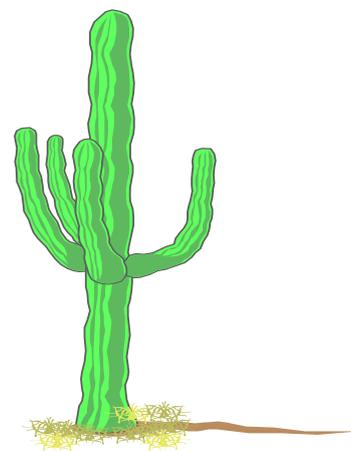


# Oxotica

The Newsletter of the Oxford Branch of the  
British Cactus and Succulent Society

December 2015

Volume 20, Number 2



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It was my honour to be elected to the role of Chairman of the Branch at the 2014 AGM. It's normal at this time to summarise the year's events and I am sure that some of what we did this year has already faded to the back of the memory. But before I continue, I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their support in the past year. It was sad to lose Brian Conway from the Committee after many years of service but we understood his reasons. Alan Ilott (Branch President) has now joined the team on a permanent basis.

It has been another eventful year. The attendance at Branch meetings has fluctuated due to work and other commitments of some of the regular attendees, but the core support is much appreciated: there is nothing worse for an invited speaker than talking to an empty room. We have been fortunate to have some new visiting speakers this year and we hope to continue to attract some new faces for the audience to appreciate next year.

In addition to the normal Branch programme of monthly meetings we had an enjoyable late Xmas Lunch in March, and Open Day visits to John Watmough's and my collections in May. Branch members have also assisted at sales stands throughout the year, one even overseas. One of the main contributors to the Branch funds was the display and sales at Blenheim Palace Flower Show and just as a bonus we were awarded a Silver Gilt Award for the display. Thanks go to Martin for his carpentry skills for building a re-useable frame for the stand, and the members who came and helped over the three days; it certainly did a lot to advertise the Society in general and us in particular. The new BCSS display boards were an added attraction.

The Branch show (with the Haworthia Society dedicated to the memory of Joyce Cocozza) in August, held at the new show venue in Grove, was exceptional again for the number and standard of exhibits. The continuing co-operation with other societies appears to work well, together with the support we get from a number of other branches' members who exhibit their plants. This year, with a great deal of local advertising thanks to Jean and David, we had lots of visitors, A special mention goes to Juliet (Martin's wife) for her excellent work in the kitchen keeping every one fed and watered throughout the day.

We also had two unexpected requests to organise auctions of plants from the collections of Rene Geissler and John Warwick. Both sales were well attended and, even after a few administrative hiccups, very successful events; thanks to all those who helped on the days in question.

In this modern world the Branch continues to promote itself well on the worldwide web; thanks to David for continually updating the web site. It's very useful to have members on the committee who are up with all the modern technology (even I am trying to catch up).

A special mention goes to John Watmough for continuing to gather plants from everywhere possible to sell in aid of Branch funds. As our Treasurer it's a bit like robbing Peter to pay Paul, but I am sure the proceeds will be put to good use in procuring digital equipment for use at Branch meetings.

A big thank you to everyone for your continued support of the Oxford Branch in all that we do. It's been a hectic but enjoyable year and let us hope for continued success in 2016.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all good health and good growing for the coming year.

Bill Darbon - Chairman



Oxford Branch sales table at Bury Knowle



Bill Hildyard surveys our sales table at ELK, Belgium

## HAWORTHIA SOCIETY SHOW

(Joyce Cocozza Memorial at the Oxford Branch Show - Saturday 1st August 2015)

The best way to see a show is to judge it as it means having a good look at all entries so it was a pleasure to be asked to judge the Haworthia and Gasteria classes at Oxford. Whilst this is a BCSS Branch Show, the Oxford Show has come to be something special over the last few years both for the outstanding quality of entries and for attracting visitors from all around the country. Rather than write notes on all the classes, I'll just make a few observations.

Not surprisingly, the standard of entries was high and, although exhibitors' names are not on show while judging, Stirling's plants stood out from all the others due to the quality of presentation. His black Japanese pots and neat top-dressing helped to enhance what were already good plants.

Classification problems were eased by including 'types' in classes for *H. splendens*, *magnifica* and *bayeri* so a few dubious retuse leaved plants could fit into these classes. The Haworthia and Gasteria classes alone produced 230 entries from 15 exhibitors which shows the popularity of these genera. From a distance, when I started on the *H. arachnoidea* class, I could see that plants of *H. comptoniana* were glowing with pride on the show bench. Approaching these plants, the 'glow' was still in its liquid form, unscented and slightly oily. It had me confused for a while but it turned out to be Leafshine! It certainly made them stand out amongst the other entries and probably did no harm to the plants though I'm not sure how other judges would have treated plants covered with Leafshine.

Plants that stood out were in many cases hybrids, particularly those produced from *H. emelyae* var. *major*. A few people asked me why I gave an award in the variegated class to a *H. splendens* that didn't appear to be variegated. The variegation was there but just in the leaf stems not on the 'window' surface.

Whilst trying to pick the best entry in the Haworthia and Gasteria classes, although there

were some superb Haworthias on show, there wasn't one that particularly stood out above the others and I chose a large cluster of *G. armstrongii* exhibited by John Watmough as the best entry, shiny but with a natural shine! Other outstanding plants given Awards Of Merit were a large *Gasteria rawlinsonii* exhibited by Tony Roberts, a large, almost black *H. sordida* from Stirling Baker and two to Alan Rollason for a collection of four *H. emelyae* hybrids and for the display class. Overall, it was good to see a well-supported show at a new venue.

Stuart Riley



Haworthia splendens Pink Form



Haworthia bayeri



Haworthia arachnoidia



Gasteria rawlinsonii



Haworthia emelyae var. comptoniana



Haworthia sordida



Gasteria armstrongii



Haworthia emelyae hybrids

[Photographs by Martin Doorbar]

**BRANCH MEETINGS  
JANUARY - JUNE 2016**

*4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in month, 7:30 pm for 8:00 pm*

*Please bring plants for the Table Show if you can - each of these meetings except January*

*We are always open to suggestions for the programme so if there is someone or something that you would like us to arrange please speak to one of the committee.*

**January 28                      A DIGITAL PROGRAMME**

**“India”  
By Keith Mortimer**

A presentation from the Society’s digital programmes library. Recently a lot of work has been carried out by a number of the Society members to convert some of the old slide collections to a digital format. This work is still ongoing and has presented an opportunity to upgrade some of the old presentations on transparencies into the new setup, and enhance some of the previous pictures.

**February 26                      TREVOR WRAY**

**“Around the shows”**

Trevor comes to us from our neighbouring Branch of Northampton & Milton Keynes and is the editor of The Northants News. He is an avid photographer and has travelled widely and takes his camera everywhere he goes. He is always an entertaining speaker; tonight he puts a different perspective on shows and showing, and I am sure this will provoke some lively discussion.

**March 24                              TERRY SMALE**

**“Succulents with Altitude”**

Terry has not been to us for some time. He is well known in the Mesembryanthemum World for his

knowledge on that wide range of plants and has travelled extensively in South Africa, He is also one of the RHS panel members who have attended our National Show. Tonight he hopefully will help those of us who are trying to cut down on our heating bills with his presentation, in which I am sure he will have a lot of tips to pass on.

**April 28                              DEREK TRIBBLE**

**“Western Cape (2014) Part 1”  
(In search of Anacampseros)**

Don’t be put off by the title, those of us that are acquainted with Derek will know that he has a wide-ranging knowledge of all matters relating to the succulents of South Africa and has traveled to many places that others have not been to, so I am sure that we will be treated to a diverse number of the plants that grow there. Derek is a well renowned speaker both in the UK and internationally so I am sure we will be in for an informative evening.

**May 26                                STIRLING BAKER**

**“Haworthias”**

Stirling is the Zone 15 Representative and the events manager of the Haworthia Society, with whom we had another successful show in 2015. He grows some amazing specimens of this, I think his “favourite” genus of plants, so I am sure he may be able to pass on some of his secrets. So we can perhaps give him a run for his money at the next joint show.

**June 23                                DAVID KIRKBRIGHT**

**“Peru 2014”**

David is a fellow of our Society and needs no introduction, as he is well known throughout the hobby as “the man who looks after the money”. He has been to a number of our Branch functions in the past, but tonight he is speaking about his trip to Peru in 2014, which he made with a number of other UK members. I am sure we will see a number of different plants in habitat.

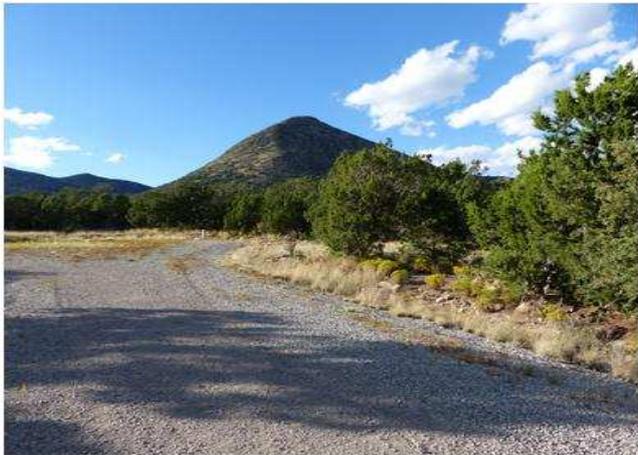
*Bill Darbon*

## TRAVELS OF A TENDERFOOT

### The Dude goes west

*By Bill Darbon*

It was my privilege and pleasure to visit Woody & Kathy Minnich at their home on the outskirts of Edgewood, New Mexico in September, they're having moved to this idyllic location after their retirement from teaching. The house, built in a Spanish style, is set in over 3 acres within a new development in the Estancia Valley and east of the Sandia and Manzano mountains.



*View from Woody's house: front garden and drive*



*The Family Woody, Kathy, Sarah & dogs.*

I travelled out on 15<sup>th</sup> September from Heathrow, the first time I had done long haul; the plane was late leaving Heathrow

and despite the pilot trying to catch up it was late arriving at Dallas (Fort Worth). I had a further connection booked to Albuquerque, but due to a baggage hiccup missed the connecting flight; fortunately there was a later plane available. Then I must try and contact Woody - Mobile not working in US, trusty payphone Ah! No change and phone box which only took a pre-paid card did not seem to work either. Then a nice American gentleman saw I was having problems and came to my rescue and called Woody's number on his phone so that I was able to advise him of the rebooked connection and my new arrival time. After a long day it was good to see them waiting at the Airport, and 45 minutes drive later I arrived at their home, in the dark and exhausted.

**Wednesday** morning was spent browsing Woody's collection of plants, a mix of both Cacti & Succulents, and outside two areas of plants under shade cloth (propagations and sales) and meeting the many animals Tortoises, Skinks, Fish and the two family dogs. In the afternoon we took a walk around the property for me to adjust to the altitude as they live at 6,500 feet. I saw a few of the plants that were growing around the homestead amongst the Juniper trees and brush, *Yucca baileyi*, *Cylindriopuntia imbricata*, *Mammillaria wightii* and *Echinocereus viridiflorus*. There was lots of evidence of local wild life from tracks in the soil on the walk around and Kathy told me that they had some deer that came to feed at the house in the mornings. We spent a pleasant evening chatting over dinner and planning trips out. Woody tried to introduce me to the finer points of Baseball, as he is an avid Angels fan (I don't think I really got it even after more intense instructions); nothing like rounders at school.



*Echinocereus viridiflorus*



*Female Mule Deer*

**Thursday** began with a disaster in the greenhouse overnight. The watering hose had split and of all places it could have sprayed managed to fill up three of Woody's terrariums of skinks and tortoises who could not escape. Despite emergency treatment draining them out they sadly perished, much to Woody's disappointment as he had raised them all from small hatchlings.

We had arranged to visit Steven Brack at Mesa Gardens, Belen in the afternoon. This was an eagerly awaited visit as I had heard of much before and was keen to see the source of the seed that he sends for the Society. I was quite amazed to see 14 greenhouses mostly covered in shade cloth and lots and lots of plants, but not in any particular order (I had expected a more regimented regime) but Steven explained that he did not like to keep

the same genera/species close together in case of cross contamination. He now has two new full time employees to help him and although they all work from dawn till dusk, the vastness of the task is enormous. We left after a pleasant two hours browsing, but nothing was for sale.



*With Steven Brack, outside one of the Mesemb. houses*

We continued on to Albuquerque Botanical Garden to meet Dave Ferguson (an Opuntia enthusiast - someone has got to be!) as Woody needed to talk to him about a potential presentation to a forthcoming Interstate conference. The gardens were well laid out; they even had an old fashion Train to run you around. However the Cacti and Succulent House display was a little disappointing considering the availability of natural flora.



*Albuquerque Botanical Garden*

**Friday** we had decided to get up early to visit Bandelier National Monument, which is set in over 33,000 acres of rugged and beautiful canyon in mesa country. It preserves the homes and territory of the ancestral Pueblo people, and most of the structures date back 11,000 years. The site is one of the designated National Monuments and conserves the Petroglyphs and dwellings carved into the soft volcanic rock cliffs. The standing masonry walls pay tribute to the early days of a culture that still survives in the surrounding communities. The Kiva at the Alcove house was a spectacular view and worth the climb up the wooden ladders (I am not sure that Health & Safety regulations applied here).



*The Kiva at the Alcove house (old settlements in the rocks)*

The afternoon took us to Los Alamos, the site of the National Laboratory that in 1942 was formed and known as "the Hill", or the town that never was - the site of the Manhattan Project. A visit to the fascinating Bradbury Science Museum occupied us for some time learning the history of the project and subsequent work being done on the development of nuclear technology, in all fields of research.

The following day we stayed at home, I helped Woody in the greenhouse doing some weeding, while Kathy retired to the garage to

do some pottery. She makes pots which she sells at some of the Cactus events. In the evening we met up with Woody's daughter and boyfriend at one of their favourite restaurants for a pleasant meal.

**Sunday** we ventured to the Indian Salt Missions, the Salinas Pueblo visitors' centre is based in Mountainair and there are three different sites to visit at Abo, Quari and Grand Quivera which reflect the history of the effects of religion on the people of 1600s who were living there before the Spanish swept through that part of New Mexico. On the drive back Woody took me to a new site for him that was known for *Echinomastus intertextus*, which was off the road and meant climbing a barbed wire fence. This was my first introduction to the natural habitat and it was tricky at first to find the plants, but despite the scrub we managed to find quite a few small plants. Also around were clumps of *Echinocereus engelmannii* and *Echinocactus polycephalus*. On the way back I had a slight argument with the fence - new pair of shorts needed - no damage to me thankfully (*Woody said that I was now fully initiated in the perils of field work*).



*Indian Salt Mission, Quari - but mind where you walk!*

A quote on one of the signs in the area said it all - respect what is there for others to enjoy.

*"Leave only footprints and  
take only memories"*

**Monday** morning Woody had some visitors from Texas so we spent time chatting and then we set off on our 4 day excursion to the Grand Canyon and Little Colorado. Our first stop was to be at Flagstaff, so off on the I 40 a stop near Holbrook saw another short trip into the hills at a site known to Woody, of *Pediocactus peeblesianus* which he had been monitoring. There were not many plants to find as they had pulled themselves down in the dry weather, but it was good to see some. On the journey I was amazed at the vastness of everything, the long empty roads, apart from the large trucks there was very little other traffic.

I did not know which way to look first - large expanses of brush reaching to the hills and mountains which were all such wonderful colours, and different shapes and type of rock, anyway eventually we pulled into Flagstaff and found our motel for a meal and a night's rest.

The following day we were off to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. We stopped at the main visitor's centre and wandered around for about an hour or so. It was sadly a bit misty but the views and colours were still amazing (I should say at this point that I ran out of superlatives) there are only so many amazing, wonderful, marvellous, magnificent etc. that you can use to describe what you are seeing. The colours changed with the



*South Rim, Grand Canyon*

differing light and slowly clearing mist. We travelled back along our original route and went north on the 89. On the drive Woody stopped at a number of places for us to explore and take in the scenery, our second overnight stay was to be at Page. We pulled into town after a long drive and found the motel and after a quick meal retired to recharge the batteries for the next day's adventure.

The following day the objective was the North Rim, but you never go straight to anywhere with Woody as your guide, diversions via the Navaho Bridge, Lees Ferry, Jacob Lake (we had hoped to stay there in one of the cabins in the woods instead of Page but they were full). A pleasant walk around the North Rim visitor's centre. Although the scenery was still quite wonderful, I felt it was not quite as dramatic as the South Rim, but I would not have missed it. On the journey back Woody was off road again to a site of *Pediocactus paradinei* that he knew. We drove past the Vermilion Cliffs and eventually stopped in Cameron at the Cameron Trading Post, a most comfortable and pleasing location with a good restaurant and attached shop, for our last night's stay.

The following day we had a hearty breakfast and set off back home. We stopped at the Little Colorado overview and I was tempted by the local Indian (Navajo) stalls selling jewellery etc. but onward, a short while later Woody was off road again to a site for *Pediocactus bradyi* that was well documented with numbered tags, no problem finding the plants here.

Back on the road via the Petrified Forest where we stopped at a couple of the viewing points to take in the breath-taking views of the Painted Desert, but time was against us to tarry too long so onward, on the journey home On the way back we took a short

diversion to a site for *Neobessya navajoensis*: these were the most difficult of all the plants to find. We arrived home after a long day tired and weary.



*Petrified Forest*



*Painted Desert*

**Friday** we had decided to try and catch our breath and not venture too far, for me it was time to reflect on an incredible 4 days of over 1750 miles with incredible views, adventures into natural habitat, a real surreal experience and it was wonderful to be able to share it with such terrific people.

**Saturday** was my last day and Kathy thought we should not do too much, so we decided to visit Santa Fe and wander around through the open market and Town Square and visit

the church dedicated to Saint Francis of Assai and to have lunch at Pasqual's (another favourite watering hole). The weather was pleasantly warm and it made a relaxing day at the end of a wonderful visit, the sights and scenery of which will stay with me for a very long time.

**Sunday** it felt like I had only just arrived as the time had passed so quickly, where had the last 12 days gone? I suppose that's what happens when you are in good company and experiencing delightful things, a great memory of a brilliant time. With grateful thanks to mine hosts for a wonderful introduction to their homeland *Adiós Amigos* a fond farewell with lots of marvellous memories.

B. D.

**Oxotica**

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**The Branch meets 7.30pm for 8pm on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month (except December) at the Rose Hill Methodist Church, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4JP.**

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