



Swiss Society of Mineralogy and Petrology

<http://ssmp.scnatweb.ch>

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Urs Schaltegger

Public outreach is one of the major concerns of the Swiss Society of Mineralogy and Petrology. Since our country hosts some of the most beautiful mineral occurrences in the world, we try to bring amateurs, students and children into contact with minerals and rocks, and teach them how our planet has evolved. This effort is increasingly important since Earth sciences are not taught at the high school level and Swiss universities are suffering a steady decrease in the number of Earth science students.

This news section reports on two new public outreach initiatives in Switzerland, which are of very different type and character. The Swiss geoscience community acknowledges the efforts of numerous members of our society who have been involved in the planning and execution of these exhibitions.

FocusTerra

The Department of Earth Sciences at ETH Zürich has opened a new museum in the renovated Earth Sciences building, close to the centre of the town of Zürich. It is designed as a research and information centre and is located in a futuristic, tower-like construction in the central hall of the Earth Sciences building at Sonneggstrasse 5.

The contents of the new "FocusTerra" exhibition are centered around the core disciplines of the Earth sciences. The themes include the formation of our planetary system, the structure and movements in the Earth's interior, and the geological processes at its surface. Selected specimens of the renowned collections of alpine minerals at the ETH are displayed, along with experiments and other dynamic exhibits, such as an earthquake monitoring screen that displays earthquake recordings of the Swiss Seismological Service in real time. The museum also includes a scaled, topographic and geological model of a deep section across the Alps of eastern Switzerland. This exhibit is five metres long and serves to illustrate mountain-building processes. A series of landscape models explain the history and morphological evolution of the region around the town of Zürich. One of the mineralogical highlights is a beautiful and large alpine crystal group of smoky quartz from the Furka region of central Switzerland (see photo). The specimen was collected in 1946 but was only recently acquired for the ETH museum. An exhibit is also dedicated to explaining how mineral resources form and why they are relevant to daily life. Burning issues such as climate change, geologic hazards, the use of energy, the role of the geosciences in tunnel construction and the disposal of hazardous waste are discussed. The wide use of media stations allows new research results to be added continually.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSANA BRUELL, HERRENSCHWANDEN

The new museum is the **prime element** for public outreach of the Department of Earth Sciences. It is designed to attract the attention of both schools and students as well as interested adults and specialists. Additional information, including the location and opening hours, can be found at www.focusterra.ethz.ch.

Basecamp09

The International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE), as proclaimed by the United Nations during its 60th General Assembly, is a three year event running from 2007 through 2009. It is aimed at promoting the sustainable development of human society using knowledge and information provided by the geosciences. Swiss scientists have identified six out of the ten themes of the Science Program of the IYPE, which represent major questions of national interest: Hazards, Earth & Health, Climate, Resources, Deep Earth and Earth & Life.

The "Science & Cité" Foundation and the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT) jointly organized a festival called Basecamp09. The festival presents outreach activities aimed at generating interest and improved awareness among the general public, decision makers and politicians of the wealth of information widely available from the Earth science community. Basecamp09 is an itinerant festival that takes place in six localities in Switzerland: Zürich, Lugano, Chur, Geneva, Neuchâtel and Bern. The festival consists of a national program, supplemented by a regional program specific for each of the six localities. Background information for each of the six themes prepared by Swiss Earth scientists is provided, along with interactive tools, talks, discussion rounds and geological field trips in each region.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELIAS SAMANKASSOU, GENEVA

The Basecamp09 festival ran successfully in Zürich on May 1–10 and in Lugano on May 22–30, confirming the interest of society in the themes of the IYPE. Basecamp09 clearly shows that the selected topics and the concept of the festival meet the interests of the public at large. For more information, please visit the homepage www.basecamp09.ch/.

7TH SWISS GEOSCIENCE MEETING "Water across Boundaries"

November 20 and 21, 2009 – University of Neuchâtel
<http://geoscience-meeting.scnatweb.ch/>

Note that the date of the 7th Swiss Geoscience Meeting given in our news section in the February issue of *Elements* has changed!