

IAT & AALAS

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The Institute of Animal Technology's meeting was ultimately held in Athens, Greece at the end of April. Let me review. I am the 2002 recipient of the B&K Universal Group Limited International Travel Fellowship Award which sends an AALAS member to the comparable IAT meeting held in Europe. Typically the venue is in the UK but because of ARE terrorist-type activities it has been necessary to hold it elsewhere. I was supposed to go to Dublin, Ireland in the spring of 2003 but due to animal rights activity at the hotel it was re-scheduled for Cyprus in early June and because of a prior commitment I could not attend. Fortunately I was able to attend this year.

I am fortunate to have received the award from Gerry Bantin of BKU and to be able to go, but with the spectre of animal rights and terrorist activity hovering just behind it all there were some issues. Both meetings (last year and this year) were planned in secret by the IAT organising committee. Those attending did not learn of the location until just days before departure and the vendors had to ship their equipment and displays weeks earlier. In my case I had to plan my trip to London months before, flying out of LAX so that I could then step on to another plane to the ultimate destination.

The IAT Congress was scheduled for two full days and started with a social mixer on the Monday night. The educational programme itself was lighter than typical due I believe to the uncertainties of the venue and reluctance of institutions to send their people. Nevertheless I found many presentations of interest. One dealt with the logistics (timing, customs, transport etc.) of bringing live, fresh mouse embryos into the UK from a lab in America. Another was by a familiar face to us at AALAS - Rob Russell talked about the mutant mouse resource repository programme that is emerging as an option for scientists in the UK too. Primates, respiratory physiology, mad cow disease (BSE), poster presentations (Casey Kilcullen-Steiner, a previous BKU award winner had one) and trade presentations rounded out the programme. The topics covered species from mouse to aquatics to large ani-

mals, regulations and research applications. Breaks were given to discuss the papers and visit the vendors in their booths.

During one break I overheard a language other than English. By this point I was accustomed to hearing "English" English as opposed to the American variety. Now I thought I was hearing Greek and that made me wish I could greet a Greek colleague I had met several years ago when I was at the NIH. He was a Greek veterinarian on sabbatical. As good fortune would have it this gentleman was the boss of my friend and it was decided that I would go to visit them at their new vivarium intended to support research and professional training in surgery and cardiology. It was in final preparation to accommodate pigs, mice and rabbits. He showed me the only rack washer in all of Greece. Truly it was an honour to visit and reacquaint myself with Dr Nick.

There was a nice mix at the IAT Congress - veterinarians, vendors, managers but primarily technicians. In addition I met a representative from the UK Home Office, a federal police officer assigned in part to protecting animal facilities and several NACWOs (Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers). I guess wherever there are regulations and government there will be acronyms such as these. These individuals are very important in maintaining high standards of animal welfare in the UK. I had the sense that our own compliance officers -

an emerging position at many US institutions - might evolve to be on par. It is important to note and emphasise that the IAT organisation is very technician orientated and this congress is organised entirely by them. There is no national office like ours in Memphis to help support the functions and activities. Indeed the organisers are to be congratulated on the feat they performed to pull off the congress in Greece.

I was involved in several conversations about training and certification opportunities with the IAT given that this is one of my own passions with AALAS. Steve and Pete, active in the IAT educational arena, reminded me of folks who volunteer their time in AALAS. As I listened to them discuss tests and their pass rates, constructing questions, developing courses etc., I had this strange sense of déjà vu. These were the same issues and same problems and they had the same resolve to make improvements.

After Greece and the IAT Congress I took some personal time and headed to Germany where I have many friends. Being a third of the way around the world I had to visit them and tell them of my experiences. With laptop in hand I was able to show some presentations from my animal facility and explain a little about biomedical research as done in America. In one town Bad Nauheim known for its therapeutic baths from natural spring water I saw construction of a new research facility for cardiology and kidney diseases supported by the Max-Planck Institute. I was told there was an animal facility nearby but did not have the opportunity to see it. The theme of biomedical research carried throughout all of my trip.

So, those are the things I did. Two weeks, three countries, scores of people and hundreds of digital pictures. But what did I learn and what were my impressions? The purpose of the BKU award courtesy of Gerry Bantin is I feel to foster a greater understanding of animal research between the United States and the UK. The person selected each year to go to the meeting of the other association is something of an ambassador. I wanted to

see the equipment that is used by the UK animal care providers as shown in the trade show, I hoped to discuss what it meant to be a technician in the large pharmaceutical companies of Britain and I planned to encourage the IAT members to come to the AALAS national meeting and experience things on our side of the pond. Actually many do come each year (good to see you again Pete). So I learned, not unexpectedly, that IAT folks are just like AALAS members and there is the same passion and compassion for the work they do. The literature about the organisation and training programmes (like our certification and professional development) covers basically the same topics and has the same objectives: to do a better job of taking care of animals used in biomedical research. But there is one big difference that definitely impressed me. In the UK ARE terrorist activity is greater. I heard stories of car searches, personal bodyguards and high security at people's homes as well as their places of business. Being able to talk and not whisper at the Congress about their occupation amongst themselves without having to look over their shoulder seemed a relief. The sense of this was stronger than I have ever experienced in the US where of course we have the likes of PETA and break-ins and demonstrations. My IAT colleagues have truly enlightened me about what it could be like in the States. I don't say that to be an alarmist but to make a point about the differences in attitudes and going about our business for improvements in health and life. Fortunately we were able to focus on that in Athens and not have any of the distractions. Yes things are different but curiously they are also the same. I came away from this thinking that both the animals and humans involved in laboratory animal investigations will benefit by further exchange.

Efadastoh ("thank you" in Greek) to both the IAT and BKU for my good fortune this year. I am so pleased for the opportunity.

After 14 years and 24 recipients B&K Universal Limited believes that the Travel Fellowship Award has achieved its aim of fostering relationships

between America, the United Kingdom and Europe and many of the recipients are now regular visitors to each other's meetings. We now believe that the time is right to close this programme and trust that everyone who has participated in it has found it beneficial. B&K Universal is now embarking on a

new programme of sponsoring postgraduates working in transgenic developments. Our first recipient is Lynnette Knowles at the University of Manchester.

Gerry C Bantin, Professor
Chairman, B&K Universal Limited