

Gaultonia

Newsletter of the
Manchester Branch
of the
British Cactus and Succulent Society

Autumn 2006.



Oreocereus festivus
Merry Christmas to all our readers

Diary Dates 2006/7.

Warrington Cactus Mart

Saturday 31st March 2007

Woolston Leisure Centre, Warrington.

All last years major vendors have re-booked.

This is the week-end before Easter week-end

See Philip for full details.

A third look at the American Journal for 1966.

by Peter Bint

In the September/October edition of this volume there is an article about a well known collection in the south of England. People interested in cacti and succulents will have visited the collection because it was one of the best known collections in the country at this time. The Exotic Collection was also well represented in the world of books with the Reference Plates they prepared for cactus and succulent enthusiasts along with the five reference books produced through the years. We have those books in the Branch Library.

The article is by the owners of the collection. The article raises several issues which still cause diverse discussion even now 40 years later. Being in mind the fact that this collection was sited at the foot of the South Downs in Sussex it enjoyed favourable conditions compared with us in Manchester. I say was because they moved lock, stock and barrel cactus to Spain many years ago...very sensible!!

A quote from the article says: "These hills (the South Downs) are chalk, and it is from them that our very plentiful water supply is obtained, which as you might imagine is very 'hard'. It is the same which is used for watering our plants with no adverse effect. It is for this reason we think some people worry too much about the pH of their soil"

That is a statement which causes much debate. I personally disagree with the concept stated, though readily acknowledge the value of lime enhanced water for Mexican and North American cacti. South American plants definitely require acidic soil.

In 1966 the climate was definitely colder in winter than we have experienced in the last 10 years. The winter of 1963 was hard in the extreme when we suffered snow through the first three months of the year without respite. Day

and night temperatures tended to be in negative numbers even on the sunniest of days. Reference is made to this in the article where they acknowledge the splendid amounts of sunshine received in Spring, summer and early autumn when they had to shade the greenhouses to prevent scorch

The collection was run on the lines of a Botanical Garden, primarily housing cacti and succulents but also boasting Chusan Palm from China, Yuccas and Phormium tenax from New Zealand to name but a few. The one drawback was the rule they employed vigorously. To gain admission to the collection you had to be a subscriber to their monthly publication. I was but never ever managed to find the time to visit.

The collection was originally started in the late 1920's by Edgar Lamb. In those days the variety of plants available to the enthusiast was small compared with 2006 but so also was the ability to travel to exotic parts of the world. 1939 to 1945 saw no growth in plants brought to the collection. In fact many plants were lost due to shattered glass on frosty nights following air raids. At the end of hostilities the collection numbered a mere 1500 species. Between 1945 and 1966 the collection grew to around 7000 species (3000 cacti and 4000 other succulents). This was a period of great exploration and plant discovery. They claimed to have an almost complete collection of Canarian succulents including the rare *Euphorbia handiensis*. At this period of time plants were flooding in from Africa, South America, Madagascar, India and the Arabian peninsular, plants that we take for granted nowadays but then they caused a massive interest. This was the period of huge growth in the size of the Society.

The owners boasted to having extensive collections of both dwarf Aloes and Euphorbias as well as many larger growing ones. The Madagascan plants, Caudiciform or bushy also figured strongly in the collection with special reference to *Pachypodiums*, *Alluardias*, *Didiereas* in addition to the aforementioned Aloes and Euphorbias. Without doubt many were habitat imports but in their defence they managed to grow them more successfully than many amateur collectors.

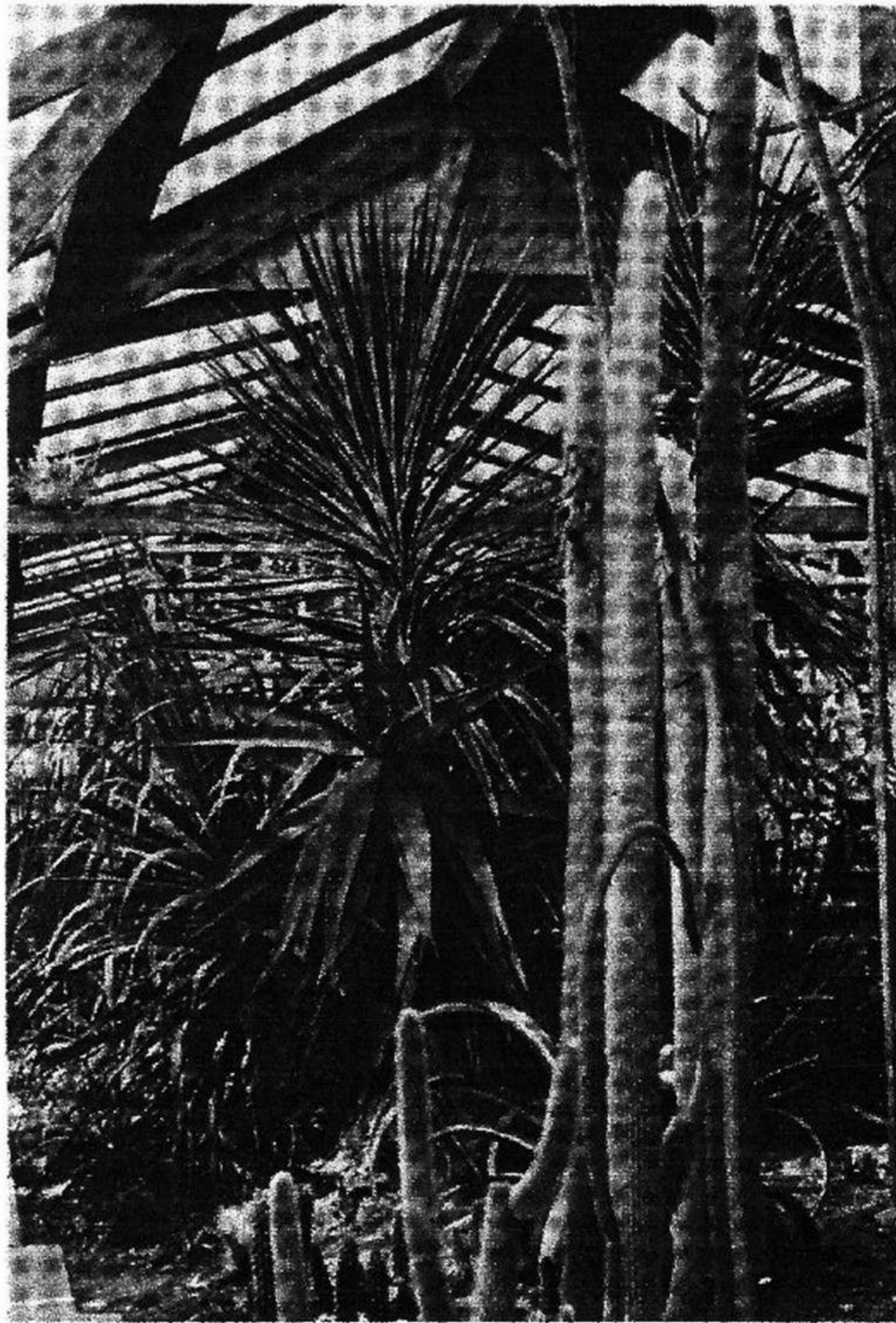
Mesembs figured strongly in the collection, particularly *Lithops*, *Conophytums*, *Argyrodermas* and *Gibbaeums* which were grouped in large pans.

South American discoveries were only just beginning to arrive in Europe to enlarge the known species. They had a strong interest in *Echinocerei* and *Gymnocalycium*. Even then they were talking about the intergradation between one species and another from the large range of plants in their possession (something which still causes huge debate even today).

By 1966 the collection was housed in 'Dutch Light' type houses which interconnected. They varied between 60' to 150' in length and 30' wide at the greatest width. They were experimenting in growing hardy plants without any winter warmth protection though they were wholly enclosed in greenhouses. This is why 1963 was mentioned so forcefully when they reached temperatures of 0 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees of frost). They had also

initiated some outside beds which were protected from precipitation but not wind or cold. On their northern boundary (and therefore facing south) they had built a lean to house to house the newer columnar arrivals from South America. These included Oreocerei, Haageocerei, Cleistocacti, Borzicacti and Eulychnias. They were bedded straight into a large rockery and were a mere 3 to 4 years in situ, not seedlings but habitat collections in all likelihood. *Cleistocactus dependens* was particularly mentioned, 3 feet tall and bearing in excess of 100 flower buds.

This has come from what was promised to be an occasional series.



Taken at the south end of our largest house, showing various cleistocacti, yuccas, aloes, *Dracaena draco*, etc.



A small part of one staging on which can be seen some of the smaller gymnocalyciums, most of which have been grown from seed, also some large denmozas, which are possibly around 100 years of age.

Little Known Succulents of Southern Arabia

This article is by Werner Rauh, a highly celebrated explorer of cactus and succulent habitats. It was an article about a trip made in 1964 with the equally famous John Lavranos, the succulents in Africa and Arabia expert. At this period of other succulent history masses of new discoveries were being made, especially Aloes and Stapelias.

Several plants are mentioned and photographed, some of them well known in 2006 but others still as scarce in collections today as they were 40 years ago. Plants mentioned that are popular and worthy of growth are:

Adenium arabicum (synonymous with *Adenium obesum*). A very desirable succulent but notoriously difficult to keep through British winters. It will flower profusely given warm conditions but needs a propagator set at a minimum of 60 degrees Fahrenheit to survive winter here. Plants pictured have enormous

caudices several metres in diameter and can stand 5 metres tall. Amongst Euphorbias mentioned are the larger growing species. Euphorbia cactus, because of its close resemblance to cactus plants grows in large stands over 6 feet tall and 10 or more feet across. The variety tortirama is particularly attractive and makes a splendid pot plant whilst small. E. fruiticosa is also mentioned. This is a basal clumping plant that will attain heights of 2 feet and 3 feet across. It is a plant worthy of greenhouse culture if you can find a specimen because it is extremely slow growing in greenhouse culture.

However many plants mentioned are rare in cultivation. Euphorbia longituberculosa is a splendid plant to grow. Its trunk is adorned with elongated persistent flower stems and it grows in lava rubble. Again cultivation in Britain is testing because it enjoys high air and soil temperatures. I was lucky enough to grow one for a few years. Cissus quadrangularis and the lesser known C. rotundifolia are mentioned. These are much simpler to grow. Many stapeliad plants are mentioned but, as we learnt from Bill Keen at the October meeting, names have changed radically.

Dracaena serrulata grows magnificently at 1800m on the Audhali Plateau but could not be recommended as a pot plant. On the same plateau occur large clumps of Euphorbia balsamifera. Beauty in this plant has to be in the eye of the beholder but it is an easy plant that can be contained in a small pot for many years. Dorstenis foetida is a very interesting plant, as are all the Dorstenias but it is a challenge. A small caudiciform plant, it produces deciduous leaves that are long and narrow each spring. However it is the inflorescences that attract conversation. What, to all intents and purposes, looks like a single flower is in fact a huge collection of miniscule male and female flowers gathered together on a single 'plate' and surrounded by a few "petals" which are actually bracts.

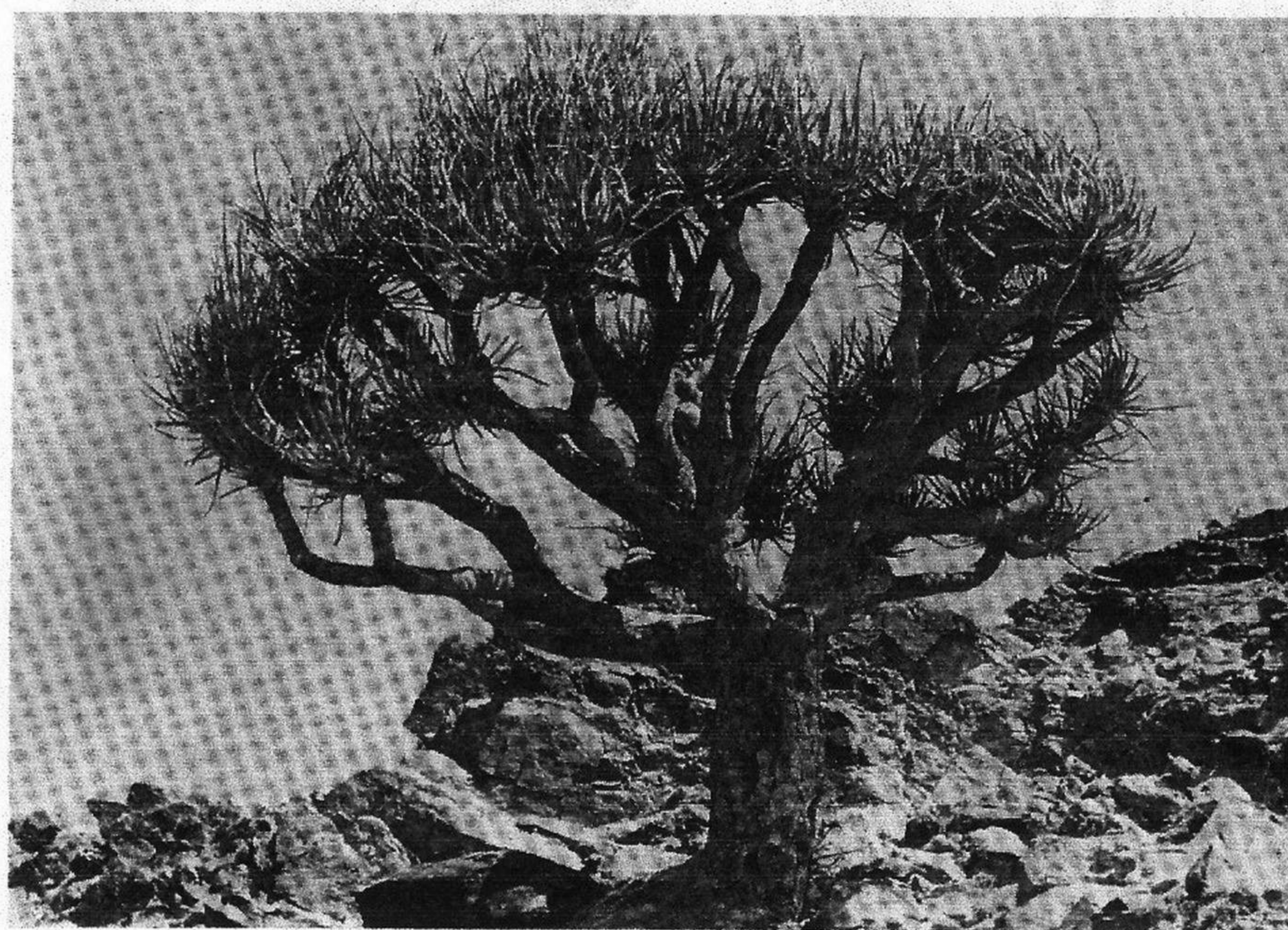


Fig. 17. *Dracaena serrulata* on the Audhali Plateau (1800 m) near Mukeiras.

November – December 1966

The final edition for 1966 has a picture of *Cephalocereus-sants* as its front cover, a splendid piece of needlecraft looking for all the world like the top section of *Cephalocereus senilis* dressed as santa.

In cacti and succulents for the amateur are some beautiful plants which could easily be grown here. *Wilcoxia* (now *Echinocereus*) *viperina* is one such plant. The beautiful flowers, which can be produced abundantly, are typical Echinocereoid, dark red to purple with the typical green stigma. Derek brought many cuttings earlier in the year for people to take and root. If you were one of those people who responded you will have found they will root in warm conditions. I may have a few plants available next spring from the cuttings that were left behind.

Also mentioned is *Mammillaria humboldtii*. This is a splendid miniature well worthy of a place in any collection. A small, slow growing plant it has white spines closely adpressed to the plant body making the surface skin invisible. The small, dark red flowers gleam against this white background. Look out for this plant in sales trays; it will disappear from the tray very quickly if you are lucky enough to find specimens.

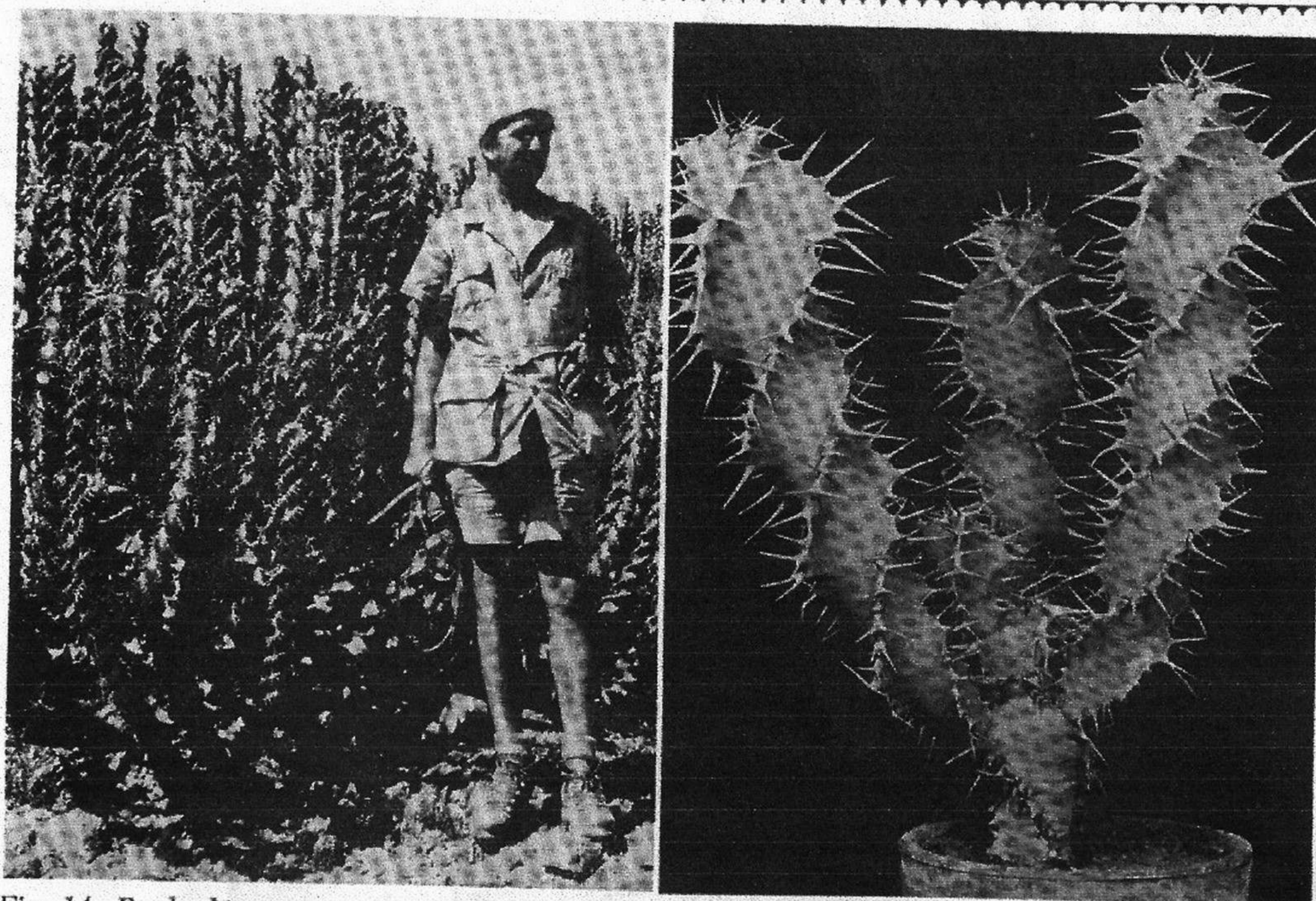


Fig. 14. *Euphorbia cactus* var. *tortirama* Rauh et Lavranos, in the Wadi Maadin, northwest of Aden. Beside the plant: John Lavranos. Fig 15. *E. cactus* var. *tortirama*, a rather old seedling. All branches are spiraled.

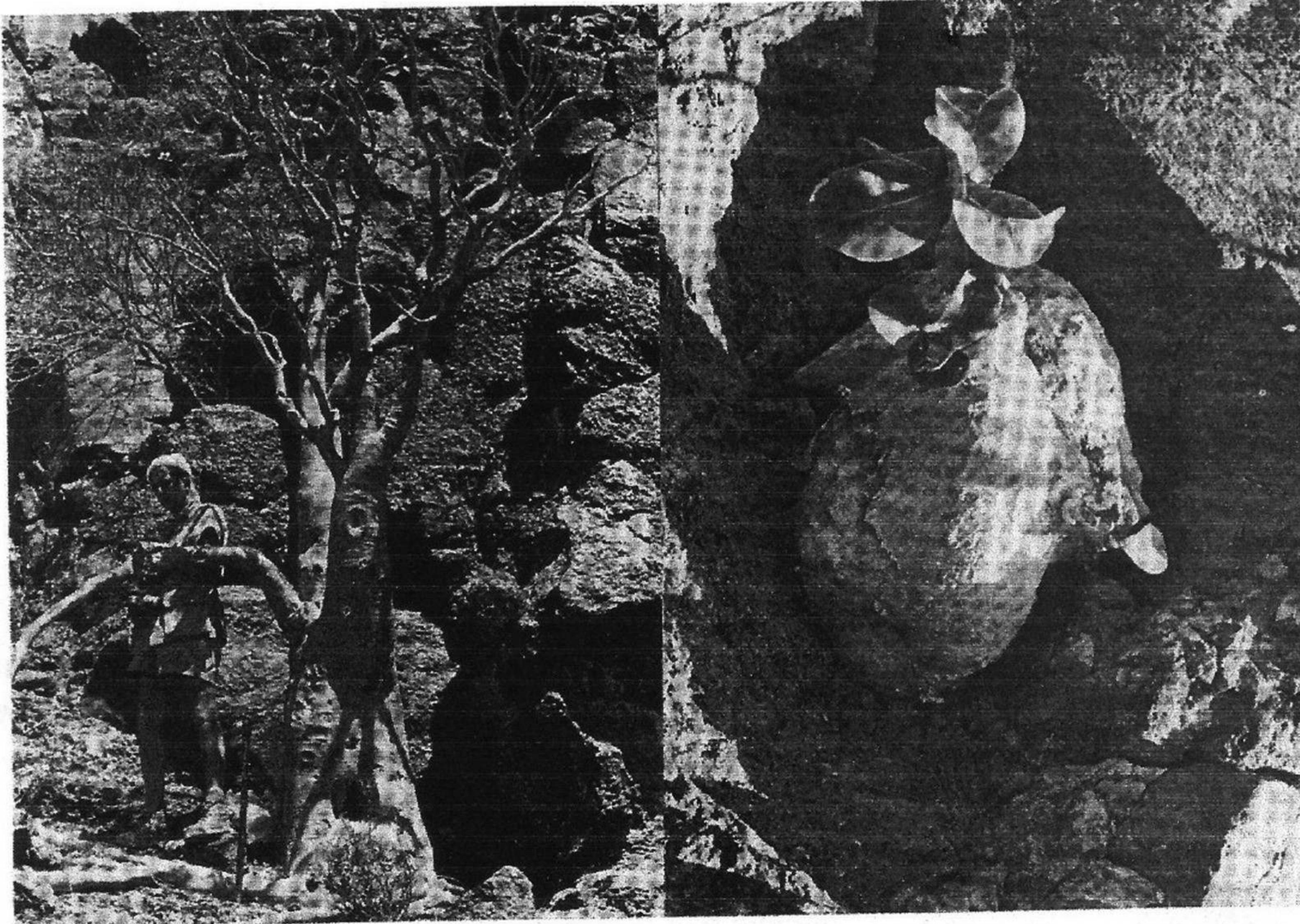


Fig. 2. *Adenium arabicum*, a five meter, arborescent specimen in volcanic rocks north of Shuqra.
 Fig. 3. *A. arabicum*, growing in a steep volcanic wall.

Two easily grown succulents mentioned are *Crassula portulacea* and *Echeveria elegans*. As its name implies the latter is a splendid looking plant with its translucent whitish leaves that have pink to red leaf edges blushing through the pruinose leaf covering. Flowers are long lasting and easily formed. *Crassula portulacea* will grow into a large plant and flower profusely but it can be grown easily as a bonsai specimen (ask Ivor about this). It will propagate readily from branches so you can always have a small specimen and pass on the bigger one to someone else.

E. Yale Dawson is still continuing "the Time of my Life". It was nearly the time of his death. In searing heat the occupants of the car were edging carefully down a narrow, rutted incline into the sweltering valley when the steering locked just at the point they should have been carefully negotiating a sharp hair pin bend. The front wheels were left dangling over a yawning precipice. Thankfully, with a bit of ingenuity and muscle power they were able to rescue the vehicle and continue their journey, the problem with the steering mechanism disappearing as quickly and mystically as it appeared. Santa rosalia was hardly a pleasant place as the following quote captures. "The miserable frame shacks of the citizens had become such wretched ovens that the streets were lined at sundown with beds and pallets supporting forms in all attitudes of exhaustion. Everything was overlain with a stench of sweating humanity and undisposed sewage. So still and heavy was the hot air that the smoke of the little cooking fires before the huts seemed hardly to rise. We were tired, hungry and parched to the bone, but still could not bring ourselves to pass a night in such depressing surroundings. Instead we chose to

continue a little way down the road towards Mulege until at length we found fresh air to breathe in the sweet cleanliness of Nature.

Obviously plant hunting has its down moments.

The area had not seen rain for three years and was desperately parched. However cactus vegetation was highly visible though not happy. Candelabra *Lophocereus* allowed their withered, water denied branches to loll in a position of collapse. Small *Cochemia* were shrivelled corpses. Clambering *Opuntias* were nothing more than dried sticks.

However the goal of that part of the journey was to discover *Ferocactus rectispinus* with the longest spines in the world which grew on the most inhospitable rocks above the shores of Conception Bay. Here is the authors account of that discovery: "The morning came all too soon with its searing sun rays. The day before we had actually fried an egg on a flat, black rock. Now, before we had finished breakfast the sand around the palms was hot and we were perspiring, but rare cacti were to be sought, so we took to the crags above the bay. There we found *Ferocactus rectispinus*, but on such nearly inaccessible cliffs that they had to be lowered by ropes when finally they were pried loose from the rocks. What unbelievably spiny plants they were. One ten inch plant bore spines radiating eleven inches on all sides. One old denizen of the rocks had some individual spines that reached thirteen inches. What a packaging problem."

And so they turned northwards towards the USA.