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Two ships from the University of California's Scripps Institution of Oceanography sail from San Diego March 16 on an expedition designed to locate promising sites for the Mohole.

The Mohole is the name given the project to drill through the earth's crust to the mantle. It takes its name from the Mohorovicic discontinuity which lies between crust and mantle. Last year, preliminary operations off Guadalupe Island proved the feasibility of such a drilling and plans are now underway for other preliminary drillings.

The National Science Foundation in Washington announced last week it had instructed Brown and Root, Houston, Texas, to prepare a detailed contract for the drilling.

Location of the site will be determined by the Site Selection Panel of the National Academy of Sciences.

Under the leadership of George G. Shor, Associate Research Geophysicist at Scripps, the ships Stranger and Hugh M. Smith will sail to Hawaii in search for potential drilling sites.

Two areas will be investigated, one off southern California, one off Hawaii. The area off southern California lies about 250 miles west southwest of San Diego, west of the Cortez Bank. The Hawaiian area is 200 miles north by northeast of the island of Hawaii.

"Several requirements have to be met for a drilling site," Shor says. "The weather must not be too bad, the site must be near an active port. Deep-water currents must not be strong. In addition, we need to find areas where the discontinuity is shallow and the seismic velocities beneath it suggest average conditions. Some of our work at sea, as well as that of other institutions, suggest that the most promising areas may frequently be found under the rises that occur seaward of the marginal trenches and troughs around continents and island chains."

Approximately 20 scientists will participate in the expedition, which is being called Hilo Expedition. The expedition is receiving support from the National Science Foundation. It is being carried out at the request of the Site Selection Panel.

A similar study of potential Mohole sites was conducted in the Atlantic two years ago, Shor says.