

Goldschmidt 2010 Knoxville, Tennessee June 13–18, 2010



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More than 2000 delegates gathered in Knoxville, Tennessee, to attend Goldschmidt 2010, the 20th Goldschmidt Conference. The Knoxville tourist brochure states that the city has “175,000+ tour guides, also known as Knoxville residents,” and indeed everyone I met seemed very proud of their city and went out of

his/her way to make attendees feel welcome. There is also something to be said for holding a meeting in a relatively small city: once you get there, the focus becomes the meeting as there are fewer distractions to pull you away from the talks.

The brand-new Knoxville Conference Center was the perfect venue for the meeting. As all events were under one roof, it was easy to navigate from session to session, to meetings, to plenaries, and to posters. As we have come to expect from a Goldschmidt Conference, the technical program was exciting and covered the whole gamut of the Earth sciences, under 22 themes and with 15 concurrent sessions. And of course, for every time slot during the week, there were difficult choices to make. An interesting point was made by Mike Hochella, coorganizer (with Frank von der Kammer) of theme 17, “Nano-Geo and -Environmental Science: A New Frontier”: 10 years ago, there were 4 talks on nanogeoscience, while at this conference, there were 120 and the “nano” sessions ran for the whole week. Thursday featured a special session highlighting *Elements'* fifth anniversary. Mike Hochella and Bruce Watson, past principal editors, chose the theme “Geochemistry Far from Equilibrium.”

The traditional Sunday-night icebreaker was well attended. It set the tone for the imaginative southern cuisine we were going to sample through the week (how about mashed potatoes with toppings served in a martini glass!). The live bluegrass music provided a good background for conversation and catching up with friends.

Each day started with a plenary lecture. All were well attended, with lots of young people sitting on the floor at the edges of the room. At the opening ceremony on Monday morning, Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander made a strong case for nuclear power as the energy of the future. He reviewed all the energy sources in terms of the land used to produce it—an interesting concept. For example, the land occupied by one nuclear plant producing enough power for 90,000 homes is one square mile. To produce the same amount of energy, solar power would require 15 square miles, petroleum 18. Eric Oelkers, president of the European Association of Geochemistry, followed with the first plenary, “How Can Geochemistry Save the World?” Our dwindling resources in the face of the increased consumption of nearly all metals are one of the many challenges faced by humanity. He stressed that our community needs to explain both the risks and the scientific solutions to major global challenges. John Parise (“Opportunities at Light Source and Neutron Facilities”), Don De Paolo (“Carbon Sequestration Geochemistry”), Sue Brantley (“Bedrock to Soil: Where Rocks Meet Life in the Critical Zone”), and Jérôme Chappellaz (“Greenhouse Gases and their Isotopes in Firn Air and Ice Cores”) were the plenary speakers on the other days of the week. These plenary talks are all available at www.goldschmidt2010.org.

The return of a poster session time slot with no concurrent sessions is to be applauded. Moreover, the posters, hosted in the exhibit hall in proximity to the exhibitors, stayed up for the full day, compared to the half-days of last year. Many of the exhibitors return year after year, a sure



From left to right, Barb Dutrow, Alex Navrotsky, Lee Penn, and Dana Medalist Jill Banfield. The Dana Medal presentation was made during session 17a – “Nanoparticles Important to the Environment: Structure, Reactivity, Analysis.”



Late afternoon snacks in the exhibit hall

sign of their commitment to our community: Thermo Fisher Scientific, Cameca, Australian Scientific Instruments, Cambridge University Press, Springer, Nu Instruments, IsotopX, Saville Corporation, Wiley-Blackwell, to name a few.

Another highlight was the Wednesday afternoon panel discussion on the theme “Energy & Environment.” Panelists included Sally Benson, Director of the Global Climate and Energy Project at Stanford University; Linda Gundersen, Acting Associate Director for Geology at the U.S. Geological Survey; Adam J. Rondinone, Legislative Fellow in Senator Lamar Alexander’s office; and Sherri Stuewer, Vice President for Environmental Policy and Planning at ExxonMobil. Unfortunately, Wednesday afternoon is traditionally the half-day break in the conference, and the excellence of the presentations deserved a full house: perhaps this event should be moved to a prime-time spot in future conferences. I found the presentation by Rondinone fascinating. The problem according to him is not understanding climate change, but agreeing on a solution. In a public opinion poll, people listed the economy and jobs as the top two issues of concern, while climate change was thirtieth and last on the list... and politicians respond to the concerns of the public. An increasingly large part of the public also thinks that the threat of global change is exaggerated. These presentations are all available at www.goldschmidt2010.org.

The tour of the Spallation Neutron Source and the field trips to Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Trans-Blue Ridge were all filled to capacity, so you were out of luck if you had not booked early. A preconference Quality Assurance workshop run by the International Association of Geoanalysts and a Teaching Geochemistry workshop were also offered to participants.

As Rod Ewing alluded to in his Triple Point column, “Is Geochemistry Important?” (*Elements* 5: 205), the Goldschmidt Conference seems to have tapped into the fountain of youth. This was also the case this year, with 554 students in attendance, making up 25% of the participants.

The meeting ran smoothly, and the level of satisfaction was high. To organize such a large meeting requires an extraordinary amount of dedication and hard work. Kudos go to the organizers, Ted Labotka (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), Dave Cole (Oak Ridge National Laboratory), and Hap McSween (University of Tennessee, Knoxville); to the University of Tennessee Conferences and Cambridge Publications teams; and to the army of dedicated, ever-smiling volunteers (see also page 256).

For that one week, Knoxville was no doubt the geochemistry-mineralogy-petrology capital of the world. Next year, it will be Prague! See you all there!

Pierrette Tremblay, Managing Editor, *Elements*