

# JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

## REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

**Expedition/Project/Conference Title:** The Association for the Advancement of Animal Breeding and Genetics 2009.....

**Travel Dates:** 24<sup>th</sup> September – 6<sup>th</sup> October 2009.....

**Location:** Barossa Valley, Victoria, Australia.....

**Group Member(s):** Jennifer Gill.....

### Aims:

1. To give a presentation entitled “Association of polymorphisms in candidate genes with carcass and taste panel assessed meat quality traits in a commercial population of Angus-sired beef cattle”.
2. To meet leading researchers in the field of Animal Genetics.

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### OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference of the Association for the Advancement of Animal Breeding and Genetics (AAABG) was held in the famous Barossa Valley, 60 km Northeast of Adelaide. The conference, which is held every two years at locations throughout Australia and New Zealand, was located at the Novotel resort, directly behind Jacob’s Creek, which lends its name to the famous brand of wine based in the region.



The conference kicked off with a comparative genomics workshop, attended by more than 200 delegates. The workshop included interesting sessions on, among other things, regulation of gene expression, genome evolution and genome structure as well as an impressive tribute dinner to Frank Nicholas, Emeritus Professor at the University of Sydney, which was the first of many social activities arranged throughout the week. One of the most fascinating talks of the workshop came from Jennifer Marshall Graves who amused everyone in the audience by stating that she believes mice are an alien life form sent from space to confuse us! She concluded her talk by stating that the Y chromosome could disappear within 5.8 million years which amused only half of the audience.



After a day and a half of the genomic workshop it was time for the 18<sup>th</sup> conference to begin. The conference was opened by famed Australian cook and TV presenter Maggie Beer who urged us all to explore as much of the Barossa valley as possible. However, the packed conference timetable, which consisted of 3 plenary, 18 concurrent and 2 poster sessions over 4 days, left limited time for exploration. One of the first talks of the conference came from Frank Nicholas, author of “Charles Darwin in Australia”, who gave a fascinating insight into Darwin’s visit to Australia in 1836. The concurrent sessions of the conference included talks on the delivery

of genomics to industry, genomic selection, beef cattle genetics, disease resistance and statistical methods.

This latter session consisted of two very well-attended talks on the mixed models used in animal breeding by Arthur Gilmour and Robin Thompson who developed ASReml, a computer program used routinely in animal genetics research. The most interesting sessions as far as I was concerned were the two on Beef Cattle genetics, the subject of my PhD thesis. Alison Van Eenennaam (University of California) gave a thought-provoking talk on the necessity for validation of DNA tests for quantitative beef cattle traits whilst Matt Walcott (AGBU), who discussed the use of genetic tests for meat tenderness in Brahman cattle, gave an interesting insight in to the incorporation of genetic marker test results into BREEDPLAN, the Australian genetic evaluation system for beef cattle.



There was a packed and varied social programme consisting of both informal buffet dinners and a Bavarian barbeque and a more formal conference dinner at the Roseworthy campus of the University of Adelaide. Along with the poster sessions, where 51 posters were perused over wine and cheese, these social events were an ideal opportunity to mix with some of the key players in the field of animal genetics. Furthermore, Wednesday afternoon was set aside for conference tours to enable us to explore some of the Barossa. Tour options included golf, pig breeder tours, a visit to a sheep farm and a wine

tasting trip. Needless to say, the majority of people picked the wine tour resulting in five bus loads of people transported around various wineries.

I was also lucky enough to be able to attend the Australasian Conference on Statistical Methods for Genomic Data Analysis which was held in the beautiful botanic gardens of Brisbane. This two day conference included interesting talks by Peter Visscher, Mike Goddard and Bill Hill and was an excellent opportunity to catch up with the new contacts made the week before at the AAABG conference.

In conclusion, the AAABG conference was a fantastic experience and I was thrilled to be able to present my work to a group of highly respected scientists. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the James Rennie Bequest for awarding me funding which enabled me to travel to Australia for the conference.