

Mexico, The Hidden Treasures of Coahuila

By Wendell S. Woody Minnich 2015

Mexico is thought by many to be the richest region in the world for cacti. For all those individuals who travel in search of rare and unusual cacti, their first choice is often Mexico. The Sierra Madre Oriental is considered the center of diversity for Mexican genera, ranging from *Ariocarpus* to *Aztekiums*, *Echinocereus*, *Ferocactus*, *Geohintonia*, *Gymnocactus*, *Mammillaria*, *Obregonia*, *Pelecephora*, *Thelocactus*, *Turbinicarpus* and many, many more. Because of the plethora of plants found in the states of Tamalipas, Nuevo Leon, San Luis Potosi and Hidalgo, most field workers have just decided to ignore the little explored Coahuila.

For most of us, Coahuila and its neighboring state of Chihuahua were often only used as drive-throughs on our way to the succulent rich south. In recent years, many of the serious plant explorers have started finding new back country roads in these two states. These new roads have graciously opened up some of the rarely explored areas to extremely remote regions, and some of these back country roads (trails) are not even found on the maps! Coahuila, as close as it is to the USA, actually has some of the least explored and most remote regions in all of Mexico.

On our trip through Coahuila, we drove for many hours without ever seeing other vehicles or back country people. There were no urban or agricultural developments as these wild places are still virtually untouched! The valleys and mountains of these expanses will surely offer many new species for the field worker willing to do some serious exploring. Near the roads, if you wish to call them roads, I saw only a few dried-up old ghost towns where apparently some tough old Mexicans, probably from the Poncho Villa era, once resided.

From the unknown territories of Coahuila, there have been numerous new cacti and other succulents discovered and rediscovered. The crown jewel of these new plants is the fantastic *Mammillaria luethyi*. It was lost for over 60 years since its original siting, growing in a rusted tin can on a dusty ranchito porch. All of us exploring Mexico had searched for this very special *Mammillaria*, until only a few years ago, Luethy found it in northern Coahuila. The Sierra del Carmen, which abuts the Rio Grand and the Big Bend National Park, has also been the origin of other new species. Close to this area, we discovered a new, very beautiful *Echinomastus*, or possibly *Gymnocactus*? Also from this region we found a very handsome red *Sedum*, as well as *Echinocereus longisetus*, and the northern most of the *Echeverias*, *Echeveria strictaflora*. In a remote dry lake bed, Laguna la Leche, we admired the amazingly cryptic *Escobaria abdita*. Wow, just some of the treasures of Coahuila!

This trip was also to be an adventure in seeing some of the brand new *Agaves*, *Echeverias*, *Astrophytums*, *Echinocereus* and *Mammillarias*. We scored on almost everything we went to see, and never, in the 45 years that I have traveled Mexico, have I seen it so green. This talk will also feature many cacti and other succulents that have never been seen in books or presentations. Come explore Mexico with me!