

## In honor of Ian Murfet

N.F. Weeden for the Coordinating Committee of the Pisum Genetics Association

One of my final duties as Chair of the Coordinating Committee for the Pisum Genetics Association is the privilege and pleasure of extending to Professor I.C. Murfet life membership in this organization. Ian has been an intrepid supporter and leader in the field of pea genetics and developmental physiology since he joined the staff at the University of Tasmania at Hobart, Australia, in the 1960s. During his approximately 40-year tenure at UTAS he lived and contributed to the revolution in pea genetics.

In the mid twentieth century, pea maintained a position as one of the outstanding models for classical and physiological genetics. Ian applied the extensive tools and knowledge available in pea at that time to unraveling the genetics and physiology of flowering time, branching habit, and stem height. Despite receiving his graduate training before techniques in molecular biology became widely used, Ian made a smooth transition into the genomic era, permitting his laboratory to move from classical genetic analysis to the cloning and characterization of the sequences responsible for the observed variation. His program is one of the few working outside *Arabidopsis* and rice to have successfully dissected important plant phenotypes into their genetic constituents and described the interactions of these genes at the molecular level.

This transition from a classical to a genomic approach was not without difficulties and frustrations. Despite the extensive genetic and physiological studies that had been performed in pea by the 1970s, its large genome, relative intractability to cultivation in tissue culture or transformation, and status as a secondary crop—even to other legumes such as soybean and common bean, served to eliminate it from contention as a molecular genetic model during the 80s and 90s. Thus, the progress made in Ian's program is particularly impressive, and serves to show what ingenuity, creativity and perseverance can do in the face of significant obstacles and little funding. With the recent progress in the sequencing of the genome of *Medicago truncatula*, and the relative ease of going from this genome to that of pea, it is clear that pea again can be considered a model species for many traits. Certainly, the extensive knowledge now available on the genetics of flowering in pea (see review by Jim Weller, pp. 1-7), positions pea as the model legume for this character.

For ten years Ian served as Editor of *Pisum Genetics*, giving the journal its present name and instituting more rigor in the review of submitted manuscripts so that they could truly be considered peer reviewed. In addition to his many other contributions to the field, it is for his long service in the Pisum Genetics Association and for his continual support of young scholars pursuing studies involving pea that



*Ian Murfet (right) discussing pea phenotypes with Professor Newton Barber earlier in his career at the University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia. (Photo courtesy of School of Plant Science, UTAS).*

the Coordinating Committee enthusiastically awards Ian a life membership in the PGA and dedicates this issue of *Pisum Genetics* to him.