Deep-seated Geothermal Resources of the Parana Basin

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Abstract

Updated data sets on terrestrial heat flow and thermal springs have been employed in outlining the nature of deep-seated geothermal resources of the Parana basin. A 1° x 1° grid system was adopted for data processing and in determinations of vertical distributions of excess temperatures. The results obtained have led to an improved understanding of the occurrence of high temperature geothermal resources and allowed estimates of associated resource base. It has been possible to identify more than 20 crustal blocks where the resource base per unit area, referred to the accessible depth limit of 6 km, are in the range of 2 x10⁶ to 9 x10⁶ Joules. There are indications pointing to occurrence of medium temperature geothermal resources at depths of 4 to 6 km in several sectors of the central and western parts of the basin. The area extent of such blocks has dimensions of several tens of kilometers. Most high temperature resources occur within the well-known sectors of fault-controlled magmatic activity associated with the eruption of Serra Geral flood basalts. In addition, isolated pockets of high enthalpy geothermal resources are found to be present along the northwestern border. The results have also allowed better assessments of low temperature resources of the Guarani aquifer system, which span over large areas of southern Brazil, western Uruguay and northern Argentina.

1. Introduction

A notable advantage of geothermal energy resources is their ability to produce base-load power and heat, with a minimum of carbon emission to the environment. It has been demonstrated to be economically competitive, especially in cases where the resources are located at relatively shallow depths of no more than three kilometers. Recently, advances in drilling technology has emerged that can extract geothermal resources situated at depth ranges of three to six kilometers. It is customary to designate geothermal resources at such depths as Hot Wet Rock (HWR) and Hot Dry Rock (HDR), depending on the geothermal and hydrogeological characteristics of subsurface strata. The main obstacle in exploitation of geothermal energy from such deep-seated systems is the relatively high drilling cost associated with the early stages of exploration. Consequently, it is necessary to make best use of site-specific data on the subsurface thermal field and local geological characteristics, which provide as accurately as possible reliable assessments of subsurface energy sources.

Very few attempts seem to have been made in deriving resource assessments that also incorporate data on regional geologic and geophysical characteristics of subsurface strata. Results of assessments of geothermal resources of Brazil have been reported in several earlier studies (Hamza et al, 1978; Hamza and Eston, 1983; Eston and Hamza, 1984; Hamza et al, 1990). More recently, assessments have also been carried on regional scales for several different parts in southern Brazil (Gomes and Hamza, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009; Hamza and Eston, 1983; Eston and Hamza, 1984; Hamza et al, 1990). The results of such early works have led to identification of several targets for exploration of low enthalpy resources, situated generally at depths less than 3 km. In the present work, we report progress obtained in assessment of deep-seated geothermal resources in the Parana basin, in south Brazil.

2. Characteristics of the Parana Basin

This basin covers an area of nearly 1.5 million square kilometers in southern Brazil but extends also into the neighboring countries of Argentina and Uruguay. The map of Figure 1 illustrates its relative location with respect to the geologic features of south Brazil. The total thickness of the sediments varies from nearly three kilometers at the eastern border to almost seven kilometers in its central parts. The overall shape of this basin is approximately oval, with its major axis in the north – south direction.
The evolution of Paraná Basin has been marked by several complex episodes of geologic activity (Soares et al., 1974; Almeida, 1980). Its lithologic record points to several stages, controlled by distinctly different tectonic and climatic factors. A multitude of depositional settings have been identified, with both marine and continental components, including glacial beds, desert sandstones and shallow marine to transitional facies (Zalán et al., 1987; Milani and Ramos, 1998). There are indications that the outlines of this basin were continuously reshaped by past tectonic activity. The last major tectono-thermal activity has been the eruption and deposition of flood basalts during the Cretaceous period. The depositional sequences of these units are illustrated in the schematic geologic cross-section of Figure 2. Note that a number of Paleozoic sedimentary sequences are buried beneath flood basalts of the Serra Geral formation. Milani et al. (2007) recognized the main stratigraphic units as Rio Ivaí (Ordovician and Silurian age), Paraná (Devonian age), Gondwana I (Carboniferous – Eotriassic age), Gondwana II (Meso to Neotriassic age), Gondwana III (Neojurassic – Eocretaceous age) and Bauru (Neocretaceous age).

Seismic studies (Assumpção et al., 2013) reveal that crustal thickness of the region of Paraná basin is relatively large, in the range of 38 to 45 km. Gravity and magnetic fields of this basin has been studied in some detail (Molina et al. 1987; Milani and Zalán, 1998). Bouguer anomaly maps reveal values in the range of 38 to 45 mgal. The data distribution covers nine states in Southern Brazil (São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás, Tocantins and Minas Gerais). Most of the Brazilian data were derived from the earlier works (Meister, 1973; Araújo, 1978; Vitorello et al., 1980; Eston et al., 1981; Hurter, 1987; Hurter and Pollack, 1996). The database employed in deriving geothermal maps, were discussed (Hamza and Muñoz, 1996; Hamza and Frangipani, 1990; Gomes and Hamza, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007; Hamza et al., 2002a, 2005b). Recently, new data acquired in the states of São Paulo, Santa Catarina and Goiás were also included. The map of Figure 3 indicates the locations of geothermal studies.

### Table 1 - Simplified description of sedimentary sequences in the Paraná basin. Shading in yellow color indicate layers with potential for hosting low enthalpy geothermal resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formation</th>
<th>Lithology</th>
<th>Z max (m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cachoeirinha</td>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bauru</td>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serra Geral</td>
<td>Tholeiitic basalts</td>
<td>1700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botucatu</td>
<td>Sandstone cross-bedded</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirambóia</td>
<td>Silt and Sandstone</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio do Rasto</td>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresina</td>
<td>Shales and Argillites</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serra Alta</td>
<td>Silts, shales, Argillites</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iráu</td>
<td>Silts, Argillites, Shales</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palermo</td>
<td>Silts, Conglomerates</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Bonito</td>
<td>Silts and Shales</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taciba, C. Mourao, L. Azul</td>
<td>Medium Sandstone</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponta Grossa</td>
<td>Shale, Sandstone, Silt</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnas</td>
<td>Sandstone with cross bedding</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Sources of Geothermal Data

The data employed in the present work are derived from the archives of the geothermal database, maintained by the National Observatory, Brazil. This database has recently been updated with temperature gradient and heat flow values for several new localities. The current geothermal database for the Paraná basin includes results of measurements at 538 localities, of which 376 are situated in Brazil and the remaining 162 in neighboring countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay). The data distribution covers nine states in Southern Brazil (São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás, Tocantins and Minas Gerais). Most of the Brazilian data were derived from the earlier works (Meister, 1973; Araújo, 1978; Vitorello et al., 1980; Eston et al., 1981; Hurter, 1987; Hurter and Pollack, 1996). The database employed in deriving geothermal maps, were discussed (Hamza and Muñoz, 1996; Hamza and Frangipani, 1990; Gomes and Hamza, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007; Hamza et al., 2002a, 2005b). Recently, new data acquired in the states of São Paulo, Santa Catarina and Goiás were also included. The map of Figure 3 indicates the locations of geothermal studies.
Details of the techniques employed in geothermal data acquisition has been discussed in the earlier works of (Hamza and Muñoz, 1996; Gomes and Hamza, 2004, 2005). Several methods have been used in determining temperature gradients and heat flow, depending on the nature of techniques employed in acquisition of primary data. These may be classified as falling into groups designated as incremental logs (ITL, described as CVL in earlier publications), bottom-hole temperature (BHT) and geochemical (GCL).

Examination of compiled information reveals large variations in the quality of primary data. Nevertheless, the database has been useful in determining mean values of temperature gradient and heat flow for 10 x 10 grid elements covering the entire area of this basin. Experimental heat flow data are currently available for slightly more than 70% of the grid elements. For purposes of the present work, estimated values derived from spherical harmonic expansion of the global heat flow field (Hamza et al, 2008) were assigned for those grid elements for which experimental data are not available. The gridded data has been useful in the past in deriving heat flow maps of four different regions in the basin (Gomes and Hamza, 2004, 2005; Hamza et al, 2005a).

4. Temperatures and Geothermal Gradients

The vertical distribution of temperatures determined using BHT data are illustrated in Figure 4. The continuous line in this figure is the least square fits to respective BHT data sets, while the dotted lines indicate approximate bounding (minimum and maximum) values, compatible with the observational data. The linear extrapolations of the least square fits to shallower levels have been terminated at depths corresponding to the values of mean annual surface temperatures; these latter ones are derived from local meteorological records. This procedure reveals the presence of vertical distributions of temperature, characterized by sharp changes at shallow depths. Such features in vertical distributions of temperatures have been interpreted by Pimentel and Hamza (2014) and Vieira et al (2014) as indicative of down flow of groundwater at shallow depths. Studies of the thermal structure at shallow depths are important in understanding the nature of deep flow systems.

5. Thermal Conductivity

The thermal conductivity data compiled in this work is based on results of measurements reported in earlier studies, which has been discussed in detail (Hamza et al, 2005a; Gomes and Hamza, 2006; Hurter and Pollack, 1996). The techniques used for thermal conductivity measurements include divided-bar (Hamza et al, 1980), line source (Marangoni and Hamza, 1983) and plane source methods (Gomes and Hamza, 2006).

Values of thermal conductivity lower than 2W/m/K were found for basalt rich Serra Geral formation and shale rich Estrada Nova, Serra Alta and Tatui formations. Values higher than 4W/m/K are found for sandstone rich formations of Aquidauana, Furnas and Vila Maria. A selected set of values for the main formations, as per the stratigraphic sequence is presented in table (Hamza and Eston, 1983).

6. Heat Flow

Heat flow values were calculated as the product of geothermal gradient and thermal conductivity for 545 sites in the Parana basin and adjacent areas. The mean values of heat flow...
flow obtained by the different methods are in the range of 62 to 72 mW/m². Gomes (2009) has provided a detailed summary.

The spatial distribution of heat flow is illustrated in the map of Figure 6. It is clear from this map that the basin is characterized by a region of relatively low heat flow along a northeast – southwest trending belt. Heat flow is relatively high along the western and eastern borders.

Table 2 - Thermal conductivity values of selected rock formations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formation</th>
<th>Rock Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>( \lambda ) (W/m/K)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bauru</td>
<td>Sand</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serra Geral</td>
<td>Basalt</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botucatu</td>
<td>Eolian Sandstone</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piramboia</td>
<td>Silty Sand</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio do Rasto</td>
<td>Silt and Sand</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terezina</td>
<td>Shaly sand</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estrada Nova</td>
<td>Shale</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serra Alta</td>
<td>Shale and Sand</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irati</td>
<td>Shale</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palermo</td>
<td>Silt and sand</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatuí</td>
<td>Silty sand</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Bonito</td>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itarare</td>
<td>Sandy silt</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponta Grossa</td>
<td>Shale</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnas</td>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Intra Basin Temperatures

Temperatures at depths of main basin formations were calculated based on results of geothermal gradients, thermal conductivity and heat flow. One of the remarkable features turned out to be considerable variations in the vertical distribution of temperatures. This can be seen in the depths of isotherms of 30 and 60°C, along the east – west and north – south profiles, illustrated in Figure 7.

In the present context, the interest has been in understanding the lateral variations in temperatures across the basin. The depth levels chosen for this purpose are 1 km, 3 km and 5 km. The spatial distributions of temperatures, calculated...
for these depths are presented in the three panels of Figures 8a and 8b. Referring to the top panel of this figure we note that temperatures are higher than 44°C at depths of less than one km in the northern parts of the basin. The lower panel of this figure indicate lateral distribution of temperatures at depths of 3km. In this case, most parts of the basin it is higher than 80°C.

Figure 9 illustrates the lateral distribution of temperatures at the depth level of 5km. The results point to several areas where temperatures are higher than 150°C.

8. Estimates of Resource base

The resource base calculations were carried out following the methodology discussed in earlier studies (Muffler and Cataldi, 1978). Volumetric method was considered adequate for the present purpose. In this method the resource base per unit area is calculated as the excess thermal energy in the layer up to a depth of 6km, the reference temperature value for energy calculations being the surface temperature. The excess temperature ($\Delta T$) was calculated using the relation:

$$ T_e = \frac{q_0}{\lambda} z - \frac{A_0}{2 \lambda} z^2 $$

where $q_0$ the surface heat flux, $z$ the thickness of the layer, $\lambda$ the thermal conductivity and $A_0$ the radiogenic heat productivity at the surface.

The basin area was divided into equal longitude cells. The resource base ($Q_{RBi}$) for the $i$th cell, of thickness $d_i$, associated with the temperature distribution given by equation (1), is calculated using the relation:

$$ Q_{RBi} = \rho_i c_p A_i d_i (T_i - T_0) $$

where $\rho_i$ is the average density of the $i$th cell, $c_p$ its specific heat, $A_i$ the area, $T_i$ the bottom temperature and $T_0$ upper temperature.

Analysis of resources based on the lateral distribution of temperatures point to widespread occurrence of low temperature resources at depths of up to one kilometer. Resources associated with the Guarani aquifer at depths less than 2km are examples. Medium enthalpy resources occur at
depths of 3 to 5km. Such resources may be found in confined aquifers of Furnas and Ponta Grossa. High enthalpy resources, with temperatures higher than 150°C, are expected in the northwestern and central parts of the basin. The map of Figure 10 illustrates the distribution of total resource base. Resource base values higher than 5x10^11 J mostly in the central and northwestern segments of the basin.

9. Discussion and Conclusions

Unlike previous studies the results obtained in the present work have led to assessments of resources that incorporate not only borehole temperature and heat flow data but also available information on structure and physical properties of the crustal layers. There are indications that this procedure has led to improvements in our understanding of the spatial distribution of both low and high enthalpy geothermal resources in the Parana basin. In particular, it is now possible to understand better the relations between origin of surface manifestations of geothermal fluids and the resource base in geothermal areas. Another important point emerging from the results of the present work is that medium and high enthalpy resources occur mostly in the western parts while low enthalpy resources occur in the eastern parts.

10. Acknowledgments

The present work was carried out as part of Ph. D. Thesis of the first author. The second author is recipient of a postgraduate scholarship by CAPES. The project received partial funding from Research Foundation of the state of Rio de Janeiro – FAPERJ (Grant No. E-26/100.623/2007).

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