THE 4TH MID-EUROPEAN CLAY CONFERENCE, ZAKOPANE, POLAND, SEPTEMBER 22-27, 2008.

The Mid-European Clay Conference (MECC) is fast becoming, if not already, an essential date in the international calendar of clay mineralogy events. Originally incorporating the Clay Groups from Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Croatia, the MECC has now extended its membership to the Czech Republic, as well as the Deutsche Ton- und Tonmineralgruppe, which includes Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The latest MECC was held in the Belvedere Hotel in the mountain resort town of Zakopane, in southern Poland. The conference fully lived up to the standards of academic excellence set at previous venues in Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia, and attracted a total of 180 participants from 29 different countries (30 if Scotland is counted separately!). It was particularly gratifying to see so many enthusiastic young scientists with a direct interest in the application of clay mineralogy to such a wide variety of different fields. In addition to sessions devoted to topics that are normally on the agenda in clay conferences, such as the structure and synthesis of clays and their occurrence in geological deposits and soils, there were also symposia on more unusual themes such as iron-rich clay materials, layered double hydroxides and clays as nanomaterials, as well as numerous different applications of clay mineralogy in the industrial and environmental spheres. One can only conclude that interest in clay mineralogy in all of its varied aspects continues to be in a healthy and vital state in mid-Europe. Some personal highlights of the conference were the introduction by Professor Leszek Stoch, who traced important developments in clay mineralogy in a historical context, an aspect that is easily overlooked if not forgotten in these days of on-line data bases that often end at 1980, the masterly plenary lecture by Victor Drits synthesizing his outstanding work and that of his colleagues on *trans*-vacant and *cis*-vacant layer silicates over the last 15 to 20 years, and the plenary lecture by Goran Durn on Mediterranean terra rossa soils, which succeeded in providing clear and logical evidence of the origin of these soils and their clay mineral constituents, amply confirming my own prejudices on the matter. There were of course many other outstanding papers and interested persons can still purchase the book of abstracts from Mineralogical Society of Poland, al. Mickiewicza 30, 30-059 Kraków, Poland (free pdf version – www.mecc08.agh.edu.pl).

The organizing committee of MECC'08, led by Dr Katarzyna Górniak, deserve hearty thanks and congratulations for the very considerable work involved in organizing such a successful and enjoyable international conference. All the arrangements worked perfectly, from ice-breaker to final conference dinner, and the choice of the Belvedere Hotel as the conference venue was

inspired. It is true that the Zakopane weather left a little to be desired, in that it rained from Monday to Thursday inclusive, but things improved considerably for the three post-conference field trips. The first demonstrated the geology of the Pieniny Klippen Belt and was particularly well-illustrated by the exposures seen from a rafting trip in the gorge of the Dunajec river.

On the final day two separate field trips were run. The first was to demonstrate the diagenetic history of the Podhale flysch basin, as shown by the illitization of bentonitic bands interbedded in the flysch sequence. The excursion was led by Jan Środoń who succeded in convincing all participants that the clay mineralogists' and not the geologists' view of the geological history of the basin was the correct one. The second field trip consisted of hardy souls willing to brave the elements in the Tatra mountains to study various rocks, soils and weathering features, notwithstanding that all were covered in snow. The reader may judge from the photos the relative degrees of comfort and enjoyment experienced by the excursion participants.

[Jeff Wilson]