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UM GEOLOGY PROFESSOR AWARDED GRANT TO STUDY EARTH'S DEEP CRUST

MISSOULA--

David Fountain, associate professor of geology at the University of Montana, is trying to get a better understanding of the structure and composition of the lower continental crust without actually going down there.

To do this he is studying exposed cross-sections of the deep crust that occur in areas where two continents have collided, causing one continent to go under and another to curve up.

The earth's crust is layered, like a cake.

"All we've been aware of is the icing, not what the cake is made of," said Fountain recently. "When two continents collide the part that curves up is like a cake laid on its side. All the layers are exposed."

With the aid of a grant from the National Science Foundation Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, Fountain will study parts of northern Norway and the southern Alps which are long recognized areas in which the deep crust has been elevated to surface levels.

At these locations he will be able to study the "contents of the cake" by simply walking along the surface and taking samples of the exposed rock.

In this way, Fountain intends to obtain firsthand information about the earth's deep crust, which is usually only observed indirectly through seismic work.

"It's basically a cheap version of drilling a hole to the base of the crust," explained Fountain.

(over)

UM GEOLOGY PROFESSOR-- add one

Ultimately regions of Australia which exhibit geological and geophysical characteristics strikingly similar to the Alpine region will be compared to determine causes for important variations of physical properties in the deep crust.

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