

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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### Editorial

The weather relented somewhat in July, but it still remains very dry, with us having received only a fraction of the rainfall that we would normally receive. Certainly I've had to water most of the plants in the garden every day to stop them from wilting or fading away.

### Announcements

During the last month, the Branch put on displays at **New Forest Show** and the **Solent Fuchsia Show**. Both events were successful, although plants sales were slower than in previous years. At the New Forest Show, it seems that re-organising the horticultural tent didn't pay off, with less visitors inside the marquee compared to last year. The Solent Fuchsia Show was cut back to just one day, this year and business was fairly quiet, with us selling around 50 plants. Thanks are due to all those who supplied plants for the displays and who manned the stand at these shows.

We would like to thank all those members who donate prizes for use in our monthly meeting **raffle**. Sometimes we have too many similar prizes, so on those occasions, Dot may withdraw some of the items and use them in the following month.

**Portsmouth Branch** will be hosting a convention in October to celebrate their **60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**. There's a notice with additional information on the front table.

### Last Month's Meeting

#### Plants of Interest

Ben Turner had brought in one Plant of Interest – it was a *Notocactus magnificus* which seemed to be have been grown in a bonsai style – it was flowering while still quite small. Some one from the audience mentioned that there was a plant of this at Kew which was a couple of feet across.

#### Arizona Adventure

Geoff introduced our speaker for the evening, Alan Phipps. Alan mentioned that he has visited Arizona on numerous occasions, and the pictures he was going to show were from trips he had made in April and October 1998.

At Heathrow he got a pleasant surprise as he was upgraded on the flight out. He got a spell in the cockpit and we saw a view over Las Vegas from 39000 feet. He arrived in Phoenix, and since it was raining in Page, the first place he went to was the Anza Burrego State Park, which is about a hundred miles west of Arizona, in the adjoining state of California. One of the first plants he saw was the beavertail cactus, *Opuntia basilaris*. He also saw the Saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*) and *Echinocereus engelmannii*. The prettiest things were the yellow dandelion-type flowers of some annual. In April, there are lots of buds on the cacti but no flowers. One of the corners of the Anza Burrego Park is known as the *Badlands* and they drive dune buggies here.

Looking south east to Yuma, the air is very clear and one can see mountain ranges 60 miles in the distance. While looking for plants, he had parked his car with the wheels on the road, and was told to move it "off the pavement" by a cop. Apparently, in the USA, a road is the pavement and a pavement is a sidewalk. Looking at the hills above Anza Burrego, he found *Ferocactus*, Agaves, Ocotillo, and a nice *Ferocactus cylindraceus* (*F. acanthoides*). There was also a yellow flowered rabbit bush. He stayed well away from a datura bush – all parts of the plant

are poisonous.

At a crossing, he found some *Echeverias* on hillsides, but the plants were too high to photograph using his equipment. He had a gammy knee and was wary of going up in to this terrain since it was very slippery. Since he does these trips on his own and is susceptible to falling over, breaking an ankle, etc, he tends not to wander too far from the car. He used a 200mm lens to view some of the higher plants. There were red *Ferocacti* everywhere once you got up and looked for them. We saw the red flowers of the *Ocotillo* – these can be seen in April, and they are quite pretty as they open up in sequence along the stem. There were not many leaves on these plants so it must have been dry - they leaf up quickly after a rainfall. By a telegraph pole, he found plants of *Mammillaria dioica*. He had not seen this plant in any collections – but he's not a big fan of *Mammillarias* – they do nothing for him.

There were some nice *Ferocacti* in flower, probably *F. cylindraceus*. He also came across a couple of *Cylindropuntias*. Near Palm Springs he found a box tortoise in a park. It was about 12 inches long but wouldn't come towards him. The shell was rounded and relatively smooth with hardly any fissures. There was another *Cylindropuntia* which he photographed from a distance – he doesn't go too near them since they stick to you and can puncture your shoes. Having learnt from experience, he now goes with good quality walking boots which can withstand spines.

From Phoenix, we saw a view of the Superstition Mountains – it looked a little like Table mountain with it's tablecloth on. 25 miles east of Phoenix is Goldfield, which has the remnants of a ghost town. There weren't many people around, but some of the signs were quite humorous, for example "Jail closed for election". Heading towards the town of Globe, you pass the Boyce Thompson arboretum – this is about 70 miles from Phoenix and well worth visiting. There are some native plants, but many are imported, like *Echinocactus grusonii* and some agaves. We saw *Agave Americana*, *Opuntia phaeacantha*, and *Opuntia ficus-indica*. The latter is denude of spines. There were gravel paths and the site was wheelchair friendly except for one section which needed a strenuous climb - however, once you did this, you were surrounded by a variety of plants. The view was well worth it. It was early in the day, and there weren't many visitors. We saw *Ferocactus wislizeni*, leaning towards the sun.

A view from the south east of Tucson showed the Santa Rita Mountains – these are about 30 miles

outside the city. We saw Mount Fagan which is 6000 feet high, still with winter snow on the peak. A general view of the desert showed that it was covered in a variety of scrub, not plain sand like the Sahara! South of Tucson is the mission San Xavier del Bac. This is on Indian land and they tend to set their own rules. We saw a view of the front of the mission, taken in 1998. Alan mentioned that it is currently undergoing repairs and covered in scaffolding. It was first built in 1812 and reconditioned about a 100 years later. One tower was never finished - maybe the money ran out. The chapel holds 60-70 people and they hold mass in there. It is richly decorated in frescos and decorations. In 2004 there was plaster dropping inside the building, and last year there was still scaffolding on the outside.

Heading south, you reach the town of Nogales which is on the border with Mexico. He headed for an old silver mining town called Ruby, but the tarmac runs out and the remaining road is only fit for a 4x4, and he had to abandon the trip. There is a nice lake here (Pena Blanca) but the water level was low at this time of the year. People were fishing for trout in the lake, despite signs warning of mercury and arsenic. Even the local restaurants seemed to have fish on the menu. Nearby, he found *Echinocereus bristolli* v. *pseudoplectinatus* – the plant was 6 inches tall by 2 inches across. You could see the bands for each year's growth. The soil is quite wet in this area. He also found *Agave deserti*, and *Agave parryi* also exists here, but it's a job to tell them apart. Miles Anderson had seen these pictures and confirmed the names. *Ferocactus wislizeni* grows anywhere and everywhere. Since it was April, the flowers had not formed yet. In September, there were seed pods but they were not ripe yet. Alan mentioned that it was rare to find a full ripe seed pod since the ants always tend to get to them first and take away all the seeds.

Off the old Sonoita highway between Vale and Elgin, there was a dirt road which is now tarmaced which suggests property development will soon follow, although perhaps slowed down by the current recession. He had found a plant of *Echinomastus intertextus* - in 1998 there were 30-35 plants on the site, but this April, there were only 6 plants left. He thought they were just slowly dying out.

We saw a Tucson sunset from his Willcox motel bedroom window. Alan mentioned that in April it gets dark around 6:15pm, and dawn occurs around 6:45am. Next, he headed north from Phoenix, to the red rock region of Sedona. There are numerous

sandstone and limestone rock formations, and we saw Castle Rock. Oak Creek canyon has a river running through it. Compared to the Phoenix plateau, there is a drop of about 3000 feet to Sedona. We also saw the church of the Holy Cross, which was a modernist design, built high up in the rocks by a Frank Lloyd Wright disciple in the 1950s. We saw the view from inside and saw the font for christening, along with a copper statue.

Back in the town of Sedona, there is a Spanish feel to the architecture. In 1998 it was mainly an artist colony with a population of 3 to 4 thousand, and just a couple of motels and some trailer park homes. Now, the population is 28000 and there are stores such as Walmart and Home Depot there. It is also awash with visitors. He is saddened by all the development. We saw some more views showing the access road to the church and another formation known as Cathedral Rock, followed by a sunset from the balcony of his hotel in Flagstaff, showing Humphries Peak.

He headed north towards Page and the Grand Canyon. Just outside the Grand Canyon Park, there is a heliport, run by Papillon helicopters. The helicopters seat about 4 people and they like to have a full load. In those days, a cheap tour cost \$105 and a full 50 minute tour was around \$150. Apart from Alan there was only one other person from Boston wanting to fly, so they struck a deal with the pilot after chipping in some extra money, and he flew them to wherever they wanted. Alan had wanted to see the little Colorado River confluence. They saw some views towards Page (80 miles away) and also the dark greeny blue of the main Colorado river merging into coppery blue of the little Colorado. Although the helicopter is not allowed to fly below the rim (to keep noise down) he did land on small spit, with the excuse that the engine was overheating. They spent around 10 minutes on the ground. He could see some large Ferocacti 6-7 feet tall growing on the slopes. The person from Boston wanted to see Angel Window which is aperture through the rock on the North Rim. Although the pilot offered to fly through the gap, they were content with just flying over it.

He went on to Lee's Ferry which was the first crossing point before they built the Grand Canyon dam. It was used by the Mormons to cross into Utah. There was a wire across the two edges and a barge could be pulled across by hand. The level of water goes up by 18 inches when water is released from the dam. He came across a group of Aussies who suggested he join them on a rafting trip since he would make good ballast. Hanging off some of

the rafts were sacks filled with cans of Fosters! Vermilion Cliffs is an area to the back of the road from Lees Ferry to Page. There are balanced boulders and red cliffs here. He thought *Pediocactus braydii* grew at the back of these cliffs but he was wrong and didn't find any.

From Page, it is possible to do a day excursion to Monument Valley which is about 2½ hours away. The road in the Valley is rough and you shouldn't take a hire car since if you breakdown or get stuck there is a hefty fine. He took advantage of a jeep tour. We saw pictures of the iconic Left and Right Mittens. The height off the ground is around 1000 feet but it looks taller from a distance. A Japanese tour bus with about 50 people was also visiting, and he took advantage of this to grab a photograph of the local Navajo Indian on a horse – normally this costs \$5. If you see children there, do not photograph them without permission – and they'll probably also want a fee. We also saw a picture of another formation called the "Three Nuns". The jeep driver took them to a person who he claimed was his mother. She was living in a home on her own, making rugs and pillows for sale. Inside was a wood burning stove and there were no windows.

There was a spot with a hole in the rocks where the sun shone through at a certain time of the day. In 1994, there was a film crew here who were making an advert for Ford, which involved putting two cards on top of the 800 foot high "Totem Pole" rock formation. He saw the advert on television later on.

Exiting Monument Valley and heading back towards Page, there was a sacred mountain peak. In those days you could climb it but now it is fenced off and you have to pay. It is better seen from the distance anyway. Spider rock is found in Canyon de Chelly, and to see this, you have to do a package deal and stay at a posh hotel for two nights and get a jeep drive for about \$340. The rock formation is 800 feet tall and from the top, it supposedly looks like a spider.

Coming south towards Phoenix, he went through Salt River canyon. We saw views of the road bridge. There wasn't much flow of water in the river, since the snow hadn't melted yet in the mountains. There are now two bridges, with the newer one taking large articulated trucks. The older bridge is now used by foot passengers. By May or June, all the boulders would be covered in water. Opuntias, Echinocerei, and Dasyliirions all grow in the hillsides. The landscape is covered in lots of vegetation so he uses binoculars to check the hills and then makes a trek up if he sees anything

interesting. We saw a view from half way up and saw the hairpin bends on the road. There was an *Agave parryi* some 3 feet across in nice condition apart from one leaf. We also saw *Agave parryi truncata* growing in someone's garden. The leaves recurve on themselves, and these plants can be quite expensive to buy. *Opuntia ficus-indica* had seed pods – these are collected to make jam, sweets, and candies. This is also done with Saguaro fruits. We also saw the nest of a cactus wren – the bird flew away when he tried to take a picture of it, and it didn't return despite him waiting for 20 minutes.

At the B&B Cactus Nursery in Tucson, he showed pictures of some golden barrel cacti. We saw a 4-headed specimen, and it appears that the plants can be made to offset by nicking the growing point when the plant is about 3 inches. We also saw a nice *Agave parryi* and a golden barrel in flower. Another unidentified *Agave* was neither *A. parryi* or *A. deserti*. *Peniocereus greggii* has straggly thin stems and a large caudex under the ground, but it is only easy to find if it is in flower or if it has a seed pod. We saw the fruit on a stem and it is bright red and about the size of a lemon. We saw *Ferocactus robustus*, and a picture of a nice relatively unmarked Saguaro with a good number of branches.

At the Santa Rita mountains, there were some plants of *Mammillaria microcarpa* and also *Coryphantha scheeri* - but these were not found on his latest visit. *Echinomastus* also grow here and we saw *E. intertextus*. Moving on to Tombstone, we saw some of the graveyards and cacti and agave growing amongst the graves. Some of the gravestones are interesting and he had taken more pictures of these on another trip. He had found *Mammillaria meiacantha* (one of heyderi complex) growing in the rubble around a grave but this was not there any more, rather like the person underneath. They have yellow flowers in the spring. Tombstone is famous for the Clanton Brothers and Wyatt Earp of OK Corral fame. While he was taking pictures, someone asked it some asked where Wyatt Earp's grave was. He actually died in Los Angeles in the late 1920s. Inside one of saloons, there was a illuminated panel of "Big Nose Kate", amongst others.

Agaves growing on shale cliffs along the road to Pena Blanca had to be photographed using a 200mm lens. You can't get close to them because the sandy soil is mixed with shale and impossible to climb. We also saw an alligator pine and a close up of the bark which gives the tree its name.

At Dan Bach's nursery, we saw *Coryphantha chlorantha* in a 2 gallon pot. At the Peter Bish

nursery at the White Mountains, there were field collected plants of *Coryphanta recurvata*.

At the Desert Museum in Tucson, we saw a view of Prairie dog behind a mesh fence. They perform for you if they think they are going to be fed. They look lovely, but the ranchers shoot them. The ones here were fat and furry, and seemed to be thriving. We also saw a harris hawk nest – the bird had just left as he was taking the photograph. They are about the size of a large kestrel.

Returning to Pena Blanca Lake in the autumn, the leaves had not turned yet – it was too far south to have suffered the effects of Autumn as yet. The water level had risen and there were still people fishing at the lake. He found an *Echinocereus* amongst the debris, some 4" across and 6-7" tall.

Tubac is between Nogales and Green Valley, south of Tucson. He showed us some examples of artistic ironwork – figures of Indians, and also an *Agave* water fountain done in copper with a water pump fitted to the bottom. These fetch upwards of \$500. Next, we saw the Roosevelt Bridge at the Roosevelt Dam – this was built in 1990 because the level of the dam rose above the road. We look at the bottom edge of the White Mountains. Water for Phoenix is pumped in from Colorado, just across from the dam. There were enormous fields of Saguaro interspersed with *Ferocactus cylindraceus*.

We saw a customs post along the American/Mexican border, with a sign mentioning a fine of \$10,000 and no alcoholics, no firearms, no cigars. The post at Sassabee is manned by three guards of which two must be on duty at any one time. They insisted on having their pictures taken with him. On the wall there were 6 Winchester rifles ready to go, and if someone crashes through the barrier, they will shoot first and ask questions later.

On the Friday night before he was due to come home, he went into the Tucson Mountain Park to see some of the endemic plants. There were 100's of *Mammillaria microcarpa* everywhere and also young Saguaro – perhaps 12-15 years old and about 18 inches high and just starting to look like a Saguaro. We saw the top of a monstrose *F. wislizeni* with one red flower hanging on. Normally, the flowers on this species are orange or yellow. There were also some *Echinocerei*.

At Tanque Verde nursery, he showed us pictures of *Coryphantha* and *Mammillarias*. The plants were growing in too little light and seemed etiolated. In their yard, they harvest the Saguaro seed pods and

make jams and cactus candy from this. There were a couple of *Ferocactus stainesii* and a smaller *F. emoryi* var. *rectispinus* with long spines. These plants are from Northern Baja so they are not endemic but they survive OK.

Next he showed some slides he bought from a tourist shop. We saw the “Queen of the Night”, which was *Peniocereus greggii* in flower with a large white bloom. There was also an attractive clump of *Mammillaria microcarpa*, and a *Ferocactus wiclizeni*. There was also a cute picture of some long eared owls in a tree stump. We also saw a Gila monster – these large pink and black lizard-like reptiles can give you nasty bite and can grow to about 2 feet long. Dan Bach had one living under his house and used to feed it dog food. We also saw a picture of a tarantula spider - in Nogales market, someone put one on his hand and it crawled up one arm, round the back and down the other. They have soft bodies like velvet and grow to 3-4 inches across.

Alan ended by saying that if you’re thinking of going, don’t leave it too long since the habitat is disappearing fast. He was asked how many times he had been to Arizona, and the answer was 30 times – he goes every year in April and October and stays for a couple of weeks. This year, he got back just before the airspace was shutdown by the volcanic ash. The state itself is around 400 miles tall and wide. Tucson is expanding like mad - areas where he used to look for plants are now built up with houses. Tucson’s population has expanded from 560k in 1994 to nearly a million people now.

*Vinay Shah*

**Table Show Results**

There were 12 entries in the table show at the July meeting.

	<b>Cacti – Echinopsis Group</b>	<b>Succulents – Aloe Group</b>
Open	(1) T Grech Echinopsis kermesina	(1) B Beckerleg Aloe plicatilis
	(2) B Beckerleg Lobivia ferox	(2) J Roskilly Aloe erinacea
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) T Grech Echinopsis sp.	(1) B Beckerleg Aloe haworthioides
	(2) B Beckerleg Lobivia famatimensis	(2) J Roskilly Aloe cv. “Lizard Lips”
	(3) -	(3) T Radford Aloe jucunda

*Ivor Biddlecombe*

**Branch Committee Meeting**

A Branch Committee meeting was held on 19<sup>th</sup> July.

Mark Jakins mentioned that a few cheques issued by the branch are still outstanding. We would follow up and see whether the recipient had mislaid the payments.

It was felt that the wearing of name labels at recent meetings was a good idea, and we should continue with this since it made it easier for new members to join in and talk to existing members.

Dot England mentioned that we are receiving a good number of donations for the monthly raffle at Branch meetings. However, sometimes there were too many of the same type of item. It was agreed that if this happened she would hold over the prize and use it in the following month.

A vote was taken to buy the new book on Stapeliads by John Pilbeam for the Branch Library. David Neville said he was due to attend the National Convention at the end of July, and would endeavour to collect the book and get it at the “early buyer” discounted price.

Arrangements for the New Forest Show were discussed. Car passes and tickets had not yet been received, but once they arrived, they would need to be distributed to the members who were helping at the show.

The Solent Fuchsia Show was also discussed. It was only being held on the Saturday this year, and Ivor and David said they would be able to do the setting-up on the morning of the show.

Our booking for a stand at the Romsey Show (11<sup>th</sup> September) has been accepted, so we will be taking part.

*Vinay Shah*

## Snippets

Jim Roskilly provided the following article. He thinks the plant in question was probably a Euphorbia.

### ***Cactus pain worker sues***

A worker nearly blinded as he pruned a 30ft cactus in a shopping complex is suing his bosses for up to £10,000.

Toxic sap squirted into Carl Woodbridge's face in Milton Keynes and doctors had to scrape it off one eye. Carl, 22, from Waltham Cross, Herts, is suing Rentokil UK Ltd.

*Daily Mirror, June 2010*

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, and will feature a talk by Ian Woolnough on plants found in SouthWest USA, namely Utah and Nevada.

The September table show will consist of the **Gymnocalycium** group (cacti) and the **Mesemb Group (excluding Lithops)** (succulents). Please note that members are allowed to submit more than one entry in any of the classes, and that points will be earned for each placed entry.

The Gymnocalycium Group includes *Gymnocalycium*, *Brachycalycium* and *Neowerdermannia*.

The Mesemb family is large and includes over 120 genera, the names of which are listed in the Handbook of Shows. Lithops are specifically excluded this month, but plants belonging to the *Argyroderma*, *Cheiridopsis*, *Conophyllum*, *Faucaria* and *Nananthus* subgroups are allowed. Some of the more common eligible species include: *Argyroderma*, *Gibbaeum*, *Pleiospilos*, *Cheiridopsis*, *Conophyllum*, *Ophthalmophyllum*, *Faucaria*, *Glottiphyllum*, *Lampranthus*, *Trichodiadema*, *Aloinopsis*, *Fenestraria*, *Frithia*, and *Titanopsis*.

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 14 <sup>th</sup>	Aug	Isle of Wight	Open Evening at John & Claudia Roberts
Sat 21 <sup>st</sup>	Aug	Portsmouth	no meeting
Tue 7 <sup>th</sup>	Sep	Southampton	South-West USA 2009 - Ian Woolnough
Sat 11 <sup>th</sup>	Sep	Isle of Wight	Flowers of the Sea - Mrs Simpson
Sat 11 <sup>th</sup>	Sep	Romsey	Display / Plant Sales @ Romsey Show
Sat 18 <sup>th</sup>	Sep	Portsmouth	Cacti, Succulents & their Problems - Tony & Suzanne Mace
Mon 20 <sup>th</sup>	Sep	Southampton	Committee Meeting
Sat 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Oct	Portsmouth	Portsmouth Autumn Show @ Christ Church Hall, Widley, Waterlooville
Tue 5 <sup>th</sup>	Oct	Southampton	Agaves, Aeoniums & Haworthias - Stuart Riley
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup>	Oct	Isle of Wight	Richtersveld Round Up Part 1 - Rodney Sims
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup>	Oct	Portsmouth	60th Anniversary Convention - Haworthias (Stirling Baker), Lithops (Dr Jonathan Clark), South America (Graham Charles)

Branch website: <http://www.southampton.bcsc.org.uk>