

Message for the Universe

BBC television's recent announcement of alien beings landing on the M6 may have been nearer the credibility mark than they realised.

In the next few weeks, Russian scientists are launching a major research programme to try to contact extra-terrestrial civilisations.

These earthbound explorers, calling themselves exobiologists, will be sending out radio pictures of 'space landscapes' over the next few months. Signal patterns will represent our sun

against the background of stars as it might be seen from a particular star.

Professor Vsevolod Troitsky, head of the academy's Radio Astronomy Council space signals research programme, acknowledges that the chances of contacting an alien culture, certainly in the immediate future, are very small.

American scientists, too, are eager to win this new form of space race. Recently Professor Frank Drake took up the quest with Cornell University's

Arecibo radiotelescope, one of the world's largest.

This can monitor 65,000 frequencies simultaneously. 'Our estimate is that one star in 10 million has a civilisation,' says Professor Drake.

Any contact that may be made with alien cultures will be a meeting of intellects only. Because of the vast distances involved, exobiologists believe that 'they' are unlikely to come visiting.

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