

8.8.96

# The Daily Telegraph

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Belgium	80 Fr
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Malta	95 C
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# That's life on rock ALH 84001

## Meteorite reveals 4 billion-year-old secret from Mars

By Roger Highfield, Science Editor, and Robert Uhlir

THE FIRST evidence of life on Mars, notably "microfossil forms" resembling hair-like bacteria, was outlined yesterday by US scientists after a 30-month study of a potato-sized meteorite. The space agency Nasa described it as "a fascinating detective story".

Dr David McKay, the head of the Nasa-funded team of scientists, said: "All evidence points to the simplest explanation — that these are evidence of the remains of early Martian life."

However, he admitted that "there will be a lot of disagreement" as the evidence was thrown open to study by scientists around the world.

President Clinton hailed the find and said that the White House would convene a summit in November on the future of the United States space programme to "discuss how America should pursue answers" to scientific questions raised by "rock 84001".

The rock "speaks to us across all those billions of years and millions of miles."

ership. But he emphasised that the results of this "fascinating detective story" were not conclusive, "for there is not yet scientific consensus that life might have existed beyond the confines of this small planet, the third rock from the Sun".

He said that Nasa would offer samples of the rock to other research teams for analysis. "We will be driven by the scientific process and not a rush to go to Mars."

Inside the meteorite the team discovered the first organic molecules thought to be of Martian origin; several mineral features characteristic of biological activity; and "strange structures", possibly microscopic fossils of primitive, bacteria-like organisms.

