



Continuing 'From my Mexican notebooks': my final excursion in 1969

Mexico City to Metztitlán

15-16 August 1969

Hernando Sánchez-Mejorada drove Dudley Gold and me the 90 km or so on the Mex 85 from Mexico City to Pachuca, through that city, and up the Mex105 into the mountains towards the historic mining town of Mineral (or Real) del Monte. About 9 km above the city, he stopped in the oak-juniper shrubland (2450 m) to show me *Mammillaria magnimamma*, *M. uncinata* and *Stenocactus phyllacanthus* [NCL 380.1] in grass between the shrubs and a form of *M. rhodantha* close to shrubs. Higher, I found a rosette-forming *Tradescantia* (*T. crassifolia* ssp. *acaulis*) and another form of *M. rhodantha*. Then, about 60 km further on, above the Barranca de Metztitlán, before the descent to Los Venados, we saw *M. polythele* ssp. *obconella* [NCL 428.1] and *M. longimamma* [NCL 400.6] close to a dense stand of *Stenocereus dumortieri*.

Hernando had decided to stop in the Barranca the way back as he wanted to show me *M. wiesingeri* above Metzquititlán and first a field of *M. magnimamma* in both cream [NCL 443.5] and



Hidalgo, above Metzquititlán, 15 Aug 1969; Hernando examining clumps of *M. magnimamma* in the pastizal.





Above (left), more variants of *M. magnimamma* in the previous locality, and (right) *M. wiesingeri* in its type locality, rooted between loose blocks of obsidian. Below, *Cephalocereus senilis*, threatened by road-building and erosion.





dark pink-flowered forms. Then we saw *M. wiesingeri* (ssp. *wiesingeri*) among fallen leaves and fragments of obsidian in pine-oak forest at about 2000 m (see previous page).

On the way back to the barranca we stopped several times to collect another *Tradescantia* for my research and to photograph *M. polythele* [ssp. *polythele*] in flower and fruit, a nice lump of *Coryphantha erecta* (above), then a short-spined form of *M. geminispina* [NCL 438.1], and to bewail the damage caused by roadworks and erosion to the fine stand of the old man cactus *Cephalocereus senilis* there.

Down in the barranca we paid our respects to a real old gent (*right*) who may have been there when the likes of Thomas Coulter, Ehrenberg and Karwinski passed that way, and we complimented the local horticultural avifauna on conserving *M. sempervivi* and *M. crinita* ssp. *wildii* on trees well above the river close by. Then on to Metztitlan and the classic rocky slope just before Metztitlan for *Astrophytum ornatum* [NCL 339.5], long-spined *M. geminispina* [NCL 438.2], *Ferocactus glaucescens* and *Turbincarpus horripilus* (*T. goldii*) (next page).



M. sempervivi, and *M. crinita* ssp. *wildii* enjoying the high life as arboreal epiphytes above the Río Metztitlán.



Ferocactus glaucescens surrounded by *M. geminispina* and *Selaginella lepidophylla*, with *Turbinicarpus horripilus* (top left and lower right)

So, after my initiation to the delights of yet a third in a week of the areas in Mexico famous for cacti, we returned to Hernando's country home at Velasco, north of Mineral del Monte, near the old mine workings, to spend the night.

16 August 1969

Before returning to Mexico City, we made a side-trip along the old road that leads off the main road from Pachuca above Mineral del Monte at 2600–2700 m towards Mineral del Chico, taking us into towering conifer forest dominated by *Abies religiosa*, the endemic equivalent of the European 'Silver Fir' forests of *A. alba* and allied species. Not a place where one might expect to see a *Mammillaria* but there is one, on mossy rocks in sunlit openings in the forest. At first I took it for another form of *M. rhodantha* but the depressed habit and flower-structure convinced me it must be *M. discolor*, later confirmed by observations in another part of the sierra.

