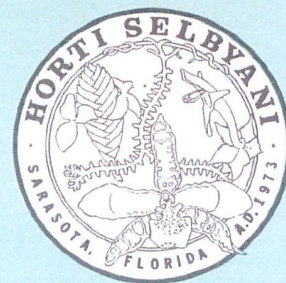


Bulletin

The Marie Selby Botanical Gardens



VOLUME 6, NO. 2

June, 1979

WE WONDER AS WE WANDER

Kiat Tan

Oro Negro — Black Gold of the Oriente — has triggered an oil boom in Ecuador that even reached our ears in Sarasota. Flying over the Amazonian forests of eastern Ecuador, a member of the U.S. Department of the Interior noted that a new road was being cut for oil exploration through virgin forests which form the watershed for the Amazon River. The suggestion that Selby Gardens might be interested in the plants on the felled trees was all it took. Rising like pellet-fed trout to chum, we immediately made plans to mount a small botanical expedition to Ecuador. The call of the wild is impelling to some of us who normally labour behind a desk, and the prospect of treading where no one else has ever trodden before is especially tempting. A quick letter to the chairman of the board of Texaco elicited a quicker response — yes, they would be happy to allow us the use of their roads and we could even avail ourselves of their camp facilities provided we were self-sufficient with provisions,

medical supplies, field gear and intestinal fortitude.

To maximize our mobility, we restricted our number to three, the number that the cab of a Chevy Luv pickup truck could cosily accommodate. It is high adventure indeed to head out for the Amazon basin of Ecuador even in these modern times. Our group lacked much past experience in dealing with the travails of the equatorial forests, but we blithely sallied forth confident in our abilities to cope with whatever situations might crop up, shy of death and Latin bureaucracy. We also made up for our inexperience with complementing skills and dispositions.

Libby Besse, staff member in charge of plant accessions at Selby Gardens and a real palm nut (*Palmaephile*), is the organizer in the group. Having recently returned from an arduous trip with three other botanists into a different part of Ecuador, she drew upon that experience for planning our trip

Continued

The end of the road: Libby Besse and Joe Halton botanizing along a brand new road cut into the Amazon basin.



and compiling a desiderata of equipment, supplies and attitudes.

Joe Halton is involved in the establishment of the Bromeliad Identification Center at Selby Gardens. Aside from being the most knowledgeable of the three about the Bromeliaceae, Joe is also the only one fluent in Spanish, and therefore indispensable as translator and mouthpiece. With the smoothest disposition of the three, Joe also served as good will ambassador of the group. I went along masquerading as botanist, and camera man.

We flew out of Miami loaded with equipment for the preparation of dried specimens, camping supplies and enough peanut butter to hide Jimmy Carter's smile. Heading into Quito in one of Ecuadoriana's gaudily decorated planes, we landed in an amphitheatre of a city nestled in an Andean valley some nine thousand feet above the sea. This ancient capital of Ecuador is literally climbing the walls as suburban growth sprawls up the Andean slopes. The climate is reminiscent of San Francisco, and the city is a unique blend of Spanish colonialism, indigenous Indian heritage and western imperialism. We chose to stay in the new section of the city in what the guide books list as second-class hotels. These are eminently satisfactory accommodations that were the former gracious homes of old families who have moved on out to more sumptuous mansions. Reasonable rates, running water and clean rooms were all we needed while we were in the city to complete our supply list and to obtain the necessary plant collecting permits. The well-stocked shops of Quito would have adequately provided us with nearly everything we needed in the way of equipment and supplies had we started out with nothing but time and money. The local supermarket even tempted us with bottles of Chilean wine — strictly for medicinal purposes of course. All our shopping and banking needs were met within walking distance of the *Residencial Lutecia* where we were fairly comfortably ensconced. Dealings with local bureaucracy brought us abruptly against the harsh realities of officialdom, namely red-tape, ignorance, incompetence, sloth, arrogance, animosity and other equally familiar human foibles. On top of that, we had to cope with the unfamiliar siesta-oriented office hours.

Frustrated by the "maybe tomorrow" syndrome and chomping at the bit to get away from town to do some botanizing, we rented an Isuzu pickup truck that well suited our needs. It was our single most expensive item in our budget aside from the airline tickets, but it was essential to the aims of the expedition to visit and collect from as many varied localities as we could efficiently fit within a one-month schedule. In retrospect, the exorbitant rental cost seemed appropriate because of the wear and tear we subjected that game little vehicle to.

Our trek into the Oriente (Western Ecuador) had an inauspicious beginning. Taking a detour into the old city to buy old newspapers for drying specimens as well as kerosene for our lantern, we became hopelessly lost among the narrow, crowded, cobbled streets that were all one way the wrong way. Three hours later, we were finally on the right road out of town. With each kilometer away from the city, we sloughed off a layer of frustration and aggravation encountered in town. We regained our sense of adventure, and became enraptured by the grandeur of the mountain scenery unfolding before us and by the exciting and unfamiliar plants that caus-

ed us to make sudden screeching stops that greatly endangered life and limb and time schedules. It took a lot of discipline at first not to stop at every patch that caught any of our six eyes (10 if you count glasses). Gradually, we grew more blasé, passing over passifloras in day-glo colors, bromeliads with flaming red bloom spikes, purple sobralias and scarlet epidendrums.

By chance rather than planning, we were in Ecuador during a drought. Recompense for the dust and heat at lower elevations is the absence of problems attendant with traveling in an equatorial downpour on mountain roads. Moreover, we did not feel the heat at our first stop out of Quito. This was the town of Baeza nestled among cleared pastureland. We stumbled into the only hotel in town, and obtained a three-bed room which looked out onto a covered carport ideal for setting up plant presses and processing running water. The mountain water was so cold, however, that any singing in the shower would have been soprano. The surrounding area looked very promising for collecting epiphytes, and we made a mental note to tarry at Baeza on our return from the Amazon basin.

The following morning, we set out for Lago Agrio, the main base of operations of Texaco in the Ecuadorian interior. The drive from Baeza to Lago Agrio was downhill in more ways than one. As the elevation dropped, the heat increased, and the dust never ceased swirling. Encountering a lumber truck loaded with plunder coming the other way on a dirt road barely wide enough for one vehicle can be unnerving. The possibility of becoming part of the spectacular scenery was real and really unappealing. Several kilometers from Lago Agrio, we ran into two roadblocks. The first was manned by a soldier we immediately dubbed Senor Sleazo, who finally permitted us to go. The second checkpoint was a military camp where we only had to endure some macho posturings. Trundling into the big bad city of Lago Agrio, we felt as if we had stumbled into a Universal Studio set for a California gold-rush town. The main drag was lined with businesses catering to the needs of the employees of the oil camp. We were only too glad to drive into the fenced compound of the camp where we were grateful for hot showers and a canteen serving excellent cafeteria food.

Anxious as we were to get as far into the interior as possible, we had collected very sparingly on the way. The next leg of the journey would take us to the very end of the new road being cut into the Amazon basin. We set off bright and early, crossing two tributaries of the Amazon by ferry, and headed for Puerto Francisco de Orellana — commonly known as Coca. The few natives we encountered along the way covered their faces as we drove by to avoid asphyxiation from the clouds of dust we stirred up. The construction of these tropical roads is very interesting. Bull dozers cut a swath through the vegetation. Tree trunks are layed across the cut, and the lianes from the surrounding trees are cut and stretched over the trunks. Then, load after load of river rock is poured over the trunks and leveled. The next step would be to pour crude oil over the surface to keep the dust down, but the road we were on had not reached that stage of construction yet.

We kept eager eyes on the vegetation on either side of the road. Unfortunately, as soon as a road is being cut into a new area, colonists move in immediately and practice a shifting agriculture based on cut-and-burn. They tended to leave

Continued

palms alone, so Libby was in her element. For awhile, I was concerned that she would succumb and make a collection of the striking *Mauritia* palm that started appearing in the wetter areas. One leaf alone would have adequately filled our trunk-bed!

The pipeline by the road kept us company, but south of Coca, we noticed that there was no longer one big pipe, but several narrow ones leading from wells. We were now traveling over the Auca oil fields. The road looked and felt rawer, and by the time the number of pipes had dwindled down to just one narrow length, we knew we were approaching the end of the road. Only we did not realize just how abruptly the road ended. A trestle bridge over which we were to drive had suffered from the previous rainy period. The tiny stream gurgling peacefully under the bridge belied the violent signs of erosion it had wrought when it brought the tree trunks that were strewn on either bank and against the bridge supports. The flood waters had risen some 15 feet or more to wash away the banks connecting the bridge to the road.

A free-standing bridge in the middle of a river is not of much use except as a place to have a picnic — which was what we did after setting up camp. Camp was an ideal spot at the edge of a clearing by the river. Trees were available for Libby and Joe to set up their hammocks, and I had enough cleared space to pitch my tent. The plant dryer was up in a matter of minutes, and we assembled our supplies to see what culinary feats we could achieve with rice, lentils, tuna, chocolate and peanut butter. Honey and saltines fortified us, and we set up a plan of action. Systematically collecting everything in flower in the immediate vicinity of the camp, we were able to accumulate a representative sampling of the shrubby and herbaceous flora of the area. Plants were not flowering in profusion because of the dry conditions, but everything in flower that we found delighted us. Most of the species were completely new to us, and the intriguing possibility of finding species new to science was always at the back of our minds. There were many surprises. White and pink veined fittonias that one is accustomed to seeing in supermarket plant racks grow in shady patches along the river. Orchids were markedly scarce in this area. Joe found several species of bromeliads in bloom, while Libby was pleasantly surprised by the number and variety of palms.

Walking down the road beyond the bridge, we found that it ended in a clearing where the next well was to be drilled. No colonists had moved in as yet, and when we went into the shade of the trees, we found a wealth of ferns and tender herbs in the wetter spots. The upper story is so dense, however, that not much light trickles through the branches and leaves. Consequently, walking was easy because of the lack of undergrowth. Animal life was unobtrusively evident — a tapir track here, a snake skin there, a rustle and a crashing among shrubbery in the distance. Bird songs ranging from the plaintive to melodious to downright piercing indicated an abundance of avian fauna. The colorful toucans were my favorites.

Trees felled during construction of the road formed fertile hunting grounds for epiphytes. Although the drought had left most of the plants in sad shape, I was able to retrieve a fair number of orchids, primarily maxillarias, epidendrums, sobralias and pleurothallids. This, to my mind, is in keeping with the intents and purposes of species conservation, and it seems all the more absurd that the restrictions for bringing



Spectacular crimson blooms of *Huntleya wallisii* collected from a fallen tree in Ecuador.

such plants into the U.S. have been stultifying.

Each succeeding day increased the efficiency of our operations. The dry weather greatly aided our efforts to make herbarium specimens, and Joe started a holding garden by the stream for our live collections. The wet sand kept some of the tenderer plant material alive till we were ready to move on. We learned to deal with the 104° heat of the afternoons by finding favorite spots in the stream. This served the double purpose of keeping us cool and the bugs off our bodies.

When we finally felt we should head on, we were loathe to leave. Our final dinner at Auca was as enjoyable an occasion as I have ever had. The moon rose bright and full. Above the murmur of the stream, the frog chorus was in fine form. Sporadic songs from the night birds punctuated the Amazonian muzak as we savored our peanut butter sauce over rice, our chocolates, freeze-dried strawberries and stream-cooled Chilean wine. Such balm to the urban-bruised spirit can never be equaled by the offerings of est, hot tubs, primal screaming, cults or unlimited trips to psychiatrists' couches. We can only hope that areas of virgin forest will be set aside by the Ecuadorean government and protected from the onslaughts of civilization.

From Field Collection

Libby Besse



While Libby Besse carefully trims and folds a newly collected specimen, Dr. Kiat Tan records pertinent field data.



Libby and Joe Halton stack specimens between sheets of blotter paper and corrugated cardboard.



Kiat and Joe tighten the straps around a bundle of specimens ready for the dryer.

If you imagine a botanical expedition, do you think of plucking showy orchids or colorful bromeliads from the trees and bearing them home proudly for splendid display in the Selby greenhouses? That only happens rarely. Instead, our treasures, the bulk of our efforts, are the brown, flattened and dried specimens that will become part of the herbarium; these are the foundation of a taxonomist's work. For not only must a properly named species be published with its Latin description in an accredited journal, but it also must be backed by a voucher specimen in the herbarium of a recognized institution. Forevermore that particular dried plant is the designated type for a particular species.

Days in the field fall quickly into a pattern: up at dawn, a brief breakfast and soon off through the forest in search of plants. There is much looking upward into treetops; for Selby Botanical Gardens specializes in epiphytic plants- the orchids, bromeliads, aroids and ferns which are found on branches often frustratingly out of reach. If the area is remote and hence seldom studied, a much broader flora is collected (almost everything that is in flower or fruit) and our extras will be sent in trade to other botanical institutions.

Before leaving for Ecuador in January, Kiat Tan, Joe Halton and I carefully selected our botanical equipment. From Sarasota we brought an Aladdin stove for drying the plant species (which we also used for cooking and drying clothes), a collapsible aluminum frame for holding the plant presses, and stacks of blotters and corrugated cardboard. In Quito we added more supplies: a huge pile of newspapers, yards of plastic tubing for rain and dust protection, and several gallons of kerosene. Packing and transporting this bulky gear consumes considerable energy, but every item is necessary for processing plants in the field.

Our collecting limits are dictated by our own efforts: How far can we walk carrying a heavy pack of plants? How much time will we need to prepare and dry them? Back in camp there are still several hours of steady work before darkness.

First we empty our bags, intrigued by each others discoveries, hoping we have several samples of like plants so that we can make duplicate specimens. Working as a team we carefully arrange each plant with its flower or fruit on a folded half sheet of numbered newspaper. At the same time we record in a notebook such information that will not be evident later from the dried specimen: color, size and texture, growing conditions, date and geographic location.

Each newspaper is sandwiched between blotters and corrugated cardboard, compiling a stack several feet high which is firmly strapped between wooden presses. Finally these bundles are turned on their sides and placed on the skirted aluminum frame with the Aladdin stove beneath. As the heat rises, moisture from the plants is absorbed by the newspapers and blotters and carried off through the open ducts of the cardboard. Small plants will dry overnight, larger ones may take several days. One must constantly check the stove, tighten the straps, (the pressure insures that the leaves and flowers remain flat, and flexible rather than crinkly and fragile), and

To The Herbarium



Canvas skirt around the aluminum drying frame keeps heat from escaping except through stack of specimens. Note Aladdin stove beneath.

periodically take the presses apart to remove the dried plants. The finished specimens still in their newspapers are carefully bundled between cardboard, wrapped in several layers of plastic to insure dryness, and eventually boxed for the long trip home.

Still our tasks are not done. After the excitement of returning home there is the urgency of tending to our live collections and the fun of catching up with friends and mail. But in the next busy weeks we must return to the dried plants, sort them, establish a tentative identification, and type labels using the information from our field notes. With this work completed, the specimens are passed to the mounting department where each dried plant is carefully, often artistically, glued to a heavy sheet of good quality paper. They receive a Selby Gardens identification number and finally are filed in our herbarium according to family and genus.

It is desirable to obtain duplicate plant samples, for it is expected on a field expedition to leave behind a set of specimens in a herbarium of the country where they are collected. If a third plant is available, it will go to a specialist on that plant group of another institution, a botanist who will be delighted to add to his own collection and it is understood that he will provide species determination for our own herbarium. If there is yet more material, most likely it will be sent to a large herbarium to increase an already sizeable collection; in the case of these tropical specimens, they may go to the botanical gardens of New York or Missouri, or to the Smithsonian, or perhaps to England's Kew Gardens, or to Denmark or Sweden. It is a trading situation and eventually Selby Gardens will receive a return donation from the other gardens' field work.

Selby Gardens is a relatively young garden, and considering its age, the 25,000 accessioned specimens are an impressive

number. Dr. Michael Madison serves as curator and, together with the other botanists, Selby Gardens has built an internationally recognized collection of tropical epiphytes — especially aroids, bromeliads, gesneriads and orchids.

If you were to browse through the herbarium, perhaps a bit overwhelmed by the smell of mothballs, you might notice the incomplete identification on many of the labels; it may be years before some of the plants are studied and their names accurately determined. Occasionally a new species will be discovered, perhaps by a taxonomist who has borrowed a specimen from us; but if it is new, our specimen will reside in our herbarium in a special red-bordered folder indicating it is a "type" specimen forever the standard of reference for that particular species.

Obviously it is the desire of the botanical scholar to have ever larger and larger collections because these dried plants are the chief references of their studies. The collections begin with the enjoyable but hard field work. There never will be too many specimens.



Straps are periodically tightened as plants dry. The entire drying process may take days.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Joe Halton



Swarms of gnats made Kiat retreat to the protection of his nylon collecting bag in the Amazon.



Fifteen extra pounds of mud stuck to Libby's boot made just trying to walk a chore.



Surprise! A snake is the last thing you expect to find hibernating in a bromeliad cup.

An important aspect of any botanically oriented trip is to make use of your time as economically as possible, to minimize time consuming activities and to get down to the work you have come so far to do. That sounds relatively easy and, indeed, things often run smoothly. However, if there is one lesson that the three of us learned very early on this trip, it was to always expect the unexpected. While the general purpose of our trip was to collect dried specimens for the Selby Gardens herbarium, we each had our own special interests. Libby, with an enthusiasm for palms, wanted to botanize the Amazonian oil fields she had seen from the air on an earlier trip. Kiat, in addition to finding out firsthand what was involved in bringing orchids into the United States, also wanted to see more of Ecuador. My own interests included seeing as many bromeliads as possible, and practicing my Spanish.

Once you have equipped yourselves, and have mapped out a basic route, there are few clear-cut rules for a trip such as ours, and you must always be thinking in terms of alternatives. Schedules, timetables and plans are provisional at best, and are constantly being reworked and revised depending on what is available, advisable and accessible within your time limit.

The three-day drive from Quito to our Amazonian oil field campsite was a good initiation. There is only one road, heavily traveled by huge oil company vehicles as well as all the earth moving equipment necessary for maintaining the roads, bridges, and ferries which service the pipeline. The combination of all this machinery and a very late rainy season raised clouds of dust on the clay and gravel road that choked and blinded us, making the mountain road even more perilous, and often slowing our pace to a crawl.

Camping and collecting in the Amazon was a highpoint for all of us. The excitement of going as far as the road could take us was animating, but so were the bugs. Thankfully, the bugs left us alone after sunset, but during the day when we had so much work to do, they were everywhere. We were forced to cover our heads with nylon collecting bags while processing the plants we had gathered and later were driven to the protection of a nearby stream where we ate our lunch submerged up to our necks in the water.

On the dry Pacific coast after backpacking down an old cattle path for the better part of a morning, we experienced the first rain in the area in two months. It was a blistering day and we welcomed the rain (we were grateful for it) until we tried to retrace our steps to the main road. The dry clay we had been walking on was now wet, and with every step more of it stuck to our boots making them seem like lead weights and slowing us down again.

These incidents are minor but time-consuming. My point is that time in the field, actual collecting time, is precious. You work hard to prepare and supply yourself for it, and you work hard getting there. To be able to accomplish what you have come to do, you must be prepared to expect the unexpected.

WILLIAM C. COLEMAN

Carlyle A. Luer, M.D.

Just as our last bulletin was about to go to press, we were greatly saddened to learn of the loss of Bill Coleman, the dynamic personality who, as president of the Palmer Bank, was responsible for the decision in 1972 that permitted the creation of the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens.

A great-great-grandson of the Rev. John Bachman, a contemporary naturalist and friend of John James Audubon, William Chisolm Coleman was born in Charleston, South Carolina on 5 August 1920. Bill seemed to have inherited a love for natural history. He received his bachelor's degree in English literature from the University of the South in 1942 and, as happened to many at that time and stage of life, his education was interrupted to serve in our country's armed forces. Bill served in the Navy on a submarine that patrolled the South Pacific. He had always had a desire to see New Guinea, but the closest he came was a tantalizing glimpse of the shoreline through the periscope. He attained the rank of lieutenant commander and was awarded the Bronze Star for his performances. After the war, he returned to earn his master's degree in banking from the Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration in 1947.

Katharine (Kit) Donald became his bride on 2 December 1942, and this happy marriage produced six healthy children: William Jr., Gordon, Felicia, Peter, Katherine and Louise. so far, there are four grandchildren.

During the years he was gaining banking experience in Charleston, Bill also followed his love of natural history, highlighted by three big-game safaris to Africa. He returned home with trophies from the first trip, but on his subsequent trips he took binoculars and cameras. Besides Kit, he was accompanied by his longtime friend John Henry Dick, internationally known ornithologist.

In 1964, Bill accepted a position with the Palmer First National Bank and Trust Company of Sarasota, and in 1966, he became president and chairman of the board. During his 10-year career in Sarasota, he served on the board of directors of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, and the Asolo State Theatre. He also served as president of the Sarasota County Chamber of Commerce, and the local chapter of the American Cancer Society.

Because of our mutual interest in conservation and natural history, Bill and I became good friends, our families participating in field trips to the Florida swamps and later twice to South America.

Marie Selby's will became known in 1972, one year after her death. The authority was provided to create a botanical garden, or, if the concept were deemed inadvisable, to return her holdings to the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation which had already been in existence since Bill Selby's death in 1956. After consultation with other botanical gardens and the University of Florida, Bill Coleman made his momentous decision to proceed with The Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. In January 1973, Bill, Kit, their youngest daughter Louise, Jane (my wife) and I set out for Ecuador to lure Cal Dodson, who was there on a sabbatical year from the University of Miami, to come to Sarasota to become the director of the



William C. Coleman

unborn garden. Bill, of course, became the first chairman of the board of the Gardens.

Following what was thought to be a mild heart attack soon after our return from Ecuador, Bill's health slowly began to deteriorate, and by mid-summer he was critically ill. Finally he was transferred to the cardiac surgical unit of the Duke University Hospital where he underwent an operation for the removal of an extensive constrictive pericarditis. The cause of the problem was never identified, but it probably was related to an auto-immune disease associated with a troublesome arthritis which was to plague him during his last years.

Bill's recovery after surgery was gradual during the following year. In the interim the economic recession caused so many problems at the Palmer Bank that the bank was finally merged with the Southeast Banks. In 1975, Bill and his family returned to Charleston where he regained vigorous health and enjoyed directing the Gibbes Art Gallery through an extensive building and revitalization program. He proudly watched Selby Gardens grow and prosper, his last look taking place one night last December when he came to Sarasota for a short visit. We talked about future plans for the Gardens, and about future trips to Ecuador and New Guinea. He felt well until Monday morning, 26 March 1979, when his life came to a sudden and unexpected end. We all miss you, Bill.

Reception To Honor Author, Illustrator

A brand new book, "Orchid Genera Illustrated," will make its debut at a reception at Selby Gardens July 24 with author Thomas Sheehan and illustrator (and wife), Marion Sheehan, on hand to autograph copies. The Sheehans are ornamental horticulturists at the University of Florida.

The reception will take place in the Green Bamboo Pavilion at 4 p.m. Members are cordially invited to attend.



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WILLIAM C. COLEMAN
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science building.