



www.dmg-home.de

German Mineralogical Society

EXCELLENCE AND DEFICITS



In June 2005 the German federal and state governments agreed to initiate an exciting new type of research funding, the so-called Excellence Initiative. The Excellence Initiative “aims to promote top-level research and improve the quality of German universities and research institutions, thereby making a significant contribution to strengthening science and research in Germany in the long term, improving

its international competitiveness and raising the profile of the top performers in academia and research.” International and national review panels became involved to select the very best researchers and to support

them with 1.9 billion Euros in the period 2006 to 2011. The most recent funding decisions were made in October 2007. Special research clusters, graduate schools, and “elite universities” were selected. Details and selected sites can be downloaded from www.dfg.de/forschungsfoerderung/koordinierte_programme/exzellenzinitiative/index.html.

This program will clearly strengthen German science and compensate for an earlier period of insufficient funding. It will also help universities to compete with well-equipped research centers, where researchers have essentially no teaching load. However, the new funds do not benefit all universities. Several universities have had to cut positions over a period of many years, and in some cases the smaller programs in Earth science were strongly affected or even closed down through consolidation. These universities now are at a disadvantage in competing for funds from the Excellence Initiative.

And what comes now? Recently the demand for specialists in the field of mineral deposits with a background in mineralogy, geology, geo-engineering, or related fields has risen tremendously, but in Germany the number of universities with such programs has decreased so strongly that the local demand is far from being satisfied. When I was recently in Chile talking to the chief executive officer of a major copper mine, he mentioned that European graduates in this field are basically nonexistent and that his company hires Canadian and Australian graduates, and even those candidates are more and more difficult to attract. Within the next ten years about 50% of the skilled employees in such positions will retire and a shortage of staff seems obvious. For our junior scientists this ballooning deficit is and will remain for a long time an “excellent” springboard into industry—again we talk about “excellence.”

Ulrich Bismayer

MEETING OF THE DMG PETROLOGY/PETROPHYSICS SECTION IN TÜBINGEN

This year’s traditional meeting of the DMG petrology/petrophysics section took place at the Institute for Geoscience in the picturesque town of Tübingen in southern Germany. It was well organized by Gregor Markl and Michael Marks with help from many other members of the Tübingen petrology group. The meeting began on Friday evening with a warm buffet, where the participants had the opportunity to discuss informally and exchange scientific and other news. The attraction of this meeting within the German petrology/petrophysics community was underlined by the presence of more than 60 participants from all over Germany, with travel times in excess of 8 hours being no obstacle for groups from Berlin, Potsdam, Kiel, and Bremen.

The scientific part of the meeting started on Saturday with the presentation of the invited speaker, Prof. Ron Frost from the University of Wyoming, U.S.A. Prof. Frost presented a talk entitled “Petrology of Serpentinization,” in which he provided an excellent overview of serpentinization processes. Prof. Frost emphasized the importance of low silica activities for the distinctive petrological and geochemical properties of serpentinites, such as the reducing conditions as evidenced by rare iron alloys, the presence of unusual minerals like hydrogarnet and jadeite, and the formation of calcic, high-pH fluids. Following on this theme, the subsequent contributions presented constraints on the phase relations in the system Fe-Ni-O-S during serpentinization and the formation and alteration of plagiogranites at mid-ocean ridges. The second part of the morning session focused on



Prof. Ron Frost conversing at the petrology/petrophysics meeting in Tübingen. PHOTO CREDIT: A. DORN

hydrothermal activity, including tectonic, magmatic, and experimental aspects, as well as on experimental work on ferropicicase and grain-boundary diffusion. The lunch break gave the participants an opportunity to venture out on a perfectly sunny day and get a brief glimpse of the half-timbered buildings of Tübingen’s old-town district.

The afternoon session covered a wide variety of petrological and petrophysical investigations. In the first part, subjects as diverse as CO₂ sequestration on a laboratory scale, experimental constraints on solubilities and partitioning behavior of trace elements in melts and aqueous solutions, and geochronological and field-based petrogenetic studies on mantle xenoliths and alkaline rocks were presented and discussed. In the second part, the importance of modeling in petrology was stressed by contributions on isotope fractionation during crystal growth and P-T paths. The session was completed by experimental work on rhyolites and

field-based studies on various metamorphic rocks. The different topics and the diverse analytical methods covered by the talks prompted the audience to look beyond their own interests and stimulated many to envisage new aspects or directions for their research.

Like previous section meetings, this one was no exception in providing an excellent opportunity for mostly young researchers to get together, present their work, and discuss scientific themes in a friendly and somewhat informal setting without the stress associated with big conferences. In particular, many PhD and diploma students contributed oral presentations. In addition, several posters were presented in the coffee lounge, stimulating further discussion. After the scientific part of the meeting, discussions continued in the backyard of the institute during a delicious barbecue that included beer and bratwurst, and some participants were not willing to stop talking science until the early hours of the next morning—indisputable evidence for the success of the meeting. The organizers are thanked for the great job they did, and the contributions by all participants were greatly appreciated. Last but not least, we acknowledge the financial support of the DMG that made the participation of Prof. Frost possible and provided travel grants to PhD and diploma students who presented their results at the meeting. Not surprisingly, the overwhelming mood at the end was anticipation for next year’s section meeting.

Ralf Halama
Universität Kiel