NEED FOR A NATIONAL MUSEUM FOR GEMSTONES

Gemstones are beautiful and fascinating little objects which nature has offered to mankind. The 'German Gemstone Museum' in Idar-Oberstein offers a glimpse of all known gemstones and gem materials at one place. This twin-town happens to be an ancient gem cutting centre in Europe. Housed in a three storeyed building, nearly 9500 gemstones and gem minerals are displayed in 135 showcases. The exhibits are classified into following sections: natural coloured stones in rough and cut form, synthetic coloured stones, diamonds, organic gems, carved stones, gems showing effect of light, inclusions in gems, gems in ancient times, developments in gem industry and lapidary processes, and books and journals on gems.

Section on natural coloured stones includes stones such as ruby, sapphire, emerald and commonly used stones like varieties of silica, garnet, tourmaline and feldspar; and lesser known gems. Most fascinating part of this section is the display of unusual and rare stones such as benitoite, ekanite and taaffeite. Unusual stones attract the attention of mineralogists, gemmologists and common people too. It is a unique experience to see gems from all over the world at one place. Man-made stones manufactured by different methods are displayed in the synthetic stone section. Diamonds of different colour, clarity, cut and carat weight and rough diamonds of several types are exhibited which is very impressive. One large stone of 44.8 ct is a star attraction.

Amber and other stones of organic origin form a smaller section which has few examples of amber with insect inclusions. A separate section is devoted for inclusions in gems. Effect of light on gems can be seen in the section where fluorescent and phosphorescent gems glow under ultraviolet light. Gems exhibiting fascinating physical optical effects of iridescence (e.g. opal and labradorite) and, chatoyancy (e.g. star corundum and cat's eye) are displayed in a few showcases. Another enchanting section is the one on carved gems. Different types of figures of animals and plants carved from variously coloured stones offer a treat. Available space at staircase and other places are decorated with large vugs and geodes comprising amethyst, zeolite and other mineral species.

In addition to the above items the Museum displays gems exploited by ancient civilizations. The section on lapidary is very informative. Various stages of cutting in early days as well as modern times are depicted by means of clay models. The last section comprises books and journals on gems.

Although the Museum has three floors with as many as 135 showcases and many more exhibits kept at available space, it is overcrowded and requires at least twice the existing space for a more satisfactory display. As all display cards are inscribed only in German, a non-German speaking visitor finds it difficult to follow the explanations. Since a considerable number of visitors come from the English speaking world, display in English would enhance the usefulness of the collection.

In addition to 'Deutsches Edelstein Museum' this twin-town has a separate 'Mineralien-Edelstein-Schmuch Museum' (Minerals - Gemstones - Jewellery Museum'). For promotion of tourism and business, excellently printed, attractively illustrated brochures/guides are provided to tourists. Apart from the museums, even small gem shops display their ware artistically giving the appearance of mini-museums.

When such a small gem cutting centre like Idar-Oberstein has such a fabulous collection of gemstones it is unfortunate that the much larger and flourishing gem cutting centres like Jaipur and Surat and the world's most ancient gem cutting centre at Khambhat (Cambay) have no such museum to offer to the public. Srivastava (Jour. Geol. Soc. India, 1998, v.52, p.118) has pleaded for a 'Museum for Coal'. More important is a National Museum for Minerals and Gemstones'. Such a Museum should include ornamental-building stones in the section on minerals and, jewellery in the section on gemstones.

NOTES

India has a vast mineral potential. Minerals are being exploited since 5000 years at least. Several ores and industrial minerals are mined in large quantity. Gem industry in India is equally old. Gems and jewellery account for around 17% of our total exports. Nearly two million people are involved in the gem industry. It is high time that at least one central museum for minerals and gemstones be established at some important city of the country. The creation of such a museum could be taken up by large industrial houses like the Tatas or Birlas. It can be on the pattern of 'Kelkar Museum' at Pune which is owned by a private party. Educating our people is more important. Common man in the country should get to know about the mineral wealth of the country.

An underdeveloped European country like Lithuania with a population of just 3.5 million has special museums for bicycles in Siuole, cameras in Kaunas and amber in Palanga!

Department of Geology M.S. University of Baroda Vadodara 390 002 R.V. KARANTH

ANNOUNCEMENTS

INDIAN GEOLOGICAL CONGRESS AND NATIONAL SEMINAR ON GROUNDWATER RESOURCES, 1-4, February 2000: The University Department of Geology, Udaipur is hosting the IGC-2000 and the National Seminar on "Groundwater Resources" during its Golden Jubilee year. The convention will be held in the historic city of Udiapur, set in a unique geological milieu. Further details can be obtained from Dr. P.S. Ranawat (Convener) or Dr. Vinod Agrawal (Organizing Secretary), IGC-2000, Department of Geology, M.L. Sukhadia Univeristy, 51, Saraswati Marg, Udaipur - 313 002. Tel: 0294-413955 Ext. 417; 0294-529986. Fax: 0294-412459; Email: psranawat@yahoo.com.

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT: 10-11 December, 1998. Organised by Department of Civil Engineering, S.D.M. College of Engineering and Technology, Dhavalagiri, Dharwad - 580 002. Themes identified: Coastal/estuarine environment and pollution; Coastal and estuarine sedimentation and coastal geodynamics; Wave refraction, sediment transport models, wave simulation studies; GIS and coastal zone management; Coastal erosion, design of structure, dock and Harbour Engineering; Placer/strategic minerals, marine resources and its industrial applications; Coastal aquifer, saline water intrusion and coastal irrigation management; Marine biology, aqua-culture and its environmental impact. The abstract of papers should reach the convener latest by 30th October, 1998. For details contact: Dr. V. S. Hegde, Convener, Department of Civil Engineering, S.D.M. College of Engineering and Technology, Dhavalagiri, Dharwad - 580 002. Phone: 0836-348327, (R) 0836-772504; Fax: 0836-347465.