



Multiple Realities

Returning home to the literally hundreds of unanswered e-mails in my in-box immediately brought home reality and the consequences of my one-week absence attending the ECS meeting in Cancun. Although the week was a very hectic one, the break from the constant churning of daily life was a welcome one. These meetings are a bit like a semiannual family reunion; a renewal of acquaintances, updates on each other's lives, pleasant dinners, festive celebrations, as well as the real work required to keep the Society moving, evolving, and growing. None of which detracts from a scientific program that was full of its own amazing revelations and progress across a huge spectrum of fields.

Now fast forward to the end of the week. On Friday my sister and I traveled with three colleagues to visit Mayan ruins at Cobá and Tulum, about 100 km from Cancun. We rented a car, negotiating both the heavily traveled highway between Cancun and Tulum and the increasingly narrow and rough local roads to Cobá. Soon we were confronted with a new reality, far different from the comfortable one we enjoyed at the hotel during the conference: The rural Yucatan Peninsula, a place of dense jungle, poverty, and few of the comforts and conveniences of first-world life. Although electricity was clearly available, no telephone lines were in evidence. The approach to the national park preserving the remains of structures, constructed more than a millennium and a half ago, was not crowded with motels, souvenir shops, and all the accoutrements we expect of tourist sites. No gas stations, no fast food restaurants, no traffic jams. In fact, there was almost nothing save for

a few villages comprised of the most basic structures. Mostly, there was the impenetrable vegetation, which densely lined the sides of the road. Arriving at the park, we found a few small establishments, one of which displayed a hand-painted sign "Visa, MC, and Amer Exp," proving that the power of credit has an incredibly long reach. We were yanked out of our comfortable existence and thrust into the reality of life for a large segment of the Mexican population. This prevalence of poverty was alluded to by the meeting's plenary speaker, Prof. José Luis Fernández Zayas, whose outspoken address hammered at the need for education and investment in technological development and research in Mexico. Little did we appreciate just how blunt this reality is as we sat listening to him speak.

Before most of us arrived at the meeting, however, some of our fellow members staged an event that I hope will become a regular feature of ECS meetings. Dennie Mah (a/k/a Doctor Electro), Gerardine Botte, and Venkat Subramanian, all of the ECS IE&EE Division, staged a demonstration of hydrogen-powered model cars for 65 high school students and about 100 university students from Cancun. The students were grouped into teams that competed to see who could come closest to calculating the amount of hydrogen (produced by battery power) needed for the car to travel a specified distance (see the article on page 15). The winning teams took home the cars to their schools. The local press got involved and ECS was featured in articles on three separate days. Aside from the good press, it was a marvelous example of how the enthusiasm and generosity of our

members could be harnessed for the benefit of the next generation of scientists and engineers.

We accomplished a great deal together in Cancun: the first joint meeting with Sociedad Mexicana de Electroquímica and Sociedad Iberoamericana de Electroquímica; 50 technical sessions; nearly 2,300 attendees; almost 2,200 papers; and 43 industrial and government sponsors, the largest number ever. Equally important, though, is that we set ourselves an example of how to go beyond our own community and reach people who have an incredibly strong need to understand and apply the science that is our domain. The fall 2006 issue of *Interface* highlights much of what is already occurring within the ECS. Let's use these examples as an inspiration to future outreach and educational efforts. For much of the world, it can't come too soon. ■



Mark Allendorf
mdallen@sandia.gov