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Prince William tells space tourists: Fix Earth instead

Britain's Prince William ignited controversy yesterday by blasting space tourism and saying that more attention should be paid to problems closer to home ahead of the COP26 climate summit. The comments by Queen Elizabeth II's grandson aired in a BBC interview yesterday, a day after 90-year-old "Star Trek" star William Shatner became a real space traveller on Blue Origin's second crewed mission.

The company's maiden human flight in July had included its founder Jeff Bezos of Amazon and was seen as a breakthrough for the emerging space tourism sector. But Prince William said: "We need some of the world's greatest brains and minds fixed on trying to repair this planet, not trying to find the next place to go and live." Virgin Galactic, which offers a similar experience of a few minutes of weightlessness and a view of the Earth's curvature from the cosmos, launched its founder Richard Branson in July, a few days before Bezos. The comments by William, second in line to the UK throne, were rebuffed by critics who pointed to the scientific value of mankind's decades-old forays into the final frontier.

British space scientist and broadcaster Maggie Aderin-Pocock said she agreed with William that humanity had made a "mess" of Earth, and had to learn the lessons. "But it can't be our only focus. Space is inspirational. Because of 'Star Trek', I became a space scientist, now I work on climate change," she said on ITV. "I'm going to COP26 next month to talk about how space is helping us with climate change. So yes, we need to focus on climate change, but it can't be the only thing." The group Republic, which campaigns to abolish Britain's monarchy, said William should "keep his ill-informed opinions to himself".

"This is politics, and while space tourism is questionable, science benefits from space exploration," it tweeted. "We may agree or disagree, but lectures from a hypocrite who can't be properly challenged are a real problem."

'Ahead of the curve'

William was speaking ahead of the inaugural Earthshot Prize awards ceremony on Sunday, his initiative to honor those working on environmental solutions. Looking ahead to the COP26 summit in Glasgow, which begins on October 31, he warned world leaders against "clever speak, clever words, but not enough action".

"It would be an absolute disaster if (son) George is sat here talking to you... in like 30 years' time, still saying the same thing, because by then we will be too late." William's father Prince Charles, a lifelong environmentalist, has also spoken out on the need for action from the leaders rather than words in the build-up to the UN climate summit. —AFP



This undated image courtesy of the Museum of Natural History of Vienna (NHMW), shows a 2,600 year-old-human excrement from the Hallstatt salt mines in which beans, millet and barley are clearly visible. — AFP photos



This undated image shows a 2,600-year-old human excrement from the Hallstatt salt mines in which beans, millet and barley are clearly visible.

Humans were already enjoying blue cheese and beer 2,700 years ago

Humans' love for cheese and beer goes back a long way. But according to a scientific study published Wednesday, workers at a salt mine in Austria were already enjoying blue cheese and beer as far back as 2,700 years ago. Scientists made the discovery by analyzing samples of human excrement found at the heart of the Hallstatt mine in the Austrian Alps. The study was published in the journal *Current Biology* on Wednesday. Frank Maixner, a microbiologist at the Eurac Research Institute in Bolzano, Italy, who was the lead author of the report, said he was surprised to learn that salt miners over two millennia ago were advanced enough to "use fermentation intentionally."

"This is very sophisticated in my opinion," Maixner told AFP. "This is something I did not expect at that time." The finding was the earliest evidence to date of cheese ripening in Europe, according to researchers. And while alcohol consumption is certainly well documented in older writings and archaeological evidence, the salt miners' feces contained the first molecular evidence of beer consumption on the continent at that time.

"It is becoming increasingly clear that not only were prehistoric culinary practices sophisticated, but also that complex processed foodstuffs as well as the technique of fermentation have held a prominent role in our early food history," said Kerstin Kowarik of the Museum of Natural History

Vienna. The town of Hallstatt, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has been used for salt production for more than 3,000 years, according to Maixner. The community "is a very particular place, it's located in the Alps, in the middle of nowhere," he explained. "The whole community worked and lived from this mine."

The miners spent their entire days there, working, eating and going to the bathroom right there, at the mine. It is thanks to the constant temperature of around 8C (46F) and the high concentration of salt at the mine that the miners' feces were preserved particularly well. Researchers analyzed four samples: one dating back to the Bronze Age, two from the Iron Age, and one from the 18th century. One of them, about 2,700 years old, was found to contain two fungi, *Penicillium roqueforti* and *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. Both are known today for their use in food making. —AFP

In this undated image archaeologists work in one of the Iron Age mining areas inside the Hallstatt salt mountain.

