



Fig. 145. *Sulcorebutia krahni*. Photo Abbey Garden Press

SOUTH AMERICAN CACTUS LOG PART XIX

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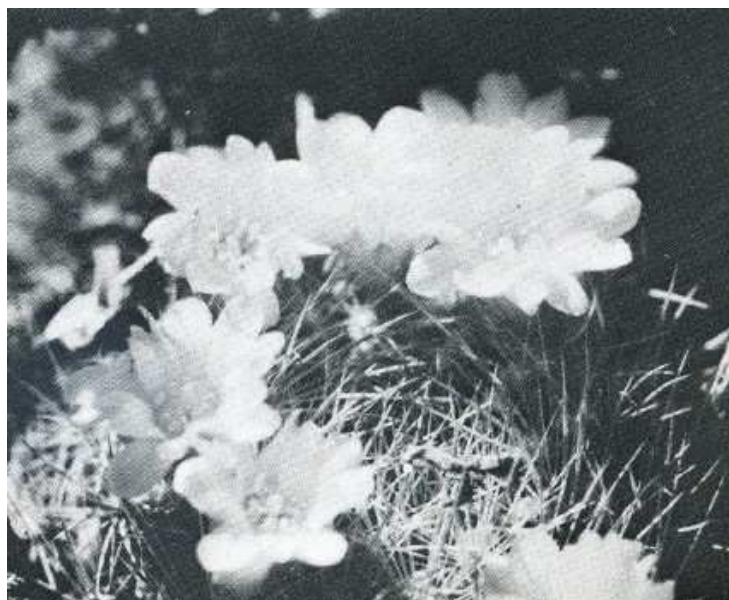
Orkho Abuelo, or Grandfather Mountain, came into view. I had been told that Walter Rausch had made a fascinating discovery there. So often in nature you have either beautiful spines and less attractive flowers or the other way around. The same is true with the leaves of bromeliads, with the exception of *Guzmania musaica* where we find spectacular flowers and fascinating leaves. *Sulcorebutia flavissima* (Lau 338), as the name implies, has yellow spination and large dark-purple flowers, making this one of the most beautiful representatives of the genus. At the time of our visit there were thousands upon thousands of plants covering the mountain. It was not the flowering season, and I did not see the white variety which I have been told has been found.

Aiquile greeted us with a myriad of *Sulcorebutia mentosa* (Lau 981). It is surprising that this species, so common in its habitat, is found so rarely in collections. The large, very dark-red flowers make this plant outstanding in comparison to others. We rushed on to Totorá from where there had been reported *Sulcorebutia totorensis*. There had been much discussion concerning this habitat and the validity of the name. Even I listed it in my collecting numbers, "totoralensis." On the road to Lagunillas near Totorá I found a very beautiful magenta-flowered *sulcorebutia* which I numbered Lau 953 and later a form, Lau 954, which should correspond to the *S. totorensis*. I am including a colored photo in this article and I would be

grateful for discussion on this controversial gem among *sulcos*. Totorá reminds me of the hardest, toughest and almost tasteless cold meat that I ever ate in my life, served by a plump, squatty Quechua woman without any concern about her guests. I sometimes wonder why people do not boycott such places, but then there is no alternative, no competition to serve a decent "Churrasco", as the South American steak is called.

Now we are nearing Comarapa and as such a center of cactus growing vegetation. Before reaching the area, to the north of the road, grows *Parodia comarapana* (Lau 951) in abundance, and with many deviations from the original description which gives "splitters"

Fig. 146. *Weingartia neocunningii* from Comarapa.



much taxonomic activity. The species grows rather flat in the grassy soil and among rocks. The yellow flowers are not large but attractive. The whole area is strewn with large specimens of *Gymnocalycium comarapense*, which strongly resembles *G. zegarrae*, in fact I cannot accept the two as separate taxa and would rather call them forms. *Gymnocalycium comarapense* (Lau 950) at times has no lines dividing the areole sections which *G. zegarrae* (Lau 948), according to the description, always has. I have tried in habitat to separate the two forms on that basis which was extremely difficult. Flowers are identical, only the spination in *G. comarapense* seems a little softer.



Fig. 147. *Sulcorebutia flavissima*.

Tambo is close to Comarapa and proved to me a great assistance and resting place. The New Tribes Mission, with headquarters in Cochabamba, runs a school for the missionary children there, and several teachers and missionaries have been friends of mine for many years. I could thus call Tambo home. In comparative luxury American-style food was offered, and for a change I could sleep in a real bed. The parents of these children work far in the jungle, sometimes with tribes that number no more than 100 people. It takes a tremendous amount of spiritual and moral conviction to live with such isolated people, sometimes traveling for weeks from the nearest landing strip or river to get there, learning the language, difficult as it is, to reach just a handful of wild tribal individuals whose lives are so completely different from ours. I remember



Fig. 148. *Weingartia erinacea*.

the film that two missionaries took in an area which was invaded with sweat bees. The face of the photographed missionary was covered in seconds with these small prickling insects. Although they do not sting, their presence is most aggravating, and it is difficult to travel there without a head mask. Naturally, under the circumstances the parents cannot teach their children privately in their jungle surroundings. While I was there, political turmoil once again had the country in its grip. General Torres, who had earlier proclaimed himself President after a military coup, was leaning to the left, the right waiting for their chances.



Fig. 149. *Sulcorebutia* cf. *totoensis*.

That the American missionaries were an easy target of abuse and adverse propaganda is always a risk which has to be taken into consideration. In the evenings there were always rumours of impending occupation of the school by leftists, and the school director during evening devotion had to quote Scripture verses of valor and bravery, preparing the children to withstand their fears with an unquenchable faith. For the Aguaruna Indian children, young in their Christian experience, coming from headshrinking practices of the past, the example of the American missionary children was a convincing example.

Comarapa is weingartia country, of the kind that can be cultivated with ease. I would separate weingartias into two categories: The easily grown *neocummingii*, *erinacea* with its variety *catariensis*, *longigibba*, *lanata*, *sucrensis*, *pilcomayensis*, *torotorensis*, *pulquinensis* with the variety *corroana* and *purpurea*, and the difficult and hardbodied *neumanniana*, *fidaiana*, *lecoriensis* and *cintiensis*. Indeed, it might be wise to create a subgenus for the latter ones which all grow in a region remote from the former. Having done so with matucanas vs. submatucanas, for the sake of taxonomical order such a subgenus would not be out of place.

Weingartia pulquinensis var. *corroana* (Lau 341) is the most common, the village of Pulquina being situated a little south of Comarapa. The sturdy spines and bright yellow flowers govern the whole landscape, interspersed with *Parodia columnaris* (Lau 952) and *Echinopsis pojoensis* (Lau 339). (The latter identity I cannot confirm, but I do not see a marked difference between the species that grows at Puete Pojo and at Comarapa) *E. comarapana* (Lau 355) also grows here. Most of these plants grow in dense brush which gives way to clearings. *Lobivia obrepanda* (Lau 959), which is found in many forms and situations, rounds off the kaleidoscope of globular cacti. In addition to this come many cereoid cacti like *armatocactus*, *cleistocactus* and *trichocereus* which I am not at this moment considering in detail.

A side-trip to Tukiphalla was a must. The dirt road (in an unbelievable condition) led us to a sandy mountain. In the yellow sand we saw yellow-spined plants with yellow flowers, very closely related to weingartia and almost camouflaged. This was Krahn's spectacular find, different from all others, *Sulcorebutia (Rebutia) krahni* (Lau 340). As we launched further into the mountain wilderness, we at last found what we had been looking for, *Weingartia erinacea* (Lau 342). The compactness of the almost round plants and the shortness of the spines reminds one of a small hedgehog in defensive position. The flowers of all of the first mentioned category, with exception of *torotorensis*

and *purpurea*, are very similar. Leaving Tambo, and the fellowship we enjoyed, we found near Mairana *Weingartia neocummingii* with its bristly spines, the softest to the touch of all weingartias. (Lau 958). Mairana also is home of *Parodia mairanana* var. *atra* (Lau 947). This is, in my experience, the easiest of all parodias in cultivation. The showy red flowers are frequent; the plant makes many offsets; but throughout the years it has come so close in appearance in cultivation to *Parodia tuberculata* that I see no difference at all. However, the two habitats are quite far apart.

Another habitat that I did not want to miss was that of Ritter's great discovery, named for his sister Hilde Winter, *Winterocereus aureispinus*

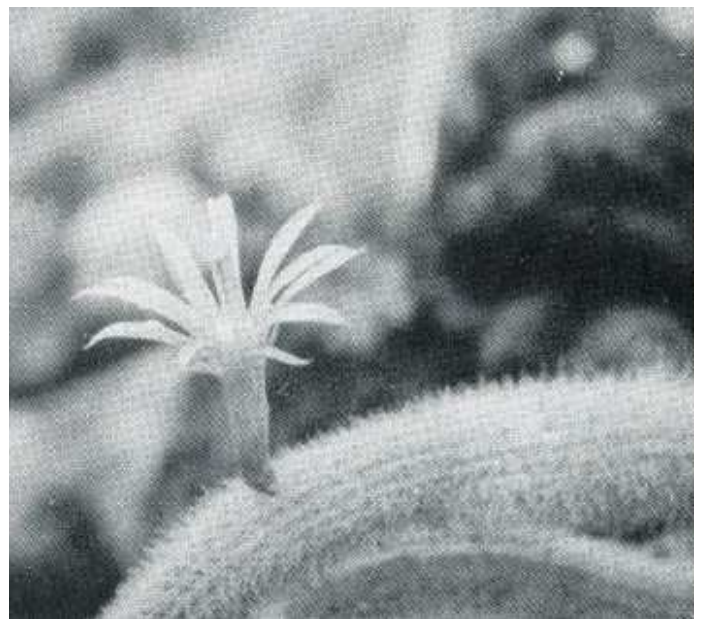


Fig. 150. *Winterocereus aureispinus* in flower in habitat.

spinus (Lau 957). Following the road towards Santa Cruz, we could see the snake-like yellow tails hanging over the cliffs, mostly beyond reach of the collector. Their orange-red flowers opened here and there, never in great quantities but in all parts of the stems, old and new.

As in all articles, I will now try to describe a climatic adventure to which I had looked forward for some time and which, is a classic example of combining excitement and cactus research. There are people in the field who are fanatics, who see nothing but the particular genus which is their specialty. No alternative subject for conversation is in their minds. Their whole way of thinking revolves around lobivias, matucanas, mammillarias or echinocereus. One acquaintance of mine did rather forego an invitation to a remote Indian village with strange rituals to witness which he could have never seen without my company, as I had boys from that region in my home and was accepted. He rather examined a mountain range that I had previously told him I had never climbed. Two days later I found him exhausted and a cot



Fig. 151. Padre Schaller.

in the village where he had left me. He had found nothing of value and spared me the physical exercise of examining the flora myself.

Any serious cactophile would like to see *Vatricania guentheri* (Lau 899) in habitat. There is no sight quite like it. But to reach the area takes courage, perseverance and patience. Looking at the map, I realized that the trail would take me through La Higuera, the village where Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the onetime

confidant of Fidel Castro was killed while leading the guerrilla band with which he wanted to topple the Bolivian regime. I had been told stories in Lagunillas, to which he had sent men to buy supplies, which indicated their hardships in barren and roadless territory, often without water or food, beset by many ailments and diseases and having little or no co-operation by the local extremely poor farmers. Many of them fled to safer areas anyhow. Yet La Higuera had to be traversed in order to get to my destination. Around the middle of the day we arrived in Pucara, coming from Vallegrande, across a very rocky dirt road. We had been told that this was the end of any transitable line.

From here on it would be on foot. Sitting on the bench in the dusty, primitive park I spotted a red-haired bearded man with a European flair. I approached him and asked: "Are you the local priest?" Eagerly he answered affirmatively and invited me for lunch in the "parroquia". We were four: Pedro Pujupat and Wilfredo Cunachi, the two Aguarunas, and Jorge Galindo. The priest, Roger Schaller, was from the French-speaking part of Switzerland. He lived all by himself, had no nun to do his cooking, washing and ironing which I had observed in other parroquias. He looked a little unkept, moving among rough people of Quechua origin, eating their kind of food, trying to live their kind of life. He had a brilliant mind. Hardly ever a person like myself gave him the pleasure of conversing intelligently, covering many aspects of life and interests. He had erased any memory of a convenient existence, having killed his past and living for these people of Pucara. The diminutive man grew in stature as I came to know him. He had learned humility, the most difficult lesson in life that very few among us ever achieve.

(to be continued)



Fig. 152. Pedro Pujupat and Jorge Galindo (left) cleaning a stem of *Winterocereus aureispinus*.

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