

Scientists dig below Dead Sea for slice of Earth's history

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Two Palestinian Muslim women swim in their clothes in the waters of the Dead Sea in the West Bank during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, September 2010. An international team of scientists has begun drilling deep below the Dead Sea in an effort to extract material that could provide an unusual look at Earth's history over the past 500,000 years.

An international team of scientists has begun drilling deep below the Dead Sea in an effort to extract material that could provide an unusual look at Earth's history over the past 500,000 years.

The project aims to examine the layers of sediment left behind beneath the lowest place on Earth over the course of millions of years, providing clues about shifting [weather patterns](#), seismic activity and [climate change](#)

"The sediments ... provide an 'archive' on the environmental conditions that existed in the area in its geological past," the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, a partner in the project, said on Wednesday.

The thin slice of Earth's history will be extracted via a 1,200-metre (3,937-foot) deep borehole being drilled by a special rig that has been set up in the northern basin of the Dead Sea.

Once extracted, the layer-cake of soil will be subjected to high-resolution examination by scientists from fields ranging from climate science to chemistry for clues about Earth's changing environment.

Details about severe weather or major [seismic activity](#) could even provide insight into human migration in and out of the region.

"We believe that the results of this project will have vast implications in the fields of science and environment and will shed light on new natural resources," Zvi Ben-Avraham, a professor at Tel Aviv University, and Moti Stein, with the Israel Geological Survey, said in a joint statement.

"In addition, a historic hydrogeological-environmental study of the Dead Sea will help unravel the mystery of human cultural evolution in this area," they added.

The project is being sponsored by the International Continental Drilling Programme, a group that has carried out similar probes deep into the Earth's crust at locations around the world.

In an unusual example of regional coordination, the governments of Israel and Jordan, which lies on the east bank of the [Dead Sea](#), as well as the Palestinian Authority are cooperating with the project, which is expected to run until the end of this year.

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