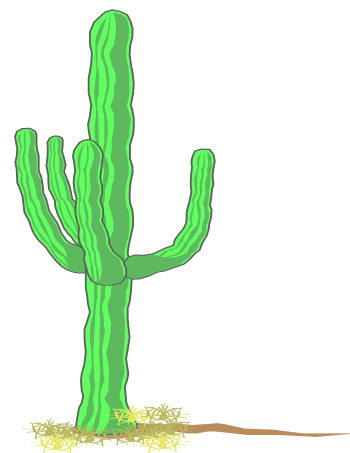


# Oxotica

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

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## CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

We are well into the calendar year and I am pleased to report that I am still enjoying my role as Chairman of the Branch; the support that I get from the members of the committee makes it an easy task, as they are always around to help when needed.

The Branch has had a stimulating and challenging six months: we have had some interesting topics at the Branch meetings - January we visited India via a new digital presentation from the Society library. February saw some plants from the show bench (some which we recognised). March "plants with altitude" (plants that can survive the winter months). April we were treated to an expedition to South Africa (plant hunting in the wild.) May saw some superb specimens of Haworthias from one of the best growers of these plants.

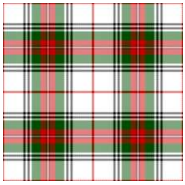
**Don't forget that it's your Branch** so if you feel that there is anything that we can arrange or help with do contact us (our door is always open - so to speak).

We are gearing up for a busy time with plants sales at various events: we are attending The Blenheim Flower Show again from 17<sup>th</sup> - 19th June, a local large horticultural event well worth a visit, set in the palatial grounds designed by Capability Brown. The **Branch Show on 23<sup>rd</sup> July at Grove**, this year we welcome The Mammillara Society in another joint venture, so dust off the cobwebs and see if there is something you can enter - MORE THE MERRIER "*I can recommend the bacon rolls*".

The Society holds one of its most important functions this year, **THE NATIONAL SHOW** on 20<sup>th</sup> August, so I hope that most of our members will be able to make the trip to, dare I say it, "Cambridge" (this is not the time for University rivalry). Being one of the organising committee I hope it will be another wonderful display of the plants that some of us wish we could grow that well. I am sure that the attraction of the sales, in particular "The Continental nurseries", will hopefully make the trip worthwhile.

Good growing !

Bill Darbon



## THE TARTAN TRAIL

The long awaited day (18<sup>th</sup> March) came when I travelled north to Hull to meet up with a group of other enthusiastic folk who were travelling on the Scottish tour that is organised by Mairi and John Frew. It did not seem like two years since we last frolicked across the sea for our four days forage around Dutch and German nurseries. Once assembled in the terminal by the shepherdess Kath Briggs the rest of us *Sassenachs* were warmly welcomed by our Scottish friends who had set off earlier that morning from Perth. It was good to see that we had the same coach and more importantly the same driver (Kevin) as last time. We duly proceeded through customs and some of us, me included, were specially selected to be screened before boarding the ferry. We spent a pleasant evening on board after dinner in one of the bars, renewing old friendships and meeting some new travellers, anticipating what we might find. I knew that there was another group travelling around at the same time as us and we hoped they did not pinch all the goodies.

Friday dawned and after a hearty breakfast we were all gathered up again for the onward journey to Andernach; our first stop was the Leon van Zanten nursery near Gravenzande, not one that other members of the party had been to before. The premises were split into two very large glasshouses either side of a small dyke and were packed with lots of seedling plants; over 1 million specimens to choose from, but no real gems, nevertheless we collected an appropriate number and ventured onwards some 85km to Lexmond and Hans Bisheuvel's nursery. Here we encountered a variety of plants of differing sizes. The locusts duly swarmed and devoured lots of the pickings on offer. Onward journey through Germany some 262 km to the friendly Rhein Hotel where we were warmly greeted by Freddie and Frau Muller for our three nights' stay. After all the purchases had been duly deposited in the cellar by a line closely resembling leaf ants marching back and forth, we were all settled into our rooms. We gathered at the neighbouring hotel for the evening meal, during which John Galvin gave a small tribute the late Peter Burton (Leeds) and we all raised a toast to his memory. Some of the party then assembled in the bar to review our purchases and chat over a coffee or beer.

Saturday after breakfast we had a scheduled later start to allow most of the party to venture into town to purchase any necessary supplies for the day's journey, or presents for those back home. As has been reported before, Andernach is quite a historic town to explore and you have the added attraction of the river craft up and down the Rhein. We travelled 118 km on a dull grey day to Exotica (Specks nursery) at Erkelenz. As many of the readers will know Ernst specialises in unusual succulents with some very large specimens available, however folk were reminded that the bus had not got elastic sides and to be sensible. There was a varied selection available to choose from, but this correspondent felt it was not as wide a selection as normal and some were not very well advanced in growth. Nevertheless most left with a few purchases. Onward 42km to Jeorg Piltz at Duren - mostly seeding plants of good quality and a wonderful private collection to view. The assembled group then journeyed back to the hotel - the journeys on these trips are never boring as Mairi exercises one's grey matter with fun quizzes and the now traditional sweetie jar round. Arriving safely back at Andernach the trail of trays of plants were duly stowed away in the cellar and some folk started to pack up some of their boxes (more of that later). The evening turned into quite a raucous affair with the incumbent Society Treasurer and Vice Chairman all being sacked and a deputy nominated (all in the best(!) possible taste).

Sunday is always the long trip, 213 km to Steinfeld, the famous Kakteenland, Again the day was grey and overcast, but as before plenty on the bus to keep you amused. As I am sure has been reported before this is a vast complex and customers have the use of shopping trolleys to wander around, and the selection varies from small choice plants to very large and imposing specimens. The added delight is a free glass of wine and the café chef had a new Cactus inspired menu to try. The return journey was via the scenic route through the Rhein valley, but again the weather was not very kind and spoilt the views. Back at the hotel the trail of boxes of plants again descended to the cellar and more furious packing ensued. After the evening meal all the packing was completed, a parade of buckets of soil being distributed to various flowerbeds in the area and the eventual transfer of all the boxes to the lounge. Some of the group assembled in the lounge to reflect on our purchases and consider whether everything would fit in the bus.

Monday - time to leave - the last few days had flown by, the bus duly arrived and with expert supervision and a flair for fitting square pegs in round holes all the boxes were stowed away. We all bid a fond farewell to our hosts and ventured homeward bound. We had three planned visits in the Honselersdijk area before boarding the ferry, and on route we made a short customary comfort break. All purchases today had to be managed on the coach or on your lap so no oversized monsters required. Our first stop was at Van der Linden's commercial nursery with its vast benches, he had an interesting bench of assorted caudiciforms, but I have to report that he was still sadly spraying plants vivid colours and sticking on false flowers. A short hop to Cok Grootsholten where we were kindly supplied with coffee and another short hop to Aad Vijverberg's nursery that had a nice selection of seedling plants at reasonable prices. We safely arrived at Rotterdam without any accidents or disasters and boarded the ferry for the journey home. The evening was spent reflecting with other members of the group on a great time spent with like-minded people, renewed friendship and new acquaintances. On this type of trip you cannot always please everyone, but hopefully all those who did take part had an enjoyable time. Grateful thanks go to our organisers Mairi & John Frew without whom this gratifying experience could not be possible.

Let's hope that we can all do it again!

Bill Darbon

## **VISIT TO STEVE BRACK'S NURSERY, SEPTEMBER 2015**

**Bill Darbon**

I was fortunate that while on a visit to Woody Minnich last September he arranged for us to pay a call on Steve Brack at the Mesa Gardens nursery. It was a visit that I was looking forward to, as I had heard much about Steve's place, particularly as it's he who provides a lot of seed for the Society. His place is a little off the highway and does not look much from the road,

but as you drive in there are 14 greenhouses spread around, all covered in shade cloth, containing lots of plants, but not in any particular order (I had expected a more rigid regime). Steve, knowing Woody very well, allowed us to wander around on the understanding that we did not touch any labels or move any plants. He now has two new helpers in addition to his normal staff, but with the number of plants it's a mammoth task keeping on top of everything. Steve explained that he does not like to keep the same group of plants together in case of any cross contamination.

*BD*





## SOUTH AFRICAN CURIOSITIES

John Pusey

*[John sent me some photos last year which he took during a recent trip to South Africa, and some texts to explain a bit more about them. Ed.]*

I have been corresponding with John Foster about an abnormal Senecio which I found on a previous visit to South Africa three years ago, and he visited me to see a specimen which I had brought back. I spent several days of my latest trip travelling back to the same location, where I managed to find the same clump of the abnormal plant again (and another plant nearby with the same abnormality). Unfortunately, I am more inclined now to think that the abnormality is the result of an infection or parasitic attack, rather than a stable genetic mutation. The location is Oudrif Lodge (which I strongly recommend as a place to stay), about 200 km north of Cape Town, on the Doring River, at the end of a back road about 90 minutes drive NE of Clanwilliam.



Tylecodon in flower – on road to Oudrif, Jan '15



Abnormal proliferation on Aloe (arboreum?) - growing in front of a house in Clanwilliam (corner of Foster St which leads to Elephant River Guesthouse)



Another view



Mesem sp with abnormal broad-leaved shoots. This bushy Mesem (which had abundant pink-purple flowers when I saw it in Nov 2011) was one of the commonest plants at Oudrif, and many of the plants have some of these abnormal shoots. My host suggested (both in 2011 and again in 2015) that they were caused by an infection or parasite, and that the same cause might also have produced the abnormal growths on the Senecio ! On some plants, in the summer drought conditions in Jan 2015, many or nearly all the normal shoots had dried up, but the compact abnormal shoots had survived. On my previous visit, I spotted a few of the abnormal shoots sending out further growth from the apex which had normal leaves; and one abnormal shoot which I brought home did the same.



This is the same plant that I found in 2011. the main abnormal shoot is on the left, but some of the newer small shoots on the right are now also visibly abnormal.



5023 Close up of the older larger abnormal shoot



Close up of the small shoots



The only Stapeliad I saw at Oudrif



A different and smaller plant nearby, also affected by the same abnormality. I don't really know whether the large abnormal stalk which is still alive at home is the top of this plant, or the top of the left hand stalk shown in 5023.



Conophytum sp - in a dry state, but many other clumps were dryer still, and probably many of those were dead



Adromischus sp, in flower (Jan 2015) - I had already detached a side shoot; Conophytums also visible. I think it is the same variety which I brought back from my first visit to Oudrif: the leaves are cigar-shaped, and when they are finally fully mature, they turn silvery, marked rather attractively with black spots





5067

5067 and 5070 show a larger specimen, with a dried up inflorescence, of the same species as the plant which I showed you, now coming into leaf upstairs in my house. I think the small rooted plant with a single stem joint which I brought home is actually visible in pic 5067, just to the left of the flowering plant; 6861 shows how it is now. Having looked at the flowers in these pics, I think it is probably Crassulaceae, something like a Cotyledon or a Kalanchoe (at any rate, not a Pelargonium) ?

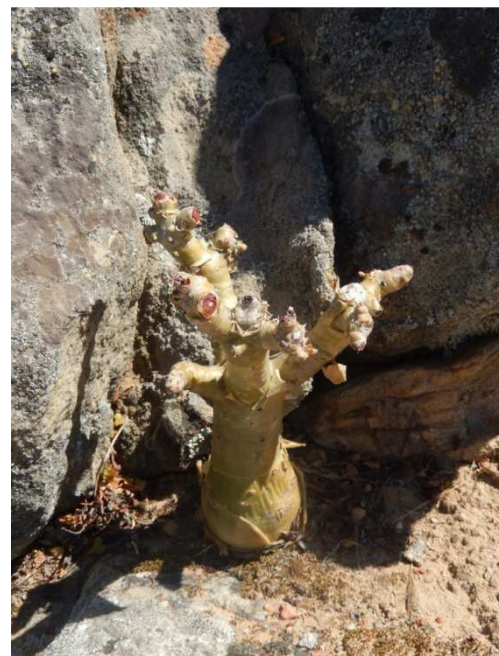


This shows (at the left of the picture) a considerably larger plant of the same species, together with some small Crassulas with reddened leaves.

I am not sure whether the one below, also seen near Oudrif, is the same species: the plant in that pic was only 15-20 cm tall, but there were some others similar, up to 70-80 cm tall, with green fleshy stems up to 10 cm diameter, with the skin peeling, in a distinctive way, several of them partly collapsed and sprawling on their sides. I think I remember being told on my previous visit that these plants had some jokey nickname – ‘fat boys’ or ‘sausage plants’ or something like that.

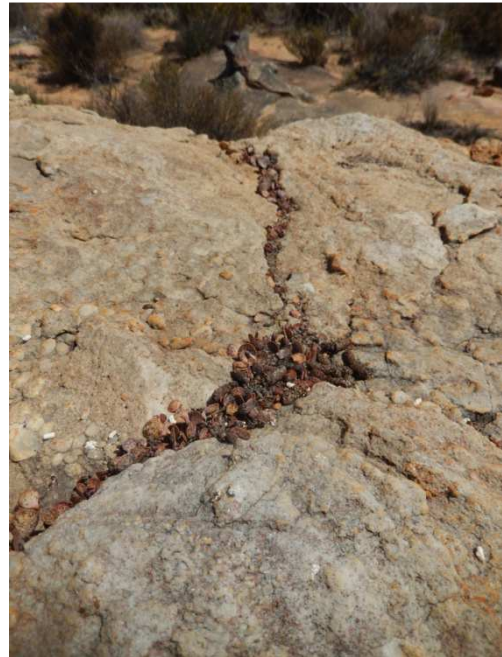


5070





Tylecodon in flower – on road to Oudrif, Jan '15



5128



More of the same, at a similar site the next day.



5129

A flat topped rock at Maaitjies-goed-kloof, a site with prehistoric rock paintings, not far from Oudrif. The flat top of the rock is made up of a vein of almost pure quartz, over an inch thick. The quartz is cracked, and in the cracks there were succulent leaves - an *Adromischus*, I guess. I didn't see any more of it anywhere else nearby. I detached a few leaves (couldn't get hold of a stem), but unfortunately they seem not to have survived the journey home.



5127



Abnormal Kleinia shoot, with outgrowths from leaves (three views)



6861

