

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

I suppose we will soon be at a transition point between winter and spring. Although there have been some chilly days recently, I think we have got off fairly lightly so far, although of course winter is not over and we can sometimes get cold spells reaching out into April or May.

Last Month's Meeting

Although at the recent AGM, Richard White had relinquished his role as vice-chairman, at the February meeting he had to reassume the role since both Adrian Bailey and Jane Williams were not present. We were also asked to sign into the attendance book. Richard also issued a reminder to renew your BCSS subscriptions, which can be done online. It is best to do this as soon as possible to avoid a delay in receiving the next journal. If you renew as an existing member you do need your existing membership number - please contact me if you need this, I believe it should also be written on the envelope of your previous journal. If you renew as a new member then you will be allocated a new membership number - and David also mentioned that the system forgets all details of people who have not renewed for a period of 3 years, so a new number will also be allocated automatically in that case. David mentioned that we did have had some new members who had joined recently - Charlotte and Theo were both here, and there was also a new member from Ampfield although he has not been to a meeting as yet. David said he expected to get an updated membership list in April.

Plants of Interest is something we need to restart - just take a look around your collection and bring in anything unusual or in flower and we can even get someone else to talk about the plant if you don't want to. If you have any other suggestions for improvements to our meetings please submit those

to the committee as well. Members are also reminded that they can bring along plants for sale on the sales table - apart from a label describing the species being sold, please insert a second label with the sale price and your initials and this will be used to work out how much needs to be paid to you on a successful sale.

Highlights of Arizona and Utah

David mentioned that he and I (Vinay) went on a trip to Arizona and Utah after having consulted with a few people for localities - the trip took place in April 2011 and lasted for 2.5 weeks. We flew out to Tucson and also returned from there, and we had planned an extensive series of things to do during the trip. We never booked accommodation ahead but this is something that's relatively easy to arrange in most US towns.

We flew to Tucson which is in the southern part of Arizona and not too far from the Mexican border, and the area of Sonora. Phoenix is a much busier city and has many more flights, but Tucson was convenient for us due to some of the sights we wanted to see in this region. We visited the areas of Ajo and Bisbee, then headed north to Phoenix and Sedona and Flagstaff and the Southern Rim of the Grand Canyon, and then Holbrook, the Painted Desert and then Monument Valley and upwards into Utah where we visited the Arches National Park, Bryce Canyon and Capital Reef. There was magnificent scenery everywhere.

The first day after arrival, we were driving on dirt roads through the scrub and we could see saguaros dotted around everywhere. There were also scrawny Opuntias of every type but these were quite dangerous if you get near to them since their pads stick on everything. David had photographed a group of 4 *Carnegiea gigantea* plants, growing in a group - the tallest were 7-8 feet tall and had reached flowering size but the others were too young. The mature plants were forming buds. Interestingly once a *Carnegiea* plant is ready to flower from its main stems, any other younger stems on the same plant can also start to flower. David took some close ups

of the buds on the crown of another plant. A few of the flowers were starting to open but we were 2-3 weeks too early. The flowers are pure white and filled with anthers. David said it looked like he had used a blue backcloth for the photographs but in Arizona, the sky is that colour every day.

We went to Bisbee, which was an old mining town which was established in 1880 - the mine actually closed in 1974. The old town of Bisbee is half a mile from the mine and there's also a new town with newer houses but the older town is more interesting to visit as a tourist attraction. It also housed a museum which we visited. The old town is an artsy and craft sort of place and there was a picturesque inn with old balconies but if you were to lean on them, it looked like it might collapse. David showed pictures of some of the older art and craft shops and also a shop selling "killer bee" honey. The hotel in the background was the "Copper Queen" which was one of the original hotels from the last century and the building in the foreground was the museum. We were not allowed to take pictures inside and only learnt this when David took a one picture showing what a thriving and bustling place it was when the town was in its heyday. There were crowds of people in the picture everywhere and even a trolley / tram.

We drove away from there and saw a side road and this is the sort of place you want to explore, and we soon started to see a few cacti. It didn't look that promising but we found a few plants starting with a pectinate spined *Echinocereus* just growing in a grassy area. There was another *Echinocereus* plant coming into growth with three spiny flower buds developing in the crown of the plant. Another larger plant was protected by being in between some rocks. There were also two *Mammillarias* here growing flush to the soil. The plants remain sunken in the soil until the rains appear. This was *Mammillaria heyderi*, around 3-4 inches in diameter and quite hard to spot. There was also a 6 inch plant growing in the shade and this was in flower, with more buds due to open later.

We wandered down to the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, and this is where *Stenocereus thurberi* grows, in large populations. We saw the plant up close. You do see it for sale in this country, with the seedlings having been grown in Holland. It has chocolate brown spines. The plant branches from the base but in cultivation you'll see a single stem for a long time. It is sensitive to the cold and wouldn't survive here in an unheated greenhouse. David mentioned that this winter, the Texas Big Bend area has had some severely low temperatures and this must have wiped out some big populations

of cacti unfortunately. We could see some buds forming on the *Stenocereus* - like little red fir cones developing on the areoles. This was also a good time to see the *Ocotillo* (*Fouqeria splendens*) in flower. Rain encourages these plants to grow and flower and they stand out a mile due to their bright red flowers. They can go back to sleep and wake up again if there is a new rainfall later in the season. David said we don't see them in collections since they have to get quite large to do anything.

We also saw *Echinocereus engelmannii* in flower on the side of road so stopped to investigate. It has big purple-pink flowers and a green stigma in the flower. Another plant had been in flower for a while and many of the buds had already faded. We also saw *Mammillaria grahamii* (used to be called *M. microcarpa*) - although it was too early for buds on these, the plants were coming into growth and we could see strong black centrals amongst the new spines. There was a sign for "seasonal area closure for the Sonoran pronghorn". David commented that the road was patrolled every 10-15 mins by Police cars looking for illegal immigrants. They did stop to talk to us a few times - from a distance I might have resembled a Mexican - but they stopped bothering us eventually.

Near the town of Ajo, we drove along a road called the Ajo Loop - this is quite a famous drive to go on, to observe the local plants. We saw *Echinocactus engelmannii* var *nicholii* - the spines are much yellower and the flowers are much smaller and paler. We also saw *Ferocactus emoryi* var *covillei* and the Teddy Bear cholla *Cylindropuntia bigelovii* - it very easily attaches itself to your trousers or shoes and is able to transport itself by this means, so you have to stand well clear of such plants. We also saw some cactus wood - the remains of an old *Opuntia*. One *Echinocereus* was variegated - it had a splash of golden yellow flesh on one side. Vinay seemed to be playing football with a another *Ferocactus emoryi* var *covillei* - this was again strongly spined. We saw some young saguaros with an *Echinocereus* in the foreground - the Saguaros are incredibly slow from seed, they only reach 18-20 inches tall after about 20 years. We saw more views of the Carnegias and Ocotillos, and in the background was another large spoil heap from a copper mine. The photograph showed some long shadows, and it was getting to be quite late into the evening. The next *Carnegiea* had brewers droop, every stem seemed to be growing at a strange angle and in a strange curve. Another of the *Cylindropuntias* demonstrated how it can grow chains of flowers from year to year - the flower remains of one year persist and the new flowers

grow in a chain. The older stems lose their golden colour and become quite woody.

We headed further North and passed the Montezuma National Monument. This features some old dwellings in the cliffs used by the Sinagua people in approximately 1100AD. We were always being watched and David took a shot of a ground squirrel. As we approached Sedona, we could see that the rocks here have a characteristic red colour. There were a few succulents growing here - *Yucca elata*, and also some Agaves and Opuntias. An agave was probably *Agave utahensis*. A plant with coarse leaves was actually *Yucca baccata* - it is something he recognised because he had grown it previously. The Indian paintbrush has bright red flowers - it is a parasitic plant, and a species of *Castilleja*. We also saw a famous church in Sedona - the Chapel of the Holy Cross, a very modern design, created by a student of Frank Lloyd - and situated up in the hills. On the day we chose to visit, there were many people gathered for a wedding.

We went on up to the Grand Canyon - David commented on the pictures being a disappointment because they appeared washed out, but it seems that pictures are never as spectacular as the real thing. It is quite stunning, and you really can't appreciate the scale and size of the whole thing. There were some little platforms on the side for a view but some people actually climb out onto the rocks and the consequences of a fall would probably be fatal. We could see the Colorado River at the base of the canyon. David mentioned that the late Sonia Barker-Fricker used to visit every year to do plant surveys and she did a canoe ride along the base once. Behind us were some pine trees and we could see some cacti growing underneath - this was *Echinocereus triglochidatus* - these can tolerate very low temperatures. There were also some Agaves, and we saw some more cacti - *Escobaria vivipara* - which is also quite cold hardy. We were again being watched, this time by a black feathered bird, which was probably a raven.

After the mid-meeting break, we continued on our trip through north Arizona. The next stop was a locality which Ian Woolnough had given us, near the Cholla power station at Holbrook. We could see grass initially and after some further examination we saw some examples of *Sclerocactus*. The first was *Sclerocactus pubispinus* and we also saw more of another genus - *Sclerocactus whipplei*. This latter plant looks different when young versus mature. We saw a mature plant of *S. whipplei* which was 4" across and 6" tall. There was a strong wind here which helps keep the plants cool. At a nearby location (Holbrook Golf Course) we had a GPS

location for *Pediocactus* so we looked for *Pediocactus peeblesianus* var. *peeblesianus*, and didn't see anything even though we were standing on the exact spot where the plants were supposed to be. It was only when we bent down that we realised the plants were sunken down in the stones and pebbles, and very hard to see unless you got to ground level. They were growing in a clay silt with stones and pebbles. Some were in flower but the flowers were small and again you had to be close to the ground to see them. At a third location in flat bedrock near a road bridge, we found *Neobessaya* (now *Escobaria* (*Neobessaya*) *missouriensis* v. *navajoensis*) - this had distinctive fleshy red fruits. There was also another plant growing here but it was not the same thing, it might have been a *Pediocactus*. There was an *Opuntia* which was sprawling along the ground and also some local plant in flower.

Next on our itinerary was the Petrified Forest - this is a region of north Arizona where large tree trunks have been turned into fossilised remains. *Oenothera caespitosa* is the tufted evening primrose and it looks like a *Lewisia*. Just up the road is the Painted Desert which looks like a scene from Star Trek. The rock formations are very large and have wonderful colours. We headed on north and the scenery approaching Monument Valley had some more amazing rock formations which you might have come across if watching old westerns. The valley is on Indian Land and you need to buy a pass to drive on the inner loop and view some of the large formations from close up.

Crossing into Utah, we visited a location called "Mexican Hat" which had a large rock balanced on a point. Near here we found *Sclerocactus parviflorus* at Montezuma Creek. People can go to these sites and report healthy populations and sometimes within a year or two, the entire population has disappeared. This is due to a parasitic grub which feeds on the plants and eliminates everything. However, once the plants die out, the parasites also perish and then the plants will re-establish themselves from the seed bank stored in the ground. We saw some healthy looking plants with nice red spines.

We continued north to Moab and visited the Arches National Park. This is a spectacular site with lots of natural arches caused by erosion and also a good collection of balanced rocks. The weather was much colder and fresher up here, and looking across to the La Sal Mountains which are 20 miles south of Moab, you could see snow on them. There are some very dramatic scenes here, and there were some slivers of rock and you could get in between them.

There was a plant of *Echinocereus coccineus* here which was covered in buds - these are very hardy plants, and along with *E. triglochidatus*, these are called the claret cup cacti.

Heading on to Capitol Reef, the weather was quite cold and icy and there was plenty of snow around. David noticed plants of *Sclerocactus* which he spotted from the car window. These were *Sclerocactus parviflorus* and they were near Capitol Reef National Park and then inside the park we found more examples. We parked along one of the roads and found some plants and seedlings of *Escobaria (coryphanta) vivipara* - these were a different form from the plants we had seen at the Grand Canyon.

We looked for *Pediocactus bradyi* var. *despainii* off Old Notem Road in Capitol Reef National Park and David eventually spotted the flowers of the plants from the car, they were growing just 10 feet from the roadside. After getting out, we spotted many more - all were solitary. These plants are very difficult in cultivation. There was another Castilleja species growing here. We drove over Boulder Mountain and it was cold and icy, and we had to be careful - and then we visited Bryce Canyon - which was perhaps the most spectacular of Utah's sites. The pictures taken in the sun were glowing and it was like some sort of city from the Lord of the Rings, it looks different from different angles and we could still see the signs of snow here. David highly recommended adding this to your list of places to visit.

We headed back south into Northern Arizona and we were amongst pines and at quite high altitude - it was nothing like a cactus habitat but we were looking here for *Pediocactus paradinii* - it only grows in these conditions and the plants remain solitary. We did find the plants and they develop longer spines as they age. There were other white and pink flowered plants growing here, which seemed to be some sort of phlox. There was also a picture of a ground cricket. We also saw more examples of *Escobaria vivipara* - these were quite large growths and they would eventually have some lovely purple flowers on them. Another plant had flowers like a vetch but it was a different species based on the foliage - we had no idea what it was. There were some agaves growing under the pines, and some examples of *Echinocereus coccineus*. We then also came across some large clumps of *Pediocactus paradinii* and these plants were tagged with numbered metal plates so it must have been some sort of population study.

We moved on to the Marble Canyon region - this was another locality which had been recommended - and David said he had seen this particular sign - featuring the brady pincushion cactus - on a TV program. We drove on to this area and after reading the sign (it referred to *Pediocactus bradyi*) we started to explore the region. There were some opuntias here and a darker spined form of *Echinocereus engelmannii* - these were a long way from the Ajo loop area where we had first seen them, but this species grows over a very widespread area and it's also a variable species. Also growing here is *Echinocactus polycephalus* which is quite rare and hard to grow - it's hardly ever seen in cultivation. These heads were football sized. It makes spectacular clumps in habitat and these were in perfect health and growing well. One of them had grown some heads and then had grown a load of new offsets. Some of the plants had recurving spines. We eventually found the *Pediocactus bradyi* plants - they were hard to spot since they are so small. There were some seed pods forming but these were not ripe. Some of the plants were in really good condition and one appeared to be turning into a cristate. We also saw another beautiful specimen of the *Echinocactus polycephalus*. David took a picture of the gully going down to the Colorado river.

Another area we visited was the Apache Trail at Globe, Arizona. We spent half a day driving around the loop area and there were Opuntias in flower and the flowers were superb - one had been visited by an appreciative insect and lots of pollen was scattered in the flower. We also found *Dudleya arizonica* here - there were a lot growing here, these were not as good looking as some of the Mexican ones in terms of farina or leaf colours but they were in flower and growing quite well in the scrub - the tall flower stems allow the flowers to be visited by insects even when growing in this type of habitat. There were Saguaros growing near the water in the lake here and these will eventually die - but this just a unfortunate situation caused by the water management here.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday April 4th. David had selected a speaker for the meeting, but that speaker has recently cancelled due to a medical appointment, and so a new speaker will need to be selected. Once we have resolved this, details will be posted on our branch website.

Also in May, we will be holding our regular Cultivation and Propagation meeting. We need suggestions for topics to discuss and also volunteers to handle some of these discussions. Please send your suggestions to David by email.

Just a reminder for branch committee members that a branch committee meeting is due to held on the evening of 28th March, at Chilworth Village Hall.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 11 th Mar	Isle of Wight	Cactus and Succulent Quiz
Sat 18 th Mar	Portsmouth	Madagascar Exposed (David Traish)
Tue 28 th Mar	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting @ Chilworth Village Hall @ 7.30pm
Tue 4 th Apr	Southampton	Monthly meeting - to be notified
Sat 8 th Apr	Isle of Wight	Monthly meeting - to be notified
Sat 15 th Apr	Portsmouth	Plant Auction

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