

MANCHESTER
BRANCH
NEWS LETTER
MARCH 1999

EDITORIAL

Into the third month of the year and many things are moving already in spite of the multitude of dull days. Plenty of new life in the garden too with the snowdrops come and gone, crocus abounding, though mainly purple this year for some reason and daffodils at various stages of flowering.

By now you will have received your first journal of the new year (or it will arrive in the next few days). However if you have forgotten to renew your membership it will be a long time coming.

I have received one offer of *Rebutia marsoneri* following my appeal in last month's Editorial and I offer my hearty thanks to the donor. Meanwhile I ask you to keep my requests before you through the year.

The second Zone 19 Symposium is being planned for Saturday 25th. September. It seems likely that one foreign and two British speakers be invited. Top of the list for a European speaker is Ernst Specks. Although he is a regular visitor to these shores he rarely visits the northern section. For those of you who do not know the name, he is renowned for the plants he brings for sale. Very interesting plants are available from him, particularly from amongst the other succulents. If he is unavailable then approaches will be made to John Lavranos. He is a highly renowned succulent explorer in all areas of Africa and a very capable speaker.

It would also appear that Tom Jenkins will be one of the other speakers. For the third speaker many names are being bandied around but the aim is to find a good attraction rarely seen in the north. You will be kept informed in these pages as events happen.

A completely new event for 1999 is being staged by the Royal Horticultural Society. Tatton Park will be the venue from 22nd. to 25th. July. This has been in the offing for at least three years now and will certainly be a

huge rival for the long standing Southport Show which is run by a private concern. Zones 5 and 19, covering the north west corner of England have made application to have a stand at the show. Your help, great or small, will be of value so if you would like to be involved in this please see either Geoff or Philip.

The zone committee have produced a month by month table of meetings and other events happening "locally". In the next month these are happening:

March 23rd. Southport Mammillarias old and new Dr. A. Glen.

March 25th. Liverpool To Bolivia with Brian part II Dr. R. Tomlinson.

April 2nd. Chester & N. Wales Tephrocactus Mr. A. Hill.

April 7th. Mid Cheshire Huntingdon Botanical Gardens Mr. K. Grantham.

April 10th. Manchester South Africa 1998 part I Mr. K. Grantham.

See me if you want any further information.

An update will appear each month.

Finally, in this month's Editorial, if there is anything you would like to see in the Newsletter please ask and I will see what can be done.

MEXICAN CEREI

Does the word *Cereus* turn you off? Do you imagine huge 40 foot giants that will push the roof off your greenhouse, conservatory or even outgrow the windowsill? They will long outlive you to be able to do that in all but a few cases. There are some beautiful plants that will not grow more than 2 feet tall for at least 20 years and will not take up the bench space that clustering *Mammillarias*, and others, demand. The space round the base of the plant can successfully be used for standing small pots thus enlarging your collection whilst not taking up extra space on the bench. If they do have a disadvantage it is their reluctance to flower at an early age. However body coloration and markings plus the columnar shape add very interesting contrasts to the collection.

The names used in this series will be those of Backeberg, with newer combinations if I can find them. For good growing conditions these plants need generous root room, an open compost and a good supply of inorganic fertiliser. Many of these species come from southern Mexico and must have a temperature of 5 degrees plus for healthy growing. If grown from seed they will be more tolerant of our winter conditions. Any that are more

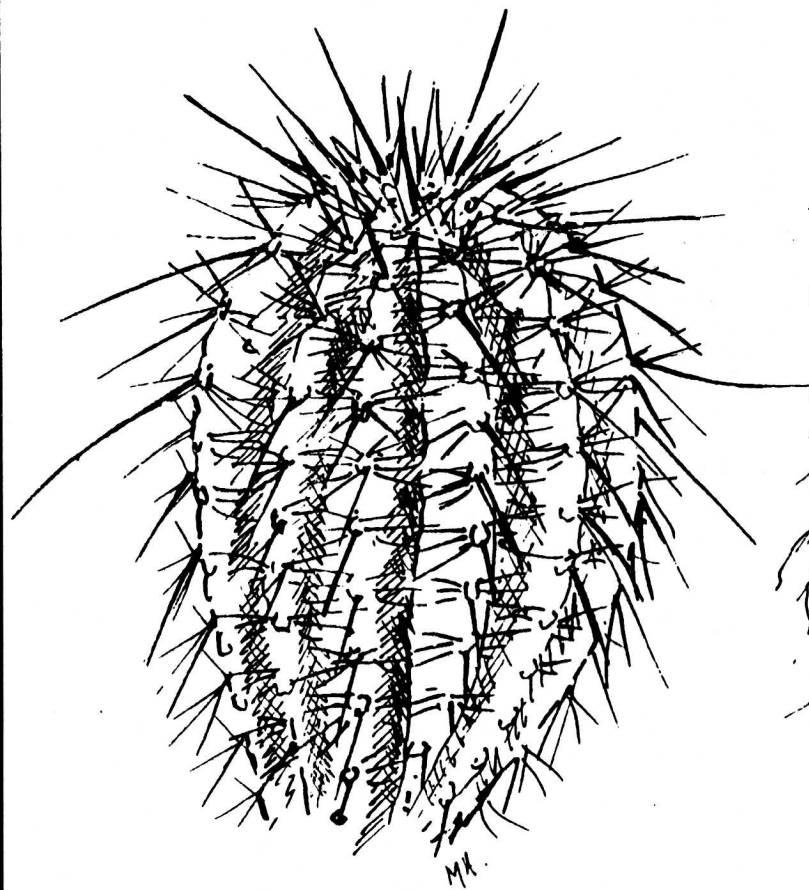
susceptible I will mention in the section about them.

1. **CARNEGIA GIGANTEA** (Eng.)
Br. & R.

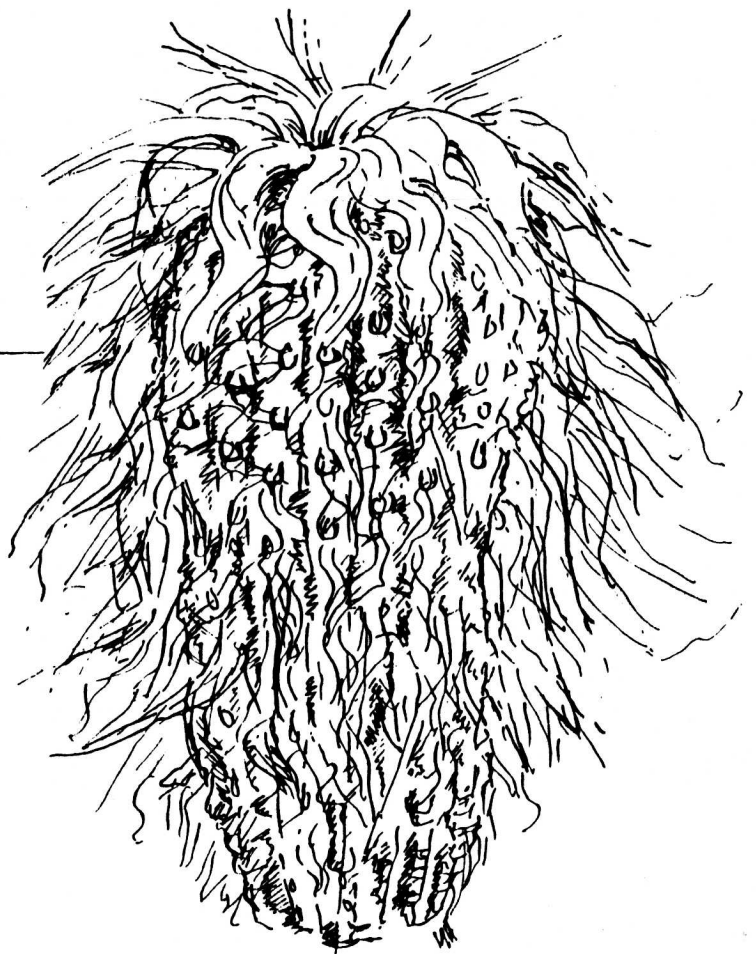
Carnegie, usually regarded as a plant of the United States, particularly Arizona, also spreads well into Sonora, Mexico. It is a well known plant, widely cultivated, as seed is readily available. It is of very slow growth in cultivation but in good light produces long, colourful spines. Providing it is not overwatered it is not difficult. It is said seedlings will grow more rapidly in a wide pan. In any case a plant 1 foot tall is likely to be of the order of 20 years old and would be highly evaluated on the show bench. Flowering and branching occur only on old plants and are unlikely to be achieved in cultivation.

2. **CEPHALOCEREUS SENILIS** (D.C.)
Pfeiff.

From Hidalgo, this is another plant often grown in cultivation. Slow in growth, it can add 2 inches in a good year but it would need very good light with long hours of sunlight to achieve this target. It is characterised by its long white hairs. Overhead watering helps keep these in pristine condition. Many books claim it has a poor root system however this is not necessarily true. Underpotting may well stunt its growth. Better I think to give it ample root room with a truly porous soil which will help prevent root loss. Propagation is best from the readily available seed. *C. senilis* forms a cephalium and flowers at about 18 feet in height so, unless you possess a huge span greenhouse I don't believe you will achieve that aim. However it is a very beautiful plant as a small column and does not lose its attraction through its stately growth.



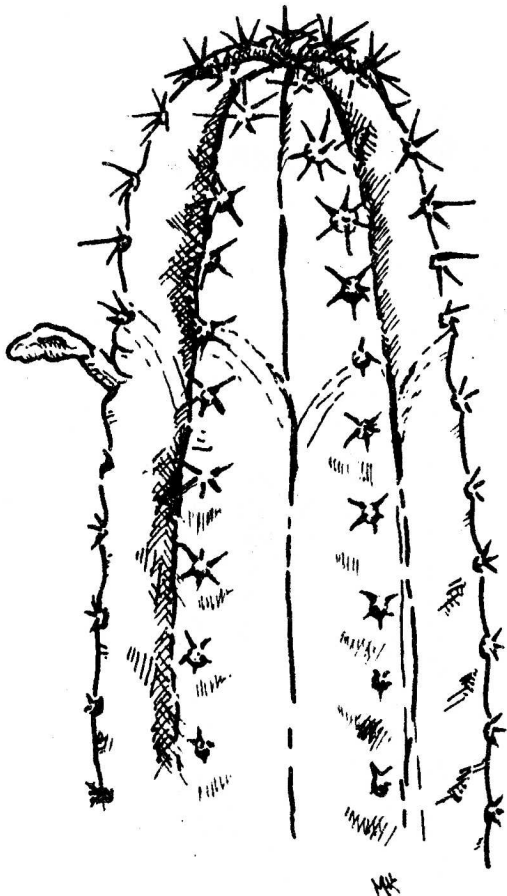
Carnegiea
gigantea



Cephalocereus senilis

3. **LOPHOCEREUS SCHOTTII** (Eng.)
Br. & R.

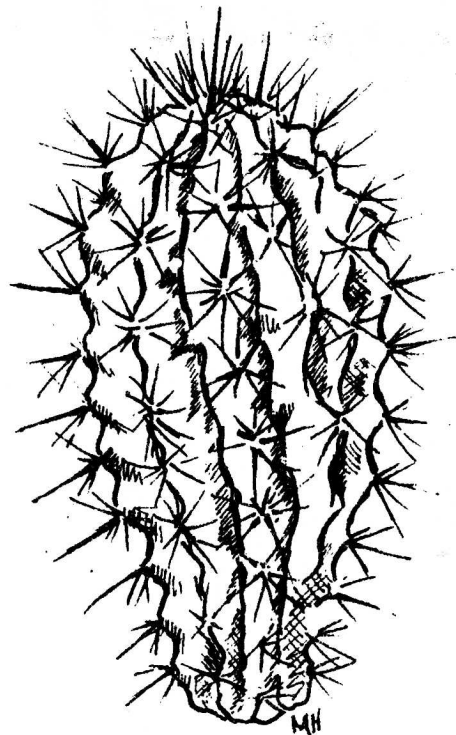
This is a plant we have often seen in its most majestic form in habitat photographs and slides supplied by the many people who have visited Mexico and then given us talks at monthly meetings. From Sonora and Baja California, this species is probably better known for its curious monstrose form which resembles a totem pole with its deranged rib formation and absence of spines. The normal form has 5-6 ribs and short spines. Both forms are quite easy plants to grow not being fussy over conditions. Very slow growth is all you can expect in either case. After an age it can reach a height of 20 feet and form a cluster of stems at the base. Flowering heads develop clusters of long bristles from the areoles and may produce flowers from each areole.



Lophocereus
schottii

4. **LEMAIREOCEREUS THURBERI**
(Eng.) Br. & R.

This has also rejoiced in the name *Marshallocereus* and some experts recognise it under the umbrella of *Pachycereus*. From the same habitats as *Carnegiea gigantea*, this species is especially pretty in its early years of life. The stem is dark green with delightful gingery brown areoles and chocolate brown spines. This is a plant which definitely needs a higher winter temperature to combat the effects of our damp winters. That means either a warm greenhouse kept at a minimum of 50 degrees or bring it onto the windowsill in the house and do not leave it trapped between window and curtains. This is a bit surprising for a plant that extends in the southern U.S.A. in common with plants that are resistant to the cold. This is another reason for me believing that it will not suffer damp conditions. It is a faster growing species than the previous ones but it will still be an age before it becomes too tall to handle. If you enjoy a challenge then this is a must.



Lemaireocereus
thurberi

5. **MYRTILLOCACTUS
GEOMETRIZANS** (Mart.) Cons.

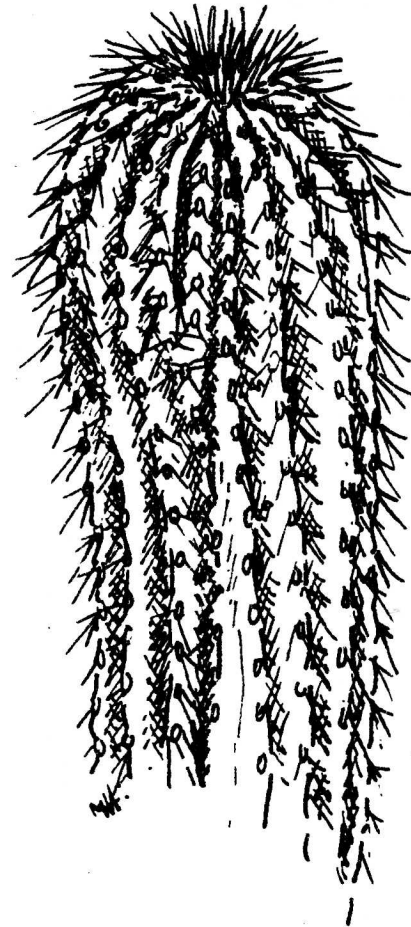
From Puebla and Oaxaca this is a very well known species frequently seen as a grafting stock. The pity is its rarity in collections. I possessed a beauty many years ago, a beautiful blue stem with long black spines. Unfortunately it suffered one winter from being in conditions too cold. It developed nasty marks on the body and eventually succumbed. Given good root room it can make a splendid column. The flowers are small and several can appear at a single areole. At about 1 foot tall it can produce branches giving it the appearance of a candelabra. It has a sister plant which is not as eye catching, having a thicker green stem. This is *M. schenckii*. I have grown both and *M. geometrizans* is undoubtedly the superior plant.



**Myrtillocactus
geometrizzans**

6. **NOEBUXBAUMIA POLYLOPHA**
(D.C.) Backbg.

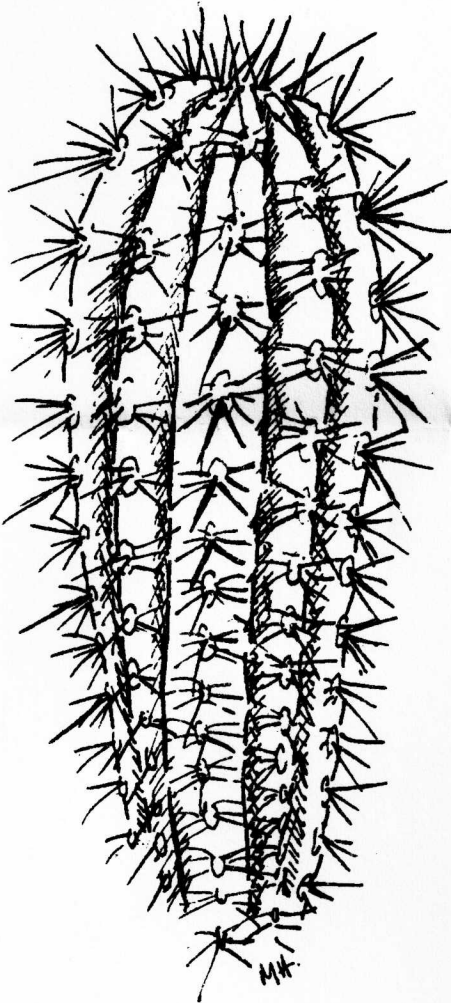
Also going under the name *Cephalocereus polylophus*, this plant from Hidalgo does not fit well with the other members of *Cephalocereus* as no form of cephalium is produced. It has a solitary light green stem eventually, in extreme age, reaching 30 feet with a large number of low ribs, and close set areoles with short, weak spines. Although this species has been available for many years as seedlings there are few good plants in this country. This is extremely frustrating as it is possible to see magnificent specimens growing in southern Europe. It marks readily in our cold, damp winters and also frequently loses its roots. All this indicates the necessity of a warmer winter environment and an extremely well drained compost. Flowers of a pleasant red hue can be produced on plants once they attain a height of 6 feet.



Cephalocereus polylophus

7. **PACHYCEREUS PRINGLEI** (S. Wats.)
Br. & R.

This eventually reaches giant size but I have seen some splendid old specimens of under 6 feet growing in British collections. It hails from Sonora and Baja California. Like *Carnegiea*, it produces a candelabra formation with age. Seedlings are particularly attractive with long pinkish spines on new growth. As the plants become larger the wool from the areoles runs together along the ribs. A plant of easy cultivation which will survive much neglect.



**Pachycereus
pringlei**

Bibliography. *Mexican Cerei in Cultivation* by Tony Mace (From *The Sussex Cactus and Succulent Year Book* 1973.)

CLIVE INNES R.I.P.

It has just come to my notice that Clive Innes, a great and respected figure in cactus culture, has passed away on Saturday 6th March aged 90. I suspect that only the longer serving Society members will be conversant with the name. However in the early days of the National Cactus and Succulent Society he was very much a leading figure.

Probably the greatest achievement was the establishment of the Ashington Reference collection which some of you will have visited. He also worked long and tirelessly for many Societies over the active years of his life. He had a vast knowledge and experience in the realm of cactus and succulent plants. He used to exhibit at the RHS Shows and won many Gold Medals. He travelled widely in search of the plants and was generous in distributing rare and uncommon species to grateful enthusiasts.

He wrote a number of books about the plants, notably *The Complete Handbook of Cacti and Succulents* (pub. Ward Lock), *Cacti and Succulents* (both Wisley Handbooks), *Cacti* (pub. Collins) and, in conjunction with Charles Glass *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Cacti* (Headline Book Publishing PLC). All are easy to read, and worthy additions to any enthusiasts library. To any surviving family we send our condolences.

SPEAKERS FOR MARCH AND APRIL

In March we welcome the return of a well known and respected speaker, David Rushforth, to give further insights into the occasionally zany side of growing these plants we love. Following the strange title "Where grow the potatoes?" we are now faced with unravelling the hidden meaning behind "Five Kegs and Four Suckling Pigs." One wonders what culinary delight sparked the thought that went into this version. All will be revealed to those who wait!

April sees the return of another well known face as Keith Grantham comes to offer us mouth watering footage of yet another of his forays into Succulent heartlands in South Africa. Keith has always been interested in the succulent flora and South Africa part 1 will undoubtedly be right up to scratch as is normal with any of his talks.