

I arrived in Washington, D.C late on Saturday night and headed straight to the hotel for some much-needed rest after a long day of travelling. I had Sunday as a free day to explore, so I woke up and headed straight out to catch the Metro towards the city. I hopped off near Capitol Hill and spent the day on the National Mall, taking in the Capitol Building, monuments and museums. A real highlight was seeing the Star-Spangled Banner and Abraham Lincoln's top hat in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, as well as some more recent items such as Dorothy's ruby red slippers from the Wizard of Oz! The Marine Corps Marathon was also happening that day, and I was struck by the incredible atmosphere, with the crowds coming out to cheer the runners on.



Sightseeing in DC

On Monday I was met at my hotel and taken to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for my first day of visits. The visit started with an overview of their team structure and compliance roles as well as a valuable introduction to the legislation and guidelines which were quite different from the UK regulations. NIH runs a brilliant monthly seminar series focussing on different topics with regard to behaviour and welfare which I was kindly invited to attend and looked forward to getting involved with. Our first onsite facility visit was to the zebrafish facility which was extremely large. The ongoing work involved in keeping a facility that size running was impressive! Next, we visited a non-human primate (NHP) facility, where I learned about marmoset research, housing and training. After this, we went to a rhesus macaque facility where they were in the process of converting their conventional cages to group housing pens. I had the opportunity to speak with their behaviourist about interesting training methods they use to encourage the macaques to come forward confidently. On our way to the final facility visit of the day, we stopped at a plaque laid in recognition of the contributions made by animals to advances in animal research. NIH holds an annual celebration in honour of their research animals, a lovely concept which is beginning to spread to the UK. The final visit was to mouse facility specialising in craniofacial research. I learned about standard husbandry practices for rodents and had a tutorial in using Hydropacs<sup>®</sup>. I was also given a demonstration of their animal health tracking processes, an impressive system which allows both researchers and care staff to track clinical cases.

At the end of the day, I was collected and driven to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) Janelia Research Campus in Virginia. I received a very warm welcome there and had a lovely dinner with some of the team before retiring for the night in one of their elegant guest rooms.

On Tuesday I woke to a beautiful autumn view of the Janelia campus. The second day of visits started with me giving a presentation to the team about my career pathway and areas of interest/specialisation. After that, I met with the surgical team and learned about how a technical service was provided by the animal staff and was able to have a look at their multi station surgical suite. I then visited the fish facility and rodent facility where I was able to see some incredible behaviour work in action and also learn about how the breeding program was managed. In between the facility visits, I had the opportunity to speak with staff members about training, how the Institutional Animal Care and Use (IACUC) functions and also to learn about their transgenics

service which creates new mouse lines for research. I ended the day with a visit to the invertebrates shared resource team and learned about the production of drosophila and C. elegans strains which were shipped all over the world. I had no experience with invertebrates, so I very much enjoyed the demonstration of Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP) and Red Fluorescent Protein (RFP) screening under the microscope! At Janelia I was struck by the passion and commitment to animal welfare throughout the team as well as the interest and willingness of the animal care staff to get involved with the research.



View from Janelia Campus guesthouse

On Wednesday, I was kindly invited to a luncheon at the AAALAC International Executive office in Maryland. I was given a lovely tour of the offices and was finally able to meet the team and many of the staff members who had been helping me prepare for my visit since the summer. We had lunch altogether in the conference room and there was a presentation on AAALAC International as an organisation, history and goals. Over lunch the team shared with me stories and photos from their various team building events and festive activities in the office. It was great to see such a wonderful team spirit and uplifting atmosphere. After lunch, we went for a visit to the National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR) offices. We had a very interesting discussion about the public's perception of animal research and how this differs slightly between the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (U.S.). I learned about how NABR works tirelessly to combat and correct misinformation and lobby the U.S. government for support.



Sightseeing on Capitol Hill (above) and Georgetown Waterfront (right)



The following day, it was time to travel to Nashville, TN for the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS) National meeting. I arrived in the evening in the middle of a storm but still decided to venture out and explore Nashville. The infamous Broadway thoroughfare was about a 10-minute walk from my hotel, and it didn't disappoint! Even in the rain it was one of the liveliest places I'd ever seen. There was music playing in every bar and people out and about everywhere enjoying themselves.



Broadway in Nashville

On Friday morning, I was collected from the hotel for a visit to Vanderbilt University. I was warmly welcomed by the team who gave me an insightful overview of their structure and helped me understand their approach to governance and compliance. I then had a tour of a fish facility and had the opportunity to see an inspection being done by one of the post-approval monitoring (PAM) compliance teams. Afterwards, I was given a tour of the rodent facility where it was great to learn about the labelling systems they have in place to monitor clinical cases and to understand how the facility runs operationally. The staffing structure was different to what I had previously encountered, and it was interesting to hear about the different roles of animal care technicians, veterinary technicians and veterinarians along with understanding the operating model as a whole. After lunch we visited the large animal facility and saw squirrel monkeys, cynomolgus and rhesus macaques, sheep, dogs and tree shrews. I had not worked with many of these species in the lab, and so enjoyed learning about the research they contribute to, as well as their housing and husbandry procedures. We ended the day with a visit to the pathology lab where necropsy for the animal program and clinical program is performed. That evening, I had the pleasure of having dinner with one of the previous American AAALAC International Fellows and very much enjoyed sharing experiences from our trips.



Saturday was a free day in Nashville. I met up with my husband who had flown in for the AALAS meeting and we enjoyed a visit to the Country Music Hall of Fame, Broadway and the Nashville

Waterfront. In the evening, we went to a show at the Grand Ole Opry, where we enjoyed some great country music.



Visiting the Grand Ole Opry (left) and Country Music Hall of Fame

The final week of the Fellowship visit consisted of the AALAS meeting. It was the biggest conference I had ever attended, with so many great presentations programmed. I found it difficult to decide which talks to attend! I was able to catch up with people I'd met during the previous weeks' visits and also made many new connections. Overall, the experience was a great opportunity for my continued professional growth and I very much look forward to collaborating with new friends and colleagues again in the future, as well as sharing what I have learned with colleagues back in the UK.



Enjoying time at the AALAS International Meeting (left) and receiving the AAALAC International Fellowship Award (right)