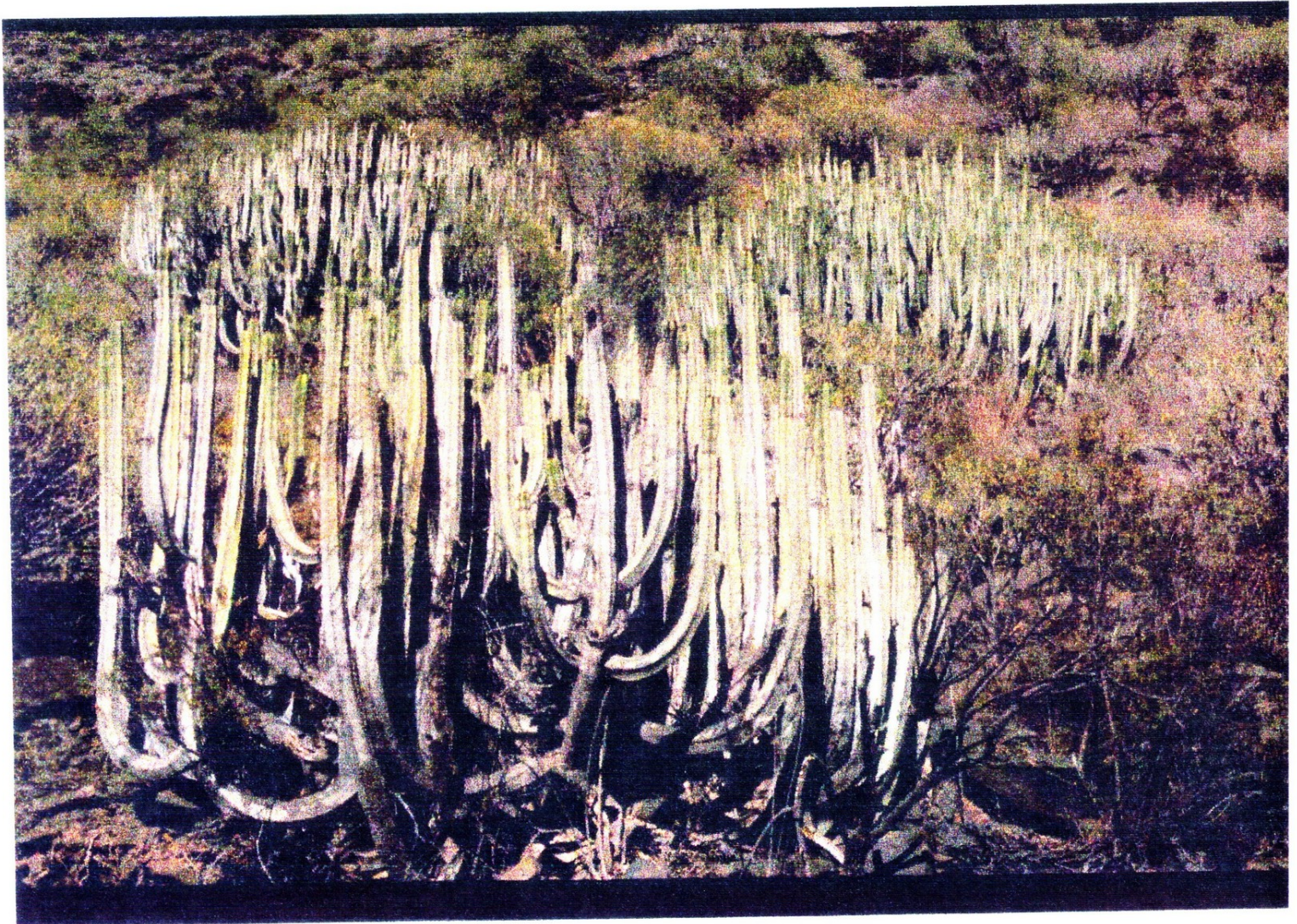




Manchester Branch Newsletter



May 2000

EDITORIAL

I think you will all agree that the international feel about this month's newsletter reflects all that is good about the internet. I have received contributions from three continents around the world; from Germany, Australia and Bolivia through the power of my phone line. This tell us much about the global extent to which the hobby is enjoyed and the world-wide spirit of sharing experiences and enjoyment of plants both in the wild and in cultivation.

If that's not enough, we dip into the world of cacti in literature and take a nostalgic look at people and events in the past that have helped shape our branch.

So, I hope you will all enjoy reading this months jottings and that this may stimulate even more of you to put pen to paper in the near future.
Ivor.

Front Cover

Euphorbia canariensis in habitat
8km north of Maspalomas
Gran Canaria

Photo: I Crook
Technical support: Geoff Bailey

OBITUARY

Harry Ormerod - Manchester Branch.

Manchester Branch is very sad to report the death of one of its erstwhile staunch members following a long illness. Until ill health forced him to resign from the committee and subsequent attendance at branch meetings, Harry was a constant attendee at branch functions where he would cheerfully circulate the people present and subtly relieve the weight of money from their pockets as he sold them raffle tickets.

Though he never received official recognition of his work for the branch in the form of a Silver Badge he was always aware of how valued his work was. He was most generous in fostering junior members and they all found their collections enhanced by seedlings he had grown and cuttings he had propagated. He carried the hobby to his local Horticultural Show, a well attended event, where he ran the Cactus and Succulent section of the event and ensured that it was judged by someone who knew the plants- a rarity for such Shows. He always had plants for sale and would spend ages talking to young folk who came to buy from his stand in the hopes he could encourage a small flame of interest. He was a quiet gentle man who knew his plants and cultivated them well.

Harry's departure leaves his family home a sadder place and the branch poorer for the loss of a wealth of talent. Our sympathy is extended to his wife and family.

Peter Bint.

CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

By John Foley

Readers, dear readers, I have bad news.

There are people out there, otherwise much like you, me, and the branch officers, who don't appreciate or even despise cacti and the more outlandish shaped

succulents! This view sometimes appears in fiction, and I was rather upset to find my favorite detective novelist, Dorothy L.

Sayers (the only one I read actually) expressing some shocking ideas in 'Busman's Honeymoon'. I quote a number of examples:-

"an unnaturally distorted cactus"

"a nice mouthful of prickly cactus"

"that infernal bloody cactus is in my way"

" a spot of mildew or whatever those ugly things suffer from"

" I know you've been coveting those cacti for years"

" I must confess to a great weakness for cacti"

" a strange, covetous longing for a cactus ... these vegetable lovers can be very sinister indeed"

" It's a morbid passion, said his wife"

"This is the dead land. This is the cactus land" (Quote from TS Eliot poem in the text)

"a repellent little cactus"

" the cactus emerging sideways so that it looked like a monstrous hermit crab clawing greedily from its shell"

" hot deserts horrid with prickly cacti"

Pretty strong stuff, eh? Not only that lot, but the villain, who is the gardener looking after the chief cactus (or charactus?) involves this innocent plant in the death of its owner, who himself was an unsavoury character. The only true cactophile is the bumbling, stereotyped vicar. We don't appear to be in good light at all, do we?

HAROLD GAULTON - A GENTLE ENTHUSIAST.

By: Peter Bint.

I first encountered Harold when I started attending branch meetings at St. Thomas' Church Hall at the end of the 1960's. At that time he was chairman of the branch. He was punctilious in all his dealings. The meeting was scheduled to begin at 7.30 and so it did right on the dot. To ensure he missed nothing he always had a list of notices, and consequently he never missed anything out. He made sure that the opening moments were as short as possible, always insisting that people had not come to listen to him prattling on, but rather that they had come to enjoy the knowledge imparted by the visiting speaker.

Delving through the branch records, the first record I find about Harold is for Saturday October 14th 1964 when he attended a meeting where a Paul Hanson gave a talk accompanied by slides, topic

unknown. He was a regular attendee at meetings and precisely one year later in October 1965 he was accompanied by his wife, Muriel, for the first time. At the 18th AGM of the Manchester branch on 11th December 1965 it was "proposed by Mr W Rowlatt and seconded by Mr C Partington that Mr H Gaulton be elected to the committee." The two named gentlemen were also important in the structuring of the branch. The beginning of an illustrious service to Manchester branch.

He was a welcoming character and any new faces entering that hall would be singled out for greeting. It was a good job really as that hall had little cheer in its décor. His warmth and knowledge were famed but he never pushed himself into the limelight. I was to come to know him much better after I joined the committee in the early 1970's. Committee meetings would often be held at his house but not before a browse round his collection, and what a collection, but more of that later. His wife, Muriel, was equally warm hearted and refreshments at meetings were somewhat sumptuous and home-made.

First and foremost Harold was a plantsman. Propagation was always happening whether from cuttings or from seed. He produced a phenomenal amount of material which would be on sale at shows. The Salford show, now sadly defunct, saw him sell a remarkable amount of these plants. He knew exactly what would attract the windowsill grower. Colourful, leafy succulents were sold in there hundreds, especially the highly coloured Echevarias that he regularly chopped up each spring. It was really amazing how people thronged through the sales room and made a beeline for him. He sold more than the rest of us put together and we didn't do badly. The regular visitors that we came to recognize even though they did not attend branch meetings. That was the magic of the man and his plants.

Rare indeed was it that you visited the man in his home surroundings and left without one plant being added to your collection. They lived in a large, desirable house where they had reared one daughter and two sons. These were now grown up and with families of their own. Consequently he had rooms upstairs that lay empty but not unused. Propagators filled the space near the windows and seedlings grew in balmy conditions where there was never a worry about power cuts. Even if there were any the seedlings never suffered one jot.

His Open Days were famed. They would start at midday on Sunday, usually in June. People came from miles around and for four hours at least the greenhouses, the garden, the living room were thronged with noise and bustle. Plants in abundance were on sale, refreshments covered the dining table and cups of tea were drunk in copious amounts. Harold had one small and two large greenhouses and a small conservatory over the back door. The greenhouses were always full of viewers and if you moved out for a second your place would have been taken by another body before you blinked.

Harold was a shopfitter for Timpsons, the shoe people, and as much an accomplished carpenter. No run of the mill greenhouse for him. He manufactured his own. When I first knew him he had just a single large house at the end of the garden but he was in the throes of building another. He had salvaged a large amount of shelving from the refitting of many showrooms. Having the glass, he then manufactured the wood to fit the glass rather than vice versa. He had one party piece which he would spring upon any new visitor. He would explain how he had built this particular greenhouse and then, much to the consternation of the listener he would pick up a brick and toss it at the glass. As they gulped in astonishment the brick would rebound and the glass would show not even a scratch. The glass was highly reinforced and unbreakable. Those

of us who had regularly witnessed this event used to say that one day the brick would not rebound but we were never proved right.

The two large houses carried the bulk of his collection which was amazingly mature considering it had been started after the war. In the one further from the house were the majority of his cacti. Veritable Mammillarias, Notocacti, Parodias, Lobivias, Cerei of many genera and others. There was one Selenicereus (Queen of the night) which used to flower in profusion. It sprawled all over the roof area and had to be pruned annually. The other house carried the greater part of his succulent collection as well as more tender plants. Harold's collection grew during the period when many new varieties were arriving from the Americas and the African continent. He was one of the forerunners in the advent of the caudiciform plant. Yes he had many habitat plants and he grew them well. Sempervivums grew in containers outside and I reckon Harold had all the varieties available then. A steel bar was attached to the outside of his latter house and hanging plants were suspended from this during the summer months. The little house at the far end of the garden was used almost exclusively for propagation.

In addition to his interest in the succulent genera, Harold kept a neat and tidy garden. The one thing that was immediately noticeable when I used to visit him in early spring was how far advanced his plants were compared to those in my garden. He had a growing season that was almost a month longer than mine and we only lived 12 miles apart as the crow flies.

As a member of Manchester branch, Harold would travel far and wide. We went to many executive and AGM meetings along with Colin Partington (an article about him later). In spite of never serving the Society as an executive in any way he was still a well known and respected figure. He always thought very carefully

before he said anything and if he did stand up to speak at any of these meetings whatever he had to say was of great value. The welfare of Manchester branch was at the heart of all he did. He regularly gave talks in the northwest but declined to travel further. The four yearly National Show would have 2 classes for branch entries, one for 6 cacti, and one for 6 other succulents. At least half the plants for these entries came from Harold's greenhouses. We always won the latter but could never quite manage the former. Harold would always go to these shows and return, car bulging with purchases. He was also a regular attendee when we would take a 53 seater coach around the interesting nurseries. Those were the days!

In the growing months he would be up at six in the morning and would spend at least an hour tending his plants before he set off for work. He believed strongly that shows were a good way of showing the public what an interesting hobby we enjoyed. Whenever he entered shows you could guarantee that nearly every entry would gain 1st 2nd or 3rd place. In my early days in the show arena it was hard to win a prize in the open section because the "big three" were Harold, Colin and Fred Prosser, another veritable grower.

Sadly, illness took over Harold's life in the latter stages. Prior to that he lost his beloved Muriel, an event that took all the heart out of his life, so much so that he did not want to continue living. He quickly remarried but it brought him a lot of sadness because Kathleen became permanently ill shortly afterwards. Although Harold would probably not agree she became a burden because she was much housebound in the latter years and was not the comfort that he had imagined she was going to be. After the blessed relief of her death Harold enjoyed a short spell of happiness again. During this period he went to Miami to meet a lifelong friend Les Nyman who had had a small nursery in Salford in the 70's and later

moved to the States. Together they visited the cactus territories in the South West states. It was on his last trip to Les that illness struck. Gangrene set in and he had to be rushed home. He lost his leg just above the knee. Undeterred he took to wearing his artificial limb and did his utmost to continue as though nothing had happened. Prior to this he had suffered and recovered from a heart attack. One enduring picture will forever remain engraved on my memory. We had gone to one of the executive meetings. Unfortunately it was a place of many levels. The meeting hall was down a flight of stairs, the toilet at the top of the same. Suddenly we were aware of Harold half way up this flight. Rather than seek to trouble anyone he struggled up unassisted on crutches, and it must have hurt him enormously.

Fate had not finished with him. Gangrene appeared in the other foot and a second amputation was necessary. The house was converted and he lived totally downstairs. Many of his friends visited to keep him company, especially those from the Legion. His daughter prepared precooked meals which he put in the microwave and warmed up. He was independent to the end, an end that was not long in coming. But it still allowed for one final endearing picture. We had moved our annual show to Wythenshawe Park. In his commitment to shows he came on his electric buggy all the way from Sale and back home again at the end of the show.

Illness and amputation meant he could no longer look after his plants. Most of his special other succulents found their way south to Luton. His cacti still thrive in different parts of the country. He kept a few in the living room and in the conservatory.

A remarkable man, an inspiration, Manchester is a poorer branch for his passing, though I believe he is happy with Muriel once again and may well be tending yet more plants in his cactus heaven.

Growing and Flowering Ferocacti

Photos by Geoff Bailey.

Right - fig 1 - *Ferocactus echidne*

Bottom left - fig 2 - *Ferocactus macrodiscus*

Bottom right - fig 3 - *Ferocactus gracilis* ? var
tortuispinus





Top right: *Trichocereus rosei*. Top left and bottom: *Trichocereus spachianus* growing in the garden of Joylene Sutherland, Victoria Australia.
Photos by the author.

GROWING AND FLOWERING FEROCACTI

By Geoff Bailey

It's been a funny spring – April was awful with probably the highest rainfall and the lowest sunshine on record, but in complete contrast somebody flicked a switch on May 1st and the weather has been great - so far! What effect this has had on the flowering of our plants is debatable but I do know that my *Ferocacti* have flowered and will flower better than ever this year. But then again, I've noticed this trend for the last several years. So I must conclude that it has nothing much to do with the weather and more to do with the plants steadily becoming more mature year by year.

As some of you may know I have been growing a pretty comprehensive selection of this genus for a number of years. Some of them will have to go because they are getting far too large. They are generally handsome plants with a few problems, one of which is their apparent reluctance to flower, at least in this country. I think this may be more a matter of size/maturity than the great British climate *per se* which affects the speed of growth to maturity more than the flowering propensity.

At the outset I will say that one 'Fero' is much easier to flower than all the rest. This is the former *Hamatocactus*, *F. hamatocanthus* also known affectionately as Ham², maybe it's not a true Fero at all!

It is about three years ago that my first proper seed raised Fero flowered – *F. echidne* which has since flowered every year in late April - early May and is still in flower as I write this. It is shown in Figure 1 and the flowers are yellowish green. Close on its heels and flowering for the first time last year was *F. macrodiscus*, which is shown in Figure 2 flowering again this year – the flowers are white with a purple mid stripe. Also flowering for the first time last year and again in bud this

year, to produce its flowers in late May or early June, is *F. viridescens* with its strong spination and flowers similar in colour to *F. echidne*. These three plants, together with *F. fordii*, are probably the smallest of the genera to flower at about 10–13cm (4-5 inches) and the rest have to be a bit bigger. A new delight to come this year is going to be *F. schwartzii* which at about 17cm (7 inches) in diameter, has for the first time produced buds – a total of five, which should become flowers at about the same time the buds on *F. viridescens*.

With some plants of *Ferocactus* I have cheated – I have bought mature plants up to about 20cm (8 inches) across. I have two plants of *F. glaucescens*, which produce about a dozen of their yellow flowers each year. I also bought, *F. gracilis* (var *tortulispinus*?) at the last National Show in 1996, and flowered it for the first time last year with its red and white flowers which hardly contrast with the similarly coloured spines (Figure 3). It is in bud again this year and should flower in a few weeks time. Has yours flowered yet Peter? I wait in hope that maybe the real barrels of the genus, *latispinus* and *pilosus* will oblige before I get too decrepit.

Another alleged member of the genus, *Leuchtenbergia principis*, flowers easily and reliably each year and produces lots of seed. The generic name *Leuchtenbergia* has priority over *Ferocactus* so perhaps I should re-title this article but then again do we want all these common plants with an aristocratic generic name?

Despite many attempts, I have never managed to produce a 'Feroberger' (although they have been produced) or a 'Hamburger', although crosses between *Ferocactus-Thelocactus-Stenocactus* are generally easy to produce.....food for thought.

Ferocacti et al thrive in a very gritty, limestone containing sandy clay compost and need plentiful water in the growing season to ensure steady growth and reliable flowering.

GROWING TRICHOCEREUS AND SOEHRENSIAS

By Joylene Sutherland, Tatyoon, Victoria, Australia.

There are a lot of standard general recommendations given out for growing Cacti. Low Nitrogen fertilizer only. Keep dry in winter. Do not water for at least a week after repotting. Be sure to let mix dry out between watering. All of the above needs to be forgotten if you are going to grow Trichocereus and Soehrensias well.

I have all my plants out in the ground with only shelter from the strong winds from the west. Winters are usually wet and cold; spring is wet also with hot dry summers. Frosts can occur anytime. The lowest being -10oC one year. This did not affect any of the Cacti. One Agave lost about a foot of the end of its leaves. Usually the frosts are no more than -5oC .

Soehrensias and most of the Trichocereus flower here in mid Spring/Summer. If it hasn't rained I will ensure they have plenty of water at this time and feed them too. Either with a soluble fertilizer. (same as you would use for veges/flowers) and with a top dressing of Dynamic Lifter if the plant is only young and I want to give it an extra boost.

I don't plant out when they are only seedlings, I pot them on each year until at least 6" - 8" high and put them in the ground in spring, giving shelter if there is going to be a heavy frost or a very hot day early on. This can be as simple as a piece of leafy tree branch or a handful of dry grass. The UV is very high here, therefore I have more problems with sunburnt plants than with them rotting because of the wet and cold. I have started growing *Solanum laciniatum* amongst the Cacti to break up the sun. This has worked very well. *Solanum laciniatum* is a local plant from the potato family. It has an open growth and is very fast growing with a shallow root system that enables easy removal when its usefulness is over. *Trichocereus*

spachianus and several *Cereus sp.* have appreciated the shelter from one of these this year. I have used *Brachychiton rupestris* in the same way, but these have to be more selectively planted as they are not so cold tolerant and are permanent.

In the last month of summer when the days begin to shorten, even when it can be still very hot, they put on quite a growth spurt. Watering well is important then too. Through the summer I water once a week (maybe you would water less in an area with higher humidity) more as they begin their growth spurt (keep the soil at least damp).

With this care they flower magnificently and look fabulous. In the winter they get a yellowish tinge and look a bit ordinary, but this soon disappears in springtime. If they look like this in the summer time, something is not right, probably need more water and a feed.

Weeding is a problem with an outdoor garden. Great care needs to be taken when using Roundup not to get any on the cactus plants. Grass and weeds just love to grow between the ribs of cacti. A long slender nosed pair of pliers are very useful for removal of these. Hoeing isn't an option as the cacti roots are usually only an inch or so at most under the ground.

Oreocereus celsianus responds well to this treatment also, they grow very fast if they get enough water and feeding. If they dry out and lose their roots at any time they tend to 'sulk' and take a long time to regain their vigor.

Ferocactus sp. struggle here in a cold winter. They need more shelter and the most sun they can get.

When in pots I use a soil based mix with grit and compost mixed in with full strength 9 month Osmocote that has added minerals. Younger plants I don't bake out in the sun in their pots, keep them where they are shaded for the middle of the day.

Echinocactus grusonii, this is a plant that literally sucks up the water and heat. It can cope with all the sun it can get and will grow reasonably fast if fed and watered well.

NOTES FROM THE GREENHOUSE.

From Chris Leather:

It seems that spring is finally here. I have given my plants a really good watering. Last year I purchased some large trays to put my plants in so that it would make watering easier. I was finding it very time consuming watering each and every plant. With this system I can fill the tray and let the plants take what water they want. It should be fine as long as I don't over fill the tray in the first place.

Looking around my greenhouse I have noticed quite a few plants have one or two mealy bugs on them. I must get something to kill them off.

Quite a few plants are showing signs of flowering. In particular the *Gymno's nigreareolatum*; *vatteri*; *uruguayensa* and *damsii* are showing very small flower buds. I spent a very busy morning last week transplanting my larger seedlings into individual pots. It is quite surprising how the spaces soon fill up in the greenhouse. I am very pleased with my *Echinopsis* hybrid seedlings.

I tried during the winter to manage in my greenhouse without heating. It seems that most of my plants have come through ok, but one or two have succumbed to the cold. I am wondering if the change in regime has brought about the extra mealy bugs?

From Konrad Muller, Leipzig, Germany:

Only for some minutes I was in my greenhouse during the last four weeks. The first flowers I have seen on the *Brasilicactus* (or *Parodia*) *haselbergii* and some succulents are blooming too.

From Brian Bates in Sucre, Bolivia. A hint of what's to come on his next visit to England?

Well, I'm still collating info. The trip is like all other new venture, a seat of the pants job. The rough outline, taking in instructions from the great lord Harry...

Leave Sucre 8th may, travel to Padcoyo to investigate Cintia further, then to Camargo to investigate a new site for Sulco. and *Weingartia fidaiana* (I have my doubts about the id of the *Weingartia*, but am assured that it is correct), then Impora - Tupiza, the 1st time in this direction, to investigate *Parodias* amongst other thing. This is a very rich area, at least around Mal Paso. The investigate (AKA try to find) *Weingartia fidaiana* near Tupiza, it's type locality, down to Argentina, buy some maps, take a look at the new Genus. What condition are the plants in at the end of their growing season? Down to Jujuy to meet Rudolf Schulz. Investigate *Oreocereus* in its range from Jujuy, through Bolivia, to northern Chile, then southern Peru, finishing phase one at Lima.

Phase 2, Peru..... 4 weeks, returning Lima early July, followed by a leisurely drive back to Sucre.

From Ivor Crook.

As many of you know my greenhouse is disadvantaged not only by the latitude and constant cloud of Manchester but also by the shade of the lush suburban trees. It was no surprise therefore to find the first flowers on my *Echevarias* in the first week of May when I had seen plants in flower in February in London. However, with the recent spell of hot weather, *Rebutiae*, *Echinocerei* and now the *Notocacti* provide a constantly changing spectacle of colour and interest.

THE FLORA OF GRAN CANARIA BY PACKAGE HOLIDAY.

By Ivor Crook.

The day the March Journal arrived on my doormat, my wife arrived home and announced she had booked a last minute package holiday to Gran Canaria. As I opened the journal the pages fell apart to reveal the article on *Ceropegia fusca* habitat in Gran Canaria. I felt my pulse start to race as I began to read the first paragraph.

Gran Canaria is situated in the middle of the Canary Islands at latitude 28 deg north and approximately 250 kilometres off the Saharan west African coast, just north of the Tropics. The climate makes it ideal to capture the tourist trade and around 8,000 people every week enter the island through its airport for a package holiday. The island boast low rainfall, daily temperatures in the 70's and 80's Fahrenheit with 12 hours of unbroken sunshine on over 300 days a year. The clear, crisp Atlantic waters lapping against clean beaches are the icing on the edge of the cake.

As most of the books say, your first visit to see succulent plants in habitat is an experience never to be forgotten. Even on our coach transfer from airport to hotel, glimpses of huge clumps of *Euphorbia canariensis*, clung perilously to the near vertical sides of barren rock gave an insight into things to come.

The main purpose of the trip was for a family holiday. Our package deal was a winter sun break in Puerto Rico on the southern coast of the island. Having to consider the needs of wife, children and mother-in-law, three days on the beach was our priority. The three days with the hire car were mainly taken up with the children's requests for visits to aqua parks. Despite all this, the 10 kilometre drive from the motorway exit at Maspalomas inland

towards Palmitos Park was to provide my short but exciting opportunity to see and photograph some plants in habitat.

Palmitos Park is a major tourist attraction that sits at the top of a steep, narrow valley of a dried up river bed some 15 kilometres inland from the coast. The zoological and botanical gardens proved spectacular. Free flying tropical birds never seemed to stray too far from this oasis in the rocky landscape. The park is hidden away behind mature Canary Island Palms (*Phoenix canariensis*) and boasts over 250 species of mature cacti and other succulents growing in the open air.

The drive up the valley and back down again offered several opportunities to stop and take some pictures. Near vertical valley walls were dotted with several large *Euphorbia canariensis* plants as well as the local member of the agavaceae, *Dracaena draco* on the lower slopes. Despite the total lack of water in the river bed, the valley floor appeared quite lush in comparison with the rocky valley walls. The local daisy, *Launaea arborescens*, widely distributed over arid areas of the Canary Islands, north Africa and southern Europe, with it's densely branched appearance begs comparison with the dried inflorescence of *Tylecodon schaeferianus*.

All too quickly the sun began to set and the light faded. We were soon all back in the car and heading back to the hotel for evening meal. I doubt this will be the last time I try to mix a family package holiday with a plant photography opportunity in a succulent habitat and I thoroughly recommend this to you all.

Photos - back cover:

Site-Barranco de la Data approx 7 km North of Maspalomas, Gran Canaria.

Top left: young *Dracaena draco*
Top right: *Ceropegia fusca*
Bottom: *Euphorbia canariensis*

