



—THE— GEOGRAPHIC PROJECT

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SPENCER WELLS, Ph.D.
Genographic Project Director

Spencer Wells is a leading population geneticist for whom the Genographic Project represents the ultimate marriage of his two great passions, biology and history. The 37-year-old scientist, author and documentary filmmaker has dedicated much of his career to studying humankind's family tree and closing the gaps in our knowledge of human migration.

Now a National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence, Wells is spearheading the Genographic Project, calling it "a dream come true." His hope is that the project, which builds on Wells' earlier work featured in his book and television program, "The Journey of Man," and is being conducted in collaboration with other leading global scientists, will capture an invaluable genetic snapshot of humanity before modern-day influences erase it forever.

Wells' own journey of discovery began as a child whose zeal for history and biology led him to the University of Texas, where he enrolled at age 16, majored in biology, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa three years later. He then pursued his Ph.D. at Harvard University under the tutelage of distinguished evolutionary geneticist Richard Lewontin. Beginning in 1994, he conducted post-doctoral training at Stanford University's School of Medicine with famed geneticist Dr. Luca Cavalli-Sforza, considered the "father of anthropological genetics." It was there that Wells became committed to studying genomic diversity in indigenous populations and unraveling age-old mysteries about early human migration.

Wells' field studies began in earnest in 1996 with his survey of Central Asia. In 1998 Wells and his colleagues expanded their study to include some 25,000 miles of Asia and the former Soviet republics. His landmark research findings led to advances in the understanding of the male Y chromosome and its ability to trace ancestral human migration. Wells then returned to academia where, at Oxford University, he was appointed director of the Population Genetics Research Group of the Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics at Oxford.

Following a stint as head of research for a Massachusetts-based biotechnology company, Wells made the decision in 2001 to focus on communicating scientific discovery through books and documentary films. From that was born "The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey," an award-winning book and documentary that aired on PBS in the U.S. and National Geographic Channel internationally. Written and presented by Wells, the film chronicled his globe-circling, DNA-gathering expeditions in 2001-02 and laid the groundwork for the Genographic Project. Wells is the driving force behind the Genographic Project, overseeing all of its scientific aspects, as well as presenter and scientific adviser for "The Search for Adam," a television program produced for the National Geographic Channel about the Genographic Project. He is the recipient of numerous scientific awards, grants and fellowships.

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