The 39th EUCHEM Bürgenstock Conference on Stereochemistry

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Over 130 scientists, both from industry and academia, from 17 countries worldwide found their way to the Bürgenstock to attend the legendary EUCHEM Conference on Stereochemistry, not only to enjoy a very interdisciplinary scientific program but also to be enchanted by a stunning view of Lake Lucerne and the surrounding mountains. It is this beautiful setting of the Bürgenstock Hotels and Resort that creates the famous relaxed Bürgenstock atmosphere, which sparks numerous discussions about future perspectives in chemistry. The president of this year’s conference Herbert Waldmann (MPI Dortmund, Germany), the vice-president Alain Krief (University of Namur, Belgium) together with the local organising committee Hans-Beat Bürgi (University of Bern), François Diederich (ETH Zürich), E. Peter Kündig (University of Geneva), and Klaus Müller (Hoffmann-La Roche, Basel), succeeded in attracting 16 excellent speakers, whose names traditionally are kept secret until the first evening.

Moreover, thanks to the generous financial support from the Swiss National Science Foundation and from the Fonds der Chemischen Industrie, the organising committee was able to invite 22 promising young European scientists to attend the conference and present their work and results in poster-form. On the first evening of the conference, which started with an exquisite dinner at the Palace Hotel, President Waldmann warmly welcomed all the participants, and in particular Ekkehard Winterfeld (University of Hannover, Germany), the guest of honour of the 2004 Bürgenstock conference.

The first day of the conference was devoted to biochemistry and was opened by Margaret Kayser (University of New Brunswick, Canada), who presented the first speaker, Roger S. Goody (MPI Dortmund, Germany). In his very illustrative talk he introduced the audience to the complex subject of intracellular vesicular transport, which can follow an exocytotic (towards excretion) or an endocytotic pathway (endocytosis).

It is known that this vesicular transport is regulated by Rab proteins, and there are over 60 different such proteins identified to date. As Goody pointed out, Rab proteins are GTPases and can switch between GDP-bound (off-state) and GTP-bound (on-state) forms, which have different conformations. In the GTP-bound form, the Rab GTPases recruit specific sets of effector proteins onto membranes, whereas the GDP-bound form interacts with Rab escort protein...