

If you go to the 1991 CSSA Convention, either before or after spend some time at;

"A BEND IN A RIVER" by David Couch  
Quiet moments in Big Bend National Park.

In west Texas, in the borderland between Mexico and the United States, a river flows, sometimes serene, sometimes a treacherous torrent. The sweeping bend of this river, as it debates its direction, forms the southernmost border of a Texas frontier land and gives it its name: Big Bend Country.

My week-long trek through the Big Bend Country began at the summits of the rugged Chisos Mountains and ended at the Rio Grande River. I passed through five vegetation zones: aspens, ponderosa pines, maples, and Texas madrones grew at the higher elevations; Mexican pinyons and oaks in the lower mountains; mesquite and grasses in the foothills; cactus in the deserts; lush green thickets of river cane, willow, and other water loving plants along the verdant Rio Grande River.

The animal life within this arid wilderness is as abundant and varied as the terrain and its vegetation. I had been especially cautious as I lay down on the desert floor to photograph a small, solitary cactus, for I knew I was an intruder into the world of the scorpion and the rattlesnake. The Mexican jays came to me at breakfast---unafriad, begging for leftovers. The Colima warblers flitted around me in the mesas, and the Lucifer hummingbird was a constant companion at the springs.

The watery environments of Big Bend's springs are home to orchids, columbine, and tree frogs. I rested one day at the spring, and sitting quietly, watched a yellow-nosed cotton rat as he watched me, his frenzied activity broken only by moments of cautious scrutiny. An insatiable appetite coupled with an instinct for hoarding items of all sorts, kept him busily scurrying about for several hours before retiring to an almost impenetrable nest, adorned with cactus, where he sought to escape the desert heat.

Late that afternoon, a mule deer silently approached the shaded spring, paused, considered my presence, then drank. Old enough to have experienced the hunting season, he was well aware of the dangers of man. Yet the deer calmly drank and departed, ignoring me after the initial hesitant moment.

I was preparing my mind for the long hike back to my campsite when a herd of javalina came to drink, their teeth clacking constantly as they had their fill and even as they wandered away.

And a strange pair, a coyote and a fox, cautiously approached from different directions. Silently, one step at a time, pausing to communicate their intentions to each other, they neared the water, their thirst overcoming distrust. Separated by only a shallow pool of water, they leaned toward each other and, with

raised hackles, snarled inaudibly. I wondered if such natural enemies could avoid physical confrontation. But, by mute agreement, they shared the precious water and left on their nocturnal hunts.

That night, as I walked toward my camp, thoughts of my time in Big Bend both gladdened and saddened me. I was sorrowful when I saw, behind a dilapidated barn, a heaping mound of small cactus, their delicate roots exposed to the burning sun. What amounted to a dump truck load of cactus, collected illegally, was left for unknown reasons. My sadness intensified with the realization that some of those unique plants may exist nowhere else on earth; some may have been the last of their kind.

I was saddened by the graffiti message "John loves Connie" spray painted on a cave wall, and the crude shovel holes beneath the cave walls, blackened by ancient campfires, where an over-zealous collector had dug for artifacts. My greatest sadness came from seeing hammer marks on the Indian petroglyphs where someone tried clumsily to remove them, destroying the ancient art.

But I was gladdened by this remote Texas frontier. I was glad to have glimpsed the deer in the woodlands, and to have seen the mountain lion in a forested canyon. I enjoyed exploring many caves, searching for traces of Indian civilization that once prospered but vanished, leaving only a few reminders of its existence. I was glad to have stood in the same place as an ancient artist who, 10,000 years ago, painted his petroglyphs on the walls of a cave, for reasons known only to him.

As I wandered this northern protrusion of the Mexican Chihuahuan Desert, the "Bad Lands of Texas" some call it, I realized why I have never been inclined to the laboratory study of biology. The scenic wonders--the rugged mountains, great canyons, the winding Rio Grande River, the vast expanse of desert, the abundant animal life--must be experienced first hand in all their bewildering, diverse, and dramatic relationships. In such a place one feels a quiet exultation and reaches a deep understand of how life melds, survives, and prospers.

By David Couch.

(From an AAA publication, submitted by the Cactus and Succulent Society of Southern Nevada.)



Why do I grow plants from seeds? Why, indeed, when I think of the frustration of no germination or gratifying germination only to see those brave little nubbins mowed down by damp off or greedy little insects.

To me there is an excitement in inspecting newly seeded pots, watching for signs of the emerging cotyledons. Sometimes I'm astounded to see little cacti developing in a matter of days. Sometimes I've given up on a batch of seeds and reseeded in the same pot to be surprised with a double crop, then trying to remember what it is as I have lost the first tag.

I have tried to grow many different kinds of plants from seeds. Many years ago when we lived in Cincinnati I grew, as many people have done with avocados, a mango from a seed given to Stan by a co-worker. I've planted grapefruit seeds and had window-sill citrus in the Mid-West.

When we lived in Schenectady, Stan devised an indoor greenhouse with growlights and I started to try cactus seeds. The only place I could find succulents in New York at that time (late '60's) was at the variety store. Park's seed catalog was the only source I knew of then for cactus seeds.

After our move to Arizona, I gave up for a while growing succulents from seeds since I was able to buy small inexpensive plants at KMart. But then I started to see plants not available for sale and I again started to experiment with seed.

Many of my plants produce copious seeds which germinate around the mother plant (and in neighbor pots). I have found parodias very easy to grow after they have germinated this way. I also have five nickle and dime size *Aztekium Ritteri* which germinated this way about six years ago. The seeds of *Aztekium* are like a fleck of black pepper, so tiny!

*Strombocactus disciformis* also has very tiny seeds, but I found they grow very well in a separate pot. When I found fresh seeds on a plant I would throw them in with other young strombos so I have a pot of various sizes doing quite well. They get watered regularly all summer like everything else.

Now that I have a large collection I have found it interesting to pollinate my own plants and have grown some rare plants this way. *Euphorbia symmetrica*, *sarcocaulon burmannii* and *haworthia maughanii* are some examples. The *H. maughanii* are so slow, but after a year they are showing definite signs of the cylindrical cut off tips they will eventually have. Other *haworthias* are not so slow. In little over a year, *H. venosa* v.

oertendahlia have made sturdy plants big enough for three inch pots.

Of course, in a greenhouse one gets a variety of surprises popping up in pots. I've found anacampseros, dorstenias, euphorbias and even cacti wandering far from their parents.

In our yard we have many trees I've started from seeds. there are mature blue palo verdes from seeds collected in McDowell Mt. Park, Acacia Farnesiana from seeds the Hennesseys gave me back in the '70's, a Chilean mesquite from seed of a tree from the Rubicek's yard in Tucson (collected on a CACSS bus trip), young Acacia stenophyla which Mike Gallagher grew from seed. We have another acacia (maybe Shafneri) grown from seeds our youngest son found on his way home from school. I also have very small boojum trees from seeds collected a few years ago by our daughter and son-in-law on a Baja trip.

We have aloes and nolinias from seeds sent to the Desert Botanical Garden from Switzerland on an exchange many years ago. Our CACSS had the opportunity to choose some seeds which were being discarded in a house cleaning.

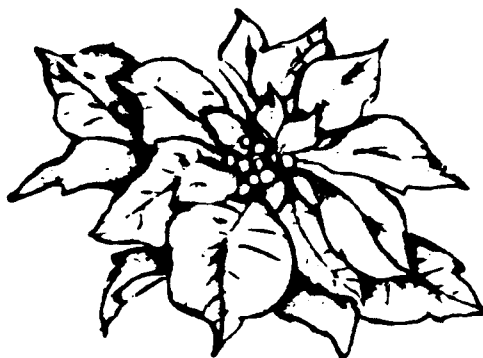
One year a friend and I sent to South Africa to purchase lithops seed from Desmond Cole. Lithops grow very easily from seeds. It's been really neat to see these babys grow up and flower.

I have a bunch of Bursera microphyla which I have grown from seed and am attempting to grow very slowly, thus bonsai-ing them. I've been amazed at how tough these little trees are.

As you can see, there is hardly a seed I don't like. Well, maybe the exception would be vegetables. I grew some patio tomatoes in pots last year but I became so angry at the birds and insects that I found it much more satisfactory to forego the practical food crop.

There has to be a time to say I have grown enough, but I just can't resist trying another tree or shrub or cactus or...

Joan Skirvin



A TIMELY WARNING  
By Henry F. Lee, M.D.

I want to sound a warning about CYGON-ZE] This product is highly active against all the insect pests known to affect cacti and succulents. Even a single drenching is effective against root meallies. It would seem to be just what we need. But it is not.

It is just too toxic. I have recently learned that, despite specific label warnings against indoor use, there are individuals who think it should be safe when used as a soil drench and systemic. Their reasoning is that, unlike sprays, the drench will not be inhaled. The fallacy lies in the factor that CYGON-ZE is moderately volatile and the resulting invisible vapor is toxic.

IT HAS NO PLACE IN THE HOME OR GREENHOUSE.

Let me give a bit more non-technical information. CYGON-ZE is an organo-phosphate. More specifically it is a di-methoate. It is related to the "Nerve Gases."

In our nervous systems messages pass across junctions between nerve fibers by means of the liberation of tiny amounts of acetyl choline. This substance, having served in the relay of a message, is then almost instantly destroyed by an enzyme called acetyl choline esterase. Then that nerve junction, or relay, is ready to function again. CYGON-ZE prevents the action of the enzyme, acetyl-choline accumulates, and the connection is functionally blocked. This impaired control of the passage of the nerve impulses has widespread effects in the body.

In small doses organo-phosphates as a group can cause many subtle symptoms that cause of which may not be recognized. Larger doses?---well, everybody knows what happens if breathing is paralyzed. We are thinking of only small doses today.

Through effects on the nerve circuits controlling muscle contraction there may be: easy fatigue, mild weakness, muscle twitching or cramps, blurring of vision, tightness of breathing especially in asthmatic patients where minute traces of air may make trouble, tingling in hands and feet. In the brain itself (where all our thought processes are electro-chemically mediated) some strange effects may occur: Excessive dreaming, nightmares, unreasonable anxiety, confusion of detail, faulty memory, slurred speech and many more.

CYGON-ZE HAS NO PLACE IN INDOOR USE].

Fortunately recovery from the effects of small doses occurs over a relatively short period of time but repeated exposure may lead to very puzzling chronic symptoms.

It is only fair to point out again that the manufacturers of insecticides do put warnings on their labels. Sometimes the print is very fine. Often users do not read it all or fail to note that

"skin absorption is possible" or "not to be used indoors or in the greenhouse."

I have singled out CYGON-ZE because it is so effective against the sometimes difficult enemies of those with cactus collections. Its use is very tempting and the symptoms produced may be subtle and unrecognized for what they are.

(Taken from CSIE #5 1985/86, page 106.)

Note: Chuck Staples, editor of the Mid-Iowa CSS paper, says he would like to have a session at the convention on the dangers of insecticides.



#### GOD AND THE CACTUS

"If God would choose a plant to represent him, I think he would choose of all plants the cactus. The cactus has all the blessings He tried, but mostly failed, to give to men. Let me tell you how. It has humility, but is not submissive. It grows where no other plant will grow. It does not complain when the sun bakes it back or the wind tears it from the cliff or drowns it in the dry sand of the desert or when it is thirsty. When the rains come it stores water for the hard times ahead. In good times and in bad it will still flower. It protects itself against danger, but it harms no other plant. It adapts perfectly to almost any environment. It has patience and enjoys solitude. In Mexico there is a cactus that flowers only once every hundred years and at night. This is saintliness of an extraordinary kind, would you not agree? The cactus has properties that heals the wounds of men and from it come potions that can make man touch the face of God or stare into the mouth of hell. It is a plant of patience and solitude, love and madness, ugliness and beauty, toughness and gentleness. Of all plants surely God made the cactus in his own image? It has my enduring respect and is my passion."

From "THE POWER OF ONE" by Bryce Courtnay  
Page 154.

Publisher: Random House.

