
KIMBERLITE CONFERENCES

PEOPLE are sometimes perplexed on discovering that Kimberlite Conferences have no perpetuating, formal organization. There is no international Council that oversees plans for field trips or establishes the format for meetings. There is no election or appointment of Convenors. Kimberlite Conferences are arranged entirely outside the protocol of IUGG or IUGS. There is not even a committee that decides when and where a Kimberlite Conference shall be held!

This remarkable informality is not inefficient; in fact, it provides invaluable flexibility to Conference arrangements. Scientific discussions can be set up in whatever manner seems most likely to provide the best communication. Field trips of great diversity and complexity can be arranged by involving any needed persons, regardless of affiliation. The informality does, however, put a heavy load on those who design and manage the local arrangements. Organizing a Kimberlite Conference is a challenging job!

THE petrological and geochemical research presented at Kimberlite Conferences grows continually more sophisticated and our knowledge of kimberlite eruptions and the petrologic structure of the upper mantle

grows steadily more complete. The question of whether or not garnet peridotite inclusions in kimberlites are cognate was still open at the time of the Cape Town Conference. Today the coarse peridotites are generally accepted to be xenoliths and petrologists have increasing confidence in estimates of their depths and temperatures of equilibration. Striking deformation textures exhibited by some peridotite xenoliths are now understood to have developed during the initial stages of eruption. Also the lithologic complexity of the real mantle – in contrast to model mantles – is much better appreciated.

MUCH emphasis has been placed on field trips associated with Kimberlite Conferences because of the collecting opportunities they afford and because discussion among geologists is often much better on outcrop or in camp than it is in formal meeting rooms. After the Cape Town Conference a group of eighty participants ventured up the precipitous Moteng pass into the Lesotho highlands. Melting snow turned the tracks into quagmires. Nevertheless, the group visited such remote kimberlites as Thaba Putsoa, Matso-ku and Kao. All Landrovers were returned safely to Maseru and

only one geologist was lost (temporarily)!

During the Navajo trip preceding the Santa Fe Conference the group ran the San Juan canyon in rafts to visit the Mule Ear diatrema. A drought reduced the river to puddles but the Bureau of Reclamation was persuaded to open the Navajo dam, upstream from the diatrema.

Unfortunately, the anticipated flood arrived a day late and participants were forced to do much wading and dragging of rafts and equipment. Incredibly, this disaster turned into a race and delegates arrived at Mule Ear convulsed with laughter.

THE above will suggest that Kimberlite Conferences require a certain amount of fortitude. They do, but those fortunate to have come to Clermont Ferrand and to have participated in the Moho and Volcano field trips will have been richly rewarded. We have learned much but many questions remain in this exciting science. Perhaps we will soon more fully understand the circumstances under which diamonds crystallize and the tectonic events that lead to kimberlite eruptions.

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