

# Drilling in the holy land

December 22 2010

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About 50 miles from Bethlehem, a drilling project is determining the climate and earthquake activity of the Holy Land. Scientists from eight nations are examining the ground below the Dead Sea, by placing a borehole in this deepest basin in the world. The International Continental Scientific Drilling Program ICDP brings together research teams from Israel, Japan, Norway, Switzerland, the USA and Germany. Particularly noteworthy: Researchers from Jordan and Palestine are also involved.

Scientists and technicians of the GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences have now completed a geophysical measurement procedure in the hole and helped with the initial examination of the cores in a field laboratory. "We have drilled through about half a million years of sedimentary deposits," estimates Dr. Ulrich Harms from the ICDP's operational support group at the GFZ. "From this, we can deduce not only the [climate history](#), but also the [earthquake activity](#) in this seismically very active region." The direction and inclination of the well were determined with high precision below this lake which is around 300 meters deep here, and the physical properties of the rocks were measured down to the bottom of the 460 meters deep [borehole](#).

These unique measurements are used to record a continuous survey of the deposits in the Dead Sea and to compare it with the recovered cores. Although scientific drilling attempts to recover cores over the entire length of a hole, it is not always possible. These special borehole measurements are conducted to cover the gaps. In addition, a second series of cores is obtained from a second well in order to verify and secure the data.

"If everything goes perfectly, we may soon be able to provide information about past climate and environmental changes in the Bethlehem area," says Ulrich Harms. His colleague Professor Achim Brauer, a paleo-climatologist at the GFZ, is one of the initiators of the ICDP project. He and his team will analyze the drill cores. They are not just interested in the climate at the time of Jesus' birth but in the climate of the whole history of mankind. The region of the Holy Land is considered a land bridge across which early man migrated in several waves from Africa to the north. The [climate](#) history of the land of the Bible is therefore closely connected with the history of mankind.

**More information:** Further information about the project can be found at: [www.icdp-online.org/front\\_content.php?idcat=825](http://www.icdp-online.org/front_content.php?idcat=825)

Provided by Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres

Citation: Drilling in the holy land (2010, December 22) retrieved 7 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-12-drilling-holy.html>

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