

INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS ANALYSIS
MT SAN ANTONIO, CA

DATE: July 21, 2026
TO: The Herald, Church of Alienism
FROM: Howard Stonecipher, Director
SUBJECT: Eastern Sierra Field Inquiry

PROSPECTIVE HERALD SUBMISSION
The Breath Beneath the Mountain

Submitted for consideration by The Herald.

A three-person Institute team recently worked across the high eastern Sierra and the Mammoth-Long Valley region. The area is geologically active enough that unusual odors require no supernatural explanation: volcanic and hydrothermal systems can produce carbon dioxide, hydrogen sulfide, and other gases through faults and fractures.

The problem is that personnel repeatedly reported a foul odor at several high-elevation sites while portable instruments failed to identify sulfur-bearing gas in concentrations commensurate with what they smelled. Carbon dioxide was present in places but does not explain the odor.

Historical accounts from underground workings in the region include references to abrupt deterioration of air, pre-existing voids, and a 'foul breath' entering through newly fractured rock. Modern retellings naturally resemble Tolkien's warning about digging too greedily and too deep. Several older descriptions appear to predate the familiar phrasing.

A Fragmented Tome passage warns against cutting 'the old stone below its appointed depth' and refers to 'the breath beneath the mountain.' Another states that deep places are not empty merely because they are dark.

At the final site, the odor persisted for approximately eleven minutes. No source was found. A passive acoustic instrument then recorded a low, poorly resolved impulse.

No excavation is authorized. The three personnel returned without casualty. No one dug.

Respectfully,
Howard Stonecipher
Director
Institute for Environmental Systems Analysis