NEWS AND NOTES

Summary Report, Earth Science Week, Maharashtra Vruksha Samvardhini – Ajit Vartak A 9, Sidhant Apt. 312, Shaniwar Peth, Pune - 411 030. (E: missiondevrai@gmail.com)

Since October 1998, the American Geosciences Institute has organized Earth Science Week – a national and international event – to help the public gain a better understanding of and appreciation for the earth sciences and to encourage stewardship of the Earth. In India, this event, essentially a series of lectures, has been celebrated for about eight years by the Maharashtra Vruksha Samvardhini (MVS), a Pune-based NGO. In 2020, the event was held between October 11 and 18. Due to the Wuhan virus pandemic, all lectures were delivered live on Zoom and then made available on MVS's Mission Devrai YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLBj5zAJzRUfcL3yIBOFQbw/videos>).

The event was inaugurated by Prof. (Dr.) Nitin R. Karmalkar, Vice-Chancellor, Savitribai Phule Pune University. In his address, Prof. Karmalkar thanked the organisers and observed that the lecture series which included eminent speakers from India and abroad would be a feast for the geological community.

Geological processes impact humans in many ways. Some of them can be destructive. Dr. Jere Lipps, Professor Emeritus, University of California at Berkeley, USA, spoke about the past impacts of volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural hazards on humans and other forms of life and of their potential threat in the future. Focusing on one such process, Dr. Leslie Almberg, an earth science educator and volcanologist from Victoria, Australia, talked about volcanology; introducing the subject, clearing up misconceptions about volcanoes and touching on the beauty, majesty and impact of these magnificent geological features.

Geological processes can also be beneficial. An example is nuclear minerals that provide us with a source of energy. Mr. Arvind Awati, a former scientist and technocrat with the Department of Atomic Energy, India, gave an in-depth presentation on this energy source, its worldwide occurrence and India's nuclear power programme. Oceans too offer a huge and bountiful treasure chest for our use. Dr. R. Shankar, an oceanographer with Mangalore University, India, presented on the vast resources of the oceans and the challenges we face managing them and the environment in which they occur.

If anything, geology is a multi-disciplinary science. Using a number of fascinating examples, Dr. Parth Chauhan, a geoarchaeologist with the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Mohali, India, showed how knowledge of geology is crucial for archeologists to answer specific questions on context, age and environs in their studies.

A cornerstone of Earth Science Week is education. As a teaching tool, no geologic topic holds as much interest and fascination for non-geologists, particularly children, as do dinosaurs. Dr. Dhananjay Mohabey formerly with the Geological Survey of India talked about dinosaur finds in India since their first discovery in 1828, their nesting behavior, dietary preferences and ultimate extinction in the Cretaceous. Preserving sites where these fossils – and other geological treasures – occur can be challenging. Dr. Ian McKay, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, described one such endeavour in South Africa, the TimeTip project, which seeks to promote geoheritage sites by creating colourful posters and a website using the theme of time-travel to tell the story of Africa's exciting geological past. Finally, maps are indispensable for earth scientists. Prof. Sanjeev Nalavade, a geographer and biodiversity educator, India, spoke at length about the timeless value of making, using, and reading a wide variety of maps.

The event concluded with a message of thanks from Prof. Roberto Greco, Chair, International Geoscience Education Organisation to the Maharashtra Vruksha Samvardhini; especially to Dr. Ajit Vartak and his team for organising the webinars, the excellent quality of the presentations, and the high level of participation. Dr. Ajit Vartak, Secretary, MVS, thanked Vice-Chancellor Prof. (Dr.) Nitin R. Karmalkar and Profs. Roberto Greco, R. Shankar, and Pramila Dasture. He also expressed his appreciation to Mr. Kaustubh Mudgal, Mr. Sunil Bhide, Mr. Sharad Phatak and the entire MVS team for their hard work, and recognized the speakers and participants with a special thank-you because without them, no event can ever really be successful.

The next International Conference on Geoscience Education is planned to be held in Japan in 2022.

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