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Our June News Letter consists of one article only - a letter from our one-time secretary, Mrs. Molesworth-Allen. But this letter was of such interest that I felt that members would not wish it unduly curtailed, therefore I have merely deleted some general sections that contain no specific botanical reference.

A JOURNEY IN AFRICA

Have you read Spencer Chapman's "Lightest Africa"? It was from this book that we planned our trip in Africa, or safari as I should call it. We more or less followed his route, for he was interested in natural history, so the places he visited would most likely be of interest to us too. We drove from Capetown up the east coast by what is known as the "Garden Route" to Durban; through the Rhodesias and into East Africa at Tanganyika, through Kenya and finally to Uganda almost to the Sudan border. This took us four months and we did a total of 42 thousand miles. We enjoyed ourselves thoroughly for Africa is truly a remarkable, if sometimes frightening, country, yet we realise how little we really saw of this vast and diverse land.

Capetown is a beautiful city, the main street is wide and gay garden flowers had just been planted down the centre. The air was clear and the sky was cloudless but it was cold. All the gardens were filled with cultivated spring flowers, looking most lovely. Hyacinths and Flowering Peach were intermixed with semi-tropical ones. There was something odd about them - something that should not be there I felt, and then I realised that spring, summer and autumn flowers as we know them, were all out together. Capetownians are clever in arranging vases, very Constance Spry, and one sees

delightful arrangements in all the banks and most offices.

I was disappointed to see so few, if any, native flowers in suburban gardens. This of course is the case in most countries, but South Africa has so much more to offer than most countries. It is true that one may not pick wild flowers any more, but that is recent, and I know that one could buy seeds of the native flowers. Many I saw later in their wild state, I had already seen growing in our own garden for my mother used to buy seeds from the Cape.

Apparently the best time to see the wild flowers is during August and September so we were very fortunate, although we did miss most of the Proteas, which appear to flower earlier or in the late summer. Neither did we see the famous red Dise orchid.

I was surprised to find that Acacias play an important part in beautifying the landscape, especially in spring. Although there are African species, many Australian strains have been brought in and are now naturalised; others (such as A. podylarifolia) are popular in gardens. When we were taken for our first drive we followed for miles in amongst small bushes of a bright yellow acacia. They bordered the roads and were in the startling white sand near the beaches, and with the deep blue of the sea made really a striking picture. This acacia (one was dominant) was called "Port Jackson"; I suppose that is where in Australia it came from. Outside the town, tall Eucalyptus trees shaded the roads, in fact they too were everywhere, apparently many kinds. Flowering gums are very popular too, but few were in bloom but from the fruits which literally covered the trees, one gathered that in flower these must be spectacular. In fact all through Africa we were continually amazed to find so many Eucalypts and Acacias. Even on a mountain in Uganda at nearly 10,000 feet, I saw what looked suspiciously like black wattle, and was later informed by botanists that it probably was!

Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens were most beautiful and interesting and are as lovely as Kew in the same wild way, although not comparable, for the flowers are so different. So much has been left in its natural state, the gardens being situated on the slopes of Table Mountain itself, only a few miles out of Capetown. There was a background of Stone pines (Pinus pinea) which are practically native now, and regenerate themselves freely. Then of course Port Jackson was lightening up the corners. Podylaria calypttrata and Virgilea capensis, two native trees with lilac flowers were everywhere. The latter is an enderic species, and looks like a large Podylaria. I do not know whether it is now in cultivation in N.Z. but it would certainly be worth while introducing. It was one of the most graceful of the flowering trees that I saw.

Of course, the heaths were out of this world. There seems to be hundreds of different kinds, some extremely beautiful. Many are very common on the slopes of the mountain growing in wild profusion with flowers in pink, red and white. I saw Erica baccans there.

Streams run down from the mountainside through the gardens, and at one of these I saw Blechnum procerum looking quite different (it is probably capense!) from the N.Z. species. Below this were beds of native flowers, such as Watsonias and quite unbelievable Mesembryanthemums, which of course are everywhere. Above these beds, on sloping ground, was the vast Protea shrubbery. When in flower these must be a remarkable sight, but of the spectacular ones we only saw the Sugarbush, P. mellifera. I was especially anxious to see the famous Cycad shrubbery, which I had so often heard about in my student days. It was near the Proteas and I was greatly disappointed. There were very few genera and only one or two named. These were usually Encephalartos which is easy enough to identify, being so distinct.

I met Dr. Schelpe who is in charge of the department of botany in the University of Capetown. He is young, enthusiastic and the leading authority on ferns. He was extremely kind and showed me my first South African ferns. For these, we went up the steep slopes of Table Mountain from Kirstenbosch Gardens to a place called Skeleton Gorge. Here I saw Hymenophyllum tunbridgense growing on a rock against the streamside; Histiopteris incisa, which seems to turn up everywhere I go; Hypolepis sparsisora, not unlike H. tenuifolia; large Todea barbara looking very beautiful. Several Blechna grew around this area, but were most difficult to put into species for the range of leafshape varied enormously within a species, or else several different ones, looked practically the same to me. There was a very common fern here, an old friend, Adiantum aethiopicum.

In another place more exposed, I saw Pellaea (several species), Cheilanthes. and interesting genera such as Cetrach and Mohria.

Almost as soon as we arrived, we were whisked to an outing with the very live Cape Bird Club. This was to the previously mentioned mountains, the Hottentot Hollands. It was a bitter day and we needed the energy that the cold weather gave us, to climb up towards what I took to be a dreary grassy slope, but to my surprise, when we arrived this was carpeted with low-growing and very gay flowers. Bright blue Lobelia, Drosera cistiflora with large white flowers, D. trinerva with pink flowers. The common Nemesia versicolor which varied from dusky pink to powder blue, and several pretty Pelargonium species. There were still a few spikes left of the yellow Lachenalia, but this is one of the first out, likewise with the flowers of Protea grandiflora, which is yellow but the shrub is often dwarfed up on these slopes. In the fern line, I saw a Polystichum which resembled P. vestitum; Schizaea pectinata and Pteridium which was just coming up, looking like the British bracken. In sheltered places there were Podocarpus latifolius which also grows on Table Mountain but most of the trees were quite unfamiliar.

.... Flowers were coming out all around us, and in the gardens of the suburbs I saw many pink and red Manuka doing very well; Cordyline australis was quite common and so were some of the Pittosporum species. One of the commonest was Tarata (P. eugenioides)

which was used a great deal for shade and was growing wild in small open places in the suburb of Newlands, on the slopes of the mountain. P. crassifolium is becoming popular for hedges. I was astounded at the quantity of Australian plants which were under cultivation, but as I said before, it was rare to find any of their own lovely flowers in private gardens.

We took a week off to lotus-eat amongst the wildflowers at a little Boer stronghold called Darling, about 40 miles from Capetown. Here, even on the middle of less-used roads, flowers of all colours were growing. It seemed wicked to motor over them. Fields were literally vast coloured patches, it just has to be seen to be believed. The little Moraea iris and bright Gladiolus were here and mixed with Sparaxias, Ixias, Gazania, different kinds of purple-flowered Babiana, Drosera with scarlet flowers $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches across. Haemanthus and related genera with the scarlet heads, were not uncommon, and of course the ever present and multi-coloured Mesembryanthemums. One could go on forever. The sand dunes were gay with all kinds of daisies, yellow and orange, the china-blue Felicia, and countless Cineraria. There were yellow and blue lupins and my husband photographed his first cape bird at its nest suspended in a blue Psoralea.

So it was the end of September when we drove out of Capetown on the smooth tar roads with the car loaded down until the springs were quite flat. We made our first stop at Caledon, famous in the wildflower season to see yet more flowers. We felt we could never see too many. Here the reserve is prettily situated on the slopes of a hill and as many representatives as possible of one family are grown together. The sight is an amazing one. A fine collection of Aloes fascinated me but I was inclined to be blasé about them by the time I had finished out trip.

From here we decided to go down to the coast and spend the night at a village on the way. In 1815 my great grandparents were drowned in a troopship from India which was wrecked on this wild and still uninhabited coast. Some kind person had erected a monument to them there and I felt I must make the pilgrimage to see it. We then discovered that we were not far from the most southerly point in Africa.

After this (a visit to Oudtshoorn. Ed.) we returned to the main road by another route and the scenery was as magnificent as the road was awful. We had to climb higher, but luckily the pass was tarred and so we went down the Outeniqua Mountains smoothly and quickly. Here under some pines were stands of Gleichenia microphylla, probably a variety, a small Cyathea, and several species of Blechnum.

On the main road again, which are called National roads, we soon came to natural rain forest which looked most exciting. So when we came to a reserve called The Garden of Eden we had to go in to it. The ferns were so exciting that I didn't look for snakes!

There were Marattia, Blechnum procerum, and a Polypod, not unlike Microsorium diversifolium. There were two species of Cyathea and a Lycopodium, and several ferns related to Malayan species. I could not recognise any of the trees, they all looked so different. We drove through patches of this kind of forest, until we came to a little country house called Heidehof, which was recommended in an A.A. list. The house was nestling amongst shrubs which certainly looked like heather, and we fell in love with it immediately. Our chalet was a little rondavel away from the rest of the buildings amongst a pretty garden. The furniture in the rondavel was exquisitely painted with pictures of the colourful birds of this area. This was done by our host's wife, who also produced excellent food, so no wonder that we stayed longer than we intended, for this was by far the most delightful place we stayed at during our trip in Africa. The garden was full of flowers, Greyia sutherlandii and other species (both of which I had forgotten to mention were common in Capetown) made scarlet splashes among Delphiniums and Larkspurs and Clematis. The "heather" turned out to be Brunia which belongs to the South African family of that name, and was new to me. Plumbago was growing wild, and this was the only place I saw the lovely green Ixia with the black centre which is cultivated in N.Z. It is now rare in South Africa. We were surrounded by tall forest and in this by stream-sides I saw Hemitelia capensis, some Cyclosorus species and other ferns such as Todea barbara which I had already seen. After three days we could only push ourselves on by looking at the map and seeing the vast distance we still had to go. To our horror we found that we were not yet north of Capetown, and this did jolt us on.

We arrived in Grahamstown in pouring rain and stayed with the Spencer Chapmans who gave us an enormous amount of help and advice, but later we found the roads had improved a great deal since his book was written. This town was a nice English-looking place famous for its public school, St. Andrew's.

....The road followed the coast to Durban. Unfortunately we could not see the coastal vegetation for the rain continued without abatement. Durban is a large modern city with a definite tropical atmosphere. There were scarlet flowered Coral Trees (Erythrina spp.) or Kaffirboom as it is called in South Africa, and Melia azedarach which was completely covered with lilac flowers. Gardens seemed full of colourful semi-tropical flowers, and there were some fine large Cycads (un-named) in the Botanic Gardens on Berea hill, which overlooks the city.

....The countryside now changed; it was rugged, rocky and grassy with few trees. There were a few low growing flowers and a shrub with flowers very like those of Colensoa, but everywhere Fairy Bells grew. They seemed to prefer the dry, arid places, (yet they appear to be happy in inclement Auckland).

Here the sky was cloudless so when we found ourselves on the border of Basutoland, we suddenly decided to spend a couple of days there. It is a British Protectorate, a little enclave within the Union of South Africa.

.... Pretoria, the administrative capital of the Union, is only 35 miles from J'burg through flat farmland. Pretoria has some fine buildings in red granite (in one of which Winston Churchill was imprisoned during his war correspondence days in the Boer War.) The city is laid out with many parks, public gardens and wide streets which are lined with Jacaranda trees. These were only in bud, but are a famous sight when fully out. From the buds the colours showed they would be all shades from pale to dark lilac.

We still seemed to be making little headway on our trip and still saw little of the wild Africa we had imagined. Hotels were still comfortable although beer was getting a little more expensive, and roads when not tarred were moderately good. Here in the Transvaal the land was poor, but cultivated, the settlers' homes were miserable and desolate looking, no gardens and few wild flowers were to be seen.

We very gradually lost height and at 4,000 feet arrived at Warmbaths, where as one would expect, there were hot springs. A typical small town of this sort, and here we were back in the tropics once more. It was hot and there were lovely trees. Silky Oak (Grevillea robusta) was mixed with Jacaranda, both fully out in flower, and against a deep blue sky made a wonderful showing. Vivid Bougainvillea plants were everywhere.

Gradually the country became wilder, the African hovels outside the towns were replaced by clusters of huts in their native style, and at last we saw true Savannah unspoiled by being made into modern farmland. It was all terribly dry and parched, everywhere were thorn trees of different kinds, and curious symmetrical trees which I afterwards found to belong to Araliaceae. Amongst them were most attractively shaped boulders. We sat on these to have our lunch, which I spilt all over myself when I did a ? graceful leap into the air as a beautiful bronze snake slid from under the rock I was on. In spite of the unbelievable dryness I found several species of Pellaea by the boulders and the remains of a Cheilanthes sp.

In the midst of this arid area we passed through a little village called Potgietersrus, which I mention because of all the lovely gardens I had seen, these were the most colourful. Jacaranda, Grevillea, a scarlet Brachychiton (the Australian Flame Tree) and a form with pink flowers, Pink Manuka, Hollyhocks, Snapdragons, yellow Gazanias all mixed with hundreds of Aloes in flower - from scarlet to pale yellow.

The countryside became more rugged and flat. Although there was no visible habitation of white settlers, we suddenly came to

a tiny hotel, with such attractive little rondavels, that we decided to stay the night. In the thorny scrub which abounded for miles, we saw many colourful birds, but most of the thorn trees were "wintering" so had no leaves. Prickly Pears were common and in flower, and a small Vitex had fruit. Combretum spp. were common and with the winged fruits were more easily spotted. There were several Albizzia species, but I could be sure of only one, as they had no leaves, but this one had old pods. There were no herbs, not even grass and ground between the thornscrub was bare and dusty. We were eventually driven back by millions of flies which were quite uninhibited. These were one of the unpleasant things about Africa.

I began to realise that African explorers must have had a special nature to endure this sort of country. Miles of flat or at the most undulating, land, which was arid and broken by small thorn trees, at this time of the year with no green colour anywhere, not to mention the heat, the awful dust (or ankle-deep mud if it rains) and miserable conditions. I was not impressed. Luckily I did not know that we had yet hundreds of miles more of similar country to go through.

Visibility decreased as the heat increased, and suddenly we came to a small hill over which the road ran. Near the top was a delightful hotel surrounded by lovely tall trees, mostly Ficus sp. - the tropical Fig trees and Bauhinia, or Butterfly Trees. Their garden seemed quite incredible; it spread down the hillside, as a mass of brilliant colour. There were Delphinium, Sweet Peas, Cannas, our pink and our common white Manuka, Wegelia, lovely Roses and Snapdragons. We sat on the verandah and looked at the shimmering heat below. An oasis such as this never failed to fascinate me and I found it hard to drag myself out into the treeless wastes beyond.

We dropped down the other side of the hill into more thornscrub and terrific heat (even to us). I was delighted to see a most lovely tree called the Wisteria Tree (Bolanthus, a legume). There were no leaves but just masses of Wisteria-like flowers, but without scent; it was a small tree and beautiful from any standard. Suddenly we arrived at Beit Bridge and the end of the Union of South Africa and drove into Southern Rhodesia over the great Limpopo River. To my disappointment it was neither green nor greasy for it was absolutely dry! Nor could I see any fever trees.