

International Conference on Goats **MUCHO BUENO**

by Jackie Dunham



When it was first announced that the International Conference on Goats was going to be held in Mexico in 2008, my husband, Michael, and I decided that we should go. It had been 26 years since this International Goat Association (IGA) event had been held in North America and besides, we had never been to Mexico and are always looking for an opportunity to combine pleasure with a tax deductible business trip!

Some months later, a member of the Alberta Goat Breeders Association wrote a letter to the AGBA board, suggesting that AGBA find a way to send a representative to the event. Through the Diversified Livestock Fund of Alberta, a grant was obtained that paid most of the expenses for president Merna Gisler and I to attend. My husband came along too, paying his own way.

We flew out of the Edmonton International Airport on Saturday, August 30, on a direct flight to Mexico City on Mexicana Airlines. We landed in the late afternoon, amidst a sea of Spanish-speaking travellers and airport staff. With the help of a friendly porter with a smattering of English, we found the bus station within the international terminal, where we purchased Primera Plus bus tickets for Querétaro. We were provided with a bag lunch, our bags were hand-searched, we were patted down by security officials, and then allowed to board the bus under the scrutiny of a guard with a video camera.

Three hours and a taxi ride later, we arrived at the conference hotel, Mision Juriquilla, which was built around the ruins of an old hacienda, dating back to the eighteenth century. The architects cleverly used the old walls and other parts of old buildings to give the hotel and grounds a lot of character and ambience. The atmosphere is further enhanced by several courtyards and gardens that link various areas of the hotel. We enjoyed a Mexican buffet supper in the hotel's restaurant followed by a poolside dance show, and then went to bed after a long day of travelling.

The next day was the only "free" day of our stay so we hired a taxi to take us into the heart of the city of Querétaro (Juriquilla, where the hotel is located, is a suburb of Querétaro). This part of the city, known as the Centro Historico or Historic Monuments Zone, was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1996. Its twisting and narrow streets, some of which are closed to traffic, are lined with colourful buildings - residences, churches, shops, restaurants, and other businesses. Also in the area is an aqueduct that was built in the 1700s to bring spring water from the ancient settlement of La Cañada, some nine kilometres away, to the city of Querétaro. After sightseeing, lunch, and some shopping, we found a taxi to take us "home" to register for the conference and attend an informal welcome ceremony.

The next morning, Monday, the conference was officially opened, beginning with the commercial exhibit hall. It was perhaps a mistake to open the exhibit hall first, as many of the participants lingered there, looking at exhibits and the goats that we found housed in pens at the back of the hall (by then, we all needed a "goat fix"!). Meanwhile, across the courtyard, the opening ceremony was taking place in the Juárez Room, a very large conference hall which was later divided into three separate halls, as needed, for presentations. IGA board members and conference organizers were introduced and participants were welcomed to the event.

Presentations began after that and continued throughout the first day, and on Tuesday and Thursday. We were provided with headsets so we could listen to the English translations of the Spanish presentations (or vice versa). As many of the presentations ran simultaneously, the three of us decided to split them up so that we could cover most of them between us, but after a few hours, it became apparent that this would not go according to plan. While many of the presentations were interesting, there were some that were too technical for us, or just not as interesting as we thought they would be. There was also the issue of timing - with some presenters not turning up for their time slots, the schedule became less and less reliable, and attending a particular presentation became a hit or miss affair. And, in the late afternoon, when heads were apt to nod, the appeal of the livelier exhibit hall prevailed.



entrance to Mision Juriquilla



Michael and Jackie by hotel courtyard and garden



marketing presentation in Juárez room



one of tables at the wine and cheese reception

However, we did attend many sessions and I now have material or inspiration for several articles which I plan to put together over the coming months to publish in *GoatKeeper*. Some of my favourite presentations were “Sustainable Goat Production - Some Global Perspectives” by Christie Peacock of the United Kingdom based charity FARM-Africa, “Future of Organic Goat Production” by IGA outgoing president Dr. Christopher D. Lu, “Use of Goats in Vegetation Management” by An Pieschel (Goats Unlimited), and “Home-based Chevron Processing: A Value-adding Strategy to Encourage Goat Production in the Uplands” by Mary Jean G. Bulatao of the Philippines.

The exhibit hall housed the poster presentations. The posters outlined various goat research projects and their findings in large poster format. Some of them were in Spanish but many were in English. We met several of the authors, who came from such places as Japan, Norway, and the US, to name a few.

The commercial booths in the exhibit hall were largely targeted at Mexican goat farmers, of whom there were a large number in attendance. These exhibits were still interesting to see, however. There were some familiar companies present, such as Westfalia and Bayer, and some not so familiar ones such as the National Cottonseed Products Association. There were also several booths selling “goat stuff” such as mugs, tea towels, soap, goat milk candy, bags, T-shirts, and stuffed toys. Merna and I spent more than a few pesos there!

A meeting of the International Goat Association membership took place on Tuesday morning in the Juárez Room. I was amazed to learn that 95% of the world goat population lives in undeveloped countries, serving as an absolute necessity of life to many families. The fundamental role of the goat in these countries makes the time and money we devote to programs for the remaining 5% found in developed countries seem rather petty and frivolous! Understandably, most of the IGA’s focus is on undeveloped or developing countries. Board members are elected from around the world and each country is invited to have a representative. The IGA would like to have more producers participate in the organization; up to this point, the membership has consisted mainly of researchers and project leaders. The meeting concluded with presentations to outgoing board members and the introduction of the new ones. It was announced that a record number of papers (over 450) were submitted for this particular conference. There were over 600 participants registered for the conference, from 44 countries. As far as we know, we were the only Canadians!

On Tuesday evening, a wine and cheese reception provided us with the opportunity to indulge in many gourmet goodies; not only was there wine and goat cheese, there were quiches and cheesecakes, pastries and ice cream, buns and crackers, tamales...the list goes on. As well, there was a sweet goat milk drink in handmade pottery mugs, which we got to keep, as well as agave liquor, in tiny pottery jugs, which we also got to keep.

By the third day of the conference, Wednesday, we were ready for a break from the “classroom”. Two tours had been organized. Route one included two university research farms and a goat milk candy factory. Route two was to visit commercial milk producing farms and dairies in Guanajuato. Merna and I opted for route one and Michael volunteered to help cover all the bases by taking the route two tour.

Our bus took us along Mexican highways for many kilometres before turning off on a bumpy country road. Soon the road became too narrow and rutted for the bus and was muddy in places. We disembarked to walk the rest of the way to the university farm, Amazcala Campus.

With our headsets in place, we stood in the hot Mexican sun (or the shade of the building), listening to the translator’s English version of the guide’s description of the facility and its projects. The farm raises Nubian goats, and Barbados Blackbelly and Romanov sheep. The goat and sheep shelters were open to the elements, with tin roofs to provide shade in the heat of the day and shelter from the rain during the rainy season. The feeders contained alfalfa hay and dry corn fodder (from square bales), although the animals also graze in arid rangeland for much of the day. The milking facility is also outdoors, under a tin roof. Goat milk is produced for cheese and candy, for which there is a small processing facility on campus. Research activity is focused on goats in semi-arid rangelands and technology transfer to producers in the region.



posters in the exhibit hall



milking equipment display in the exhibit hall



milking facility at Amazcala Campus



tour guide at Amazcala Campus processing facility



National University of Mexico, Veterinary Medicine



University of Mexico goat milking area and housing



University of Mexico rotary milking parlour



children at Bernal

The next stop was Rancho el Acicate, a large goat dairy farm currently under construction. We sat on banked hay bales in the newly constructed and impressive feed shed, and munched on snacks while we watched a power point presentation and listened to owners and managers talk about their plans. The goal of the farm is to milk 3000 goats twice a day with an average production of three litres per day per doe. This farm will be the largest of its kind in Mexico (see separate article on page 41).

We got back onto the bus, and drove to the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Located near Tequisquiapan, this university campus and farm is new and very modern, with rooms for students and visitors, classrooms, an auditorium, library, milking facility and dairy processing plant, and a pathology laboratory. Besides goats, the farm has dairy cattle, beef cattle, red deer, and dairy sheep. This centre offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs, as well as research and extension. After a delicious lunch in the campus cafeteria, we walked over to the goat facility.

We were directed into the milking parlour where afternoon milking of the farm's dairy herd was about to begin. The farm's herd consists of Alpine, Toggenburg, and Saanen dairy goats, and also Boer goats. The dairy does were milked in a new rotary parlour, in a milk room which is basically open to the elements except for partial walls around the rotary parlour and a domed roof overhead. The goats, who were fairly new to the rotary parlour, came down the alley tentatively and some had to be encouraged with a push or two to enter their place on the slowly revolving parlour. The parlour was equipped with individual meters to measure each doe's production. One worker attached the teat cups, while another followed along behind and detached the cups when the udders were empty and then dipped the teats. The goats were then released into the exit alley, to return to their pens. The triangular pens were clustered around a central area equipped with gates to allow various configurations for entry and exit into and from the alleyways leading to the parlour. The shelter itself was polygonal in shape, open to the elements except for divider walls and the roof. In the pens containing young kids, there were calf hutches for additional shelter. Along the outside perimeter of the shelter were feeders that ran the width of the pen. These were filled with alfalfa or grass hay, and, in one case, pellets. Goats graze in irrigated alfalfa and grass pastures for part of the day.

The next stop was Bernal, a beautiful village traditionally dedicated to goat production. The town has many tourist attractions, the most famous being the Bernal Rock (third largest rock in the world - the Rock of Gibraltar is first). The Bernal Candies factory is located in this picturesque village and is a good source of employment for people in the region. The factory, which began in the kitchen of the founder's home, belongs to Don Julio Rodriguez and family, whom, during the past 40 years, have been devoted to the traditional caramelization of goat milk into delicious sweets, which are sold in many outlets throughout Mexico, including Wal-Mart! Unfortunately, due to health regulations, we could not tour the factory, but were instead shown a video. We were served water bottles and samples of the candy by three young children dressed in traditional Mexican clothing. After some hurried shopping in the quaint little stores of Bernal, we boarded the bus for the ride back to Juriquilla.

While our tour involved a lot of driving between stops, the tour that Michael went on was more concentrated, so to speak. His group visited several dairy farms and an artisan cheese plant in a relatively small area, belonging to an organization called Caprinocultores unidos de Guanajuato (United Goat Farmers of Guanajuato), which has been in existence for only seven years, although most producers have more than 15 years experience as goat farmers. Currently there are 14 producers in the group, with 4000 dairy goats, producing an average of 950 kg milk per lactation per goat over 305 days. The farmers are advised by geneticists who specialize in goats; and also enjoy the support of nutritionists and a veterinarian. These farmers have a pathology laboratory at the Livestock Union of Guanajuato and automated equipment for milk analysis and somatic cell counts. A monitoring program for disease control has been developed as well. Some producers have adopted the system of artificial kid raising in raised-floor pens, with pasteurized colostrum and milk, or milk replacer. Producers are focused on control and eradication of diseases

such as CAE. All of the producers participate in a program to control and eradicate brucellosis and most have brucellosis-free herds. The group toured the facilities of some of the farmers, and enjoyed cheese samples at the cheese plant.

On the final day of the conference, Thursday, there were more presentations in the Juárez Room, yet many attendees wandered over to the exhibit hall instead, to take in the goat show. The Nubian show was judged by Silvio Doria de Almeida Ribeiro from Brazil. There was a total of 28 Nubians shown. Boers were up next and 27 animals were presented to Mexican judge Marcos de Luna. Five Toggenburgs, ten Alpines, and 37 Saanens were then judged by Javier Chaurand from Guanajuato, Mexico.



Judges chose junior and senior champions, and then grand champions; no reserve championships were awarded. We were not sure if this was a sanctioned show, and if so, by what agency. The announcer's commentary was in Spanish, and headsets were not provided so, although a young woman from Brazil tried to help some of us out, a lot was lost in translation and we did not get much information about show structure and procedures.

The exhibitors wore smocks bearing entry numbers; these smocks appeared to have been provided by a sponsor, Purina. Other than the smocks, there did not seem to be a dress code - exhibitors wore jeans for the most part, and shirts of various colours under their smocks.

A banquet was held that evening in the Juárez Room. The dinner was the best meal of the entire conference, although the wine and cheese reception was a very close second! On each table was a bottle of wine and a bottle of Cabrito tequila, its main attraction to conference attendees being that it has a Toggenburg goat on the label and the bottle has a goat head shaped into the glass. How I wanted one of those bottles, but the waiters swept them all away after dinner! How envious I was of the slightly tipsy young woman we encountered on the way back to our room after dinner - she had managed to come away with a half empty bottle! Unfortunately, the duty-free shops at the airport did not stock that brand!

On Friday morning we got up early for our journey back to Mexico City to catch the flight home. Now that we've been home a few weeks and have been exceedingly busy, the trip seems like a distant memory already, overridden by the pressing obligations at hand, and the urge to say gracias has almost subsided!



However I would like to say one more "gracias" to AGBA, DLFOA, and, most of all, the IGA and the local organizers of this wonderful event. It was worthwhile in every way, life-enriching and eye-opening!

The next IGA International Conference on Goats is in Brazil in 2010, then in the Canary Islands in 2012.

Mark your calendars!



Guanajuato milking parlour (above) and cheese samples (below)



GRACIAS!