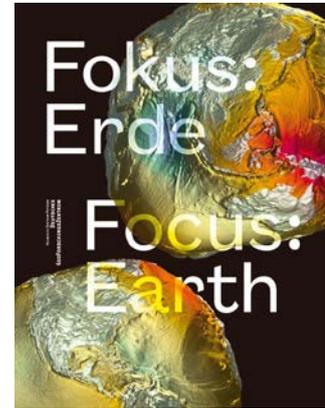


Anniversary celebrations of Helmert and the Potsdam Geodetic Institute ¹⁾

Through the whole year 2017, scientific institutions and organizations throughout Germany commemorate - with lectures, colloquia, or exhibitions - the 100th anniversary of Friedrich Robert Helmert's (1843-1917) death. In this short report, we summarize activities in Potsdam and at GFZ connected to this anniversary, the 125th anniversary of the moving of Helmert's institute from Berlin to Potsdam, and, on the sidelines, certainly also the 25th anniversary of GFZ.



History of geosciences on Telegrafenberg and stories of Potsdam scientists are presented in the splendid exhibition “Focus: Earth – About the measuring of our world” that is presently shown the House of Brandenburg-Prussian History in Potsdam. The exhibition, organized on occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Helmholtz-Centre Potsdam - GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences, can be visited until 9 July 2017 (www.hpbg.de). The exhibition poster on the left shows Erich von Drygalski taking midday height with a small theodolite during the first German expedition to Antarctica (1901-02).



More background information on this topic provides the superb accompanying German-English book “Fokus: Erde. Focus: Earth” (above picture: book cover), ed. by GFZ, Deutscher Kunstverlag 2017, ISBN 978-3-422-07395-1) available in bookshops (25 Euro) or in the museum (22 Euro).

A true highlight in the broad supporting programme of the exhibition was the colloquium on the “Promotion of Scientific Geodesy since Helmert” on 7 April 2017, organized by the Leibniz-Sozietät der Wissenschaften zu Berlin e.V. together with GFZ, DVW, and TU Berlin.

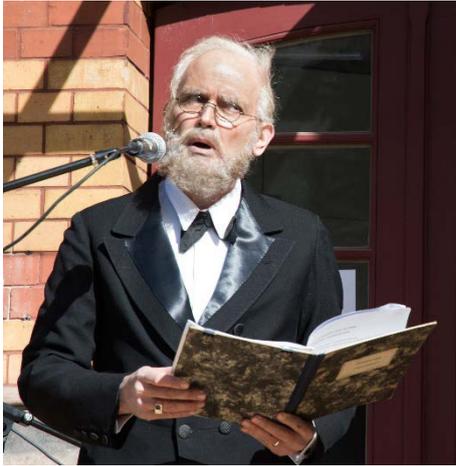
The GFZ, specifically our Department 1 “Geodesy”, celebrated the moving of the Royal Prussian Geodetic Institute (founded in 1870) with its second director Helmert from Berlin to Telegraphenberg hill near Potsdam 125 years ago with a worthy and entertaining festivity on 6 April 2017 (the “department stamp” on the right was designed just for this jubilee).

About 250 guests followed a colorful and dynamic programme. The great achievements made in the field of geodesy that began here on this campus with the work of Helmert were recalled and honoured with great respect but also with a healthy sense of humor. First, there was

a stage programme with – following the official addresses – non-stop surprises: Potato medals bestowed by a potato king, historical play scenes reviving the founding days of our institute, sculpture awards showing a geodesist bravely balancing on a potato-Earth, or music performances with ballads on the history and today's topics of Department 1.



¹⁾ This report was published in the IAG Newsletter of May 2017 on the IAG website at www.iag-aig.org.



Friedrich Robert Helmert, Wilhelm Foerster and Herrmann von Helmholtz talked about the reorganization of the Royal Prussian Geodetical Institute and the establishment of the Telegraphenberg location. Johannes Ihde and Andreas Reinhold (BKG) had rolled up their sleeves and provided the noteworthy libretto of the discourse. The actors are professionally made-up colleagues of department 1. During the whole afternoon, you could have encounters with the three celebrities, promenading and chatting along their way...

A top-ranking delegation of the potato club „Societas ad usum potatonis“ in Lohr in Bavaria, with potato king, viceroy, and lord steward, delivered a memorable address sketching the facts leading to this historical visit of the potato king traveling to GFZ in the heartland of Prussia to pay tributes to the GFZ scientists Frank Flechtner and Christoph Förste and their team for their unwavering efforts for the exploration of the true Figure of the Earth,



the Potsdam Potato. Frank Flechtner shows the golden “Fridericus Magnus Primus Rex Potatonis” medal he was awarded by his highness Eduard I. in recognition of his merits for the Potsdam Potato.



Harald Schuh congratulates Wolfgang Torge, one of the recipients of the sculpture award „The Earth is a Potato“, endowed by Department 1. The other recipients are Christoph Reigber, Ludwig Grunwaldt, and Johannes Leicht (curator of the *Focus:Earth* exhibition). The original sculpture by the artist Axel Gundrum was copied with a 3D printer. The prizes were then coloured by the artist and put on a substantial pedestal.



After the official programme, there was a manifold supply of things to see or try or investigate in and around our building. Here is a selection: The building’s astonishing functionality for geodetic measurements around 1900 was explained in guided tours through pendulum room, old library, attic, and deep cellar. Many old handwritten (i.e. illegible for the modern individual) documents from the institute archive were transcribed and could be studied in the library. Oh, what an insight they give into the careful performance of the fathers of modern geodesy, and also into Prussian bureaucracy! Historical photos and construction plans were on display throughout the building. All office doors in all four stories of building A 17 were “suddenly” labelled with historical name plates according to the old plans. So, some colleagues found themselves working in the institute’s laundry, or Helmert’s dining room, or, worst: a professor had to realize he is residing in the office of a “Hilfsarbeiter”. Using an invar-wire measurement, the question was solved “how well Department 1 is connected to Prof. Hüttl’s office” (the scientific director of GFZ). At a motion picture station, short films out of the past and present were shown. Measurements of people by tachymeter were performed (“But hey, I’m used to be much taller - what did that guy say about a 4 cm bias?”). In the library, there was a fanciful exhibition of doctoral hats of Department 1. Some of the offers like geocaching or the painting station (for adults) were just beyond the scope of a single afternoon... As one can see in the pictures, we were blessed with bright sunshine, after a long spell of wet and gray weather. Actually, it was an extremely and very chilly day! Fortunately, the geoid soup you could get at the caterer provided some basic heating.



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Altogether, it was a fabulous party that will be fondly remembered by the guests, and by the people organizing this event: the colleagues of Department 1!



all pictures: GFZ
text: Sibylle Itzerott, Katrin Gundrum and Harald Schuh