EXPEDITION TO THE BRANDBERG IN NORTHERN NAMIBIA

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EXPEDITION TO THE BRANDBERG IN NORTHERN NAMIBIA

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The Brandberg (burnt mountain) is an isolated island mountain rising almost vertically out of the eastern fringe of the great Namib Desert sand-gravel plain. It is located some 60 miles from the Atlantic Ocean in Damaraland in Northern Namibia. The mountain was formed by furious magma upwelling intrusions through the earth's crust, solidifying into a gigantic granite pluton measuring approximately 17 miles east–west and 14 miles north–south and rising to about 7,800 feet. It is of great historic interest, having been the home of ancient San hunter-gathering people (Bushmen) who have left a rich heritage of rock art all over the mountain in caves and overhangs. These prehistoric people were attracted to the mountain in that it provided limited water (unlike the surrounding desert) derived from precipitation and condensation from the west-flowing sea mists and from seepages and pools refurbished by rare periodic summer rains. This meagre water supply is also responsible for the existence of the interesting mountain flora.

In planning our ascent of the mountain, my wife and I were warned by various authorities not to climb alone. Thus, in preparation, a suitable number of young people were invited (both my wife and I are middle-aged, to say the least). As all water, food and sleeping gear must be carried, a suitable fitness programme was embarked on. Literally at the last minute, our young friends dropped out to pursue more fulfilling occupations. Although warned against it, because of our long period of preparation and the pull of the flora and pristine wilderness, we decided to go it

Fig. 1. *Aloe asperifolia.*

Fig. 3. *Adenia pechuelii.*

Fig. 2. *Sarcocaulon marlothii.* Note finger-like opposite branches.

Fig. 4. *Cyphostemma currorii,* leafless in winter.

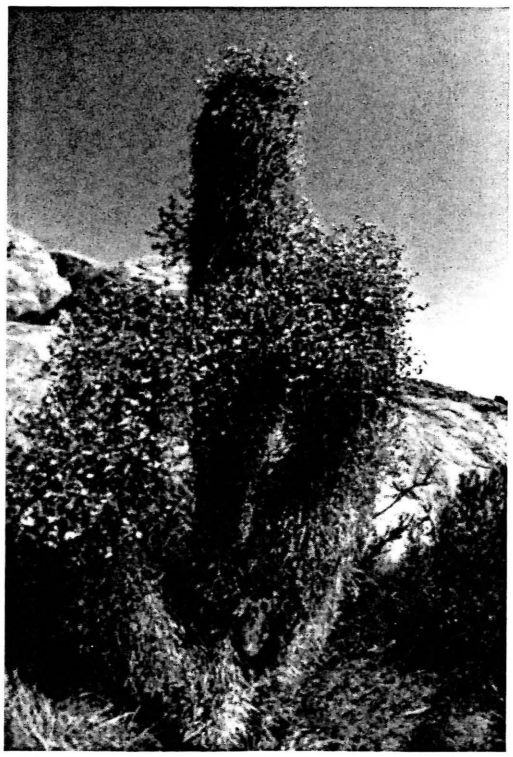


Fig. 5. *Euphorbia monteiroi* ssp. *brandbergensis*. Plant about eight feet high.

alone. A friend in Walvis Bay who was very concerned for our safety agreed to mount a helicopter search if we had not returned by a certain time.

As we approached the mountain, colonies of the rare *Aloe asperifolia* Berger were encountered in flat sandy places. Mature plants grow prostrate with long dry-leaved stems. The green leaf growth points away from the vicious sand-blasting prevailing wind and the lax inflorescence is produced horizontally. The flowers are pinkish and mostly hang downwards. Close by, on dark exposed flat rock, growing in sandy pockets was the black-stemmed, rather weird *Sarcocaulon marlothii* Engl. This three-foot high plant, drab during winter hibernation, in good rain years can be covered in very showy, spectacular rose-purple flowers.

On leaving base camp at sunrise,the first exciting encounter was with the giant succulent *Adenia pechuelii* (Engl.) Harms. The grey-green caudex is about three feet across with a dense brush of short porcupine-like pointed spiky branches. This plant occurred periodically on the lower slopes of the mountain. Also seen on these lower reaches were the exceedingly toxic, branched shrub *Euphorbia virosa* Willd. and our old friend *Aloe dichotoma* L.f.

From halfway up the mountain we began to

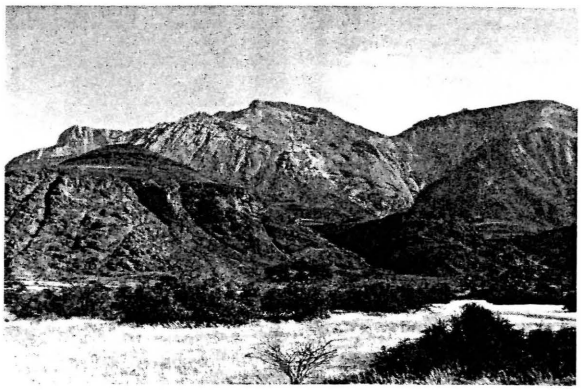


Fig. 6. South face of Brandberg looking at Orabies Koph, 2,166 m high (about 6,500 feet) above the Namib–Damaraland gravel plains. Note heavy grass cover after good summer rains.

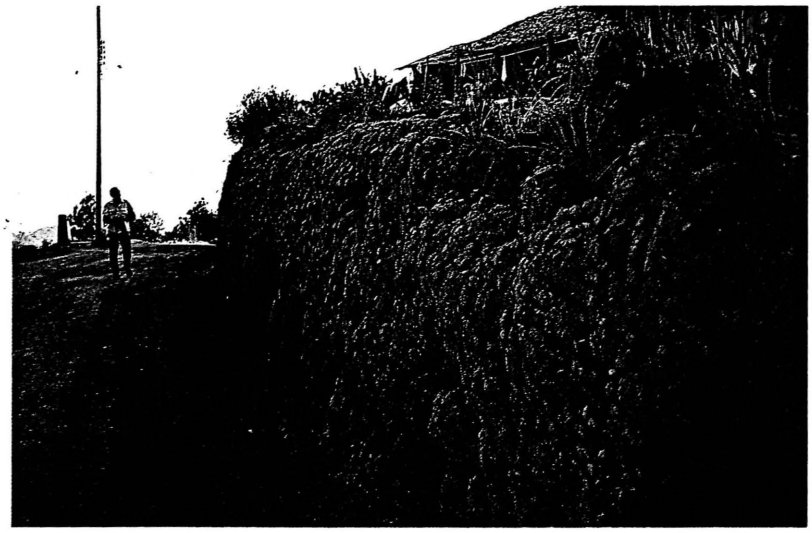
encounter the yellow-barked *Cyphostemma currorii* (Hook. f.) B. Desc. named after a certain Dr. Curror who collected plants in Angola round about 1840. This curious plant, rising to eight feet, is a member of the grape family (Vitaceae) and adds a touch of unreality to the barren, arid mountain landscape. In the same zone, large scattered plants of *Aloe littoralis* Bak. grew.

The summit rim was reached at sunset after a strenuous eleven-hour climb. That night, at 6,500 feet, the temperatures dropped to zero and, sleeping without tents, we wrapped ourselves in survival blankets. On awakening the next morning, much to our surprise and pleasure we had chosen a camping spot within reach of a shaggy *Euphorbia* completely new to us. The plant resembled what one might imagine the "Abominable Snowman" to look like. The flowers were almost over. However, we salvaged what we could and on returning home sent the material plus a photograph to the doyen of eurphorbian taxonomy, Larry Leach. The plant turned out to be an en-

Fig. 7. *Aloe hereroensis* on the lip of the summit plateau.

demic, *Euphorbia monteiroi* Hook. f. subsp. *brandbergensis* B. Nord. We were familiar with the small thin-stemmed plants of the typical subspecies so were completely flabbergastered by these large thick-stemmed, robust plants. The plants were fairly frequent over the summit plateau, giving the appearance of some lost lunar landscape. Dotted here and there were plants of *Aloe hereroensis* Englr. in full flower. One of our objectives was to discover the almost unknown *Lithops gracilidelineata* Dint. subsp. *brandbergensis* (De Boer) Cole. In spite of careful searching in the Orabies Koph area, we were not successful. Several other succulents were observed—a thick-stemmed stapeliad and an *Anacampseros* in the *papyracea* group.

After three days on the mountain, our precious water reserves were running dangerously low, so we slowly made our way down to base camp.



ANOTHER ECHEVERIA WALL!

Ever since I first saw in an early Journal the wonderful wall of *Echeveria elegans* growing years ago in Omitlán, Hidalgo, Mexico (reprinted in Walther's *Echeveria* monograph on page 55), I have lusted to possess such a wall! . . . even to SEE one! While the wall in Omitlán, near the habitat of *Echeveria elegans,* is long gone, to my ecstatic delight I saw one almost as good on an expedition to Oaxaca with Myron Kimnach in January of 1992. Driving around in the mountains just north of Oaxaca City, in the town of Benito Juárez (see "*Mammillaria deherdtiana* and its variety *dodsonii,*" this issue) we came across a magnificent wall of *Echeveria glauca* (*pumila* var. *glauca,* if you will) that I assumed must be the product of at least 50 years of care. The owner of the wall told me, no, she first obtained a few of the plants nine years ago . . . and she by then had thousands as the picture shows. She kindly gave me a half dozen heads which I have been feverishly propagating to try to reproduce such a wall of our own at our new Botanic Garden, El Charco del Ingenio in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico! So far those 6 heads have produced nearly a hundred offsets . . . perhaps we can get there in less than 9 years!

CHOICE TEGELBERG PLANTS ACQUIRED FOR THE HUNTINGTON BOTANICAL GARDENS

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Gilbert Tegelberg, Jr., is renowned for his magnificent seed-grown plants, as was his father before him (see the article on the Tegelbergs in this issue of the Journal). Because of his recent illness, Gil made the tough decision to relinquish his world-class collection of specimen plants. But how to dispose of them? Naturally, he wanted his prize plants to remain together as a collection and in a place where they would be seen and enjoyed by hobbyists and the public.

Fig. 1. Gil Tegelberg, Jr., at his Lucerne Valley nursery—with his sensational *Astrophytum myriostigma* crest.

Seymour Linden of Los Angeles, past president of CSSA and a volunteer at the Huntington Botanical Gardens, thought the collection should be at that institution. He initiated a cooperative effort with Jim Folsom, Director of the Huntington Botanical Gardens, John Trager, Curator of the Huntington's Desert Collections, Joe Clements, Curator of the Huntington Desert Garden, and Clark Moorton, Desertland Botanical Garden at Palm Springs, California.

The first step was raising money to purchase the plants. At the April 1992 CSSA Board of Directors' meeting in Phoenix, Linden moved that the CSSA donate $1,000 toward the purchase, as it was not known then what plants were available. The motion passed. Linden called John Trager and urged that appropriate personnel from the Huntington visit Tegelberg's Lucern Valley nursery to inventory the plants that the Huntington would like to purchase. Joe Clements and John Trager traveled to the nursery and returned with a preliminary inventory of 152 important plants, ranked in four categories of preference.

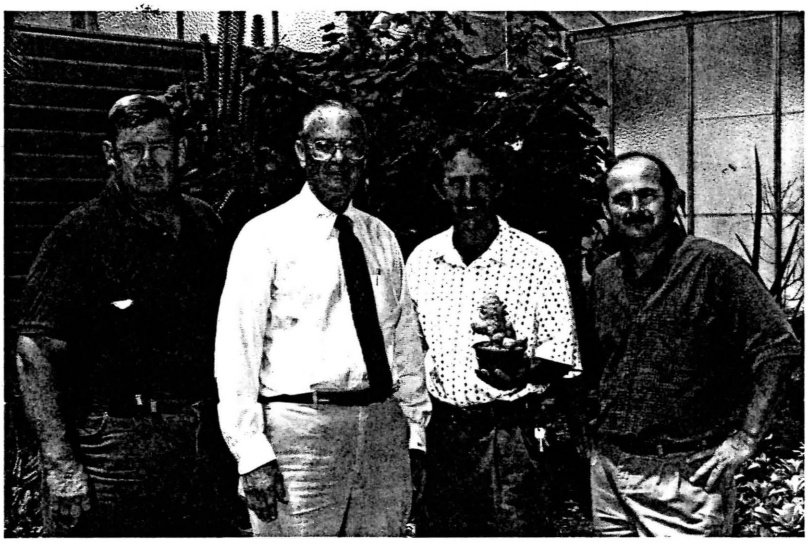

Fig. 2. Seymour Linden, second from the left, with the Huntington staff responsible for acquiring the Tegelberg plants. From the left, Joe Clements, Curator of the Desert Garden; Seymour; John Trager, Curator of the Desert Collections, holding a multi-headed *Pseudolithos migiurtinus* from the Tegelberg collection; and Jim Folsom, Director of the Huntington Botanical Gardens. (Photo: Art Waldinger/Tru-Dimension Co., all others by John N. Trager.)