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Home-grown success

Gregor Mendel would have smiled upon the meeting of geneticists Jiri Bartek and Jiri Lukas. The pair first met in 1988 at the Cancer Research Institute, about 100 metres from the Brno monastery where Mendel famously cultivated his peas. Mendel would be even happier to hear that the two native Czech scientists are returning to their home country to claim an award bearing his name — the G. J. Mendel Honorary Medal for Merit in the Biological Sciences awarded by the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

The original meeting was pivotal for both their careers. They decided to join forces in Prague to establish a new department. But they soon found resources to be limited and scientific excellence “lacking”, says Bartek, so after a year they headed west for more training. Bartek went to the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (now Cancer Research UK) in London and Lukas joined the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Heidelberg, Germany. “That was a turning point,” Bartek says. Both got access to facilities — and colleagues — they didn’t have back home.

Bartek and Lukas are now reunited at the Institute of Cancer Biology in Copenhagen, where they are working on the cell cycle and DNA damage and repair. When they return to Prague this week to receive their medals they will tell young scientists there that they now have more opportunities closer to home and that their skills are in demand, as interest in core disciplines in the West is slipping. The young Max Planck lab at Dresden now offers opportunities for scientists from the East (see *Nature* 413, 4–5; 2001) and is complemented by a host of growing facilities in Vienna (see *Naturejobs* 4–5; 11 April 2002). The two scientists will encourage aspiring researchers to make the same decision — leave home for better training in the best lab that will take you and then decide where to establish your own. But that advice holds true for young researchers everywhere.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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