojan War and the return of Odysseus (the hero of Troy who devised the trick of the wooden horse) from the battle to his palace on Ithaca, an island somewhere to the west of Greece. The stories had a massive influence on philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates and they shaped the intellectual and cultural development of Greece throughout the classical era. This in turn has been the cornerstone of western culture, and for that reason Homer is regarded as the earliest and foremost architect of western civilisation.

Despite Homer's immense influence, for 3,000 years it was thought that the *Iliad* was a work of fiction and that Troy as Homer described it had never existed. Then in the 1870s Heinrich Schliemann conducted excavations in north-western Turkey which led to the discovery of the city and buried beneath it, the gold of Troy. However, the site of the island of Ithaca in the *Odyssey* has been an enigma for over 2,500 years.

## **Further information**

*Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca*

Publication date: October 6 2005. 618 pages, 340 colour illustrations

Authors: Robert Bittlestone, with James Diggle and John Underhill

Cambridge University Press ISBN: 0521853575

Information about the book and the research is available at the project website:

<http://www.odysseus-unbound.org>

The previous Channel 4 news film about the authors' September 2005 announcement is available at:

<http://www.channel4.com/news/special-reports/special-reports-storypage.jsp?id=819>

## **Detailed Results**

A separate document called *Detailed Results of recent geological tests on Kefallinia* has been simultaneously released at <http://www.odysseus-unbound.org/news.html>

## **Further photographs and print-quality graphics**

The project website provides a Press Resources area containing high-resolution versions of all the latest research photographs, as well as photographs of the authors and other press resources. To access the Press Resources area, contact [anne.stephenson@metapraxis.com](mailto:anne.stephenson@metapraxis.com)

## **Contact details**

Press enquiries:	John Mattison	<a href="mailto:jm@mattison.co.uk">jm@mattison.co.uk</a>	+44 20 7645 3636
	Tali Brauer	<a href="mailto:tb@mattison.co.uk">tb@mattison.co.uk</a>	+44 20 7645 3636
Author enquiries:	Anne Stephenson	<a href="mailto:anne.stephenson@metapraxis.com">anne.stephenson@metapraxis.com</a>	+44 20 8541 2743
Channel 4 enquiries:	Fiona Railton	<a href="mailto:fiona.railton@itn.co.uk">fiona.railton@itn.co.uk</a>	+44 20 7430 4220
	Julian Rush	<a href="mailto:julian.rush@itn.co.uk">julian.rush@itn.co.uk</a>	+44 20 7430 4661