THE ROAD TO DAVOS – GOLDSCHMIDT 2009
CONFERENCE REPORT

With over 3100 abstracts submitted and more than 2800 registered
delegates (28% students), the meeting at Davos in June 2009 was the
biggest Goldschmidt Conference to date. The top ten countries in terms
of delegates were the United States (578), Germany (338), the UK (265),
Switzerland (232), France (223), the People’s Republic of China (157),
Japan (140), Australia (78), Russia (75) and Canada (69). Just over half
of all delegates were from Europe. The success of a meeting cannot be
and isn’t judged by its size, but by the quality of the science presented
and the environment for meeting colleagues and friends. As an organ-
izer it is easy to get a distorted view of how well a meeting has worked.
That is why we thank all the delegates, just under 15%, who took the
time to fill in the post-conference questionnaire; they provided an
essential reality check and very important feedback. With respect to
overall satisfaction for the meeting, 55% judged it as good and 40% as
very good. Forty percent of delegates ranked the science content as
good and 60% as excellent. Goldschmidt has never had feedback in
this form before. With the community’s help, the organizers now have
a base from which to improve meetings and to assess whether future
meetings are reaching the high standard expected.

Past European meetings have been organised by a single institute or a
local consortium of institutes, and without exception they have been
great successes. Davos 2009 is the first Goldschmidt meeting to be organised
directly by the European Association for Geochemistry (EAG). The
motivation for organisation by the EAG was the increasing size of the
meeting. The infrastructure and time commitment required to run an
expanding Goldschmidt means that it is becoming increasingly harder
to find European institutes or local consortia willing to take on and
effectively subsidise future meetings. Goldschmidt is a meeting that
has become so important for geochemistry that it is both unwise and
unfair to have its future success or failure rest solely on one institute’s
shoulders. With EAG involvement in the organisational process of
European Goldschmidt Conferences, an infrastructure has been created
that removes the burden from local organizers and provides a stronger
base for institutional memory and continuity for future meetings.

As the site of the successful 2002 Goldschmidt meeting, Davos was an
obvious candidate for a return visit. The principal convenors were the
organising committee chairman, Chris Ballentine; the local convenor,
Judith McKenzie (ETH Zurich); and EAG vice-president/president, Eric
Oelkers. The committee chairman was responsible for forming the sci-
cence committee. The convenors were aided by an organising committee
that included the then EAG president, Alex Halliday; EAG secretary
Susan Stipp (later Steve Banwart); and EAG treasurer, Catherine Chauvel
(later Christa Gopel). The administration of the conference was run
by Cambridge Publications, which also had a role on the organising
committee (Paul Beattie). It was very important to form a European rather
than a national core science team, and we were very pleased when
Philippe Van Capellen (University of Utrecht) and Janet Hering (EAWAG)
joined the science committee to complete the full Goldschmidt 2009
organising committee. The committee first met in Davos in May 2007.

From the outset we wanted to involve many top geochemists from
around the world in constructing the scientific program. The convenors
identified 19 science themes and potential chairs who, along with the
co-chairs of their choosing, were to put together a team to identify the
key theme topics that would form the conference sessions. This inter-
national science panel was 149 strong (30% women), the largest ever.
The sessions proposed initially were checked by the Goldschmidt 2009
science committee for consistency and possible overlap, and 107
approved sessions were advertised shortly before the Vancouver
Goldschmidt meeting in 2008. An open call to the community brought
in a further 20 sessions. From comparisons with other meetings, we
predicted an attendance of 2300–2500 (Fig. 1)

The Conference

The 22 February 2009 abstract submission deadline, we had received
3099 abstracts for the meeting. We hired four extra speaker rooms in
a nearby hotel and made the hard, but essential, decision to reduce
congestion by running the posters in parallel with the oral sessions.
Light food, lunch bags and beer throughout the afternoon, only avail-
able in the poster hall, helped bring in delegates to view the posters,
which were also on display during lunch and after the oral sessions
had closed in the afternoon. On Monday and Tuesday, throughout the
day there were between 400 and 550 delegates continually in the poster
hall. By Thursday, numbers during the day had dropped but they
increased during lunch and in the evening. While most delegates would
clearly have preferred oral and poster sessions not be scheduled in
parallel and, even better, be held in the same building, we were never-
theless pleased to see that the overall conference satisfaction rating
by the poster presenters was the same as the average.

Workshops, Field Trips and Social Events

A total of 270 delegates took part in a range of field trips before and
after the conference. Three one-day trips, two three-day trips and one
two-day trip were held. All field trips reached the minimum number
of participants required, with the three-day trip to the Damma Glacier
at capacity. The field trips were led by volunteers from institutes across
Switzerland, but some leaders came from as far afield as Torino and
Copenhagen. Feedback from participants was excellent, despite some
adverse weather. In addition to the field trips, five workshops ran in
conjunction with Goldschmidt, three on site, one in Zurich and the
other in Nancy, France (with a Nancy–Davos shuttle provided). The
Thermodynamics and Kinetics MSA short course was at capacity (125
delegates). The organizing committee would like to echo the partici-
pants in thanking all the field trip and workshop organizers for their
hard work in making these events such a success.
The well-attended Sunday icebreaker featured live music provided by Double Scotch, a band of geochemists from CRPG, Nancy, whose rock covers were particularly popular with younger delegates. The conference dinner on Wednesday was attended by 1120 people and held in Davos' Valliant Arena, the ice stadium also used for the poster displays. The catering company provided an outstanding selection of Swiss local specialities, in volumes sufficient to satisfy the hungriest. Live Brazilian jazz music and a DJ got many on their feet, resulting in a stage full of dancing bodies that only cleared when the music stopped at 1 am. Other social events were also popular, with alpine views, high dining and a sell-out glacier restaurant train attracting 370 delegates to three smaller events.

Dancing at the conference dinner takes over the stage.

**Pens, Bags and Organisation**

We followed the footsteps of other Goldschmidt meetings on innovations that worked well. Instead of thick paper volumes, reusable pen drives (memory sticks) containing the conference abstracts were issued, conference programmes were pocket sized and paper handouts were discouraged. With so little conference material to carry, we decided to make conference bags optional, and only 402 of a potential 2800 bags were ordered.

Cambridge Publications provided the Internet infrastructure and support office that administered the science program construction; the liaison with exhibitors; abstract submission; registration for the conference, field trips, social events and workshops; help desk; and much more. Previous Goldschmidt organisers have all praised Paul Beattie's team for the quality and good value of their product. EAG and the Goldschmidt 2009 organising committee had an equally good experience with the service, as did delegates and session chairpersons, and their raw data. Cambridge Publications not only made conference bags optional, but also recruited nine scientists to provide a Goldschmidt blogger forum – a direct form of feedback guaranteed to be read by all on the organising committee as well as by a wider audience. Doing this was no small time commitment. Judging by the blogs, everyone seemed to enjoy the process and the conference (see inset) as much as the committee and others enjoyed following the blog content. In addition to the conference bloggers, 38 BSc, MSc and early-PhD Earth science students recruited from Switzerland and southern Germany formed the core of the conference support staff. The students worked diligently at the registration desk and later with the session chairpersons, and their raw energy and infectious enthusiasm lasted the entire week; Georgi Laukert, who looked after the conference photography, deserves a special mention. Our thanks to you all.

On behalf of the Goldschmidt 2009 Organising Committee,

Chris Ballentine, Chair

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**THE GEOCHEMICAL SOCIETY’S GOLDSCHMIDT CONFERENCE BLOG**

Nine people covered the whole event giving their views and thoughts about the meeting and spreading news, information, debates and lots of nice geochemistry 'chit-chat'. If there is one useful application of blogs, it’s following a conference like Goldschmidt in almost real-time. Why? Because in my opinion the bloggers were taking the essence of the event, bringing its 'spirit' to the general public, to those who could not attend it and even to the participants who contributed with talks and posters. This spirit that we transmitted was made of ‘take-home messages’ from participants, discussions, chats and interactions during coffee breaks, lunch or dinner-time. In other words, it is made of what we remember when we come back home after enjoying great science.

Juan Diego Rodriguez Blanco

Blogger, University of Leeds

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**Bloggers and Student Support Staff**

The future of geochemistry lies in the gifted students whom our subject can attract and retain. We have to provide a stimulating conference environment for younger scientists, and feedback from students and early-career scientists is essential. The Geochemical Society, in addition to administering the student and developing-country grants, also recruited nine scientists to provide a Goldschmidt blogger forum – a direct form of feedback guaranteed to be read by all on the organising committee as well as by a wider audience. Doing this was no small time commitment. Judging by the blogs, everyone seemed to enjoy the process and the conference (see inset) as much as the committee and others enjoyed following the blog content. In addition to the conference bloggers, 38 BSc, MSc and early-PhD Earth science students recruited from Switzerland and southern Germany formed the core of the conference support staff. The students worked diligently at the registration desk and later with the session chairpersons, and their raw energy and infectious enthusiasm lasted the entire week; Georgi Laukert, who looked after the conference photography, deserves a special mention. Our thanks to you all.

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