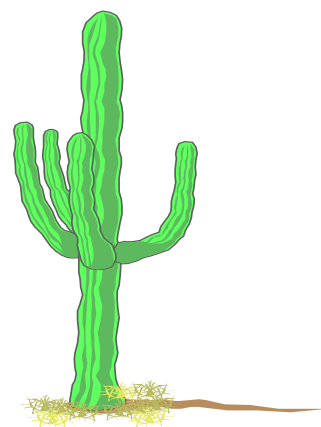


Oxotica

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

June 2007

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NORTH LONDON CONTINENTAL CACTUS CRAWL

Organised by John and Joyce Jackson

Thursday. 5:30 a.m. Bleak and cold. Martin and John W. and Martin's daughter's toybox standing at Headington Roundabout. (Brian has decided not to come.) 8:10 a.m. still there. It turns out that Witney's vandals have smashed up as many coaches as they can with crowbars, including ours with the extra large luggage compartment.

Neither Ricky, our incomparable driver, nor Nicky, our indispensable guide, nor the Chingford contingent, are at all flustered. Some are flushed, but none flustered. Joyce Jackson allocates seats. It is done on the basis of social class. On a coach the poop is at the front, the forecastle is a hindcastle, and the heads are amidships. So the officers and gentlemen are put in the front, the roaring boys and the probationers at the back, and Alan Rollason to supervise the door to the heads. Front: tea, no sugar, thank you; rear: scrumpy and applejack. Yes, Malcolm and David are on the back seat. Soon the bilges are on the upper deck.

Drove straight on to the train at Ashford. But can we accommodate John Jackson's "surprise visit" scheduled for this afternoon? Take new tunnel north of Antwerp, then bypass Bergen-op-Zoom to the west by driving across the North Sea. Ducks each side of us, water everywhere. Eventually reach land; pursue lanes, tracks, and the margins of fields until we come to the Back of Beyond, or the STC. Secret Terrorist Camp?

Front office, caravan camouflaged by cow dung spray. Rear - huge gleaming cactus factory. Wow! It is the Succulent Tissue Culture works. Buy all their Uebelmannias plus trayfuls of fancy Haworthias.

Two hours later safe in the Golden Tulip at Zaltbommel, propping up the bar as if we have been there since last March.

Friday. Set off for Jorg Piltz. Front: crochet patterns and jam recipes; Rear: personal insults and swashbuckling with plastic bottles. One probationer hires a car and follows the coach for the entire duration. Better class of conversation. Piltz brilliant, as ever. Do you rush round sales and linger in his fantastic private collection? Or do you queue for ages at the cash desk and get herded back on to the coach?

Head north across country to Erkelenz. Specks expects us. Lose reason and euros. Gain gnarled and knobby caudices that we didn't realise that we desperately needed. Philip Clark buys football-sized Whiteslonea. "It'll be dead by the morning." "If it is, I'll jump out of the hotel window." Ernst and Marita very jolly.

No time for second thoughts. Ingo Breuer is nearby and so are cash machines. Many cards swallowed: "Unusual Spending Patterns". Quite. Roaring boys try to crush each other between Breuer's rolling tables.

Long drive back to Zaltbommel. Specks's personal motorway connecting Erkelenz to the Channel Ports still incomplete. Perhaps he can now afford to finish it. Poop: early to bed; forecastle: in bar until 3:00 a.m.

Saturday. Wives of roaring boys on private cultural visit to Amsterdam. No restraint. 9:30 a.m. – Front: “Did you sleep well?”; rear: bellowed obscenities of a medical nature. Ask Joyce how one gets promoted to civilised society in front of the toilet. Joyce diplomatic but Calvinist. At least tone of conversation can’t get any lower. 9:35 a.m. - It does.

First stop, a new wholesale nursery in the Dutch Succulent Fields around Honselersdijk called Gebroeder Westeijn. Find the street, but not the nursery. Ricky and John get out to look for it. “Excuse me, is this the Cactus Nursery?”. “If you are not goink away I am callink de Politie!” Your correspondent tries to improve the cultural tone by telling an instructive and socially inclusive tale about a Chinese Glaswegian. Gets thorn in his eye and is blind for rest of trip. Philip Clark, a probationer, adjusting to the ambient culture, tells the Story of the Trip. It is about a monkey. John Betteley is disgusted. Westeijn Brothers have only dozens of everything. We buy them out of several kinds of goodies. Ha ha! Catalogue obsolete.

Next, Van der Linden. Greenhouse bigger than some countries. James Gold does not buy any mature Agaves. Perhaps replacement coach too small. Eddy Harris takes all their Lithops. Last year they had 200,000 and he couldn’t carry them all. There is a row of *Cyphostemma uter* as big as cows, never mind udders.

Then on to Cok Grootcholten, where we meet the Darbons. Cactus people glum, mesemb maniacs merry, worshippers of sticks and stones ecstatic. Cok and Ina also very happy.

Last, to Two Shovels (Bisheuvel Boom- en Cactuskwekerij) at Lexmond. Usual ill-mannered scrum round “special sales table”. Malcolm Pym buys trees instead, but mercifully only small ones.

Back in the coach for return to Zaltbommel. Front: “Wasn’t it a nice day?”; rear: pelt Stirling Baker with refuse.

Sunday. Packing the coach. Brian Conway much missed. The man with the hired car tells John and Joyce that he has never enjoyed a coach trip so much. Cross back into Belgium. Motorway exit signs change from terse Dutch UIT to gentler Flemish UITRIT. Stop for first lunch of the Tour – something and chips. Stop further on at chocolate factory. John Betteley buys bottle of “cactus gin”. It proves to be a mixture of surgical spirit, malathion, and green Dayglo colorant. Head like Death Star, urine like light sabre, but malaria and hookworm cured instantly.

Last stop – English booze warehouse at Calais. Stock up for the 2008 trip. “If there is one”, says John.

Tearful farewells and raucous insults as we deposit passengers and boxes at intervals near the M25. Unload coach at Chingford. Boxes marked “Oxford” taken off. Martin and John W. reload them. They are taken off again. Reminded of leaf-cutter ants. Recirculation, but dockers outnumber stevedores. Brian Conway missed again. Finally, recover situation by vigorous application of profanities. One doesn’t sit behind the toilet for four days without something rubbing off. Thank John and Joyce for wonderful trip.

On way back to Oxford, Ricky tells M and J that all he could hear for four days was a continuous roaring noise at the back of the bus.

Losses: One eye (nearly); one tooth (false); liver function (partial); last vestiges of innocence, dirty clothes and a *Monadenium* (left on coach and shipped to Bridlington). Gains: lots of plants; quite a lot of information about them; huge stock of lavatorial jokes for every social occasion; and many friendships.

John Watmough

**BRANCH MEETINGS
JULY - NOVEMBER 2007**

(Fourth Thursday in month, 7:30 p.m. for
8:00 p.m.)

Please bring plants for Table Show

**July 26th. Tom Radford -
"The Asclepiadaceae"**

Tom is one of the leading lights of the successful Southampton Branch. His very welcome talk will fill gaps in our knowledge of plants that we all grow some of, but that we tend to have rather a sketchy knowledge of.

**August 23rd. Suzanne Mace -
"Mesemb Workshop"**

Suzanne is the leading Mesemb propagandist in this country. Today she gives hands-on instruction in how to grow this beautiful plant family to the standards that we should all aspire to.

**September 27th. Alan Phipps -
"Scenery & Smoke, Spines & Flowers".**

Alan has visited us many times. He is best known for his North American cacti, particularly Ariocarpus. Here he shows us where they grow, and spices the entertainment with some antique railway scenery.

**October 25th. Derek Tribble -
"Karooensis 2001"**

Derek knows his way round the succulent areas of South Africa as well as any non-native, and his knowledge of the plants in their habitats is quite special. Here he shows us some of what he saw on one of his field trips.

**November 22nd.
AGM plus Entertainment**

There will be the usual Christmas fare to encourage members to come to the most important business meeting of the year. The Entertainment will be provided by the Chairman, who is promising something really amusing.

John Watmough, Secretary

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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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**CSSA CONVENTION
MAY 25TH - 30TH 2007, SEATTLE**

by David Greenaway



Downtown Seattle, Mt Rainier in distance

Whilst we would probably have gone to the convention wherever it was held, I have to admit that the fact that it was in Seattle, the "Emerald City", was a draw for us. This was not because the north-west of the USA is big cactus country, it is not, but because we had not been that area before. I was reminded on the flight out how curious it is to leave at 4pm and land one hour later, local times. Long day - sort of time travel. First plane I have been on where I could choose my own film etc from a large list, and have it relayed to my own personal screen.

The convention was held in the Doubletree airport hotel and "Hilton HHonors" points got us a room at the top of the tower block overlooking the Cascade mountain range. This range gives its name to the local C&S society, which was the host for the convention.

We actually arrived in Seattle several days in advance of the convention, and took the

opportunity to travel with the rail company Amtrak across the border into Canada, to Vancouver, which is only 3 or 4 hours away. The reason was to meet up with relatives, my late cousin's son and daughter and her husband. We stayed overnight, watched the racoons in Stanley Park and then had a fine seafood lunch in a restaurant there before travelling back to Seattle on the evening train. Amtrak only runs that one train each day down to Seattle. Bush puts money into roads and airports, but not trains. Also, the track is owned by the freight companies, so they get priority on the line. Took an hour to get out of Vancouver proper. Great journey after that though, right on the shoreline for much of the way.

Friday afternoon - registration and a welcome cheese, fruit and wine event in the evening. Seattle proved NOT to be a draw for Americans, and this was one of the smaller conventions. 120 were on the attendance list, and this did not include us as we booked only the week before! (An oversight - we had booked the hotel months earlier). Six of us came over from the UK, plus two Brit. speakers.

Day 1, Saturday 26th - Talks, mainly on "other succulents". A talk by Sheila Collenette on succulent euphorbias of Saudi-Arabia kicked-off the convention. Actually, that expression hardly applies to Sheila, who has become progressively less mobile over the last three conventions. She told me that this one would be her swan song. Sheila talks about her plants in alphabetical order - to aid memory she said. Another personal thing is that she takes "cheap shots", as she puts it, saving film by seeking out plants that show both fruit and flower together. She noted that Euphorbia cactus was bee pollinated, and

wondered whether the honey would be toxic.

John Lavranos, also speaking for the third CSSA convention in succession, was next - talking about Somalia. I noted again that the extreme north coastal areas have winter rainfall, a clue to growing the plants from those places.

After lunch, local man Peter Gammarano talked about "window-sill gardening". His window-sill turned out to be a two-storey glazed extension to his house. After moving his plants to Seattle from warmer climes, he adopted this solution rather than building a traditional greenhouse. He uses cut-up venetian blinds for labels and coloured tags to indicate his watering routine. Peter was one of the most enthusiastic speakers of the convention.

Graham Williamson then showed us superb pictures of Namibia, Richtersfeld and Bushmanland. I was interested to learn (reminded, actually) of the Gariiep region, where the tiny succulents grow embedded in lichen fields. In fact, the Gariiep has simultaneously the world's highest diversity both of succulent plants and of lichens.

Urs Eggli had the next slot, giving us an "inside view of succulent plants". He gave a careful exposition of the factors that can be used to decide whether a plant is succulent or not. Some bromeliads, for instance are as much succulents as those taxa that we are able to show in the UK. My *Deuterochnia longipetala* is a succulent, for instance, and so was the *Tillandsia cyanea*.

Conference dinner in evening. Convention Co-Chairs Dixon Blackmer and Eugene Collias received Special Convention awards, and Urs Eggli and Hans Dieter Ihlenfeldt were made fellows of the CSSA. Superior Service Awards were given to Rosalie Gorchoff, Bob Jewett and Brigitte Williams.

Graham Charles was the guest speaker after the dinner with a slide-show compilation of his 16 visits to South America. The theme was habitats under threat.

Day 2, Sunday 27th - Talks, mainly on "other succulents".

Myron Kinnach started the day off with his "Moroccan Adventure". This was the same trip that our Mary Stone went on and wrote up for Oxotica (Vol 4 (1999) No 1), so I will leave it at that.

Peter Gammarano was back with "Giants of the Succulent World". Peter's trade mark is to be in every photograph - so he did not take any of them! Graham Williamson rounded off the morning by completing his tour of the Succulent Karoo.

After lunch John Lavranos gave us part 2 of his talk on Somalia, and Sheila gave her talk on Jabal Shada. Immediate CSSA past-president Dan Mahr then gave the first of two talks on "Succulent Trees". It took the whole of this first talk to define a "tree".

The auction in the evening made \$10,000. Silent bidding in the days before the auction provided a starting price for each item. Local man Nick Heiting payed \$2700 for one plant, a monstrose *Ferocactus wislizeni* (see the CSSA journal Vol 74 (2002) No 1).



Ferocactus wislizeni

I missed bidding for a Lewisia book, but Peter Gammarano gave me some seed from his plants. Lewisias are native to the Seattle area which has a similar climate to ours. They flower in an attractive range of colours.



Lewisia cotyledon

Day 3, Monday May 28th - Field trip. We were bussed inland over the Cascades mountain range to the interior of Washington state, to Yakima. There was a

very sudden change in vegetation as we went down onto the plains; the area is classified as a cold desert. In the morning we visited the outstanding collection of Ron McKitrick that is planted out in ten large garden beds. Ron started with one greenhouse, then built another, then started experimenting with plants in the open, to see what would survive year-round.



Ron McKitrick's garden

In the afternoon we went to a habitat of *Pediocactus simpsonii* in a wildlife area near Ellensburg, in the foothills of the Whiskey Dick mountain. None were still in flower (it flowers in April), but we found a large number of fine plants to photograph. Somebody with tweezers gave me a capsule of seed that he had "rescued". The locals say that it is the variety *robustior*.



Pediocactus simpsonii var. robustior



Pediocactus habitat, Washington State

Carrying the tripod in the habitat photo is Irwin Lightstone. (See his article in *CSSA journal* Vol 78 (May-June 2006) No 3). He takes many shots of a plant, changing the focus slightly each time, and then uses computer software to reconstruct an image having unlimited depth of field.

Day 4 Tuesday 29th - Talks, mainly on cacti.

Dan, having defined a tree on Sunday, was able to steam ahead with a survey of the succulent examples. Jon Rebman gave an excellent talk on the Succulent Flora of Baja California, tying the great variety of plants in with the great variety of climate regimes. 30% of its plants are endemic and 70% in the case of its cacti. Nick Heiting gave an off-beat presentation on the subject of living plant art, and then it was lunch. After, Joe Clements took us to Chile - "cold, dry and beautiful", then we switched to the tropical West Indies and its cacti, with Myron. West coasts of the islands are dry (rain-shadow areas) and is where the xerophytic plants are; east sides are wet and have the epiphytes. Leo Martin gave a well-prepared talk on cacti from seed, and gave out a multi-page writeup as well.

In the evening were the "small meetings":

Affiliates. San Diego was confirmed as the convention choice for 2011; it is in Tucson in 2009, at Easter, Fri 10 - Wed 15 April. The previous time that it was held in Tucson (1995, the first one that we attended) 900 people took part, two dozen being from UK. However, there are 700 members of the Tucson Society! "Very few" of them are members of the CSSA as well. The Certification of show judges was proposed and accepted; there will be a pilot study in the mid-west states.

Newsletter editors meeting. Not much on newsletters, but Peter Bockentheim, the editor of the CSSA newsletter "To the Point" who was chairing the meeting, was putting a daily conference blog onto the CSSA web site. At the time of writing it is still there.

Cacti_etc. Bob Jewett brought DVDs of the digitisings of Vols 21-35 (1949-1963) of the CSSA journal to the convention. Vols 1-20 have been available since the last convention. This DVD covers fewer volumes because the pictures have been digitised at higher resolution than before. They are in no hurry to digitise more journals this way, as recent back-copies are still bringing in good money.

Day 5 Wednesday 30th - Talks, mainly on cacti.

Joe Clements was back, talking on 100 years of the Huntingdon. Accession No 1, an Agave, is still there 100 years later. As well as plants, the library has many original manuscripts and works of art. Huntingdon said in his will that entry should be free, but in recent years they have been asking for donations (\$3.50 suggested). Then they discovered that if entry was free for one day each month, they could charge what

they liked. They now charge \$15 dollars and visitor numbers have increased!

Urs Eggli spoke on understanding the cacti of Chile, and Leo Martin on cacti of the valley of the Rio Huaura in Peru. After lunch Joe had a third stint, this time on southern California hot spots. Jon Redman spoke on Baja California again, this time about research and resources; see web site www.bajaflora.org for more information. Finally, Nick was back again with his wacky containers to round the whole thing off.

The next CSSA-sponsored trip is to Brazil, 8-19 June 2008, led by Graham Charles. After Tucson (2009) there will be 10-12 days in Sonora, Mexico led by George Montgomery and Matt Johnson, and in 2010 a trip to "somewhere in Africa".

So we came to the final dinner - great salmon (probably wild Alaskan) and very enjoyable local musical entertainment by multi-talented Nick Heiting and friends.

We spent four days sightseeing after the convention.

First day - a Seattle town tour. We saw the first Starbucks outlet (opened in 1971); did you know that Starbucks was from Seattle, plus Amazon, Microsoft and Boeing? All their headquarters are there. It was also the home of grunge music, but you can't win them all.

Next day, up to the snows and glaciers of Mt Rainier National Park (a 14,000 ft dormant volcano - Mt St. Helens is only 30 miles away).

On third day we went back to Canada again, on a catamaran ferry to Vancouver Island (Victoria) and of course Bucht Gardens. Everyone goes there.

Lastly, we went on the tour of the Boeing aircraft factory. We saw the first 787 Dreamliner being assembled in the world's biggest building (by volume). Over 650 are on order, and delivery starts in May 2008.

Monday 4th June. Flight home. I was not sleepless in Seattle, but I was on the 9 hour flight back. What with that and the eight hour time jump forward, local time, I was jet-lagged until mid-day Wednesday.



Echinocereus in flower in McKitrick's garden.



Ditto