

# The 23<sup>rd</sup> International Geological Congress, Prague, 1968



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# Introduction

- **The 23<sup>rd</sup> International Geological Congress (IGC) hosted in 1968 in Prague, the largest congress of the IGC since the first held in 1878 in Paris (Ellenberger, 1978), was the only one to be cancelled due to a military occupation.**
- The original planned length of the IGC was for a five-week period. The ten days of scientific symposiums were planned to be held from 19<sup>th</sup> August until 28<sup>th</sup> August. The excursions were planned to be held from 8<sup>th</sup> August until 7<sup>th</sup> September.
- The 23<sup>rd</sup> IGC, the largest ever planned meeting of geologists in Czechoslovakia, was unfortunately interrupted by the beginning of the Warsaw Pact invasion (on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1968) and cancelled by the organisers on 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

# The Congress Preparation

- The IGC was prepared **since 1964**.
- All Czechoslovakian (**more than 30 institutions**) and some additional foreign geological institutions participated in the preparation. The main organizer was the Central Geology Office (*Ústřední geologický úřad – ÚGÚ*). The Ministry of Education and the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences were authorised by ÚGÚ to organise the Congress event.
- **The President of the Organizing Committee of the 23<sup>rd</sup> IGC was Josef Svoboda, the Director of the Czech Geological Survey** (then known as *Ústřední ústav geologický – ÚÚG*). Arnošt Dudek became the Secretary General of the Organizing Committee, with the four vice-presidents being: prof. Zdeněk Pouba (Ministry of Education), Milan Šnajdr (Central Geological Office), Vladimír Zoubek (the Academy of Sciences of Czechoslovakia), Miroslav Kuthan (vice-president for Slovak affairs). Four secretaries were responsible for the key stages of the organizing work: Tibor Buday (Excursion Secretary), Jan Petránek (Secretary of the Scientific Sessions), Miroslav Malkovský (Publication and Press Secretary), and Z. Nýpl (Organizational Secretary). The President and Secretaries comprised the Presidium, with the Czech Geological Survey as the main office of the Presidium. The international Bureau was thus established.
- **Six hundred people, including 80 volunteers, prepared the event itself.**



**Josef Svoboda, the President of the Organizing Committee of the 23<sup>rd</sup> IGC and the Director of the Czech Geological Survey.**



**Arnošt Dudek, the Secretary General of the Organizing Committee of the 23<sup>rd</sup> IGC .**



# The Opening Ceremony



The number of participants that arrived in Prague was 2,911 (including 698 accompanying members). They came from 91 nations, the list of participants was published in the General Proceedings (Dudek A. ed., 1970). Two thousand participants attended the opening ceremony at the Industry Palace in Prague 7 on 19<sup>th</sup> August.

# Scientific Programme

The scientific programme comprised both meetings of scientific unions, associations, commissions, committees, etc., and sessions of the Congress sections and symposia. On the whole, 491 lectures were prepared for 2 Symposia and 13 Sections. *Symposium I* had the theme **Kaolin deposits and their genesis** (2 days); *Symposium II* had the theme **Genesis of mineral and thermal waters** (3 days). Below is given the list of the Sections:

- Section 1: Upper mantle
- Section 2: Volcanism and tectogenesis
- Section 3: Orogenic belts
- Section 4: Geology of Precambrian
- Section 5: Geological results of applied geophysics
- Section 6: Geochemistry
- Section 7: Endogenous ore deposits
- Section 8: Genesis and classification of sedimentary rocks
- Section 9: Stratigraphy of Central European Lower Paleozoic
- Section 10: Tertiary/Quaternary boundary
- Section 11: Origin of Coal deposits
- Section 12: Engineering geology in country planning
- Section 13: Other subjects (non-terrestrial geology, Mathematical methods in geology etc.)



# Special Events

- The **Geo 68 exhibition**: laboratory equipment and geological literature, was held in the Czechoslovak Brussels Expo 58 pavilion (Prague District 7, the Exhibition Grounds / Výstaviště).
- The **international geological maps and publications exhibition** that included participants from 43 countries was situated in the Czech Technical University in Prague.
- The **International Geological Films Festival** with 18 films from the USA, Great Britain, France, Canada, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, was opened on the 21<sup>st</sup> August in the Czech Technical University – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering building, which was then cancelled the following day.
- Five **postage stamps with a geological and paleontological motive and postmarks** were created by the Czech artist Jaroslav Lukavský and the die-sinker B. Housa.







# Excursions

- There were **6 to 10-days excursions scheduled to a total of one thousand localities** for the pre-Congress excursions (40 excursions) and post-Congress excursions (51 excursions), and 17 one-day excursions during the Symposiums.
- Unfortunately, **only the pre-Congress excursions took place**, from 8th August till 18th August. There were a total number of 718 participants for the pre-Congress excursions alone. The post-Congress excursions were cancelled, only a few were held in Poland, Hungary and Romania, with 19 participants in total.

This is the list of groups of the planned excursions:

- **General excursions** in Czechoslovakia
- **Regional excursions directed to detailed geological problems of the Bohemian Massif**
- **Regional excursions directed to the detailed problems of the main geological units of the West Carpathians**
- Special excursions
- Excursions in the neighbouring countries

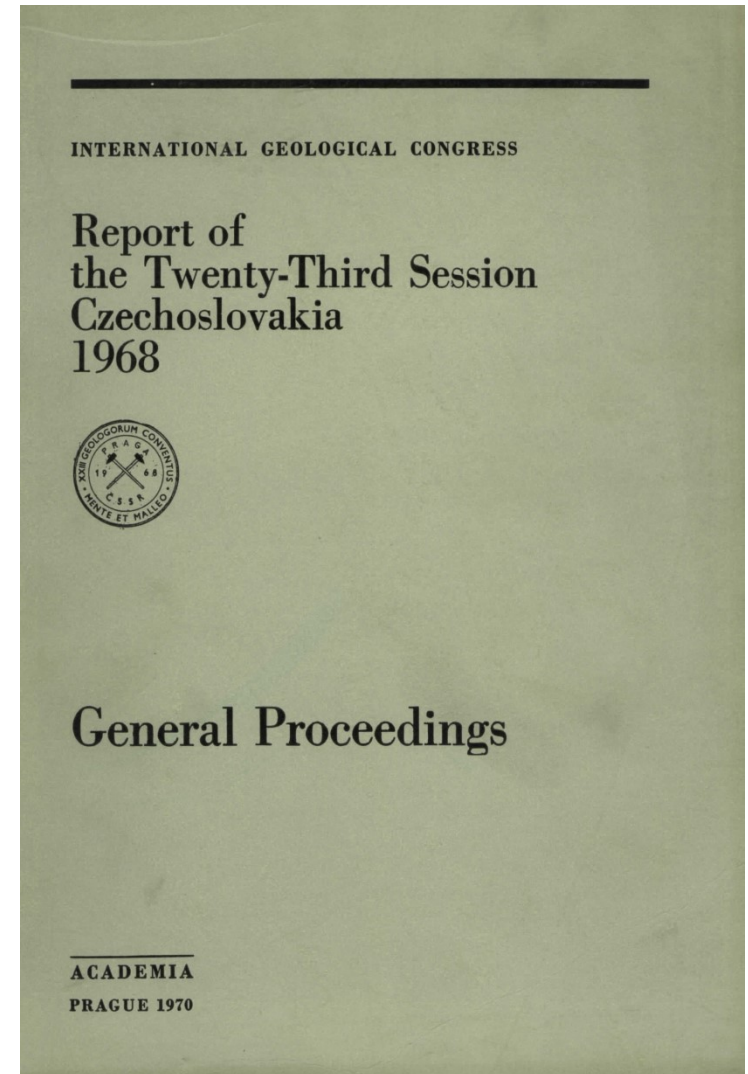


**The Chvaletice mine pre-Congress excursion.**



# Printed Material

- Approximately 35,000 copies of the **first Congress Circular** were distributed prior to the meeting. The collection of the **658 paper abstracts** were distributed to all attendees, 2 months before the beginning of the IGC. A total number of **51 Excursion Guide volumes** were written by 150 authors from several countries. **Collection of papers for the 2 Symposiums and 13 scientific sections** involved 311 papers on 4,336 printed pages.
- The main language of the papers was English; the combination of both French and English were rare indeed.
- The regional geological themes of the two Symposia were printed in 1969. The **General Proceedings** were printed in 1970 and summed up all the substantial data about the Congress itself. The **daily congress bulletin newspaper named *Trilobite*** was printed in 6 total issues, through F. Fediuk, who was responsible for this activity. This daily newspaper became a model for many future IGCs.





# The Invasion Began Unexpectedly During the Night

- During the night from 20<sup>th</sup> August to 21<sup>st</sup> August, the five states of the Warsaw Pact began their invasion of Czechoslovakia. The invasion was a reaction to political development in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and to the people's need for freedom of speech and freedom in all of the citizen's activities.
- In the early morning on 21<sup>st</sup> August the Warsaw Pact tanks arrived at key state locations. The whole territory of the Capital and Czechoslovakia was under the Warsaw Pact armies control.
- The participants of the Congress were quickly informed of events. The organizers and part of the participants stayed calm and struggled to keep the Congress activity plan in operation. However, this was almost impossible: there was chaos in the city, public transport was very irregular, the bridges were closed (this in effect divided Prague in two separate parts), there was lack of food and drinks in restaurants and shops, lack of fuel, as well as shooting in the streets. The situation was very dangerous and serious. Many participants decided to leave Czechoslovakia immediately.



# The Official Closing of the Congress

- The **Bureau of the Congress** held a meeting **daily** (on 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August) **to manage the Congress in this critical situation**. At its last meeting they decided to call the General Assembly. **The closing section of the Congress was held on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> August at the General Assembly meeting**. The number of participants of the General Assembly was only 500. There was not only Congress organizational topics discussed, but also others from the historical point of view related to the events taking place. For example: “Radio news informed us that some congress participants kindly offer their blood to the wounded people in Prague, and so I take this opportunity to express to them my sincerest thanks,” told the Secretary General Dudek (see Minutes in General Proceedings). There were many expressions of thanks and international solidarity with Czechoslovakia captured in these Minutes.
- **The main part of the Congress activities had to be postponed until the next Congress.**



**Last meeting of the Bureau, where the decision on the premature closing should have been made. The Secretary General of the Organizing Committee Arnošt Dudek opens the meeting.**





**The Closing Ceremony: Participants of the final General Assembly on 23<sup>rd</sup> August voting on the premature closing.**

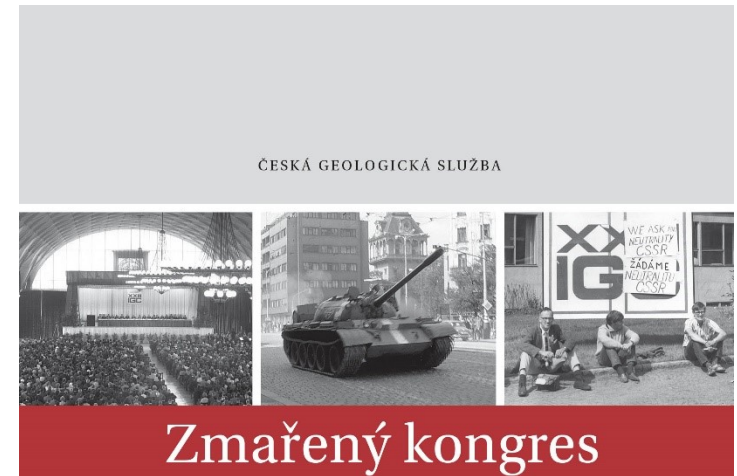


# Acknowledgements

- Alena Čejchanová (formerly archivist/librarian of the Czech Geological Survey; INHIGEO member for the Czech Republic) processed manuscript documents from the Czech Geological Survey archives about the 23<sup>rd</sup> IGC Congress during 2018-2019. She compiled these materials and also information from eye-witness accounts of these events within the booklet published in the Czech language (Čejchanová A. *et al.* 2019).
- Many thanks belongs to all authors of the photos. Unfortunately it is not able identify them. Author of the photo 1 on the page 12 is F. Ellenberger.



**Memory Coffer with 23<sup>rd</sup> IGC documents.**  
Czech Geological Survey Archive, Prague.



*Osobní vzpomínky několika účastníků  
23. mezinárodního geologického kongresu  
v srpnu 1968 v Praze*

Alena Čejchanová, Arnošt Dudek, Ferry Fediuk,  
Alfred Lenz, Eva Trojanová, Gordon Winder,  
Grant M. Young, Jana Zoubková



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- The main sources on the 23rd International Geological Congress organization are the following data sets, deposited in the Czech Geological Survey Archive, Kostelní 26, Prague 7, Czech Republic:
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- Pamětní truhlice (Memory Coffers): Dokumenty k 23. Mezinárodnímu kongresu. (23rd IGC documents). Czech Geological Survey Archive (CGS R000279).
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- The Congress photos are available in the Czech Geological Survey Photo archive (password: XXIII. IGC v Praze).