



Fig. 118. The journey from La Paz to Oruro.

## SOUTH AMERICAN CACTUS LOG PART XV

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One morning at 10 am I entered the Ministry of Agriculture in La Paz. When I had found the right office I presented my credentials to a certain "Ingeniero" and explained my plans for the coming six months. If permitted, I would collect between 30 and 60 specimens of each cactus species, to be distributed to various countries in the world. They could not all be sent directly to institutions and botanical gardens but would find their way to such plant collections via importing companies which would send out catalogues. Naturally, some of the plants would be bought by amateurs and enthusiasts. If this would be against the law I would then proceed to Argentina without doing any research work in the field.

I was somewhat surprised when the man told me that there would be no problem if I would promise to send five specimens of each collected species to Dr. Cardenas in Cochabamba for his botanical garden. To this proposal I consented wholeheartedly as it had been my desire to meet this distinguished botanist of worldwide fame.

Armed with permits to collect, I was able to organize and make several expeditions that brought a wealth of material to the cactus specialists of the world. It was through my growing experience with rebutia and sulcorebutia that a close affiliation with John Donald, now the president of the I.O.S., came about and a number of new species were described as a result. Many famous collections the world over were enriched by these specimens accompanied by scientific data.

Fifty plants per species disappear very quickly when they are distributed over the whole world. I collected 228 different species which came to a total

of 11,400 plants well cleaned, labeled and packed – a mountainous task in a period of six months. Such an amount filled 48 wooden crates.

Only of *Gymnocalycium cardenasianum* did I collect more than the allowed quantity. No plant was ever endangered at that time--there was an abundance of material in the habitats then. In retrospect, what happened afterward during the seventies when thousands of plants per species were shipped to the USA and Europe, thus criminally decimating plant populations, I feel ashamed that I set a precedent. Had I ever dreamed that plant collection would take those vast proportions, I would not have collected any plants. I would have

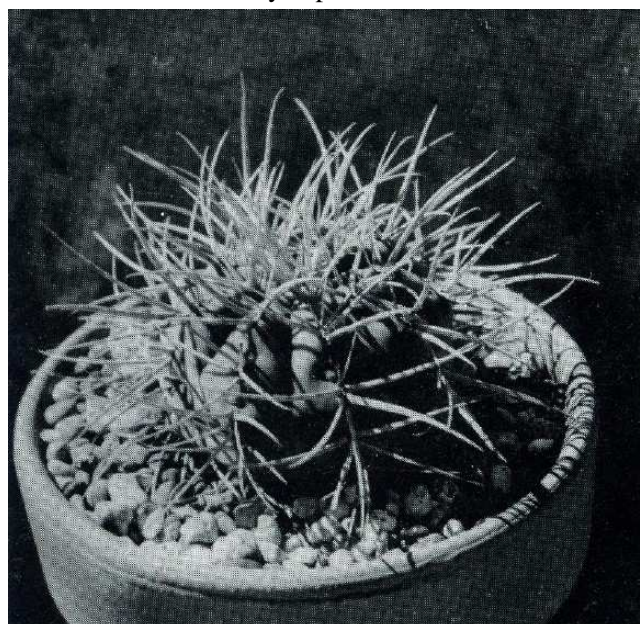


Fig. 119. A young seedling of *Gymnocalycium cardenasianum* (figs. 119 to 121: Abbey Garden Press).



limited my activities to seed collection apart from a few samples for publication.

As I see the daily process of organized plant destruction, it would be bitterly against my moral standard to export any plants at all unless I am requested to do so for scientific research.

The journey to the cactophile's paradise in Cochabamba and Chuquisaca is, in the first long stretch to Oruro, uneventful. This is a cold, high plateau, the people like the climate-rough, aloof and wary of strangers. The first paved road south from La Paz was under construction but not yet open for traffic. You breathe dust on these roads called "calamina" or washboard, the road is lined with various species of *Tephrocactus*. One beautiful lobivia is sometimes seen with its light purple flowers, *L. wegheiana* (Lau 423).

One of the greatest hindrances are the rivers as there are practically no bridges. The flash floods come suddenly but the waters recede after a while so one has to wait five to eight hours until the bravest driver in the mile-long columns of trucks ventures into the water. Those with experience know exactly what they are doing. Getting stuck in the middle of a river can be fatal - as my experience between Moquegua and Puno nearly proved. Since that time I have a great respect for crossing rivers that I do not know. Usually, I wait until a vehicle crosses and follow in its tracks, but here, at a river which flows into Rio Desaguardero, I waited for hours and no other truck passed. Finally, a Quechua Indian approached and told me that he could drive the station wagon through the river if I had the confidence in him. The route through the river was well marked so there was no problem there - but wading through the ice cold water to test the depth and risk being washed away with the fast current? Too dangerous for me!

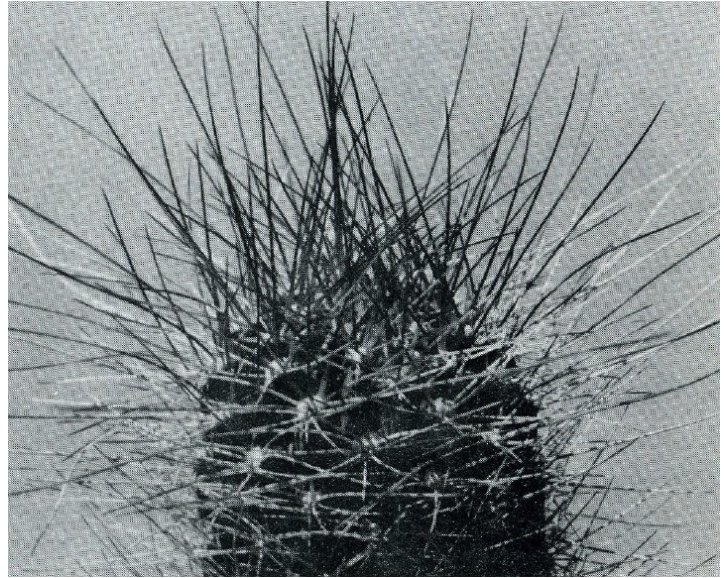


Fig. 121. The clonotype of *Lobivia wegheiana*.

When it comes to earning a tip, the people become very versatile in their capabilities. Should I trust this man? Does he even have a driver's license! My impatience was being tested - I wanted to get to Inquisivi that day. As the man started the engine I ran up to the railroad bridge that ran parallel and took a picture; Shawintu and Rafael, the two Aguaruna lads, stayed with the driver. This time all went well.

Inquisivi is an old and quaint little town which can be reached by leaving the road to Oruro at Eucaliptos and going northeast, passing the snowy Cordillera de Quimsa Cruz with its highest peak at 5.900 m. Inquisivi is the type locality of *Lobivia miniatiflora* (Lau 307).

A lady that offered us a room at her home was intrigued by the way Shawintu and Rafael fried



Fig. 120. Another view of *G. cardenasianum* accentuating the impressive spination.





Fig. 122. A long-spined, red flowered form of *Sulcorebutia menesesii*, a most available species!

potatoes German style. At a later date when I revisited the area, she proudly presented me with a supper of German fried potatoes that were delicious. This being the land of the discovery of the potato, there was no problem in having all we wanted to eat.

*Lobivia miniatiflora* is, in many ways, similar to *L. caespitosa* but with the flower tube longer and the typical color of cinnabar, the mercury-bearing ore. Clivias have the same color. It grows even in semi-shade between rocks and grass. In my collection it sends forth blooms several times a year, even in a semi-shaded position.

The dream of any botanist would be to see *Pseudolobivia callichroma* in flower. All pseudolobivias are known for their large diurnal flowers but it is the unique color which is hard to describe that makes this plant a sensation. One

needs a color chart to find the number corresponding to this kind of purple.

Long before reaching Cochabamba I made a left turn and drove for more than an hour through a wide, dry river bed. The village of Tapacari is like an island located in the midst of this sandy expanse. As we tried to make a new ford in the sand north of the village, we spotted those gorgeous flowers from a distance. *Pseudolobivia callichroma* (Lau 965) is easy to cultivate and blossoms for me every year. I found another habitat of the same species near Coridi (Lau 309).

Now, Kami to the north was beckoning. Unbelievable dirt roads led up there but once in the area, with people offering us a bed and food, we stayed for several days. There was an echinopsis (Lau 308) which I was unable to identify; the same is true of a *Lobivia* (Lau 975). *Lobivia caespitosa* (Lau 962) grows in abundance but my full attention was directed to myriads of groups that, to my limited mind, could only be *Sulcorebutia menesesii* (Lau 974). The distribution was quite large, the porphyritic rock revealing plants with short and long spination and flowers of yellow to orange red. Even the flower size would vary in later years I have sent branches of these many different types to a number of experts in the genus *Sulcorebutia* and if I had heeded their advice my Lau 974 would have a dozen different names. I still cling to *S. menesesii* until somebody comes up with a reasonable proof that I am wrong. It would be very rare indeed that in one population of plants, with all having flowers at the same time, five or six species would occur, they would hopelessly hybridize. This is a classic example for splitters who are eager to create new names. The many forms of *S. menesesii* are the pride of my *sulcorebutia* collection when they adorn my greenhouse with flowers from April to June. We slept that night on llama hides.

(to be continued)



Fig. 123. A red flowered, short spined form of *S. menesesii*

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