Adansonia gregorii  Maureen Lucas

I also forgot to tell you that Adansonia gregorii is named after my Great-great grandmother's cousins - the Gregory brothers (probably mainly Sir Augustus Gregory). He took the Great Expedition across the top of Australia in the 1800s with Baron Von Mueller. During this expedition they discovered and named many Australian native plants. I suppose you could say that these Gregories are my distant cousins. Just out of interest, in a similar way I am related to Gina Rhinehart. Her great grandfather and my great grandmother were brother and sister (both children of my great-great grandmother) and so she is also related to the Gregories. It is a small world isn't it?
Bill Nicol out front of his house in Spotswood, Victoria. He is proudly standing alongside a superb flowering specimen of Agave bracteosa. Bill’s comments - “I received this plant from Leo Cady, Kiama NSW, in January 1972. I called in to see Leo who was sick in bed and was unable to show me around. He told me that he had just repotted plants which he had imported, and I was to go to the glasshouse to select any I liked. Agave bracteosa was one he kindly consented to give to me. From this plant which offsets freely, I have given dozens to friends of the society who have had success in growing them in small gardens and containers.”

Bill gave a talk to the CSSA meeting on Tuesday, April 2013, assisted with technology by Melissa Jackson. The meeting’s record in the May 2013 Spinette says:

“TALK: Bill Nicol – Stories from my garden. Bill took us on a tour of his garden – then and now – giving a history of how he acquired some of them and anecdotal stories of some of the people involved. A very enjoyable time with many laughs too.”

On P. 96 of the ‘History of the Ballarat CSS’ compiled by Noel Main in 2003 for the 30th anniversary of that society, Bill said: “My interest in cacti began when I purchased a Cereus peruvianus (monstrose form) from a roadside stall outside Gosford, NSW. I was intrigued by the shape, it looked like a little old man. At the same time Jean (Bill’s wife) purchased a plant the lady called “Billie Burger” which later proved to be a plant of Billbergia vittata; hence the beginnings of haunting nurseries and shops for plants.

In the early 60s I was introduced to Bert Swanwick, a renowned grower of succulents. Through Bert I met most of the growers, namely Ralph Field, Tom Dawson, Clarrie Borch, Bert Weingard, Arthur Burke, Percy Barrett, etc., etc., must include John Himmernann. At this time most cacti growers were also growing Bromeliads, which I understand were introduced by Charlie Hodgson, a remarkable botanist. Through Arthur Burke (he established the cacti and succulent section of the Botanical Garden) I got interested in the aloes of Africa and Madagascar, also agaves. From here the size of my collection exploded into Euphorbia, Crassula, Kalanchoe, Echeveria, and a host of other varieties, then onto cycads, caudiciforms, variegates and also cristates. In 1967 I imported, which were probably the first in Australia, some Japanese variegates and cristates, featured in the August 1968 edition of ‘Your Garden’.

In July 1983, a small group of growers got together and formed a society for the propagation of rare species of cacti and succulents. We called the club ‘Exotica Australia’, of which both Roger Jones and Harry Mehmet were members. Through this small gathering of people, a lot of information and knowledge was exchanged, as were plants. I also did a lot of photographic work (thank goodness), as I now have a comprehensive compilation of photos of collections now gone, also society newsletters dating back to the 1950s”.

Gasteria ‘Bill Nichol’ is a hybrid named after Bill by Rudolf Schulz, who spelt his surname incorrectly in his ‘Tarrington Exotics’ catalogue. It forms a striking plant of very thick, smooth leaves lightly spotted white.
Sometime, 12 months or so ago, I bought a plant and I cannot even remember who from. It was a nice Trichocereus looking plant with a name that I had never seen before, Gräsers Schönste X Avanne, and so started my research into what this plant actually was. What follows is a compilation of articles and a blog so please forgive if there is some repetition. (Ed.)

My plant Gräsers Schönste X Avanne,

(Abstract J. Bockemühl)
‘Gräsers Vermächtnis’, a hybrid of an extraordinary parentage. In the 1950’s, Robert Gräser from Nuremberg pollinated Disocactus (syn. Aporocactus) flagelliformis with pollen of Echinopsis (syn. Trichocereus) candicans (nothogenus x Disonopsis G.D.Rowley). He described that the seedlings resulting from this cross initially grew like Aporocacti but that after being grafted on different stocks they exclusively developed the traits of the pollen donor. The only difference was a beautiful red flower colour in contrast to the white bloom of the paternal plant. Furthermore, the anthers on the hybrid were sterile or missing. The hybrid, named ‘Gräsers Vermächtnis’ (‘Gräser’s Legacy’) by Klaus Rippe, was used by Gräser for further crosses. Two well known cultivars resulting from these experiments are ‘Gräsers Schönste’ (‘Gräser’s Finest’) and ‘Gräsers Erfolg’ (‘Gräser’s Success’). However, the progeny of crosses with, or among, these hybrids always looked like the paternal Trichocereus and never yielded plants showing properties of the original female Aporocactus. Therefore, considerable doubts about the parentage of this wide cross arose among botanists and cactus fanciers. The author, however, is convinced of the extraordinary parentage and supports his view with, among others, the critical and responsible character of Robert Gräser, who has published all the precautions he had taken to prevent uncontrolled pollination. Furthermore, the author argues that the fruit was produced on the Aporocactus and not on the Trichocereus, thus excluding the possibility of apomixis. He admits, however, that further genetic analyses will be necessary to elucidate the parentage of this impressive plant.
The interested reader will presumably ask if something like this here is possible at all. That this cross-breeding was successful, I do not doubt. That during the inheritance process almost only the attributes of the male parent be visible in the following generation and that those of the other parent are pushed totally to the background as our example shows: this is extremely unusual! It has not only generated scepticism for some scientists who are occupied with cacti but also caused throughout understandable disbelief about the truth of this event in many cactus lovers. For this reason it is relevant to strike out a bit more and to look at the facts and backgrounds which have been reported in older, sometimes only difficultly accessible editions of our cacti magazine. (Gräser 1957, 1967). The author describes in detail how he achieved the said cross-breeding in which careful measurements for protection were taken to avoid unwanted foreign pollination; how the more than one and a half year period of development of the fruit with Aporocactus proceeded; and how only a few seeds have been sown in the middle of the winter, from which the first ones germinated after 3 weeks. He writes that the seedlings had looked the same as Aporocactus flagelliformis during the early stage, “with small germinal leaves and a relatively long and very thin piece of the stalk between root and germinal leaves”. (Gräser 1957).

To accelerate the initial growth, he grafted altogether 6 seedlings one by one on an Epicactus shoot, by choosing its still very young bastard branches as a temporary base. It was here that the first surprise came, because “between the germinal leaves, globular objects broke out, from which very soon strong, yellow prickles developed. One could assume that the graftlings were small grusonii” (Gräser 1957; connotation: he meant Echinocactus grusonii Hildmann, in the vernacular, known by the not so lovely name of ‘mother-in-law’s chair’). Some weeks later he re-grafted on diverse more robust bases, where a special juvenile plant developed particularly well on Opuntia senilis Parmentier and, three years later, produced the first blossoms which had been anxiously awaited.

Already, before the blossoms had been produced, it could be seen that this going to develop into an almost perfect image of a pollen giver (by virtue of its habit and the thick thorns), and with regard to the blossoms there was, as could be seen, no big difference to the candicans bloom except for the colour, which Gräser describes as a ‘beautiful, hard to describe red’, which is
denoted according to the colour atlas of the English Gardening Society as “Delft Pink” (Gräser 1957).

Gräser's Vermächtnis, by R. Gräser.

Whatever we may imagine here, it is seen in many cases as the result of an intermediary heredity with participation of the red and white blooming parents, which has been regarded eventually as a clear proof of a participation of *Aporocactus flagelliformis* for this cross-breeding. Looking at the matter more closely, there is theoretically also another possible interpretation. Considering that the bloom of the *Trichocereus candicans* is highly variable, depending on its physical location, appearing in many possible colour variations, from white to pink, salmon, yellow, orange, red to crimson (see Eckert & Wessner 2004), then it is also conceivable that the white blooming male parent’s part has also recessive genes for a red or pink blossom colour, which could once again have caused the appearance of the “Delft Pink”.

Whatever, this ‘exotic-looking’ plant – the parents being assigned very different tribes within the subfamily Cactoideae – provoked large interest for everyone who is concerned with cacti breeding, also because of the extremely beautiful flowers with their slightly waved blossom leaves which are also fringed at the rims, accompanied by small, crimson coloured seams. The filaments are surprisingly red, the anthers are, if they exist at all, mostly deaf, i.e. they produce no or infertile pollen, which can be interpreted as a direct consequence of the fact that both initial types, as mentioned above, are only very distantly related to each other. Indirectly, this would be another, albeit not very clear, argument for the formation of the cross-breeding as much as for the longer blossoms, give some evidence that the compared to their ‘father’ smaller but longer leaves are probably due to flagelliformis influence.

The new plant was relatively complicated to propagate, because it sprouted only in old age and even then only hesitantly. Its small availability was consequently another reason for being a widely searched for collection object over decades for friends of Echinopsis hybrids, and for whom it enjoys even nowadays nearly ‘cult status’. In the 1970’s, it was included in the “legendary” Stauch Echinopsis Hybrid List under No 321 as ‘Flagcand’ (*Aporocactus flagelliformis x Trichocereus candicans*), thereafter propagated as much as possible.
Thus there was at least a certain, sparse distribution among the members of the then Echinopsis Hybrid Group. In the meantime, it was named in honour of the grower, Robert Gräser, by Klaus Rippe, who was personally acquainted with him, taking the name ‘Gräsers Vermächtnis’ (Gräser’s legacy) which is fully accepted today.

G. D. Rowley (1980) created a new nothogenus for our plant, which he denoted as x Aporechinopsis (syn. x Aporotrichocereus Willis = Aporocactus Lemaire x Echinopsis Zuccarini). The ex-species Aporocactus has, however, been reclassified some years ago by Barthlott as Disocactus, thereby reclassifying the hybrid species as x Disonopsis (Disocactus Lindley x Echinopsis Zuccarini) (Rowley 2004). The ‘official’ name for Gräser’s breeding is now x Disonopsis ‘Gräsers Vermächtnis’.

Latterly, some hybrid enthusiast friends of Axel Neumann from Irxleben and Reinhard Liske from Hodenhagen, have devoted themselves especially to the propagation of this hybrid by perfecting the not-so-easy art of the grafting of Areoles, thus being able to reproduce them in larger ‘lot sizes’ than ever before (Neumann 2005). It is, thus, to be expected that the ‘desirability status’ of this plant will be significantly relaxed in the near future.

As a compliment to this, I still want to mention that our plant has been used for further breeding even by Gräser himself, since it has proven very fertile when used as the female partner. The most famous of all these consecutive hybrids were the two ‘super stars’ ‘Gräsers Schönste’ and ‘Gräsers Erfolg’, the former having old rose crown petals with blueish-red coloured sepals, and the latter having dark red to crimson petals, and again with slightly longer and obviously slimmer receptacle. Their strongly crinkly and fringed blossoms contribute to the incomparable beauty of both types of blossoms, which occurred already with the ‘mother’, but here in much more distinct form; and it can even appear again once in a while in further consecutive generations. Both of
these (and others, in addition) have been created by the cross-breeding of ‘Gräsers Vermächtnis’ with an especially selected, dark red blooming ‘SCHIGRA’-F2 hybrid from a Grex, which has been bred as well by Gräser, which, as the name suggests, was produced by an alliance of the so-called Trichocereus schickendantzii (Weber) Br.& R. with Helianthocereus grandiflorus (Br.& R.) Backeberg (today both listed as Echinopsis Zuccarini). All the aforementioned plants as well as all further breedings based on them (as long as no partners from ‘alien’ species were involved), and which would have been assigned to the hybrid species x Disonopsis, have never been shown to possess any attribute of the ‘ancestral female parent’ Aporocactus flagelliformis. This is even valid for hybrids of the cross-breeding ‘Gräsers Schönste’ x ‘Gräsers Erfolg’, which have also been created from a more direct continuation of the original breeding line (grandchild generation) – and this, even though we know that Aporocactus normally leaves clearly-visible traces in the immediate next generation with cross-breedings e.g. with Epicacti, Heliocereea, Selenicereea and others!

Now we come back to the start of this article, where we asked ourselves about the credibility of the Gräser cross-breedings, in which Aporocactus flagelliformis played an important role as one of “our“ very own plants, about which, however, doubts seemed not to be have been totally unjustified. Nevertheless, there are some evident arguments for the truth of Gräser’s hybrids and his related statements, which I want to list once again:

1. Robert Gräser was a very faithful and credible man, judging from all that I heard from people who knew him well personally. He also had the necessary scientific knowledge as a lecturer at the Nuremberg Gardening Technical College to be able to give credible explanations of his cross-breeding trials to his own and others’ satisfaction, both in theory and practice, just as he kept proving over and over again in his many earlier contributions in the Kakteen und andere Sukkulenten (German Cactus Society’s magazine ‘Cactus and other Succulents –Ed)

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2. For the abovementioned cross-breeding, all conceivable provisions have been made to exclude a potential, uncontrolled pollination of the Aporocactus blossom.

3. The fruit which has been produced after the pollination process, was maturing on Aporocactus flagelliformis as a female parent plant, not on a Trichocereus candidans.

4. The seedlings which have been produced by the cross-breeding resembled the “mother” in the initial state. After the appearance of the small plant bodies between the germination leaves, the attributes of Trichocereus started to dominate.

5. Even the fact that externally small Trichocereus were created from the sowing is even a strong evidence for a credible success of the cross-breeding, because stimulus pollination or Apomixis are excluded as possible causes.

6. The blossom colour of ‘Gräsers Vermächtnis’ (‘Delft Pink’) and its slightly extended receptacle (blossom tube) as well as later again with ‘Gräsers Erfolg’, could possibly be regarded as additional hints to a participation of Aporocactus. In case the pink pigment should be due to a existing recessive candidans gene, this would also be another proof of the fact that the cross-breeding worked.

7. Gräser mentioned that the blossom of ‘Gräsers Vermächtnis’ measured only 13 – 15 cm in diameter, while the Trichocereus candidans which was used had 20 cm wide flowers (Gräser 1957). Now, the bloom of the hybrid is still to be regarded as being of a respectable although still smaller size, being that this could have been caused by the ‘small blooded’ female parent.

A small element of doubt still remains because the attributes of the ‘mother’ disappear and do not re-appear which cannot be explained using the Mendelian laws. The only – and I want to emphasize explicitly, not likely – possibility for an explanation would be that Gräser has sown – maybe by confusion – the seed of another Trichocereus – i.e. Helianthocereus – cross-breeding, which would make the existing results, of course, easier to understand. But I cannot believe this for reasons which I have explained in detail. A clarification of the contributory factors involved in the creation of this hybrid is only possible via complex genetic research, e.g. by research into the isoenzyme polymorphism of that plant.

Bibliography


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For further information and photos please go to:
http://www.llifl.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/16029/x_Trichopsis_cv._Gr%C3%A4ser%C2%B4s_Sch%C3%B6neste

All that remains for me now is to find what the ‘Avanne’ is on my plant’s label. Ed
Till death us do part—or maybe not!
By Attila Kapitany

On a recent visit from Australia to California, I had the opportunity to spend considerable time with a range of interesting people: primarily those who grow and collect cacti and other succulents. Many of these are members of their local cactus and succulent societies, but not all. So many different collections, so many different gardens, each with special if not unique stories to go with them. One such story thread follows here!

I wish to share an interest I have that seems more common than I previously had thought. Prized plants in collections occasionally die for whatever reason, but what remains is sometimes kept as a special memento. Why? The first most obvious answer might be that the former living plant was something very valuable, old, rare or just something that you have been growing for many years, and after it dies you haven’t got the heart to just throw it out, like a worn-out pair of shoes. After all, these types of plants were once living things, not quite as precious as say when a pet dog dies, and you rarely just throw a dead dog in the bin like the shoes.

Some succulents and many cacti have the ability to hold their ‘exoskeleton’ in its original position within a pot for months if not years after the softer, highly succulent interior has rotted away, or dehydrated from lack of water. A classic example is the Elephant’s Foot (Dioscorea elephantipes). These types of plants can be so visually deceptive when dead that even experienced growers have at times continued to water and care for them. Sooner or later, the realization and possible disappointment sets in. Dead and dry specimens that can still appear visually appealing, turn up from time to time in collections: these are kept, not for the memory of the lost plant, but fundamentally for the unique appearance of the remaining structure.

True internal skeletons exist in many taller growing cacti that have evolved the need for extra structural support to hold them up. These plants include the Cholla (species of cylindrical-stemmed, shrubby Opuntias), Saguaro (Carnegiea gigantea) and the Cardon (Pachycereus pringlei). Much of South America also has tall-growing cacti species that produce internal woody skeletons that are prized as a building material for homes in arid regions. True skeletons of medium-sized cacti around 2 metres in height, or less, are cut into smaller lengths of one metre or less and used to make rainsticks—musical instruments that are popular with tourists. They originated from northern Chile where they were used from ancient times to bring rain. Their name also describes the rain-like sound that these instruments produce.

Early in my USA trip, I was in Santa Barbara visiting Randy Baldwin’s large, primarily succulent nursery where I came across a large dry remnant of an Agave that had long since flowered and died, but still had remarkable form and so was kept. Randy subsequently took me into his nursery office and proceeded to show his collection of dried cactus stems and parts. I accidentally dropped one to the ground where it broke into two smaller pieces. I was most embarrassed and apologetic. Perhaps my worst mishap on the trip! A week later I was near Santa Monica with a friend, M A Bjarkman who walked me down to one of her local friends who also grows and collects weird and unusual cacti and other succulents. Linda Hudson is a professor at Otis College of Art and Design, California—these kinds of plant art forms worked in very well as teaching aids. After perusing her apartment’s modest outdoor garden, we were soon inside; on her dining/kitchen benchtop I came upon the dead dry remains of a superbly grown Ferocactus latispinus. On this occasion I did not hold it, rather asked that Linda hold it while I took pictures. Her gentle handling of this (once living) ‘Work of Art’ reflected more of her reverence for it than any fear of its (still very sharp) spines.
Midway through my time away, mostly in California, I stayed several days in Riverside with Buck and Yvonne Hemenway. While there, I saw fine artworks of cacti and other succulents adorning most of their walls, one of which immediately stood out as exceptional. It was a photographic montage by Daniel P Griffith of several photos of a close-up of the remains of a dead and dry Ferocactus, and then even further close-ups, of the same ‘former plants’ parts and spine clusters. A lengthy discussion followed with both Yvonne and Buck enthusiastically telling me how they obtained the artwork in question. Then they went on to explain that their local Cactus and Succulent Society has a synchronized ‘Dead Plant’ ‘Plant of the Month’ every year to coincide with Halloween. Buck and Yvonne emphasized how much fun members have with this unusual, annual event!

In my last few days away, I was taken by Kelly Griffin on a tour of the Nevada Desert where I saw many interesting things; however in keeping with the current theme, I will only show you some dead cacti that for all intents and purposes I thought were healthy and happy in habitat. That is, until I got out of the vehicle and examined them closely!

Now I feel I can reveal to all that I have a considerable collection of plant skeletons or dried parts of dead plants eg. thorns and spine clusters. Most of these are from living plants I once grew. Is it then a collection of my failing to grow plants well; or rather a celebration of plants I once lived with? All of these items are a part of a museum-like display in a huge glass cabinet in our house of which I am very proud.

Kelly Griffin with Ferocactus cylindraceus in habitat, Nevada, USA. From our vehicle windows all these plants indicate a healthy population of juvenile and mature specimens of varying sizes. Closer examination revealed many dead plants. The above example, though dead, was splashed with drinking water to show how different and brightly coloured the spines typically appear after moisture from rain or fog.
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