

icdp 30 years 1996–2026 news



to all our icdp friends

from **Marco Bohnhoff**,
icdp Executive Director

February 26, 2026

Today marks a very special milestone: exactly 30 years ago, the International Continental Scientific Drilling Program (ICDP) was officially inaugurated. On behalf of the entire ICDP community, I am delighted to share this short commemorative message looking back at three remarkable decades of scientific achievement and looking forward with confidence and excitement.

Marco Bohnhoff, ICDP Executive Director

THE BEGINNING

February 26, 2026 marks a special milestone in the history of ICDP. On this day 30 years ago, on 26 February 1996, the International Continental Scientific Drilling Program (ICDP) was officially inaugurated. Over the last three decades, ICDP has made significant global contributions to uncovering the geological secrets beneath our continents, including challenging questions such as how the Earth's crust is structured and how it evolved; which minerals, rocks, fluids, gases or rare-earth elements occur at depth; under what physical and chemical conditions life can exist in the deep subsurface; what environmental and climatic conditions were like hundreds of thousands of years ago; how earthquakes and volcanic eruptions initiate and originate; and where and under which conditions geothermal energy can be exploited economically.

THE FOUNDING MOMENT

On 26 February 1996, representatives of the U.S. National Science Foundation, China's Ministry of Geology and Mineral Resources, the German Federal Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Technology, and the then GeoForschungsZentrum Potsdam (GFZ) ratified a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the German Embassy in Tokyo, formally establishing ICDP. The idea for an "International Continental Scientific Drilling" initiative dates back to 1993, when a conference on the same topic, organized by GFZ in Potsdam and attended by 250 participants, laid the scientific foundations. The German Continental Deep Drilling Program (KTB), led by GFZ founding director Prof. Rolf Emmermann, together with the pre-existing International Lithosphere Program (ILP), a global research network dedicated to investigating the Earth's interior, provided both the conceptual framework and the impetus for developing an international scientific land-drilling program complementing the existing international ocean drilling program.



Scientific drilling at the New Zealand Alpine Fault — one of the many landmark ICDP projects of the past three decades. © Thomas Wiersberg / GFZ

THREE DECADES OF DISCOVERY

Over the past three decades, more than 60 major drilling projects have been carried out worldwide on all continents, including Antarctica. ICDP has contributed over USD 60 million to these efforts. Together with approximately USD 240 million in co-funding from additional sources, total project funding has exceeded USD 300 million. The success of an international scientific program such as the ICDP depends on many factors, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to its success:

STANDING ON MANY SHOULDERS

- **The funding organizations** of the ICDP member countries, whose contributions make the financial and operational support of the drilling projects possible and who are represented in the **Assembly of Governors (AOG)**.
- **The Executive Committee (EC)**, which is responsible for managing the ICDP and evaluates proposals for their operational, technical, managerial, and financial feasibility.
- **The Science Advisory Group (SAG)**, whose tireless efforts in scientifically evaluating proposals ensure the outstanding scientific quality of the program and the funded projects.
- **The Operational Support Group (OSG)**, led by Thomas Wiersberg, which contributes significantly to the success of the program and the projects by supporting the PIs in project planning, implementation, and execution.
- **The GFZ Helmholtz Centre for Geosciences**, which hosts the ICDP. As the Executive Agency of the ICDP, it manages the ICDP budget, represents the ICDP in all legal matters, and, last but not least, finances a large part of the OSG's positions.
- **The newly founded ICDP Early Career Researcher Network**, which helps to ensure that the ICDP's success story continues into the future.
- **The international geoscience community**, whose submission of outstanding high-level drilling proposals is crucial to the ICDP's success. I am delighted to report that this year's 23 proposals have even surpassed last year's record.

Thank you all — and let's move on, keeping the bit rotating.

Marco Bohnhoff

ICDP Executive Director

icdp in motion - our updates from the drillsite to the world!

your icdp team from potsdam