

CONFERENCE ON CARBONATITES AND ASSOCIATED ALKALINE ROCKS OF TAMIL NADU

Carbonatites are a rare group of igneous rocks of mantle origin and are well known for their LREE and Nb resources. In fact, production in single deposits like the Bayan Obo in China (LREE) and Araxa in Brazil (Niobium) control the entire world market for these metals. The present conference in Southern India almost after 2½ decades, organized by the Department of Geology, University of Madras, Guindy Campus, Chennai between 12 and 18 February, 2001 is most welcome and timely. The conference notably evaluated the present status of carbonatites and associated alkaline rocks of northern Tamil Nadu, besides new work on other complexes from India, China, Mexico, Czech Republic and Sri Lanka. It also provided an opportunity for delegates to participate in the field trip and visit some of the well known carbonatite and/or syenite complexes of Tamil Nadu, such as Sevattur, Samalpatti, Elagiri and Pakkanadu. The conference was inaugurated by Sripathi, Chairman, TAMIN. Viladkar of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, who was the Chairman of the Organising Committee, gave a brief account of the genesis of the conference. V. Ram Mohan, Department of Geology, Madras University was the co-ordinator of the symposium. Viladkar, R.N. Dey, V. Subramanian spoke at the inaugural session. Twenty

papers were presented in the conference divided into six sessions.

The main topics covered by the seminar include geology, geochemistry and airborne and ground geophysics of the carbonatite complexes of Tamil Nadu, including the alkaline carbonatites, shonkinites and lamprophyres; integrated exploration involving satellite imagery, regional geochemistry and airborne geophysics; collaborative research between Japanese, Indian and Russian teams on the carbonatites of India and Russia; carbonatite breccia from China, Eppawala carbonatites of Sri Lanka, alkaline volcanism in Mexico, alkaline carbonatites of Bohemian massif, felspathoidal plutons of Prakasam alkaline province and nephelinites of Ambadongar; nitrogen as tracer to the carbonatitic magma source; and secular variation in the carbonatites of Tamil Nadu and Southern Asia.

It was emphasized that carbonatite research in India and notably in Tamil Nadu should be intensified considering the economic potential of these complexes for rare metals and rare elements.

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NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON TEACHER EDUCATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL MAGNETISM

Environmental magnetism is an important and up-coming discipline that has developed considerably during the past two decades. It has been gainfully used in placer mineral exploration; understanding past climatic changes; surface processes; sediment movement in harbours and beaches; river-bed sediment transport; environmental pollution; and impact of anthropogenic activities. Environmental magnetic methods are simple, rapid, inexpensive and non-destructive. Because of these merits, frontline research and developmental work in environmental magnetism has been carried out elsewhere in the world. However, efforts to use environmental magnetic techniques in India are limited, probably because scientists are not fully aware of this fascinating discipline.

The Ocean Science and Technology Cell (OSTC), in collaboration with Association of British Scholars, Mangalore Centre, organized the first "Workshop on Environmental Magnetism" for ten days from 9th to 18th February 2001. About 13 teachers from different universities/colleges participated in the workshop, which was inaugurated by B.L.K. Somayajulu and presided over by S. Gopal, Vice-Chancellor, Mangalore University.

The workshop was conducted by Prof. F. Oldfield who is a pioneer in environmental magnetism. In the morning session, he delivered lectures on the principles of environmental magnetism and its application in earth, atmospheric and ocean sciences, with case histories.

He also introduced the basic instruments that are used in environmental magnetic studies. A brief account was also given of sample collection, preservation and storage procedures. K.B. Vijaya Kumar and R. Shankar also gave lectures on the central theme. The afternoon sessions were devoted to laboratory work where hands-on experience was provided to participants.

The publication titled "Environmental Magnetism: A

Practical Guide" by J. Walden, F. Oldfield and J. Smith formed the valuable course material.

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WORKSHOP ON LIFE

The interdisciplinary "Workshop on Life" was one of the scientific meetings before the Millennium World Meeting of University Professors in Rome. It was held on September 3-8, 2000 at Modena, Italy and organized by the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, the Accademia Nazionale di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, the (Italian) Ministry of Universities (MURST) and National Research Council (CNR).

The workshop consisted of 23 keynote lectures, 42 short communications and two round table discussions, carrying many of the exciting scientific, philosophical, moral and religious aspects of life on the earth or even its possibilities elsewhere in the universe. 91 participants from 25 countries delivered lectures.

The participants represented a wide variety of scientific expertise, ranging from sub-molecular aspects of biomolecules and the fundamental physical features of chirality (the inherent molecular asymmetry of most life-forming molecules), to instrumentation problems of searching for life on other planets like Mars and Europa (Jupiter's satellite) to social, religious and moral concerns.

Deep interrelations between the definition, origin(s) and social-moral-religious values of life have been evaluated and analysed. The lectures and discussions contributed significantly to get a clear picture of possible definition of life, to mathematical and chemical description of minimal models for living systems, as well as limits and development of molecularly coded information required for life.

One of the highlights of the workshop was the lecture by C. de Duve (Bruxelles) analyzing the current model of prebiological and early evolution.

Most of the philosophical contributions were dedicated to comparison between the religious and scientific visions of life. Many representatives of various religions were present. All the talks have tried to put in evidence for continuity between the two different approaches to knowledge.

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NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON COMPUTER APPLICATIONS IN MINERAL EXPLORATION, MINING AND WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

A two-day national workshop was organized jointly by the South Asian Association of Economic Geologists (SAAEG, India Region) and the Government Engineering College at Raipur on 23rd and 24th March, 2001. The workshop was inaugurated by Satyanarayan Sharma, Minister of Education, Chhattisgarh State who exhorted the scientists and technocrats to develop a practical work plan

for eradication of poverty by employing modern technology for exploration of our rich mineral resources. R.C. Jain pleaded for optimal use of computers in planning and programming the technological education in the State. K.L. Rai was the convener of the workshop. S.K. Sarkar in the valedictory address hoped that the geoscientists shall optimally utilize computer techniques to ensure proper