

## Meeting Report

The eleventh meeting of the European Histamine Research Society was held in Bled, Yugoslavia, in May 1982 at the kind invitation of Prof. F. Erjavec. It was attended by over 80 members and guests, who were all accommodated at the Grand Hotel Toplice (not the Grand Topless Hotel and not the Grand Hotel Top Lice). Fifteen countries of Europe were represented and our guests also came from Canada and Japan. The weather was mixed, two days of continuous rain followed by two of fine sunshine. The location alongside Lake Bled was first-class and all arrangements were according to plan. Most participants arrived on the Sunday in time for the usual informal get-together in the evening. Many travelled via Zagreb Airport where a coach was waiting to take the party to Bled (a 3 hours journey). A second coach was organised to help the later transport but there was only one member (W.S.) to be carried and we understand he had a great time, trying out each of the 40 seats!

After some opening comments by the local Chairman and welcoming words by the President of the Yugoslav Pharmacological Society, the meeting got underway on the Monday with the main lecture by John Foreman from London. We all enjoyed his delightful presentation of the relationship between histamine and substance P at the sensory nerve endings where both appear to play a role in wheal and flare formation, once a stimulus has initiated a sequence of events. Structure-activity relationships within the polypeptide nucleus of substance P were also stressed. The lecture was well presented and enjoyed by all present, even those not working in this particular area of histamine research. The remainder of the day was concerned with aspects of Histamine Release and the importance of Histamine within the Central Nervous System. Discussions were lively and informative but at the end of the day one wondered what was the true connection between isolated rat peritoneal mast cells and human basophils in patients with multiple sclerosis. Everyone enjoyed a presentation about brain histamine levels and disease. The speaker (from Sarajevo) said 'So it seems there's no end to different stories about histamine. Phenothiazines can do anything from inducing catalepsy to increasing brain histamine concentrations'. Dinner was taken in the Hotel that evening (very well arranged as the rain was pouring down outside).

The second day was confined to Histamine Receptors and later to the Cardiovascular System. It was nice to hear that an S.K.F. worker studying the calcium paradox found great difficulty in trying to obtain H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> receptor blockers! This was followed by one of our Italian friends arguing about the difference between Overflow (not Over Flo!) and Release. He did not have much to strengthen his case when he said '50% of the animals did not respond and they were in the minority!' Still, with his feet on the ground, he was sure the heart is the heart and the stomach is the stomach. But in the Discussion, one worker said 'You know, all you are saying – yes, everything – is rubbish!' The Chairperson then told the lecturer – 'You are probably very tired after answering so many questions. You may now sit down'. From East Berlin, we then heard about the Worst Side of the Whole Meeting!

On the Tuesday afternoon, we all went by coach to Postojna Cave – a fantastic Wonder of the World. A half-an-hour's train ride underground was followed by an hour's walk before we returned to daylight. This was the Highlight of the Meeting. We returned to Ljubljana for sightseeing and Dinner. The latter was well remembered by the intense noise of the band and the lady singer.

On the Wednesday, the topics considered were histamine and the Gastrointestinal Tract, Pathophysiology of histamine and methods in Histamine Research. A truly important step forward

was taken by Wilfried and Philip during the latter session. Measurements of very low levels of histamine always present delicate situations and it was therefore pleasing to hear that members of the Society are to join a ring study for plasma histamine assays so that difficulties can be ironed out. Samples are to be exchanged and assayed in different laboratories. Again it was a most interesting day, though several times speakers said that their last slide summarised their results and then after only 2 seconds called for the lights. An interesting comment came from French workers – ‘To die or not to die, that is the question. Is it nobler to lower the histidine decarboxylase activity than to lower the histamine content?’

Finally, there were a few non-specific statements made after lunch. For example, our West German Editor said ‘Sex is not a symptom with the highest sensitivity’ and from Denmark we heard ‘There are not quite normal mast cells but there must be some normal ones as well’. Best of all, from the UK was the statement that ‘This is not a good experiment to show addition. But we will show it by doing the experiment again in much better circumstances’.

The General Assembly of Members and Scientific Guests followed and was very well attended. Procedures, Finances and the Society’s Future were all discussed at length. The next meeting was to be in England in May 1983. The Farewell Dinner in the evening was a lavish affair with band playing whilst we ate the good food – and drank the Yugoslav wine. We had dancing but above all the singing of the International Anthem of the Histaminologists of Europe, suitably accompanied by a very co-operative band. Our sincerest thanks go to all the staff at Ljubljana for a meeting of the highest quality. The 21-strong British party had to leave Bled at 6am the next day to connect with the morning flight from Zagreb but we had had a super time so everything was taken in its stride.

G.B.West, Secretary-General (London)