



Newsletter of 'Using our Brains' Donor Program Issue 17 August 2007

In June, Clare Hunt and Donna Sheedy attended the International Society for Biomedical and Environmental Repositories (ISBER) meeting in Singapore, the first in the Asia-Pacific region. The society's mission is to provide a forum to address technical, legal/ethical and managerial issues relevant to repositories of biological and environmental specimens ie tissue banks like ours. With the new developments in molecular biology, nanotechnology, environmental toxicology, and computerized data management, it was a good opportunity to exchange ideas and gain knowledge from those with other backgrounds and expertise.

There was a range of biobanks represented, both human and non-human. It was of interest to compare the challenges of the diverse banks, to find the commonalities and the similar philosophy of sharing resources to benefit local and global communities.

Dr Paul Bartels, Head of the National Zoo's Wildlife Biological Resource Centre/BioBank in South Africa, gave an interesting presentation on the African Wildlife Biobanking project. The materials they are banking (blood, feathers, skin, tissue) are made available to biodiversity and biotechnology organisations around the world, with due benefit-sharing accruing to the South African and African stakeholders. That includes universities and research institutes, both in South Africa and abroad.



A veterinary team working from a mobile laboratory with Dr Bartels in the grey shirt, treats a darted lion in the Pilanesberg National Park [Photo © The Tony and Lisette Lewis Foundation]

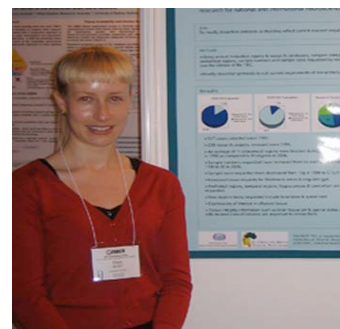
The main theme of the ISBER meeting was the international standardization and harmonization of biobanks. The increasing number of international research institutions collaborating and accessing

facilities such as ours rely on our quality control protocols. Highlighted during the meeting were differences in terminology, ethics, governing protocols between countries due to language and cultural differences, or simply historical. Within the Australian Brain Bank Network we strive to maintain the quality of our resources in all management areas nationally. An important aspect of this is the availability and accuracy of information collated and maintained in a standardized manner.

In studying the disorders associated with the brain a number of factors have been shown to be influential. Collating accurate information on alcohol consumption, smoking, and environmental hazards eg exposure to toxins, enhances the outcomes of research. We endeavour to contact all our donors on an annual basis to update changes or add other information you may feel useful. Please inform us if you have changed your contact details.

Clare Hunt: Technical Officer, NSW Tissue Resource Centre

After completing a Medical Science degree at UTS in 2003, Clare worked in a real estate agency before taking up her position as Technical Officer with the NSW TRC. This year marks her 3rd year with the TRC, where she deals with the 'hands on' side of brain donation. She is part of a team that processes, archives and retrieves the donated tissue for research. Clare's duties also include preparation of tissue samples for research projects and she liaises with researchers to ensure their requirements are met.



Clare standing at her poster presentation ISBER conference, 2007

Outside work, Clare's activities revolve around dancing - mainly for fun. Rock'n'roll and the Argentine tango are her specialties - the latter she co-teaches once a week - providing a good balance to the scientific nature of her job. We were very proud of her achievements last year when she represented Australia at the 2006 World Tango Championships in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

From the Director:

The Director is enjoying a well-earned break from duties. He and wife Therese Garrick have been travelling, firstly to Tasmania, then Victoria, western NSW and, more recently, camping and sailing along the east coast of Queensland. Clive keeps us informed (and envious!) by means of bulletins. Here are some highlights of their trip:

Tasmania:

“There is such a friendliness and ease of travel here. We loved the north-west and the north-east. The valleys and mountains between St Helens and Scottsdale were some of the most beautiful we have seen for many years. We have been particularly impressed by the helpfulness and friendliness of the Taswegians and also by the infrastructure of this small island. Given a population of about 500,000, the roads, signage and national parks are a credit to them.”

Victoria:

“We had forgotten how beautiful the beaches are along this part of the coast, especially Torquay and Anglesea. A camping neighbour in Wye River had recommended the ‘Otway Fly’ treetop walk – and it was well worth the visit. An hour’s walk through mountain ash, sassafras and myrtle beech woods, beginning at ground level along a series of metal corridors to the tops of the trees at about 50 metres. The information provided on the history of the area, the trees and the insects was fascinating. Some of the mountain ash were at least 350 years old. We have never seen such straight, tall timbers. The mountain ash has almost no bark so is highly vulnerable to fires; the general area was badly burnt out on Ash Wednesday in 1983, although this small section was preserved.”

Somewhere in the Grampians: “I took the ‘short cut’ along the Old Mill Road but we got a bit lost. My grandfather’s nickname was ‘short-cut Harper’ so the genes are still running strong. We turned on the GPS which showed our position in the middle of a forest with no marked roads.”

Back to Sydney for the Order of Australia Award Ceremony in May:

“The awards ceremony was scheduled for 10 am at NSW Government House. It is an impressive sandstone building which dates back to the 1840’s (convict built) surrounded by beautiful gardens, in a prime position on Bennelong Point overlooking the opera house and Sydney harbour. The organization of the day was military-like in timing and precision. The Governor, Marie Bashir, her husband, Sir Nicholas Shehadie, and representatives from

government, the military forces and police were in attendance. There were 35 awardees. A citation was read for each of us as we stood on the podium and then the presentation was made. It was an emotionally charged moment for each of us, engendered largely by the exquisite pomp and ceremony. I felt overcome with a sense of pride.”

Queensland:

Camping at Mooloolaba during school holidays:

“The afternoon entertainment was new arrivals at the camp trying to squeeze their large caravans into inappropriately small spaces. It is like any crisis situation when everyone gathers about and become instant friends.”

Sailing: “The aim is to get to Lady Musgrave Island during daylight hours. It is said to be a beautiful reef with a lagoon that one can anchor inside, about 35 miles NE of Bundaberg. The breezes were relatively light and we had to motor sail at about 7 knots. The high point of the watch was the sun rising in the east over the placid sea. Just after lunch Lady Musgrave Island came into view. It is a tiny coral cay but mariners can be easily misled because the size of the actual reef is probably a thousand times bigger than the visible island. It would be very easy to run aground and the history books are filled with these events. It is certainly much easier with a GPS and chart-plotter which show both the visible island and the full extent of the reef; so we easily navigated into the lagoon through a narrow passage. Therese and I donned our togs, snorkels and goggles and swam out over the reef. It has some really special features, like a massive purple ‘cauliflower’ shaped dome over which were swimming hundreds of tiny luminescent green fish, all identical. Next moment a beautiful large turtle appeared from a cavern in the reef, gently rising and looking us each in the eye in turn – completely unconcerned by our presence.”

“This trip is totally different from anything we have ever done before. We have never had so much free time with no agenda and, although it is hard for me to admit, I am enjoying sitting in the forest or on a beach for hours in contemplation. This afternoon we tried to identify the bellbirds that are everywhere but extremely difficult to see in the deep foliage. Life seems to have become very simple with activities like birdwatching and tree identification filling our days. We have not felt so relaxed in a very long time and I commend it to all of you.”

Clive Harper

*Thoughts on getting older:
Funny I don't remember being absent-minded.
If all is not lost, where is it?
It is easier to get older than it is to get wiser.*