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IVth Canadian Conference on Geohazards: From Causes to Management

IVe Conféference Canadienne sur les Géorisques: des causes à la gestion

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Conference Report

IVth Canadian Conference on Geohazards: From Causes to Management
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A trip to Québec City is always welcome. The Fourth Canadian Conference on Geohazards, chaired by Jacques Locat was held there from May 20–24th, 2008. Jacques has a reputation for being a wonderful host, so there was much for which to look forward. Jacques' co-conspirators included Didier Perret, Dominique Turmel, Denis Demers and Serge Leroueil as well as an army of keen students that Jacques seems to always have available. This conference is the fourth in a series that grew out of an initiative of the Engineering Geology Division of the Canadian Geotechnical Society. The conference goal was to establish the state of knowledge regarding natural hazards in Canada, particularly those of geological origin, and to address relevant issues from processes, consequences and also scientific and social aspects of risk management. Associated with the conference were "un atelier sur la géomatique appliquée à l'analyse régionale des aléas géologiques", and a workshop on applications of InSAR techniques for monitoring geohazards. Following the conference, there was a field trip to look at natural hazards and risk management examples in the Charlevoix and Saguenay regions. Sadly, I did not have the time to participate in these events.

Conference presenters were asked to submit extended abstracts well in advance of the conference. As a result, papers were published on-line prior to the conference, and a 594 page book that included a CD of pdf files was provided to conference attendees at registration. Submissions were mostly Canadian but with contributions from Europe as well. The conference itself was hosted in the Pavillon Alphonse-Desjardins at the Université Laval and consisted of 8 consecutive sessions over two days with each session featuring a keynote lecture. There was a concurrent poster session in the reception area; the coffee and treats forcing attention to the posters. In a wonderfully Canadian way, the lectures and the articles, were in either French or English, and the conference supplied an interpreter, broadcast through a headset, for those of us who are language-challenged!

The eight sessions attempted to break the talks into Processes and Mechanisms, Techniques and Methods, Case Histories, Inventories and Hazards, and Risk Assessment and Management, but any categorization of such a diversity of topics is relatively arbitrary. Keynote lectures, which set the tone for each session, included topics such as Prevention and attenuation of natural hazards by Michel Doré; Ice roads by Don Hayley; Earthquakes in eastern Canada by Maurice Lamontagne; Social considerations of natural disasters by Danielle Maltais; Process modelling and GIS in hazard assessment by Derek Martin; Risk-based land-use planning in snow avalanche terrain by David McClung; and Submarine mass-movements in Canada, by yours truly. Drawing on a relatively small community in Canada, topics at such a conference are bound to be somewhat disparate, which is unavoidable. Topics covered included earthquakes and tsunamis, rock and snow avalanches, submarine and subaerial landslides, hazard processes and analytic techniques, climate change and hazard impact, and gas hydrate dissociation, as examples. This broad spectrum of topics running in a single consecutive forum can be viewed as a negative for those focused within their own field of study. Alternatively, such diversity also has the consequence of leading to cross-discipline stimulation and increased awareness of parallel research and novel techniques.

The conference proceedings volume, "Locat, J., Perret, D., Turmel, D., Demers, D., et Leroueil, S., 2008. *Proceedings of the IVth Canadian Conference on Geohazards: From Causes to Management*. Presse de l'Université Laval, Québec, 594 p." consists of 71 extended abstract submissions and is a quality product that represents a milestone summarizing much of the state of research on geohazards in Canada. In addition, the conference organizers orchestrated media attention for the event and a number of interviews were conducted with the CBC, Radio-Canada, and CanWest Global. This publicity element is critical, I believe, for what good is all the research we conduct on geohazards if we do not inform the public of our results in as many forums as possible? Ultimately, this research can be used in public decision-making to help prevent or to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters.

I cannot end a review of this conference without mention of the

fabulous banquet put on by the organizers. In truly grand style, the multi-course banquet was held in the foyer of the Musée de la Civilisation. Between courses, while sipping on wonderful wine, a small musical group sang operatic excerpts while touring amongst the tables. It was a combination of cuisine and culture that reflects the Québécois joie de vivre and makes me envious of the fortunate residents of that province.