

Fig. 139. *Lobivia* Lau 331 in flower.

SOUTH AMERICAN CACTUS LOG PART XVIII

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As we approached Mina Asientos a friendly and intelligent looking miner stopped our car and asked for a lift. This proved to be a great asset to us for the coming days. His private and tiny mine, called "Cascabel", was situated far to the east of Asientos and this gave me the opportunity to lodge there and climb the extremely steep and difficult mountains to the north and to the south for extensive exploration. Even now, two plants from there still await description; one of them of dubious origin.

After a good night's rest and a hearty breakfast I set out with Pedro Pujapat to tackle the long steep slope to the north; the others remained in the vicinity of the mine to clean plants and seeds. After three hours of exhausting mountain climbing I saw something between the rocks that resembled snowballs. The first *Aylosteria fiebrigii* was published from material near Escayachi but there are numerous habitats over a huge area with forms of this beautiful gem among cacti. I was probably confronted with the variety *densiseta* which was published by Cullman. *Aylosteria fiebrigii* (Lau 323) does not branch readily when grown on its own roots. The yellowish to light red flowers contrast well with the white bristly spines, especially when the color of the bristles is a pure white. I possess some beautiful plants of this dazzling *Aylosteria* grafted on *Hylocereus undatus*.

Several times I was tempted to give up reaching the highest part of the mountain but

it is in just such places where most of my new discoveries have been found so we pressed on with sweat running down our faces in spite of the cool temperatures in that high altitude. Noon came--it was time to return. That was the moment when I found two specimens each of three different species that are still without description.

One of these plants, I was told, surely could not occur in that vicinity and that I must have made an error in marking the package. That was number Lau 239 A which John Donald

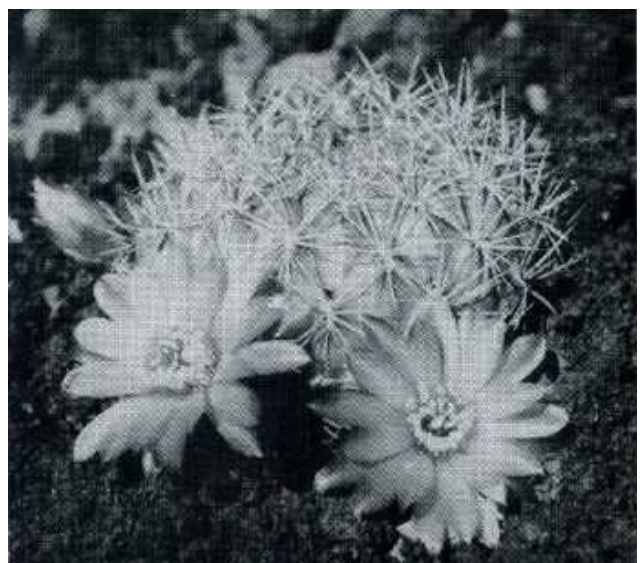


Fig. 140. *Weingartia* Lau 331 A in flower.

identified as *Rebutia narvaecense* and pointed out that it hardly seemed possible that the distribution area could reach some 300 km from Narvaez, the type locality, to Asientos, with which I wholeheartedly agreed. At the IOS Congress in March, 1980 I was told that Lau 329 A was not *Rebutia narvaecense* after all and that it was a new species whose name would be *Rebutia perplexa*. That made me as perplexed as the plant and its name.

Really, I would be delighted to climb that steep and difficult mountain again, even if it took me two days, to verify its origin and determine whether I was correct. The plant was mentioned and illustrated recently by Charles Glass (this journal, 52, 4, 182, July August, 1980) so I do not have to make more comments--the beauty of the magenta colored flower speaks for itself and makes this a superb new introduction to the genus *Rebutia*.

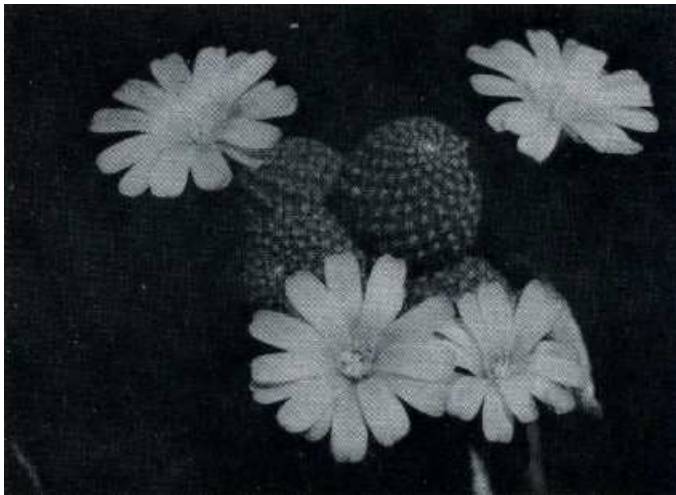


Fig. 141. *Rebutia perplexa*

The other plants were so dehydrated that at first I regarded them all as the same species. Not taking a second look through a magnifying glass, they looked the same in that sorrowful state so I marked them *Lobivia* Lau 331. As they started growing under our tender care they developed into magnificent plants--and they turned out to be not only of different species but of different genera as well. I then marked the other plant Lau 331 A.

Lau 331 has a most unusual flower. The outer perianth segments are a pale purple; the inner ones of a dark blood red. The golden yellow radiating spines are pectinate and give the plant an attractive look even when not in flower.

Lau 331 is a *Weingartia* of the same group as *purpurea* and *torotorensis* of which I will speak later in this article. Both deserve to be published soon as the photos shown here of the plants in cultivation are sure to develop

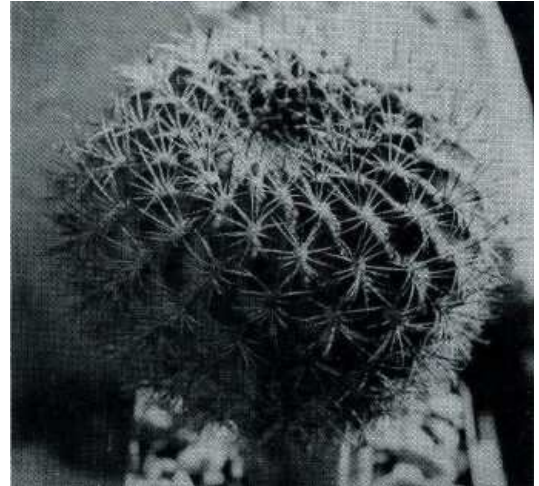


Fig. 142. *Weingartia* Lau 331 A (photo Abbey Garden Press).

great interest among connoisseurs. I am frantically trying to propagate them to offer these plants to serious collectors--but progress is slow.

Thanks to a moonlit night we brought the plants safely down to Mina Cascabel. Apart from a few falls which gave us only slight bruises, we had no other serious encounters.

At a cloudless sunrise another morning, the south side beckoned. This time I took Jorge Galindo with me. With his 13 years he was well built, dark blond and had greenish eyes, curly hair, and an almost European resemblance. He spoke Jivaro as he had been growing up among that wild Indian race. (In October, 1980 as we celebrated our Silver Wedding Anniversary, we lived with him in Kankaimi in the deepest jungle of Ecuador where he is a schoolteacher among his deloved Jivaros. We climbed the Cordillera Cutucu with two Ashuaras which is the Indian name of the Jivaros. One night I was stung by a scorpion which gave me great pain and put me out of action for a whole week).

It was again past midday when we reached the highest point. The incline was not as steep but the distance was greater here. Even in this high altitude the heat was a great hindrance to our progress. As we reached some large granite rocks we met our first *Parodia* of that day. There was much color variation between orange and red in the medium sized flowers. I was sure that I had again found something hereto fore unknown. A year passed before the mystery was solved. This was the real *Parodia punae* whereas the one I had previously but mistakenly thought to be *P. punae* was the new species, now *P. laui*. We found two habitats of *P. punae* (Lau 328 and 330) that day with slightly different spination.

Now it was time to start downhill. Jorge's head was as red as a tomato and I was afraid he might get a sunstroke. As we descended, slowly and gradually, we could see Mina Asientos far to the west. Thick cumulus congestus clouds were forming and the weather became intolerable. But wait! We could not yet descend--there was a cactus I had never seen. As we walked slowly downhill, utterly fatigued, we almost did not see them, coming from above. They were facing west and always hiding in front of the rocks; had we been walking uphill we would have seen them easily. White to gray spines, a dark green epidermis, and shimmering purple flowers made us pause and investigate. This was no doubt a new *Weingartia* (Lau 327). We collected some under strain as we had no interest in cactus—at least not much—until we could dip into the river far below and drink some water at a spring in the deep valley.

When I sent a few specimens to Prof. Dr. L. Diers in Cologne, Germany he immediately started a description of this new find. Alas, just as he was ready to publish it in the German language journal *Kuass*, it appeared in another magazine (this journal, XLIII, 6, 243, November-December, 1971) under the name of *Weingartia torotorensis*. Dr. Puna had found the plant at almost the same time and I wholeheartedly give him credit for climbing these high mountains to contribute to the enrichment of new cacti.



Fig. 143. *Parodia punae*, Lau 330.

At least! we arrived at the river, left the basket and gear on the bank and threw ourselves into the refreshing water. Jorge told me later that never in his life had he felt so close to losing consciousness. We sloshed through the river and arrived at La Cascabel just as the thunderstorm broke loose. I had parked the car

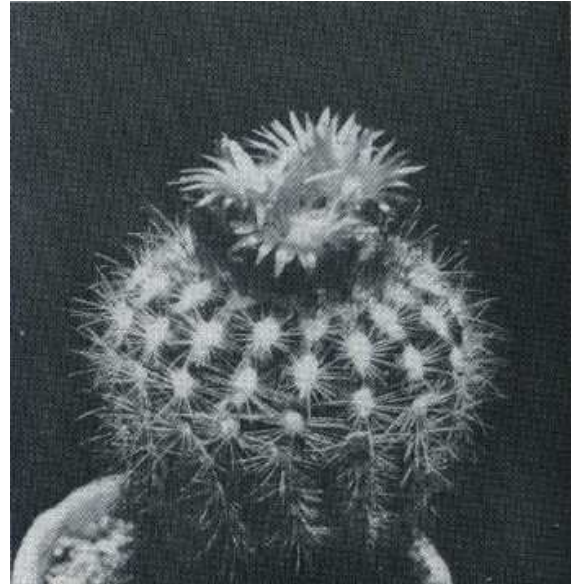


Fig. 144. *Parodia laui*.

on the safe side of the river where the road led to Asientos. In order to be perfectly at ease I drove it a little farther uphill--and what a good thing that was ; if I hadn't, I would have lost it. We were just settling down to our evening meal when a roaring wall of water converted the crystal clear river of moments before into a raging torrent of mud. We stood stunned by this meteorological spectacle. The river would be dirty for days after that.

The night was cool then and we slept soundly. In the morning we had to cross an unsteady hanging bridge and we were soon on our way to Asientos. The kind people there sold us a few gallons of gasoline. Near the steep cliffs at the river we saw something we had missed before--a few plants of an ecotype of *Parodia ocampoi* (Lau 334).

Long before we reached Cruce we stopped once again while the sinking sun still gave us enough light to search--and again there was a sensational discovery. What was later described by Donald and Lau as *Weingartia purpurea* (Lau 336) grew just in front of our feet and a few yards away from the dirt road. I did not see any flowers then, a privilege that I had much later when I cultivated a few plants of this exciting species. The epidermis is very dark green and the 11-18 spiraled ribs are strongly tuberculate. The spines are very dark, reddish black ; 10 radials and 4-5 centrals. Flowers are short tubed and wide funnellform, color from violet-mauve to bright purple to reddish purple. The last color was found in Lau 332 which at that time was considered the same as Lau 336.

In the next story we shall continue eastward to other exciting habitats.

(to be continued)

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