

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

MSA conference in Utah, 24th-30th July 2009

Prepared by Irene Barnes

After a scenic 12 hour road trip on the interstate 80 from Davis in California, across the Nevada desert and through the Salt Pans of Utah, the FABI delegation arrived at Snowbird Ski resort, just outside Salt Lake City, for this year's meeting of the American Mycological Society (MSA). The given title of the conference "Botany and Mycology" connected five leading scientific societies that included members of the Mycological Society of America, the American Bryological and Lichenological Society, the American Fern Society, the American Society of Plant Taxonomists and the Botanical Society of America.

Three representatives from FABI were privileged to be able to attend this meeting. Accompanying Prof Brenda Wingfield was Post-Doc student Irene Barnes and PhD student Quentin Santana. Quentin presented his first paper ever at an international meeting on the pitch canker pathogen of pines entitled "Microsatellite discovery in *Fusarium circinatum* using ISSR-PCR and deep sequencing" and Irene presented work related to the anthropogenic movement of the invasive pine pathogen, *Dothistroma septosporum*. Other contributions to the congress were two student posters entitled "Gene expression during vegetative incompatibility in *Amylostereum areolatum* by Magriet van der Nest and "Diagnostic markers reveal two species of *Dothistroma* in Hungary" also by Irene.

The conference commenced with a pre-conference MSA foray into the Uintah mountain range of northern Utah. Two busloads of eager mycologists could be seen foraging through the natural forests in search for some interesting looking mushrooms and even possible new fungal species. The day's collections were delightfully displayed in the poster hall for all to see. The timely event of some rainfall two weeks prior to the meeting left spectacular fields full of native wild flowers. Observing these beautiful blooms was a highlight for those botanists and mycologist alike, who managed to get up early enough to attend the morning walks, organised, and lead by, world experts in Botanical nomenclature and taxonomy.

The congress had an exciting program filled with a week's worth of workshops, lectures, poster sessions and special symposia including a "Women in Science Panel Discussion" over lunch. It was often difficult to decide which event to attend. While some of the FABI members attended the pre-conference forays, others attended various workshops that were relevant to the research and the teaching done at FABI. These included workshops such as "Using and writing case studies for botany and mycology education", "Preparing Digital Images for Publication" and "DNA-Align, A New Cross-Platform Multiple Sequence Alignment Tool". Although the talks covered a great diversity of topics, many were relevant to a wide scientific audience. These topics ranged from assembling the plant and fungal trees of life, dynamics of evolution in plant and fungi, climate change and biological invasions.

As for some "other fun", a tram ride up to the top of ski slopes afforded the group some relaxation and the opportunity to play, bare foot, in the snow. The Zipper ride down the mountain, however, was definitely for the adrenaline junkies. The conference, as a whole, was exciting and a great experience. It was good way to catch up with some old friends and colleagues but also a great way to establish new relationships and collaborations with other scientists.

Irene Barnes would like to thank FABI and Whitehead Scientific for the travel grants that sponsored her attendance at this conference. Quentin Santana had his way paid through UP student travel bursary. Brenda Wingfield is currently on sabbatical in the USA and this has been sponsored jointly

by the NRF, Oppenheimer Foundation, the DST/NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology and the University of Pretoria.



From top, left to right: Irene and Brenda on the salt pans in Utah; Catching up with old friends Conrad Schoch; Brenda and Quentin hard at work; Irene meeting Eva Stukenbrock from Switzerland with Brenda presenting the poster to Jeff Stone in the background, meeting new friends; Quentin and his first snow experience; Variety of wild flowers observed on the Botany walk.