

Penrose Conference

Plume IV: Beyond the Plume Hypothesis

Post-conference evaluation of administrative and logistical aspects of the conference

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1. Administrative and logistical aspects

The conference went excellently in every respect.

Prior to the conference, all materials were made available to applicants by posting them on the Web at www.mantleplumes.org. All applicants supplied abstracts electronically and all communications were electronic, with the exception of the letters of reference on letterhead required by a few delegates for visa application purposes. The material will be maintained on the Web indefinitely.

Because of the great diversity of viewpoints regarding the origin of anomalous volcanism, prior to the meeting we made a particular effort to attract applicants representing all opinions and subdisciplines within Earth science. Our efforts included emailing over 5,000 GSA members and inviting them to apply. The meeting was also advertised in GSA Today, EOS and on the webpages of the Geological Society of America and the Geological Society of London. We strove to be inclusive by emailing members of the Association of Women Geoscientists. We attempted to email the National Association for Black Geologists and Geophysicists but failed to make contact. They now have a website at <http://www.nabgg.com>. We encouraged minorities to apply wherever possible. Our efforts resulted in a 30% oversubscription, which reduced subsequently by attrition.

Most of the critical decisions, including offers of places at the Conference and the allocation of grant money to delegates, were made at a conveners' meeting held at the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park, California, 22nd – 23rd May 2003 (see Table). Dean C. Presnall (Carnegie Institution and Univ. of Texas) and Bruce R. Julian (USGS), who convened sessions at the Conference, also participated.

The largest pre-Conference tasks were liaising with the applicants/attendees and preparing the Conference booklets. This work was more than a full-time job for one person for the entire month preceding the meeting. We were able to respond to emailed questions, comments, requests and suggestions within a few hours in most cases. Several attendees mentioned that they appreciated this. The goodwill engendered, and the timely problem-solving enabled by this rapid communication without doubt increased the number of people both inclined and able to attend.

Table: Agenda for Penrose Conveners' Meeting, May 22nd – 23rd, 2003 (auxiliary attached documents not included)

1. Applications: who gets an invitation (see spreadsheet)
2. Who gets how much money? (See p 2, applicant spreadsheet and funds available spreadsheet)
3. How are the invitations are worded? First come first served/limited number of places, or what?
4. Meeting agenda: Who talks, how many talks, sessions, discussion, session discussion leaders. (See p 3 and draft meeting agenda)
5. Audio-visual equipment needed/Powerpoint? (see p 4)
6. The conference handbook – contents, reproduction, transport to Iceland (see p 5)
7. Fieldtrip plans (see p 6):
 - a. Reykjanes (1/2 day)
 - b. Hengill (full day)
 - c. South Iceland (4-day post-conference trip)
 - d. Field guides
8. Timeline for production of post-conference Proceedings book (see p 7)

Three color conference booklets were produced:

1. *The Hotspot Handbook* (334 pp), which contains an introduction, the agenda, a list of participants, a geological background to Iceland and the Conference location, a relevant paper of historic interest, some famous quotes, a list of all the abstracts, and the abstracts themselves (distributed to all attendees).

2. *The Website Handbook* (193 pp), which contains a brief background to www.mantleplumes.org, and printed copies of all the main web pages available at the time of going to press (early August). We could afford to print only 40 copies, and these were distributed to session organizers and keynote speakers.

3. *The Fieldtrip Handbook* (15 pp), which provided background information for the post-Conference fieldtrip (distributed to all post-Conference fieldtrip attendees).

The booklets were printed at Kinko's, Menlo Park, CA, who offered us an exceptionally advantageous price, undercutting the estimate that the GSA was able to provide. The final booklets were of very high quality and produced complimentary remarks from many attendees. The printed booklets have now all been distributed. We are meeting additional requests for copies by distributing CDs. The components of the Handbooks have been posted on the Web at www.mantleplumes.org so interested persons may also download the files required to assemble their own copies.

We had slightly more than our target number of attendees (62 vs. 60). Delegates came from 12 different countries, making it a truly international experience, and there was a good mix of senior, eminent attendees, those in mid-career and post-docs, along with 8 students (13%). 27% of the attendees were women. Several of the more senior attendees gave superlative keynote talks, the standard of presentations from junior scientists was excellent and the students were sharp, enthusiastic and a delight to have along. They were extremely helpful, sorted out some

nuisance computer problems, managed the map sales, asked questions that were difficult to answer, and prevented everyone from taking themselves too seriously.

With the help of Kristin Torres and Dianna Gury, the conference co-ordinators (sequentially), all administrative aspects of the conference went like clockwork. Transport to and from the Conference venue, which was a hotel in a small village in the country, was well organised. The hotel rooms were comfortable and the outdoor geothermally heated swimming pool functioned as an evening discussion room. The food was of high standard – perhaps too high, and in future a sandwich buffet at lunchtime might be better than the two-course sit-down meal provided. Perhaps the greatest problem was that the food was served very slowly to begin with, as the hotel politely waited for everyone to finish each course before serving the next. They were persuaded to stop this practice, however, and the food service became quicker as the days passed.

The conference room provided was ample in size and the furniture, public address system, overhead transparency projector and screens were fine. We provided our own data projectors for Powerpoint presentations (borrowed from the U.S. Geological Survey and University of Durham) and a spare overhead transparency projector was provided by the University of Akureyri, courtesy of Axel Bjornsson. An antique slide projector was provided by one of the conveners. Facilities for displaying posters (dubbed “the clothes line” by Marge Wilson) were unconventional but adequate.



Group photograph taken during the Reykjanes Peninsula fieldtrip (*courtesy of Carlo Doglioni*)

Two fieldtrips were run during the week-long Conference. Sveinn Jakobsson and Gillian Foulger led a very enjoyable half-day trip to the Reykjanes peninsula in fair weather. A day-long trip in the Hengill/west Iceland area, led by Gillian Foulger and Axel Bjornsson, had poorer weather. The damaging effect of the weather was mitigated by reversing the route driven. This ensured that the better visibility conditions later in the day were enjoyed when panoramic sites were visited. The Icelandic guides and victualers involved rose to the challenge of the short-notice change of plan admirably. Special arrangements were made for a small number of attendees with dietary restrictions and health problems. The students were very helpful in assisting physically challenged attendees.

The post-Conference fieldtrip proceeded according to plan, and 19 attendees participated. It was led by Sveinn Jakobsson and Gillian Foulger. A couple of minor changes of plan had to be made as a result of rain. As with the rest of the conference, there was a great deal of positive feedback and it was a delight to get to know a few of the attendees better than was possible during the more structured Conference.



Group photograph from post-Conference fieldtrip, taken at Jökulsárlón. Left to right: Warren Hamilton, Don Wright, Françoise Chalot-Prat, Richard Chamberlin, Bob Christiansen, Emma Chacon-Perez, Gregory Huffman, Carol Finn, Pepe Mangas, Angelo Peccerillo, Wolf Elston, Gillian Foulger, Phil Wannamaker, Bruce Julian, Carol Stein, Sveinn Jakobsson, Seth Stein, Hetu Sheth, Brian Pope (*courtesy of Pepe Mangas*).

The Conference stayed within budget.

2. Suggestions for improvements based on comments by the attendees and convener's experience.

1. It was difficult to prevent speakers from running over their time. In general, 45 minutes of each 90-min session were allocated to three, 15-min talks. However, with the addition of the volunteered 2-minute presentations also allowed, talks often occupied much of the time. The sessions where the most substantial discussion took place were “double” sessions, where two 90-min sessions were allocated to a single subject but still only three 15-min talks were scheduled. In hindsight, it would have been better to have had fewer, longer sessions. The discussion parts of the Conference were extremely exciting, and feedback indicated that attendees would have preferred more of it.
2. Feedback suggests that there was insufficient time for viewing posters, and there was strong support on the last day for an impromptu “compulsory” poster session after the last oral session. In hindsight it would have been better to have had a formally scheduled “compulsory” poster session each day. This could have been held during the lunch hour if a lunch buffet had been arranged.
3. The GSA rules regarding accompanying persons and compulsory on-site residence were relaxed by executive decision of GRF in the cases of a small number of crucial attendees in special circumstances, and Icelandic attendees who lived locally. While we support the policy of making Penrose meetings scientific retreats, this Conference would have been significantly diminished had we not relaxed this rule in a small number of exceptional cases. The accompanying persons accepted that the conference was an intensive scientific think-tank, and they were co-operative and supportive of this. We recommend that executive decisions of this nature be accepted by GSA in future, where the scientific program would otherwise be significantly adversely affected.

3. Summary

All aspects of the conference went well. There was a lot of positive feedback from attendees and no serious complaints. The few minor problems that arose could all be dealt with speedily. The Conference achieved its goal of brainstorming alternative models for areas of anomalous volcanism and fostering collaboration between people working in this field.