

It's a jungle out there – L.A. in the 21st century

SGM at the ASM 100th General Meeting

Aidan Parte & Janet Hurst

We arrived in Los Angeles on Saturday afternoon: Janet Hurst, fresh from a week in Las Vegas, and Aidan Parte, stale from a week in Reading. The weather in the home of Hollywood, food fads, iced tea and Ice-T was an unseasonably warm 90 F, but over 100 F in the Valleys. Thank goodness for air conditioning! Our hotel was in Downtown L.A., not too far from the Conference Center.

After a sleepless night (for a jet-lagged Aidan, anyway), we went to the massive new L.A. Conference Center in Downtown, to set up our stand in the Publishers' Park section of the trade exhibition. Unlike last year, we decided to hire a stand from the ASM – this saves the aggravation of carting the famous blue wheelie-bin thousands of miles around the world. It was a great relief, though, that the seven boxes of journals, *Microbiology Today*, educational material, etc., had arrived safely at our allotted booth. What most conference-goers don't see is all the work behind the scenes. It is truly amazing! Fork-lift trucks zooming around, no carpets, cables and packing crates everywhere. Then when we came back in the morning, it was all transformed into a professional and smart-looking trade exhibition.

The conference opened on Monday 22 May and was immediately extremely busy, with nearly 8,000 scientific delegates registered for the 100th ASM Annual Meeting. The trade exhibition was in a hall that resembled an aircraft hangar and was arranged so that delegates had to go through it to get to the timed poster sessions. This resulted in a constant flow of people, with plenty of interest in the SGM's services, particularly membership (it is still staggering the number of people who think SGM is the British arm of the ASM!), *Microbiology Today*, posters, stickers and journals. It was surprising that there was not much interest in the online side of the journals operation, which we had available on a lap-top, probably because the novelty has worn off and it is now expected of us. This just shows how quickly things are moving in electronic publishing. It was also good to get plenty of positive feedback on our Symposium volumes. Many SGM members dropped by the stand – it was nice to see their friendly faces – and we were grateful to those who stopped to help for a while, enabling us to have a look round the 800 or so other 'booths'.

Liz Sockett, SGM Education Officer, made some useful contacts in the ASM Division W (their Education Group) and participated in a school-teachers' training day on microbiology, where she distributed packs of SGM resources. She also presented a poster on our educational activities for younger children which was very well received. All of the free handouts on the poster disappeared in a flash. Compared with most of the other educational material at the event, SGM products are of high quality and very innovative. The positive reaction of delegates was most welcome.

It was not all work, work, work at the conference. As you can see, we managed to get into the non-urban jungle, where we met a friendly lioness who even allowed us to have our picture taken with her! When it all ended on the Wednesday, most of our material had been taken and we only brought back our display copies of the Symposium volumes, and of course pens, chocolates and post-it pads that we had swiped from other stands!

We ate every night in the hotel. The reason we didn't go out is that Downtown L.A. is not very



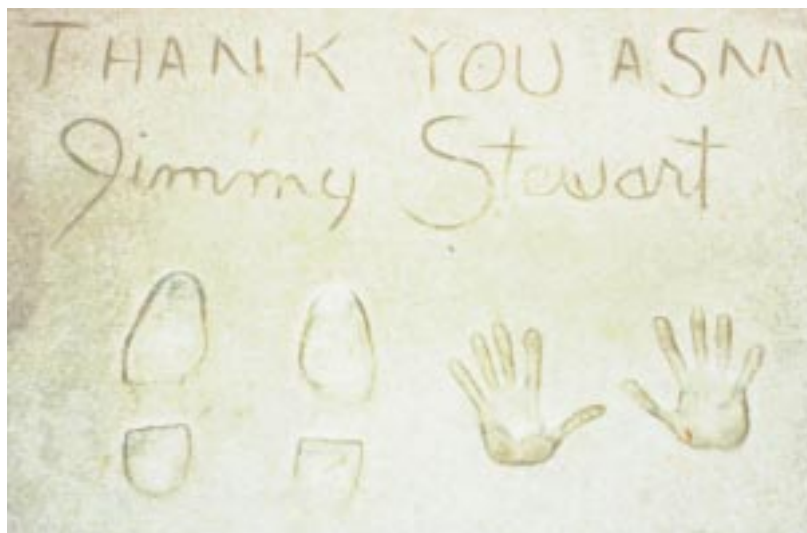


nice! It certainly wasn't like the movies, except perhaps *Boyz 'n' the Hood*, and we heard every night on the TV about the latest tit-for-tat drive-by shooting not far from where we were staying. So that our dreams weren't completely shattered, in the free time before flying home we went on two coach trips. At Universal Studios we did a tour of the backlot – Bates Motel will give you a real welcome – and other special effects shows and rides including *Backdraft*, *E.T.* and *Back to the Future*. We also managed a whistle-stop tour of Venice Beach, Beverley Hills and stars' homes in Bel Air, and the Chinese Theater where we made our mark in the pavement!



All in all, it was a very successful conference and well worth the effort for raising the SGM's profile in the States.

● **Aidan Parte**,
Managing Editor, *IJSEM*
● **Janet Hurst**, SGM
Deputy Executive
Secretary



FAR LEFT:
The skyline of Downtown L.A.

BOTTOM:
Universal Studios' backlot, Hollywood (Warner Brothers in the background).

CENTRE (UPPER):
The new L.A. Conference Center, Downtown L.A.

CENTRE (LOWER):
The SGM Stand in the L.A. Conference Center. From left to right:
Aidan Parte (Managing Editor, *IJSEM*), Erko Stackebrandt (Editor, *IJSEM*),
Janet Hurst (SGM Deputy Executive Secretary).

ABOVE (UPPER):
Janet Hurst and Aidan Parte with a friendly lioness in the non-urban jungle!
COURTESY APPLIED GRAPHICS TECHNOLOGIES

ABOVE (LOWER):
A 'thank you' from Hollywood legend James Stewart outside the Chinese Theater!

ALL PHOTOS AIDAN PARTE EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED