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The University of Granada publishes the first study on geodynamics of the Scotia Arc, in Antarctica

08.02.2007

Fernando Bohoyo Muñoz´s thesis "Fragmentacion continental y desarrollo de cuencas oceánicas en el sector meridional del arco de Scotia, Antártida" (Continental fragmentation and oceanic bowl development in the southern sector of the Scotia Arc, Antarctica) is the first in-depth study on tectonics of the Scotia arc in Antarctica.

This work, carried put in the Dpt. of Geodynamics of the University of Granada (Universidad de Granada, [http://www.ugr.es]) and the Andalusian Institute of Earth Sciences, has given rise, for the time being, to four publications in prestigious international scientific journals. "Intense earthquakes can be registered in the area, reaching 7 degrees in the Richter scale, whose tectonic content is similar to that of other densely populated regions of the planet, like the San Andreas Fault (California, United States), the Caribbean arc or Japan", Bohoyo points out.

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Working on the ground is quite difficult. "The campaign is brought up in Granada in detail, but once there the climatic conditions and the enormous ice blocks limit the possibilities, leaving wide unexplored sectors", the young scientist says. Expeditions take place on board the Hespérides, ceded to the CSIC (Higher Council of Scientific Research) and crewed by the staff of the Spanish Ministry of Defence.

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"The main objective is to study tectonic blocks´ fragmentation and evolution", Professor Jesús Galindo Zaldívar explains, who is one of the persons in charge for the work, together with Andrés Maldonado López. With data of different scientific nature, researchers from Granada have obtained a map of the morphology and

tectonic evolution of the area; thanks to them it has been possible to determine the expansion age of the Scotia Sea oceanic bowls. Galindo adds that "it is a continental crust area that formed a barrier between the Atlantic and the Pacific, between South America and the Antarctic Peninsula, thirty million years ago".

Circumpolar antarctic current

The opening of this big barrier that connects the two oceans, gave rise to a circumpolar current that, at the present day, influences in a determinant way the planet´s climatology. It is the most important current in Antactica, which connects with others, isolating the antarctic continent. In fact, its existence is one of the keys of the extremely cold anctartic climate and one of the most important international scientific lines at present.

The scientific dimension of this group of the University of Granada is very relevant. Last week (the last week of August), Galindo and Bohoyo were present in the biannual meeting of the SCAR (Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research) in Bremen (Germany). This International Scientific Committee concentrates a total of 28 countries involved in the scientific knowledge of the Antarctica.

Before the work of the researchers from Granada, there were hardly a few scarcely systematized data about the Scotia Arc, from British expeditions in the seventies. As a matter of fact, Fernando Bohoyo goes to the British Antarctic Center, one of the international reference centres on the subject, at the end of this week, to go deeply into data on the external part of the tectonic arc and the northern part of the Scotia Sea. In December, they will go back to the Antarctica to collect more data and continue with this promising scientific study.

Antonio Marín Ruiz | Quelle: alphagalileo

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