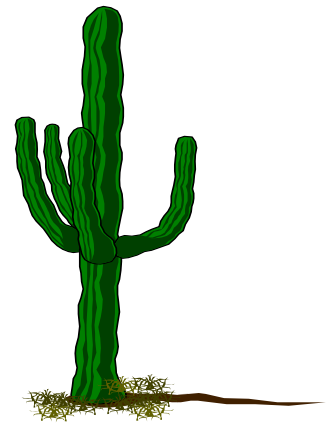


NEWSLETTER

of the Oxford Branch of the British Cactus and Succulent Society

Meetings are held at 7.30 PM on the fourth Thursday of each month in the John Bunyan Baptist Chapel, Cromwell Road, Cowley, Oxford.

December 1996 Volume 1, Number 3



Season's greetings

The Committee would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy new collecting/growing/showing/studying year in 1997.

ADESTE FLORALES

One of the selling points of our hobby is that even in a modest collection there is something happening on every day of the year. With this thought in mind, I went out to the greenhouse on Christmas morning and took note of which plants were flowering.

Mammillaria (Cochemiea) pondii was anxiously waiting for a hummingbird. Hamatocactus setispinus, a form with a pure yellow flower, was out and Gymnocalycium friedrichii was opening its lovely coral pink display. Mammillaria schiedeana had a lot of rather nondescript blossom. Among the mesembs, Glottiphyllum fragrans was out but not detectably fragrant, and Conophytums bilobum and uvaeforme still exhibited the fag end of earlier glories.

Among other South African succulents were flowering Kedrostris africana, Poellnitzia rubriflora (Long-lasting flowers, these), various Haworthias, Crassula mesembryopsis, and Senecio articulatus.

In bud, just waiting for a bit of sunshine to break open, were Mammillarias solisiodes and hernandezii. Echeveria lauii is normally

ready at this time of year, as is Senecio stapeliiformis. More surprisingly, perhaps, were Aloe rauhii from Madagascar and Avonia quinaria, still better known as Anacampseros alstonii. Unsurprisingly, various mesembs in the range Titanopsis, Aloinopsis/Nananthus and Rabiea were threatening to burst out. Colour was showing on Psammophora longifolia (white) and Cephalophyllum alstonii (red). Lithops optica had plenty of buds, but I have never had one open. Its red-leaved relation was not even showing buds.

As for the Schlumbergia hybrids, sold as Christmas Cacti, they would probably not start opening until mid-January.

A really nice plant to have at Christmas is Senecio rowleyanus, the String of Beads Plant. A hanging basket of this will fill the greenhouse with a beautiful smell of cloves throughout the Christmas period. Unfortunately, mine had exhausted its pot and I restarted it from a small pieces last Autumn.

John Watmough

Saturday, 17th August, 1996; Spalding.

Since first attending a National Show (at Luton in 1975), I have missed only 1979, when a recalcitrant motorcycle indicated that it was definitively unwilling to provide transport to Luton that afternoon. Although showing is not a major factor in my cactus-growing ethos, some of my plants have now reached the stage where their presence on a showbench is no longer an embarrassment. So for 1996, my fifth National, I decided that instead of just spectating, I would exhibit in a few classes. After all, entries were free, and I might just as well take a few plants to Spalding in the back of the car as a couple of cubic metres of air!

In an ideal world, show plans would be made at the beginning of the growing season, so that the chosen plants could be cherished and nurtured with particular care, in order that they reached their aesthetic peak at showtime. Unfortunately, the real world doesn't work that way. Instead, at the beginning of the growing season the concept of the show is surreptitiously introduced into domestic planning. Holiday proposals are gently steered out of August, urgent household tasks rescheduled, and the wrath of mothers-in-law is risked.

Thus it was that a couple of days before the closing date for entries I managed to identify a total of 14 potential entries, despite a holiday in the latter half of July, the hottest weeks of summer, that had left many plants looking desiccated on my return. Hoping these plants would regain their pristine(-ish) condition by the time of the show, an entry was duly ventured. Fortunately, most of these plants had already been prepared for the Branch show earlier in the summer, so not too much dressing was required before they were again ready for the showbench.

In previous years, my trips to National Shows have begun with the detonation of an alarm clock at an unnaturally early hour on a Saturday morning. However, on this occasion I decided it

was more sensible to travel up to Lincolnshire the day before, to allow time for a more relaxed journey. In 1992, when the Show had been at the same venue, I had noted (from the traffic jam) that Stamford looked an interesting town, so I resolved to stop there overnight, and have a look around.

Thus, after lunch on Friday the car was loaded, and I set out for Lincolnshire, maintaining a sedate pace, especially round corners, to avoid that distinctive rattling sound that means some unpremeditated repotting will be required! (Apologies to anyone who got bored following me on the bendy bits - I remembered my load and restrained my driving accordingly - unlike the occasion when I had a large sheet of plywood tied on the sidecar frame and I gave the 'bike a big handful going back home round the Oxford bypass!.....but that's another story.....). Stamford was reached without incident (or repotting), and suitable (=cheapish) accommodation found. Up early Saturday morning, 25 miles to go, and then it was Showtime!

When I arrived there was already much activity at Springfields, the venue. However, everything seemed well organized, and staging went smoothly and uneventfully. Next a quick restorative cup of coffee, to refresh both body and spirit, the latter somewhat deflated on seeing the competing entries, then on to the sales hall.

Apart from showing competitively, I suppose there are three principal reasons for going to the National Show: to see the exhibited plants, to see what the Nurseries have on offer, and to meet old friends. Perhaps it is an indication of age that I now find the latter aspect the most enjoyable - especially as there is little room for new acquisitions in the greenhouse! Of the Show itself, there was much too much to cover adequately in a article such as this, so brief impressions will have to suffice. Although the show was well-attended, it was not so crowded that it was uncomfortable or difficult to see the plants. I exclude the sales hall and the queue for

refreshments at key times of the day! As ever the exhibited plants were magnificent, and it seems invidious to select individual entries for particular mention. Most classes were well supported, although there were a few with disappointingly sparse entries; does this reflect a lack of interest in the genera concerned, or merely a (mistaken) belief that most examples are not good 'show' plants?

As I write this some time after the Show, I can note only those exhibits that left a lasting impression. Firstly, there were the BIG plants. Probably the most impressive of these were the cerei - transporting these must have been a major (and high risk!) undertaking. Predictably, there were vast Mammillarias and Echinocactus group to amaze and enthrall too. One class worthy of comment was the *Mammillaria elongata* class, which showed so effectively the variation possible within a species, with spination ranging from pale straw to dark red-brown, and varied prominence of central spines. Other memorable exhibits included two of the thematic exhibits, one of *Lobivia* (by a former Oxford Branch member), the other of dwarf *Opuntia* group plants (where can I get some??? - they never seem to appear in nursery lists and plant sales!). The Chileans Society display was also a personal favourite, showing the range of *Copiapoa*, and using plants of a quality comparable to many in the competitive classes. Similarly the display of *Coryphantha* presented by the Mammillaria Society was highly instructive. That these are remembered possibly says more about my own interests than about the show itself, however! My apologies here to the other succulents enthusiasts - my main interest is cacti and I guess the bias shows in this report.

In the sales hall there was a bustle throughout the day, and I spent a considerable time browsing the plants there. However, my plant purchases were few, reflecting both a shortage of greenhouse space, and the lack of commercial availability of most of the plants I am now seeking (see comments on *Opuntias*, above!). One (welcome) change in recent years has been an increase in the number of books published on

cacti and succulent plants - and a brisk trade in these was done at the show. My own wallet was depleted somewhat in this way! Taking my purchases back to the car, I was struck by the number of solitary picnickers sitting in the parking area - no prizes for identifying those who did not share their spouses' hobby!

After the Show I went on to Southfields Nursery, which remained open late that day, to see what they had on offer; then it was the end of a wonderful day and back home to Oxford, where the problem of fitting my show plants and new purchases back into the greenhouse occupied me for some time! Somewhat to my surprise I had returned with a couple of prize cards from the National Show at my first attempt - a pity it will be four years before I can have another go at this level!

To the visitor, the Show appeared well organised, and the venue is excellent for an event of this type. There was much to see - the National Show seems as ephemeral as a *Frailea* flower and an extra hour or so viewing would not have come amiss, especially for the unfortunate visitors from continental Europe whose coach was caught up in traffic problems on the way to Spalding and who only arrived as the show was almost closing. The show was held open for an extra half hour or so for them, but it must have been an exceedingly frustrating and disappointing experience. Although I felt this show had less impact than either the first National Show that I attended, or the previous Show at Spalding in 1992, this can probably be attributed to familiarity, to a large extent. To me the plants exhibited seemed less diverse than in the past, though there was no diminution in quality. An objective comparison of the number of species represented in this and previous shows would have been interesting - it will be unfortunate if the range of plants shown decreases because certain species are perceived as unlikely to win prizes, thus denying many visitors an opportunity to see plants that they have hitherto only read about.

Ray Pearce

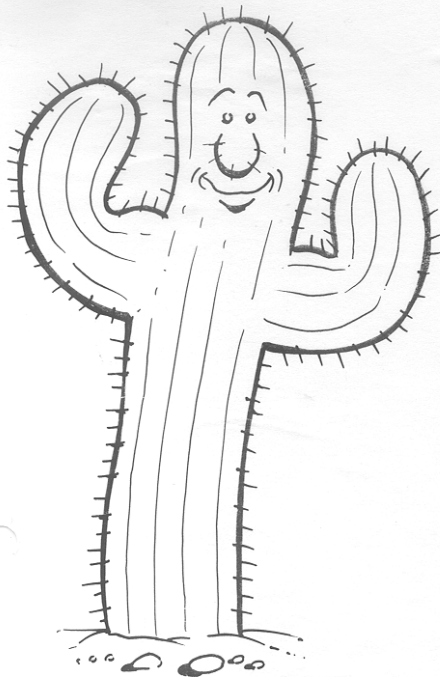
ODE TO THE SHOW

*I know it seems so long ago
but were did that summer go
A new venue was to be found
for you to come and wander round.*

*Now that all the summers sun has gone
I wonder if the Winter will be cold and long
Now's the time to sit and remember
where perhaps you can be a contender.*

*It doesn't matter what you bring
its taking part that is the thing
We try to encourage old and new
to bring their plants if only a few.*

*The plans are now being made
for our plants to be displayed
In Witney town will be the show
so do come along and have a go.*



HELLO

meet **ERICK**

We all have favourite names for our plants.

ERICK is an appliqué design available on Sweatshirts and " T " Shirts in Brown or Green.

Available in sizes to suit you, background colour of white or natural.

Sweatshirt £15.00

" T " Shirt £10.00

Other styles and colours are available

call Bill Darbon

01993 881926 or write to
10 Walkers Close, Freeland
Witney, Oxon OX8 8AY



Your editor gets the knack of pole work.

Saguaro fruit harvest, June 1995

A small coach-load of us from the Tucson Convention left very early in the morning, before the desert warmed up, and were driven to the Saguaro National Monument, some 20 miles to the west. For three weeks each year, in June, the Tohono O'odham Indians are allowed to harvest the red fruits of the *Carnegiea gigantea* here, and they in turn encourage a limited amount of tourist interaction. After a brief demonstration on the use of the thirty foot gathering pole (traditionally of saguaro rib), with its short cross-piece near the top, they let us get on with gathering the fruit for them - no fools, these! Surely, though, the plastic collecting buckets could not be traditional?

We spread out through the scrub, taking care not to lose sight of at least some of the others. Interest in the fruit collecting waned after we had all had a go with the poles, so we explored. Care had to be taken to avoid contact with the three or four kinds of *Opuntias*, waist-high ferocactus species, and wee *Mammillaria microcarpas* - not to

mention a rattler, tightly coiled up and fast asleep, under a Blue Paolo tree.

By 10am it was too hot for comfort, so back to the camp and under the shade of the ramada, where we breakfasted on the Indians' desert hash and corn bread, and sampled yesterday's batch of saguaro jelly. We watched as they boiled down the fruits, with a little water, and skimmed the top froth off. The extract was strained first through a metal mesh (replacement for the baskets of old) and then through a cloth bag, before being reduced down. The bag was left later spread out to dry in the sun. Use is made of the black pips and the pulp as well; nothing is wasted.

David Greenaway

If you would like to contribute any item to the next Newsletter then please phone
01235 762761.