

It's 126 years old, but it doesn't look it: The 32nd International Geological Congress

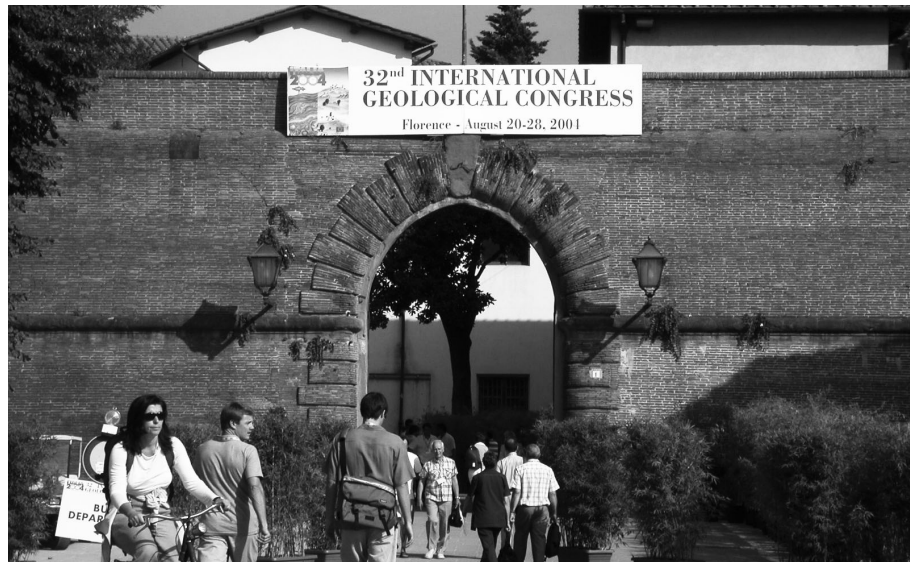
Florence, Italy, August 20–28, 2004

While attendance at previous IGC's was remarkable, the more than 7,000 earth scientists, exhibitors and guests who met in Florence for the 32nd International Geological Congress set an all-time record as the highest number of participants. They came from 120 countries and 75% were not Italian. This proportion of foreign attendees was the largest ever; in line with a trend of increasing non-local participation, it testifies to the vitality and international character of the IGCs.

Countries with highest attendance, in addition to 1,900 Italians, were the USA (675), Russia (537), China (486) and Japan (346). Various institutions (the European Commission, UNESCO, the IUGS, the Hutchison Fund) together with the 32nd IGC Organizing Committee provided the highest funding for the GeoHost program which gave more than 600 participants from 90 countries assistance with air fares, accommodations and/or waiver of registration fees.

Italian national and regional authorities, together with the Organizing Committee and the IUGS and UNESCO representatives, were particularly happy to welcome the Minister of Land and Resources of China, the Minister of Energy and Mines of Morocco, the Minister of Natural Resources of Russia and the representative of the European Commission, all of whom, addressing audiences at the official ceremonies, stressed the importance of the Geosciences for mankind.

The Congress venue was a sixteenth century Renaissance fortress in the heart of Florence, close to famous museums and buildings. In this ancient structure, converted into a versatile Convention Center, 3,500 oral and 4,650 poster presentations were given. They discussed the issues suggested by the Congress motto: "From the Mediter-



The Fortress entrance to the Congress Center.



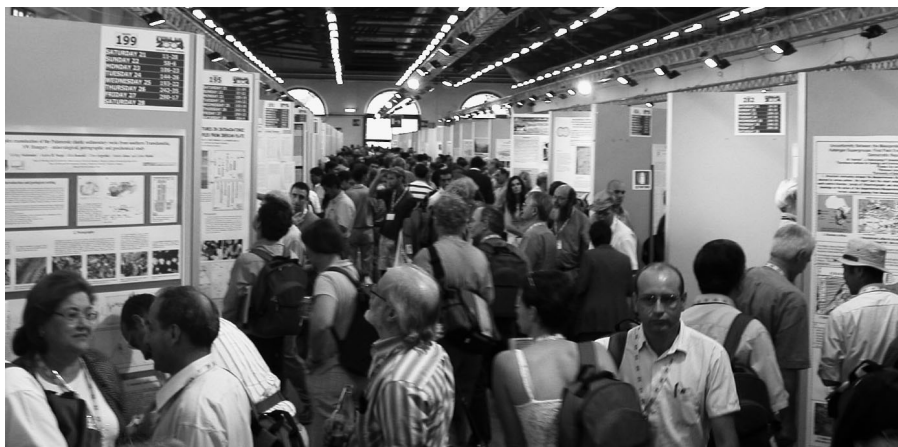
Authorities and 32nd IGC organizers at the Opening Ceremony.

anean area toward a global geological renaissance—geology, natural hazards, and cultural heritage”.

The general framework and the details of the scientific program had been established by the Scientific Program Committee

in cooperation with the Commissions of the IUGS, which is the scientific sponsor of the IGC, the Mediterranean Consortium, representing countries of the Mediterranean area and those nearby, and individual proposals. The resulting format of the scientific program consisted of 7 Plenary Lectures, 14 Special Symposia, 38 Topical Symposia, 24 General Symposia, 26 Workshops and Short Courses, and 29 Field Trips.

One of the concepts which ran through the scientific contents of the 32nd IGC was that implementing research in fundamental Geosciences enhances their applications to societal needs. Adhesion to this principle can be found in the subjects covered by the Plenary Lectures; these included the role of volatiles in the mantle, the stability of the leaning tower of Pisa, the differences and similarities between Mars and Earth, the volcanic hazards in densely populated areas, the perspectives of offshore oil and gas exploitation, geological aspects of the conservation of a cultural heritage and future scenarios induced by global warming.



A Poster Session in progress.



Ribbon cut for GeoExpo.

The extensive use of telematic innovations was one of the remarkable features of the 32nd IGC scientific organization. The huge number of contributions (more than 9,000) were handled through online submissions enabling editing until the final version. The electronic evaluation of abstracts was made by conveners who, through individual mail accounts in the Congress web page, gave electronic notice of abstract acceptance. For the first time in an IGC, oral presentations were managed through a local area network and a computerized slide center, which enabled PowerPoint presentations to be made in 40 rooms contemporaneously.

Along with the scientific program, 90 business meetings of scientific institutions, societies and special groups provided for the spread of information, the coordination of current research activities and the promotion of new projects. During an IUGS Council meeting Zhang Hongren (China) and Peter Bobrowsky (Canada) were designated as the new IUGS President and Secretary General, respectively.

The IGC Council and the General Assembly meetings were particularly relevant to the organization of future IGCs, since the abolition of the General Assembly and the integration of the IGC and IUGS Councils were ratified.

During official ceremonies awards were presented to distinguished geoscientists. Carlo Doglioni, "La Sapienza" Rome University, was the first Italian recipient of the Spondiarov Prize established by the Russian Academy of Sciences more than a century ago. The Q.Sella Prize for an outstanding scientist in the field of geological mapping was awarded to Harald G.Dill, Federal Institute of Geosciences and Natural Resources, Germany. The Digby McLaren Medal and the ICS Medal, both newly established by the International Com-



Participants entering Palazzo Pitti for the Get-Together party.

mission on Stratigraphy, were awarded to Jan Hardenbol, USA, and Stephen Hesselbo, University of Oxford, UK. The 32nd IGC Special Medals were awarded to the hydrogeologist Costantino Faillace for a career distinguished by professional and human achievements and to Viktor Efimovich Khain for his major contributions to Geotectonics.

Twenty nine field trips were conducted before, during and after the Congress with visits to geologically and culturally interesting sites in Italy and Mediterranean countries. The Prestige Field Trip took fifteen enthusiastic participants on top of the world across the Central Asia ranges from the Indian Plate to Karakorum and Eastern Hindu Kush. Confirming a trend revealed by previous IGCs, field trip registrations lagged behind what had been foreseen. Out of the initial number of field trips offered, only a third were actually conducted. Although expectations were scaled back, the diligent and cooperative responses of the field trip leaders allowed the publication of six volumes, including the guidebooks of all the field trips initially planned. A CD with this most lasting product of the 32nd IGC Congress can be obtained upon request from guerrieri@apat.it.

A scene of lively and crowded attraction in the Congress venue was the GeoExpo with exhibiting entities from 21 countries. Besides scientific institutions and Geoscience-related industries, governmental agencies were numerous and particularly active in reporting what they are currently doing about environmental problems.

"32nd IGC INFORMS", a Congress newspaper aiming to communicate effectively with participants as had the one first launched at the 28th IGC in Washington, D.C., was available by 8 a.m. each day at the Congress center entrance. Together with interviews and program variations, it provided the means by which attendees were advised of major special events during the Congress. Such highlights included the First International Earth Science Film-Festival, the

International Conference on Development and Prospects of Professional Geology in the World sponsored by the Italian National Council of Geologists, the unveiling of a plaque in memory of Steno, a seventeenth century founder of modern geology, the approaching launch of the project for 2006 as the International Year of Planet Earth and the exhibition of ancient geological maps.

For the host country as well as for other attending countries each International Congress is an occasion to produce special publications for an international audience. A vast range of new printed volumes, maps, and CDs were presented in the GeoExpo booths and some of them were in the Congress bag. Regional and continental geological maps and explanatory notes, essays on the historical aspects of the geological sciences, atlases of seismic profiles across the Italian region and the Mediterranean, special issues on petrography and mineralogy and paleoclimatic maps were among the scientific materials collected and updated for the 32nd IGC.

In the closing ceremony the Florence Congress left a legacy to the Geoscience community with the document "Strategic vision for the Earth Sciences" (for the entire text, see *Episodes*, this issue). It stresses the importance of redefining the position of the Earth Sciences in the face of changing societal needs and suggests some key issues for future action. To what extent these objectives are being achieved will be a test and a challenge for the next IGCs in the Nordic countries (Oslo 2008) and Australia (Brisbane 2012).

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