SOUTH AMERICAN CACTUS LOG
PART XVII

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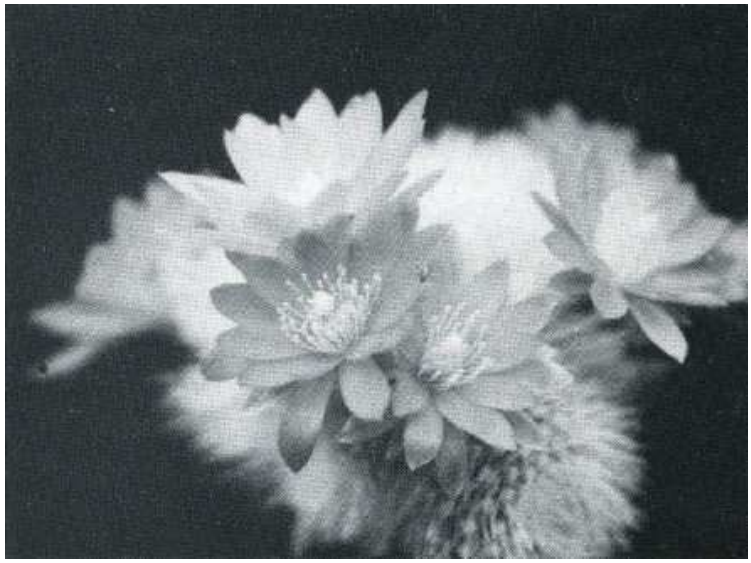
We were driving towards Toralapa with Pedro Pujupat and Wilfredo Cunachi, the two Aguaruna children fast asleep on the back seat. Evening was falling when Jorg Galindo, the son of a missionary in Ecuador, who today teaches in a jungle Jivaro school, pointed out three men who were driving cargo laden mules heading in our direction and on the right side of the road. They seemed to be very drunk. Suddenly, just as we reached them, the men decided to cross the road and drove the mules directly in front of us. It was impossible to stop in time and I collided with one of the mules - but fortunately at a very slow speed. The man turned a somersault in the air and landed in the ditch, the frightened mules bolted, tossed off their cargo, and ran for the darkness. In no time at all I was out of the car and looking for the injured man, only to see him vanishing in the darkness. Realizing that he had provoked the accident in his drunken state, he was scared stiff. One of the car headlights and the fender were broken and we thanked God that nothing worse had happened.

Toralapa is a tiny place. Like most villages in the area it is uninteresting but it is identified with one of the most beautiful cacti of Bolivia, *Pseudolobivia toralapensis* (Lau 318). Although closely related to *Ps. carmineoflora* and *orozasana*, the large 14 cm long flowers of *Pseudolobivia toralapensis* are bluish red and extravagant in beauty. Unfortunately, their flowers open for just one morning and then only in full sunshine.

Another marvellous lobivia was seen a little later near Cuchu Punata. Although the habitat is close to a major road and the many small, red flowers of 2,5 cm in diameter are visible from a distance as sometimes there are as many as eight to ten flowers open at the same time, it was not described until 1963 by Dr. Cardenas. Under cultivation I have had little luck with *Lobivia oligotricha* (Lau 319) as I can not duplicate the rough climate of the habitat. At times one can spot a form of *Pseudolobivia obrepanda* (Lau 320).

Arani was the next attraction for us. There are two very beautiful cacti growing together on the hills and slopes of this region. *Parodia schwebsiana* var. *applanata* (Lau. 978) dots the landscape interspersed with one of the most beautiful of lobivias, the breathtaking *L. pseudocinnabarina* (Lau. 977). The flowers of the Parodia were salmon colored so we could name it var. *salmonea* as Backeberg suggested. Personally, I would regard it as a form as flower color in itself is no justification for setting up a new taxon. *Lobivia pseudocinnabarina* has many forms in as many habitats. The spination is not particularly outstanding with 14 radials and 7 central brown spines but the spectacle of seeing these beautiful plants in full color with deep carmine-red flowers is never forgotten.



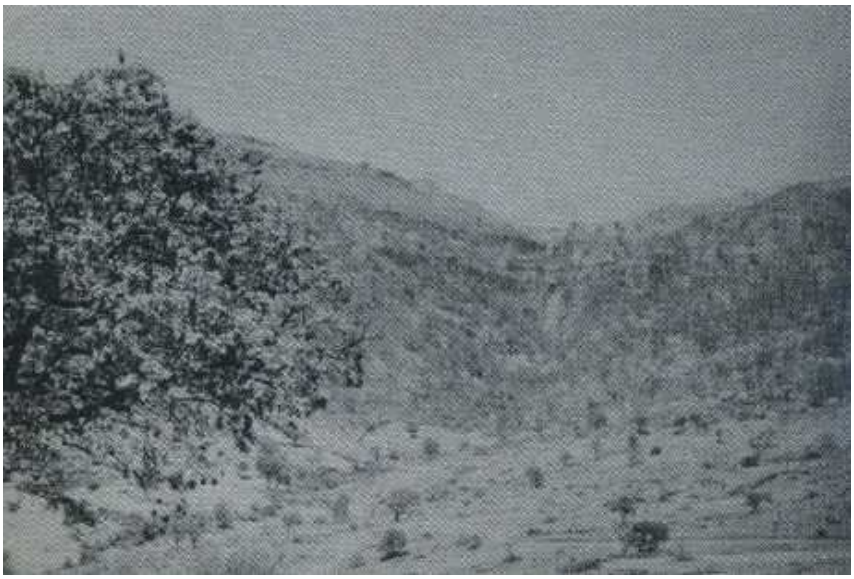


Fig. 131. *Rebutia fiebrigii* form.
Fig. 132. (below, left) Flowering jacaranda trees in the Mizque valley.

In every article of the South American Cactus Log it is my intention to use one or two highlights. If the reader is getting a little bored by a travel log or the mention of species of cacti that are known to most every cactophile, do not stop reading here as we shall, in time, arrive at a quite exciting part.

Before we come to that, let us travel to Mizque. On the road we climbed a high mountain and found Lau 324. We had found only a handful before a man chased us who did not like to see strangers roaming his hill. He seemed to be dangerous and threatening and for that reason I do not possess one single specimen of this most interesting species--they were all sent to several European experts who even now are not very sure of what it is. In my opinion it belongs to other *Weingartia* related species with red flowers of which we shall speak later on. At the IOS Congress in Reading, England (September, 1973) John Donald gave a very interesting dissertation about these plants from the eastern part of Bolivia. At that time he theorized that he had found the link between *Sulcorebutia* and *Weingartia*. I was told that Mr. Ritter even set up a new genus for it but I do not know the details about his reasons. Still others want to throw them all into the ever increasing genus *Sulcorebutia*.

In Mizque almost every house advertised Chicha with varying home made signs. Chicha is an alcoholic drink made of corn and is similar in some ways to the Mexican pulque which is derived from agaves. Not drinking any alcohol, we did not linger there but continued on and up the Rio Mizque. To cross this small but treacherous river we had to backtrack, gather rocks, carry them in our arms to the water's edge and locate them precisely for tracks so that we could cross. This small and narrow river gave us more trouble than we had anticipated and it kept us busy building a passable ford.

I had been informed by European friends that a new species of parodia had been discovered in this area which differed from the more common parodias in that it had very small yellow to orange blossoms and yellow spines. Most of the hills there had been burned over - a common practice in all of Latin America. I have even seen occasions when the hills were burned as we visited in order to anger and annoy us - and too, cactus were stinging weeds that had to be eliminated. At last we found the habitat of *Parodia hausteiniana* (Lau 321) and although many of them looked like burned cucumbers while deprived of their spines, those burned plants later started growing again and produced showpieces with their extraordinarily beautiful spines.

Continuing up the dirt road, in some places almost impassable, I saw my first wild Jacaranda trees in habitat. In full flower, their blue color gave a marvellous contrast to the otherwise rocky and brownish xerophytic landscape.

We decided to stop at an interesting rock formation. A deep, broad valley with a length of almost 5 km was enclosed in a half moon of high cliffs of volcanic origin. Walking the whole length we found, here and there a very long

Fig. 133. (below, left). Preparing the river bed for fording the Rio Mizque.
Fig. 134 (above). *Sulcorebutia markusii* in flower in habitat.

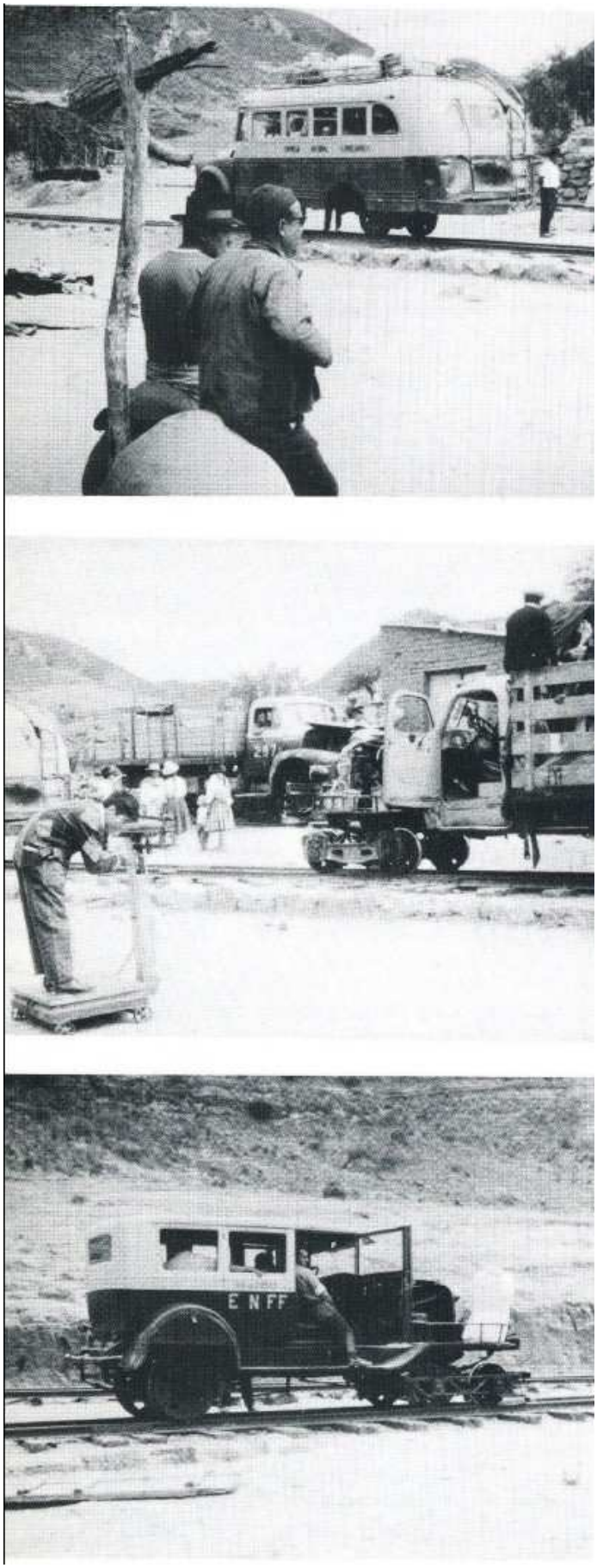


Fig. 135. - 137. Scenes at the railroad station of Cruce

spined sulcorebutia. The spines were bristle like and did not sting. Only recently I was told that I had found *Sulcorebutia latiflora* (Lau 377) which had not yet been described at that time. Our destination on that day was Cruce which was to be a central point from which I made some of the most interesting discoveries of my life. If I ever return to Bolivia again I would probably choose this region for more explorations.

The train line passing through Cruce was a sight! Trucks on railroad wheels, loaded with passengers, made the journey to outlying regions. We also saw a beautiful 1929 Packard for first class passengers go whizzing by on the rails. Maybe they were officials of the railroad company? The Quechuas with their bowler hats and colorful clothing gave the whole scene a fiesta-like feeling. At last, to make the picture complete, came an old City of Los Angeles bus on iron wheels and that caused a traffic jam at the Cruce railroad station.

Our first excursion from Cruce led us to Vila Vila. This is the place where another new species bad been found and described. *Sulcorebutia markusii* (Lau 333) was quickly found and introduced into our collection of this genus. With its pectinate spines the plant itself is beautiful even without the flowers.

Returning from Vila Vila I had to investigate some hills with limestone rocks and, of course, sandy soil - one always encounters something exciting in an area of different geological and chemical composition, even though small. The yellowish and whitish colored habitat revealed something completely different from what we expected when we found a new Sulcorebutia - *Sulcorebutia cylindrica* (Lau 335). The distribution of *S. cylindrica* is not wide but in the limestone this new discovery is plentiful. As the name says, the plant is cylindrical. John Donald and I described it in the March 1974 issue of the British journal Ashingtonia.

There is a certain similarity between *S. cylindrica* and *S. breviflora* which it belongs in a larger sense; the flowers being a deep yellow, the spines number 10-12 white or pale yellow radials, 5-10 mm long, and 4 centrals a little stronger and of the same color.

Although the cultivation of *S. breviflora* and its relatives do not present any difficulty for me, I have never been able to cultivate *S. cylindrica* successfully. It produces long snakelike branches and only once delighted me with one single flower. For this reason, and because the plants were not in flower at the time of discovery, I have no photographs but John Donald has a few very remarkable photos of this gem among sulcorebutias. Maybe the high altitude (2600 m) of its home in comparison to the low habitat of *S. breviflora* makes cultivation difficult for me.

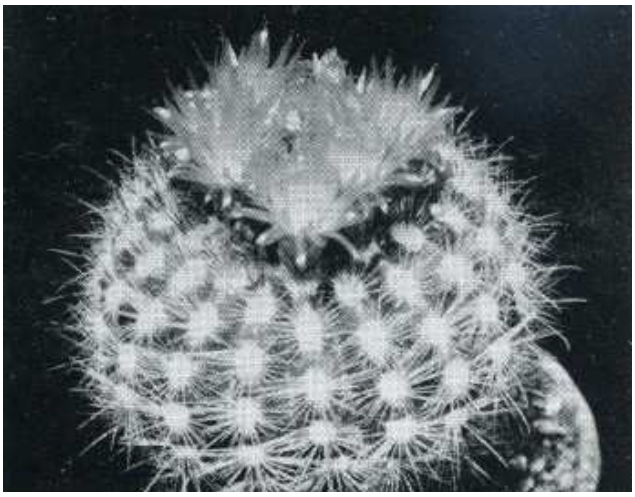


Fig. 138. *Parodia laui.*

The closest village to the habitat is the railroad siding of Pushqua. In spite of the dryness and altitude and a typical mineral composition of the soil, *S. cylindrica* is associated with moss and lichens.

John Donald writes about this plant (in Ashingtonia 1, 5, 65, March, 1974). "The remarkable similarity between the seeds of these two new plants *Weingartia purpurea* and *S. cylindrica*) reinforces the argument for a combination of the genera *Weingartia* and *Sulcorebutia* but until this question is unambiguously solved there will always remain some difficulties in deciding the correct genus for these borderline cases....".

The continuation of Rio Caine close to the Asientos mine would be largely unexplored. I knew, however, that a new parodia had been described - *Parodia punae*, discovered by Dr. Puna of Cochabamba on one of his periodic visits to check the teeth of the miners in Asientos. This *Parodia* I wanted to collect. It would be a long, long dirt road, down hill and in a miserable state and so steep in some places that no trucks would come uphill during the day because of overheating. While Cruce at 2500 m was a cool place, Asientos was extremely hot.

The first few miles were uphill to almost 3000 meters and then we soon saw the large basin into which we planned to descend. To our dismay we had a flat tire. While the boys removed the wheel I looked for plants and soon found a form of *Sulcorebutia latiflora* (Lau 332). We started downhill again but arriving at an altitude of 2700 m, a second tire went flat. This was to prove a blessing in disguise. The truck drivers, being used to such frequent flats, always take along a repair kit and help out when others are stalled. Since we could not expect any vehicle until nightfall, we had five hours of doing nothing. I would probably never have explored at this particular place if it hadn't been for the flat tire. To the southeast I spotted a very steep canyon with slate rock outcroppings - an ideal situation for parodias. It was not long until we found the first specimens. There were no flowers at the time and not having a detailed description I assumed the plants were *Parodia punae*, collected it as such deep in the canyon at a winding dry creek and even sent a few to Europe under that name.

To the surprise of everyone working with this genus, the dark red flowers of larger than *punae* size revealed that I had been mistaken - it was a new species.

Mr. Fred Brandt contacted me and wanted to describe the plant in my honour. Not knowing the man but having recommendations that suggested him as a parodia expert, I consented - a fact that I later regretted. It is not that his descriptions aren't precise or taxonomically correct. I saw his excellent collection when we visited his home and we were treated with great hospitality. His ideas were exact; our conversations agreeable. With gratitude, I accepted the description of *Parodia laui* (Lau 322).

It was later that I became disgusted with misleading parodia names from Brandt's descriptions. Mr. Brandt had asked importers in Europe to send him plants from my collecting trips that deviated in some respect from the typical plants. He would then describe them as new species! I was never consulted again but I came to the conclusion that after *Parodia laui* had been described I had no right to protest - it would have been a discourtesy.

A classic example of misleading unwary buyers who look for new discoveries is the case of *Parodia procera* described by Ritter. From plants of one population of this species that I exported he made three new species! That was contested soon afterward by Mr. Friedrich Ritter in an article directed against Brandt. Ritter explained that he and I were the only ones who had ever penetrated into this very remote and difficult region to collect specimens - and that I would have consulted him if I had found anything new there.

Mr. Brandt did not stop there but extended his fame by publishing numerous new names for parodias which, in time, will have to be eliminated as not being valid. He used little known journals for these false descriptions which were duly copied by the publications in the Democratic German Republic (East Germany) for lack of familiarity with the subject. It will take quite some time to disentangle the net of confusion that he has caused.

Today I am working with the respected authority of Walter Weskamp in West Germany who shares my feeling about Brandt's activities.

(to be continued)

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