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INFORMATION

26th Oil Shale Symposium in Golden – waking up the largest oil shale reserve in the world

World's largest oil shale deposit – Green River formation located in Midwest of the United States – is almost untouched treasure containing more than the half of the total known shale oil reserves in the world. Although there have been numbers of different kind of research activities for almost a century, there have been only very limited commercial activities.

Large-scale development plans were started after US oil embargo in the seventies of the last century. Billions of private and federal money was spent on numerous projects and technology developments with involvement of all major oil companies, such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Shell etc. Different technologies for underground and above-ground oil shale processing – such as Tosco, Modified In Situ, Paraho and others – were developed and operated for some period of time. However, oil price was not motivating enough for US oil shale business, and after Black Monday on May 5, 1982 when Exxon pulled out of its 5 billion dollar Colony project, there have been only very limited oil shale activities in US.

In 1964, the Colorado School of Mines initiated an annual oil shale symposium which continued until 1992 – ten years after Black Monday. This series of symposia was composed of 25 sessions and was ended after the 25th session because of the difficulty in getting enough worthwhile papers to make symposia valuable. General thought at this time was that, if crude oil prices reached above 25.00 USD barrel, shale oil production in Green River basin would be viable.

After a 14-year break, Colorado School of Mines initiated the 26th Oil Shale Symposium on October 16–20, 2006, responding to growing interest in oil shale field created by continuously high crude oil prices. More than 350 participants represented 20 countries around the world, including Morocco, Jordan, Malaysia, Brazil, China and Estonia. Governmental officials, research institutions were represented together with major oil companies, such as Shell, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhyllips and others.

A well-arranged 3-day symposium was divided into 14 verbal sessions, including 2 plenary and 12 group sessions. The afternoon of the third day was focused on poster session of 25 poster presentations.

Although the symposium was worldwide, a good part of attention was paid to US untapped oil shale reserve. Geology, water issues and socio-economic aspects were discussed in parallel with technology and chemical properties of oil.

Papers presented covered "wall-to-wall" themes, from visionary thinking and theoretical dreaming to practical production and narrow scientific findings. Every participator had a chance to select the session with greatest value.

After 3 days of sessions there was a 2-day field trip to the oil shale basin where geology of the deposit was explained and some previous and current oil shale development sites were visited. Especially interesting was the visit to the Shell's in situ conversion site, where successful piloting of the new technology has been in progress for last 3-4 years.

Fruitful discussions with professionals from over the world between the sessions were an important part of the symposium. Number of old contacts were refreshed and even bigger number of new contacts established. Majority of the participants confirmed the need to have one good annual worldwide symposium. Colorado School of Mines basically agreed to be the coordinator of such activities.

Number of proposals and suggestions regarding the next symposium were made during and after the current symposium. A group of participants, including Colorado School of Mines and major oil companies, reached an agreement that to maintain a high level of the symposium, there is no need to have more than one worldwide symposium annually. Accordingly it was agreed that in 2007 oil shale symposium will be held in the fall of 2007 at School of Mines, the next, 2008, symposium in some other oil shale country – Brazil, China or Estonia.

On behalf of the Advisory Board of Oil Shale Journal I thank Colorado School of Mines and especially the "Soul of the Symposium" – Mr. Jeremy Boak – for the well-arranged and high-level event and wish them good luck with preparation arrangements of the next symposium.

The treasure in Midwest of the US has to be tapped – it is good time for doing that.

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