

International Geological Congress Meeting in England

Reported by Ian Campbell

GREAT BRITAIN was the scene of the eighteenth session of the International Geological Congress this past summer and this was the first meeting of the Congress since the war. It was in every way a pronounced success—a deserving tribute to those who planned and carried through the arrangements despite the difficulties that postwar conditions imposed.

The International Geological Congress was founded at a convention in Paris in 1878. Meetings are held ordinarily every three to four years, with the government geological surveys of various nations serving as hosts. The sixteenth session was held in the United States in 1933, the seventeenth in Russia in 1937, and the eighteenth had been scheduled for Great Britain in 1940. The war forced an eight-year postponement.

V. V. Belousov, chairman of the USSR delegation, opened the 1948 meetings. H. H. Read, president of the Geological Society of London, was elected president of the eighteenth session of the International Congress and will hold office until the opening of the nineteenth session which has been scheduled for Algeria in 1952.

Over 2000 registered at the Congress making it the largest assembly of geologists ever recorded. Almost every country in the world sent one or more delegates, and nearly every professional, educational, and research organization in the field of geology had representatives present. Nearly 400 papers were presented during the seven days of the official program in London. These were organized into several sections, some of which took the form of symposia, as follows: problems of geochemistry; metasomatic processes in metamorphism; rhythm in sedimentation; geological results of applied geo-

physics; geology of petroleum; geology, paragenesis, and reserves of the ores of lead and zinc; geology of sea and ocean floors; pliocene-pleistocene boundary; faunal and floral facies and zonal correlation; correlation of continental vertebrate-bearing rocks; earth movements and organic evolution; and mineralogy and geology of clays.

A rich intellectual fare was provided and "granitization," "alkaline rocks," "ore zones," "hydrothermal deposition," "stratigraphic boundaries," etc., are still "fighting words," and, as eleven years had elapsed since there had been opportunity to review these problems on an international scale, the discussions that developed were correspondingly enthusiastic and stimulating. The mining fraternity will be glad to know that the papers presented at the symposium on lead and zinc are already published and available in a single volume. Other papers will appear in the volumes of the "Congress Proceedings" to be issued later.

The general assemblies were held in Royal Albert Hall; section meetings were dispersed among the lecture halls of the Geological Survey and Museum, the Imperial College of Science, and the Royal Geographical Society. Notable features of the meetings which provided additional opportunity for enlarging the acquaintance of the participants were the evening receptions given by His Majesty's Government at Lancaster House, by the Geological Society of London at Burlington House, by the Institute of Petroleum at Manson House, and by the University of London. If truth be told, some American delegates went across with some misgivings as to what the rumored restrictions in the British diet might do to the well-filled waistline. But nowhere was there cause for complaint.

Provisions (in both the literal and the more general sense of the word) were more than adequate. We came away hoping only that our hosts had not been over-generous in ensuring that their guests suffered no lacks.

Field excursions have always been one of the most attractive components of the International Congresses, providing as they do an opportunity for the host country to exhibit to its visitors the more interesting and instructive phases of its local geology. The organizers of this session arranged a wealth of such excursions, ranging from half-day walking trips to study the stones of London's buildings to fortnight-long conducted bus and rail trips offering such diverse choices as the mineral deposits of Cornwall, the stratigraphy and vertebrate paleontology of the Old Red Sandstone in north-eastern Scotland, or cauldron subsidence and other volcanic phenomena in the West Highlands. The one-day and shorter trips were interspersed with the regular program of papers; the longer excursions were arranged to precede and to follow the London program. It was on these excursions, where groups were restricted to twenty or thirty people, that perhaps most geology was learned, discussions proved most stimulating, and the most enduring international friendships and understandings were developed and cemented.

The accomplishments of such a Congress, although not difficult to assess, are difficult to express, for things intangible so far outweigh things tangible. That the Congress was a huge success is agreed by all. And, speaking for the participants from the AIME, I once again salute our British hosts and thank them for a job well done, and for a labor that has accomplished much.

Reprinted from the November 1948 issue of MINING AND METALLURGY, monthly magazine of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers.