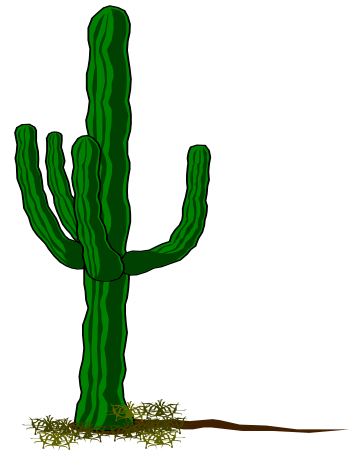


Oxotica

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

June 2006

Volume 11, Number 1



This has almost turned out to be The International Edition, with reports on visits to India, South Africa and the European continent! We start with the last-named of these from John Watmough:

CACTUS CRAWL

**Waltham Forest Continental Cactus
Crawl 16th - 19th March 2006**

Organised by John and Joyce Jackson

Thursday

Strangely but conveniently, a Tour starting at Chingford uses a coach company based in Witney. So we see Brian Conway, Martin Doorbar and John Watmough standing, teeth chattering, by Headington roundabout at 5:30 in the morning. Martin is ribbed for bringing his daughter's big red toy box for packing prospective purchases in. Martin defends himself. It is a new coach, only one week old (is that wise?) but the same old driver, Ricky, a real master of the driver's art. Collect Nicky, our guide, from a roundabout in Essex. Pick up main party in Chingford. JwM picks up a dog's egg on shoe and transfers it to new coach. General revulsion. Joyce Jackson, having done much of the organising, can't come: she has broken her leg. One lady has brought enough personal effects for a major safari. Martin's toy box is forgotten. Collect more passengers from parts of Essex. Then drive straight to de Herdt's. Really.

Actually we discover a bolt sticking out of one of the tyres while waiting at Ashford Terminal. Nobody panics. Nobody does

anything. Ricky drives slowly from now on. Rear seat of coach unusually quiet. Learn that Malcolm Pym and David Offord are in Texas. Stirling Baker and Alan Rollason are asleep. Silence. Ricky drives wide bus sideways on to narrow train and gets it right first time. Applause.

"De Herdt not as good as in the old days" (i.e. pre-CITES), but still plenty of decent plants. Proceed to the Golden Tulip Hotel at Zaltbommel, on the Waal. "They're letting us come back!"

Friday

Old hands eat big breakfast, much of which is secreted in pockets despite the attempts of the hotel staff to stop us, because we shall not be having lunch on this trip. Alan Rollason has brought his lunches with him, a bagful of revolting cakes consisting of cholesterol, trans fats and aspartame. Brian throws them in the hotel rubbish skip. Alan is not grateful (though he should be) and fishes them out again. Moans all the way to the Aachen bypass. Long trip to Germany past forests of wind turbines, through Düren on the Ruhr to Piltz's nursery. Buying frenzy.

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Just enough time to see his private collection. Incredible!

Make haste to Specks at Golkrath. Buying frenzy. Ernst and Marita grinning insanely. Drive out just as Scottish coach is driving in. Merry greetings - middle digits and buttocks. Ha Ha, we've bought everything. Short trip to Ingo Breuer. Much of his stuff is Nicht für kaufen. Everything is on huge roller tables. Surreptitious crushing of pelvises and distant yelping. Very comical - the Britischer sense of humour. Not much bought; just as well, not much room on coach.

Motorway providing direct link between Specks' nursery and the Channel ports still not completed. Get stuck in Roermond: old road closed to buses and coaches! Notice that outside temperature has not exceeded 5°C since leaving Blighty. Moaning. Missing good drinking time. Still, Anthony Mitchell (ARM) more than makes up for it in the bar with his wonderful travellers' tales.

Saturday

Bypass Rotterdam; pass between cities of glass, each devoted to its specialist monoculture. Reach Van der Linden's wholesale nursery. Admire delivery van - 42 ton artic. Admire curvature of the earth visible within greenhouse. Fill box with Lithops at silly prices, and buy anything that might resell in England. James Gold considers buying a three-foot Echinocactus grusonii. Thinks better of it. Buys several mature Agaves instead. Ricky says we are all mad.

Round the corner to Cok's. Meet Doug and Doreen Donaldson. Eddy Harris checking all the mesembs. Buying Frenzy. Cok and Ine grinning madly. Then on to a new nursery just two streets away. It is Aad Vijverberg's place. Oh No! They have

set their prices too low. Buying frenzy. Aad and his wife grinning...

Last stop, Two Shovels. That is the official English translation of Bisheuvel Boom en Cactuskwekerij at Lexmond. Admire Two Shovels mixing compost - one double handful is half a hundredweight. Admire his size 20 clogs, admittedly worn over his Wellingtons. Too late. Experienced hands are already clustered round the "Special Table" where he keeps the rare goodies. It's like the January Sales only less friendly. JWm and BC cunningly leave them to it and go in search of 4 Thelocacti in 1 pot for 3 euros. We leave Two Shovels with both shovels full of money, grinning...

Sunday

Leisurely drive home. First lunch for four days. Call in at chocolate factory to dispose of last euros. Cross French frontier. See the sun for the first time. Stirling wakes up (for the first time?) and exclaims: "Bleedin' 'Ell, the currant's out!" Call in at alcohol warehouse. Alas, no euros. Credit cards out. Still contrive to catch earlier train. Forced to wait at immigration. Suppose they want to examine all our gigantic boxes! Moaning. Immigration Officer comes on board the coach. She is very pretty. Moaning stops abruptly.

Discharge unbelievable numbers of boxes throughout south-west Essex. No room in cars for passengers. They must either run behind or wait to be collected later. Fond farewells are said at Chingford and a replica of the Giant Pyramid is constructed out of James Gold's boxes. Martin's toy box is still forgotten. However, it comes back into prominence at last, when we are safely offloaded at Headington and it doesn't fit into the boot of any saloon car.

John Watmough

BRANCH MEETINGS JULY - NOVEMBER 2006

27th July A change from the published programme. We have been able to secure the services of Leo van der Hoeven from the Netherlands, who will be talking about Peru. The cacti featured are mostly of the cereoid types. Cathy and Bill have had a preview of his slides and say that they are sensational.

24th August Brian Bates, a resident of Bolivia, will be in this country and has very kindly agreed to give us one of his two new talks on the cacti of his adoptive country. We are very fortunate to have secured his services, which would hardly have been possible without the internet.

28th September Our own Gillian Evison, who specialises in making the impossible look easy, is giving her "Succulent Masterclass". Gilly has an international reputation, and nobody will go home after this talk without being enthused to expand their repertoire.

26th October John Watmough has put himself down to talk about "Unusual Plants", of which he has quite a lot. But there is the possibility that a guest from much further afield may become available, so the programme can be changed without causing too much disruption.

SHOWS (both at Langdale Hall, Witney)

Sunday 16th July - Cactus Only Show with the Mammillaria Society.

Featuring Wolter ten Hoeve from the Netherlands giving a talk afterwards on Mammillarias.

Sunday 8th October - Mesembs and Other Succulents Show.

Members are exhorted to arrive as early as possible (doors open at 8:00 a.m.) to help with the setting up.

John Watmough, Secretary

NEW WEB SITE

On April 14th our new web site went 'live' at

<http://www.oxford.bcsc.org.uk/>

Hosted by the cactus_mall, it replaces the previous simple page that we had on the mall. The site was an initiative by the whole Branch Committee, and was largely designed by Martin Doorbar (content management) and David Greenaway (maintenance). Please send contributions, normally through Martin, so that we can keep the site dynamic and up-to-date.

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The Branch meets at 7.30 p.m. on the 4th Thursday of each month (except December) at the Rose Hill Methodist Church, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4JP.

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FIELD TRIP TO SOUTH AFRICA 2005 - Part II

By Mary Stone

Saturday afternoon - and we could find nowhere in Alexander Bay to replace the spare wheel, so we had to go on our way hoping for the best. We were lucky as it happened!

Just south of Alexander Bay, we stopped to explore the coastal desert. This is a wonderful place - it seems so pristine, the surface of the sand is scrunchy as one walks over it and at first sight it seems to have little plant life to offer, but soon one sees tiny things. Everything is reduced in size because of the tough circumstances, but it is still there. Quite close to the stopping place we found *Euphorbia stapelioides* - really quite stunted. It was windy and impossible to keep one's hat on (we were advised to wear them in the bright sun), but I found it useful to kneel on when taking photographs; Thierry (from France) offered to lend me a pair of kneeling pads when he saw me!



Euphorbia ramiglans

Suddenly a shout from Werner: "Mary, a *Euphorbia*" - he could always be relied on to tell me of any new finds. On investigation it was a medusoid, half buried in the sand, but with big purple buds; it was another *Euphorbia ramiglans*, but unrecognisable

from the plants we had seen earlier on the journey northwards. Time and again we found plants with the same name which took on a completely different look according to their surroundings. A few feet away was a *Sarcocaulon patersonii* with a pretty pink flower - this delicacy was quite remarkable in such a harsh terrain.

We walked a couple of hundred feet to an outcrop of rocks and climbed to see what was growing up there. There were all kinds of things. First of all several *Euphorbias*, mostly 'sticks', but very much stunted, *Avonia papyracea*, an *Othonna*, *Adromischus*, *Conophytum*, *Crassulas* and even a succulent grass, the only known one! What an interesting place! Time is always too short.

As we were coming back into Steinkop, we pulled into the only place where *Cheiridopsis peculiaris* grows; this time we got there before the sun had quite gone down and the flowers were still out. It was sad to see that someone, presumably the farmer, had bulldozed out a section of the hillside and a lot of rubbish had been dumped there. I also found a very bright red-leaved *Othonna*. I do not know if this was the natural colour or whether it was the circumstances, but I am inclined to think it was natural because we found it in other places as well.



Cheiridopsis peculiaris

We spent the night again in Springbok, this time I think I had the most comfortable room of the whole trip (they had all been good) and I was sorry to leave the next morning. It was a lovely drive southwards towards Vanrhynsdorp – the heat was a little less, the views beautiful and interesting. The plant finds were also good, in particular, where we scrambled up one hillside to see the Aloes and various Crassulas, Adromischus and Asclepiads. Here grew big clumps of *Euphorbia hamata* which had the reddest flowers of all I had seen, and were probably the last of the trip. We visited Kern's nursery in Vanrhynsdorp and were able to see their private collection, which included some lovely flowering Asclepiads. At this point, Kotie Retief left us and Alex Fick joined us for the rest of the trip. We made our way on to Clanwilliam where we stayed in the old Clanwilliam Hotel, a place of great character. In the evening we drove out of the town to a place where there were some large *Dioscorea elephantipes*; it was rather scratchy and tangled to get to them, but worth it – what big elephants' feet! Of course there were other plants, many of them bulbs which were looking their best.



Tanquana prismatica

Next morning we travelled down through the Citrusdal and marvelled again at the bulbs and orchids growing with succulents. The countryside was very different with many orchards, the trees being covered with

flowers foretelling of fruit to come. It was strange to be back in such gentle surroundings, but it was not for long. We were soon back into succulent country. The next two nights were spent in Laingsburg and we were able to explore the areas nearby. We found *Cono. subfenestratum*, *Argyroderma*, more *Euphorbias*, *Astridia*, *Othonna* and *Crassula* – *C. columnella*, *C. columnaris* and *C. barkleyi*. In the Perdewater area, we saw *Tanquana*, *Didymaotis*, *Crassula barbata* with a spike of pink flowers (they are usually white), *C. tomentosa*, *C. deltoides* covered in flowers and a *Tromotriche* with a yellow star-shaped flower. There was a form of *E. multiceps* which grows smaller than the other one, looks more 'bristly', and is not so neatly cone-shaped. *Sarcocaulon crassicaule* was growing here – we had seen it in the Richtersveld several times, but it is widespread into the Karoo as well, and as far as Beaufort West. It grows larger than the *S. patersonii*, and often grows to be at least a 20 inch plant.



Haworthia pumila

The following day we set out to drive south of Laingsburg; while we were enjoying a roadside stop with *Haworthia lockwoodii*, *E. atrispina*, a *Crassula rupestris* with really colourful leaves and another *Othonna*, we were remarking on the large amount of traffic passing us, when a car drew up and a young man got out and approached Alex.

"Hello Uncle" he said! It was his nephew! He said when he saw us all with our heads down, he knew it must be one of these succulent trips! The traffic was all going to a farm sale.

A bit further on we met up with Gerhard Marx, who guided us for the rest of the tour through the areas which he knows so well. We went on into the Anysberg Nature Reserve, which is kept as nearly as possible unspoilt. We were sorry to see a big clump of *Agave americanum* – it had been there two years earlier to my knowledge and it appeared that nothing had been done to remove it – to me it seemed that it should have been a priority in a Nature Reserve – but they were probably more interested in the animals. We found *Haworthia pumila* – after a bit of a search because we had stopped a bit too soon; they are lovely with the colouring acquired because of their exposure to sunlight. We soon found more open areas with *Gibbeum pubescens*, sub. sp. *shandii*, *G. alba* and *G. luckhoffii*. Also there were the *Euphorbia multiceps* which grow larger and more smoothly shaped, *Crassula pyramidalis* with yellow flowers (they more usually have white flowers) and



Euphorbia multiceps

Crassula congesta, sub.sp. *laticephala*, which is a more robust looking plant than the species. To my delight we also managed to find *Euphorbia lumbricalis*, which is a stick

type plant but which lies flat along the ground – it is quite small and sometimes looks like dark coloured worms!

We travelled next day, down through the Seveweeksport, which is a very long gorge. It is a spectacular sight from end to end and is worth seeing even if there are not many opportunities to stop to see the plants and birds. One of the great things about South Africa is the wonderful mountain ranges and this tour had taken us through so much mountainous country. I believe that from Laingsberg to Calitzdorp there is a drop of nearly 7000 feet. As we neared Calitzdorp we went to a well-known succulent spot – Triangle Farm. It had been hoped that it could be purchased to become part of the Groenfontein Nature Reserve, but the owner has held out for a higher price than could be afforded. It is sad because there are so many plants growing in this one small place and it would be a valuable addition to conservation.

The plant of particular interest to me was *E. gamkensis* which has only quite recently been found to be different from *E. crassipes* – they had to lift a sheet of old corrugated iron to let us see it. Part of the site has become a dump for unwanted farm detritus.



Didymaotis lapidiformis

That night we were warmly welcomed at the Port Wine Guest House in Calitzdorp –

this is a place I have come to know well and I was flattered to be recognised by name! It is situated in the centre of the best Karoo succulent flora so it is just the place to work from each day. The next day we called in to see Gerhard Marx's nursery – what a wonderful experience to see so many plants beautifully grown! He grows plants for the trade, for the most part, and many of them end up in European nurseries so perhaps have even been bought by us. *E. colliculina* grows nearby his house, so we had a good time looking at them. Onwards from there, we circled around from Outshoorn to Herald to find *Haworthia helmiae* and *E. silenifolia*, and to Dysselsdorp, known for the large number of *Haworthia truncata* growing on a rubbish dump. Actually there are many other succulents there too – *Cotyledon orbicularis*, *Gasteria brachiphylla* and several *Crassula*, to mention but a few.



Euphorbia colliculina

Our tour was beginning to draw to a close, but we still had another day with Gerhard covering the area from Calitzdorp to Montague. At a roadside stop while the others were looking for Gibbeums and other things of interest to them, I found *E. pillansii* in flower, some plants covered with seed, and also *E. stolonifera* – this is a 'stick' with a difference, and as the name suggests spreads underground. Having seen it, I think I should know this one again! Later we

found some *E. suzannae*, this was also flowering and had some seed on it; alongside was *Othonna retrofracta*, which is hard and woody with a caudex about the size of a tennis ball.... These were growing near the site of *Muiria hortense*, *G. album* and *G. pratense*. A little further down the road we came to the site of a hybrid, thought to be a cross between *E. suzannae* and *E. juglans* or perhaps *E. pseudoglobosa*.



Euphorbia suzannae

From Montague, as we climbed through a short gorge, we stopped to photograph the *Cotyledons* which were making a bright show of flowers. Tucked into a corner of the rocks there was a patch of *Haworthia arachnoides*, but unfortunately I did not manage to get a good picture of them. On to the Worcester Botanic Gardens which is always a good stop. We were lucky to be shown the greenhouses, which was a delight for our *Asclepiad* friends, and for me too! If we had had *Haworthia* buffs with us they would not have been disappointed. This brought us to the end of the tour and we dispersed in Cape Town. It had been an interesting trip not only for the plants and habitats which we had seen, but also for the varied members of the group. I feel that I have said little about them, but I very much enjoyed meeting them and hearing about their collections and interests.

Mary Stone

XVIIth I.S.O.C.S. SHOW 2005*(the Indian Society Show)**by Doug Donaldson,
High Wycombe Branch*

It was both an honour and a privilege when Meena Singh, on a visit to the UK in 2004, invited me to judge the Cactus section of the Indian Society of Cacti and Succulents Annual show, on the first weekend in April 2005. Meena and her husband Vinod have been truly great friends to Doreen and myself since our first meeting at a judges' course here in the UK in the early 90s and with that kind of friendship it did not take long to accept the invitation.

Just a few days before leaving the UK we were in the Netherlands visiting cactus friends there and the temperature one evening in the North of the country was -25.5°C. Adding to this the 30cm of snow which fell in a 24hr period made driving conditions quite difficult to say the least. So it was a great relief when we boarded the Virgin Atlantic flight at Heathrow, destination Delhi. Almost 10 hrs later we arrived to a lovely warm sunny day at 32°C.

*"...myself and everyone else
around covered in coloured
powder..."*

Needless to say Meena and Vinod were at the airport to greet us as they had been on our three previous visits to India. Within a few minutes the bags and luggage were in the car, Vinod behind the wheel, and off into the Delhi traffic; just glad that I was not driving. I have driven in many countries but I admit there is no way that I would attempt to drive in this dodgem car situation in Delhi, but I also admit that for some unknown reason I never feel nervous as a passenger in the car. At this point in time I could not see any changes from my earlier

visits except to take in that there were a lot more dodgem cars on the road than before, and instead of all being Morris Oxfords and motorised rickshaws they were now in the league of BMW, Mercedes, Honda, Subaru - to name a few.

The day after arriving was the holiday festival of "HOLI" so it was decided that we should all stay firmly behind locked doors for a quiet day at home. The morning was quiet at first but then broken by the arrival of Kwnar, one of Meena's friends, with her husband who then succeeded in having myself and everyone else around covered in coloured powder washed in with water - clothes, hair, everything from head to foot. However we did enjoy being able to participate in the celebrations, especially when we were able to obtain our own powder water mix and retaliate. I believe that running with the Bulls in the streets of Madrid would be a much safer option.

HOLI is a festival when everything is plastered in colour and in the evenings bonfires are lit and fireworks let off all over the country to celebrate the death of the demoness Holika and the dark days of winter, then to celebrate the longer warm days of spring.

The week leading up to the show was spent doing some shopping and sightseeing, also visiting a few plant collections around the area. This was very interesting, looking at the plants and of course keeping a neutral bias (with the show in mind) as to which plants belonged to whom, but with so many plants to look at it was soon forgotten who owned what. The week really flew by and Friday came along and this heralded the moment when we had to drive to Delhi Haat for the setting up of the two day show. This was a new venue for the show and new to me also, as previous visits had been to Pragati Maiden and the School for the Blind. After some confusion about entry to Delhi

Haat via one of the rear gates, we were soon allowed inside the grounds, to see a lot of empty space. This was soon put right when the I.S.O.C.S. committee and a host of helpers got to work, and in no time at all a massive marquee had been erected and tables and covering all set up inside awaiting the first show plants to arrive for staging. This did not take too long as there was a fleet of trucks, lorries, scooters, rickshaws and anything else that had wheels at the rear gates, all lined up awaiting entry to the show ground to unload their cargo of plants, then going off for many more of them, having travelled hours and even days for long distances.

As the first exhibitors started the task of staging their plants this was my signal to leave the show tent and stroll around Delhi Haat looking at the various items and crafts that were for sale, resisting a strong temptation to buy as they were so cheap and knowing that next day Doreen would be having a field day buying such Indian crafts. The area could be described as Pickets Lock and Camden Market joined together.

We eventually headed home quite late in the evening and after what appeared to be a very short night in bed were soon back at the show venue next morning. The plants were finally all in their places on the tables with the exhibitors giving their final checks to make sure that everything was correctly displayed as staging came to a close. My instructions were then passed on to me by the shows secretary to begin the task of judging, and a quick glance at this point across the cacti section confirmed my previous fears that this was not going to be an easy task. I was assisted by Ram Gandhi's daughter, Pallavi, who kept taking the results from me and returning most times with ice cold drinks in the 35°C heat. Eventually I got to the end of my section and just could not believe the quality of the plants on display. There were absolutely

superb multicoloured Uebelmannias, Mammillaria beneckii with 200 heads in 3 ft pans, and "best cacti in show" going to a magnificent Ariocarpus trigonus with many heads (a plant that I had remembered being in the show in 2000). The growers should feel very proud of both their skill and dedication growing such specimen plants, many of which would be more than capable of winning at our own National Show here in the UK or better still taking pride of place in my collection!!!! But unfortunately Virgin Atlantic baggage allowance is only 20kgs.

"...some of the sizes were incredible..."

After this it was time that I had a look at the "other succulents" section in the show (which I did not judge) and again was amazed at the superb quality and presentation on display. Also, some of the sizes were incredible: that they actually got their Pachypodium rutenbergianum at least 12 ft tall with 15 or more branches, and all showing their huge white flowers. But a small gem of a plant that caught my eye was a "Rhytidocaulon". I think it was the species "ciliatum" from the Yemen and was amazed to see that such a choice plant had been overlooked by the judge as a potential prize winner in the class. I met up with the Succulent judge over lunch and asked why such a plant had been passed over for a prize expecting to find that there was something on it that I had maybe missed but to the amazement of the Chairman and everyone else he remarked that it was only a common Indian Caralluma he thought!! And wrongly labelled. Later in the day the temperature seemed to fall a little when the owner of the Rhytidocaulon had overheard the judge's thoughts.

After lunch the show was officially opened by the Honourable B.L.Joshi, Lieutenant

Governor of Delhi, to whom I was privileged to be introduced before he was shown around the exhibits by the Chairman, Dr Ram Gandhi, and President Mr P.M.Mathai followed by his posse of followers and security agents. There was then a steady stream of people all showing great interest in the plants. This stream was repeated and got even busier the following day, Sunday. It was also nice for me to be able to talk with many of them including a lot of Europeans who were either holidaying or staff from their respective Embassies.

Afterwards I was able to spend a few hours looking around the Nursery stalls which had been set up outside the main show area. This was taken up by approx 20 sellers all selling or possibly a more exacting comment would be to say giving away plants and various other items, for example, *Espostoa lanata* about the size of your forearm for 100 rupees, *Gymno's* approx 25cm diameter for 50 rupees, and if you wanted a *Pachypodium lamerei* or *Adenium obesum* at 6-8 ft tall with their huge coloured flowers and many heads then you are looking at a staggering price of 300 rupees. I should tell you that the exchange rate is 85 rupee =£1 but no room in the suitcase I am afraid.

"...we were overtaken by an elephant in the fast lane."

Well as the saying goes all good things have to come to an end. Doreen then had the honour of presenting the many various pieces of silverware to the winning recipients and then with a few thank you speeches from the I.S.O.C.S. committee brought what can only be described as a really fantastic weekend to a close. Like the setting up, the closure was done just as quickly and soon the venue was being emptied and people started to make their way home. The most difficult thing was

trying to stop many more people from coming in (this was around 6.30pm). But for Vinod it was a different story - as we had been first to arrive at the show venue in the morning, all the trucks and lorries succeeded in blocking our car behind the open gates while they loaded up the plants, much to Vinod's anger which was growing all the time. There were a lot of words being used by now, which I guessed could only come from a retired Lieutenant General in the Indian Army and not from the Hindi dictionary!!!!

We did eventually get away albeit by the light of the moon and to describe the scene - it was like trying to get away from Wembley after an FA cup final. But I think, as the saying goes, the final straw that broke the camel's back was when, in slow moving traffic on the Aurobindo Marg (Marg means road in Hindi), we were overtaken by an elephant in the fast lane.

For Doreen and myself it was a great pleasure to have been invited again to Delhi to renew many acquaintances with old friends and of course add some new ones to the list. In the five years since my last visit in 2000 the dedication shown by all the I.S.O.C.S. members can make them feel proud of the success they have achieved with the hobby in India under such extreme conditions.

It was now time for us to get to bed again for a few hours and pack before heading back to the domestic airport in Delhi next morning, and head off 2000 miles South to see if some of the plants from previous trips were still in existence [*of which, more another time?? - Ed.*].

Doug Donaldson