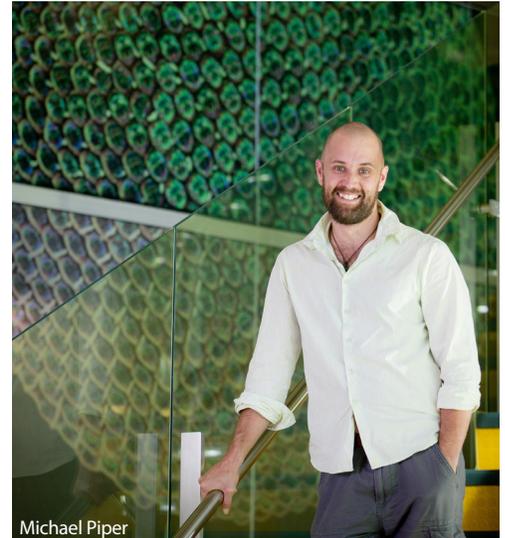




Interview

ANZSCDB Emerging Leader Award winner Michael Piper

Michael Piper grew up in a small town in North West Tasmania, receiving his Bachelor's degree from the University of Tasmania in Hobart. He completed his Honours year in 1997 at the University of Tasmania, under the supervision of Dr. Michael Feitz, studying the regulation of the hedgehog gene in *Drosophila*. He then moved to the Sunshine State, going on to complete his PhD under the mentorship of Prof. Melissa Little at the University of Queensland. Here he studied the Slit Gene family and their putative receptors, the Robo genes, in the developing murine kidney. Following his PhD, in 2003 he redirected his research focus to understanding the molecular and cellular mechanisms underlying neurodevelopmental and degenerative disorders. A relocation to the University of Cambridge with Prof. Christine Holt resulted in him exploring the role of Slit2 using *Xenopus* retinal growth cones and the NF- κ B-cadherin-mediated cell-cell adhesion in axonogenesis. In 2006, he returned to Australia to work with Prof. Linda at the Queensland Brain Institute, investigating transcription factors in CNS development. He currently runs a laboratory at the School of Biomedical Sciences at UQ. The goal of The Piper lab's research program is to understand the factors that drive neural stem cell differentiation during development and in disease.



Michael Piper

What inspired you to become a scientist?

I think two defining traits for many scientists are curiosity, and a love of the natural world. Both of these were important to me growing up, and I also had some wonderful teachers who encouraged this when I was at school.

What questions is your lab focusing on right now?

Our lab is trying to understand the transcriptional programs that control the biology of stem cells within the developing and adult brain, and the consequences of abnormal neural stem cell biology.

Which model system do you use to address these questions?

We predominantly use the mouse as a model system.

What attracted you to this field and what recent findings do you find most exciting?

The complexity of the brain, and fact that we still know so little about its development and function, was what drew me to this field. Some of the single-cell sequencing data that is defining the diversity of neural stem cell populations is exciting currently.

What is the best science-related advice you ever received?

Work hard, publish often.

How do you achieve a work-life balance when you're trying to establish yourself as an independent investigator?

Being married to a very understanding wife, and having a great family helps. Running keeps me sane as well.



Right: 2015 Buffalo Stampede Sky Marathon. This photo was taken prior to Mike and Jim spending 7 hours out on the trails. Photo Credit: Sarah Piper

Michael Piper's contact details: School of Biomedical Sciences, The University of Queensland, St Lucia QLD 4072, Australia
<https://biomedical-sciences.uq.edu.au/research/labs/neural-stem-cells>
 E-mail: m.piper@uq.edu.au

To date, what have been the pivotal points in your career?

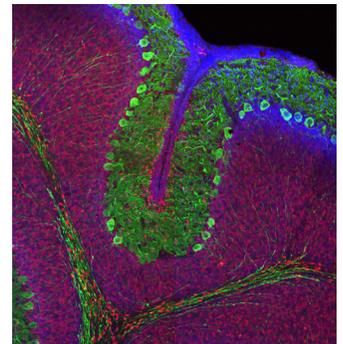
Delving into neuroscience in my first post-doc was a pivotal point in my career. Also having access to great mentors and leaders.

If you weren't a scientist, what would you be?

Kindy teacher.

If you had the chance to change one thing within the funding structure in Australia, what would you change?

A greater emphasis on funding basic, fundamental research.

*Could you tell us an interesting fact about yourself that people wouldn't know by looking at your CV?*

Always loved Frank Zappa. (We also have it from a reliable source that Mike likes "...pina coladas, and walks in the rain.")



Right: Mike taking a break at a recent conference to visit an owl cafe in Japan

"...two defining traits for many scientists are curiosity, and a love of the natural world."

Michael Piper was interviewed by Samantha Stehbins with help from Larisa Haupt ANZSCDB QLD State Representatives.