

Antarctic glaciers may be hiding undiscovered life

Is there an undiscovered colony of plants, algae and small animals living in caves beneath glaciers in the Antarctic? That's the intriguing possibility arising from research led by Ceridwen Fraser from the Australian National University, [published in the journal Polar Biology](#). Fraser and her team investigated a series of caves formed underground around Mt Erebus, an active volcano on Ross Island in Antarctica. The caves have been hollowed out by steam.

The researchers took soil samples from inside the extensive cave system beneath glaciers on the volcano and subjected them to a metabarcoding analysis. The results produced numerous traces of DNA. Some of it remains unidentified, but other samples were matched with a range of complex life, including mosses, algae, arthropods, and nematode worms.

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In their paper, Fraser and colleagues note that the number of different plants and animals identified through the DNA sampling almost certainly represent only part of the total biological community that might be in the caves. They note, in particular, the absence of tardigrades – which are found in almost every terrestrial environment – from the data.

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“The next steps will be to take a closer look at the caves and search for living organisms. If they exist, it opens the door to an exciting new world,” she notes.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [Hidden life may thrive in caves beneath Antarctic glaciers](#)