

Xerophytica 2014 - Plants for our Future | Post-Congress Tours

POST-CONGRESS TOUR 1: EWANRIGG BOTANIC GARDENS

Sunday morning, after the Closing Dinner of Xerophytica 2014, we headed out early to Ewanrigg Gardens, to setup piping hot teas, coffees, gingerbread and rusks. An abundant bar with softdrinks and perfectly chilled alcoholic beverages, was expertly assembled by Rob Jarvis, for those in full post-congress mode. Our zone was set up in front of structured lines of *Aloe aculeata*, with their greyish to vivid green leaves and dark brown prickles scattered over both surfaces and arising from pale rounded tubercles. The aloes were all lined up like soldiers, with their sword-like, fiery red, bright orange and yellow inflorescences standing to attention, ready to salute the arrival of the buses filled with Ewanrigg Post Congress Tour delegates.



After tea/coffee and gingerbread and rusks were served, we were welcomed by our Chairman, Malcolm Thackray, followed by an introduction to the gardens by Annah Pasipanodya, the current Curator of Ewanrigg. Manfred Spindler then provided all our presenters and experts with permanent markers and labels, in order that they could help the Aloe Society and National Parks with the correct labelling and to remove any incorrect labelling of the plant specimens in the Ewanrigg Garden. What a unique opportunity for us to harness the combined knowledge of our presenters, most of whom have written books on the plants, and get their input and assistance! They were all enthusiastic and jumped on board in full force. It was amusing to witness the great debates between the gurus, as to what aloe was which, and which *encephalartos* was what, and we soon realised that even the experts don't know everything, and won't commit to an identification unless they are 100% certain!

Our delegates were then free to amble around the gardens, in the company of our Congress presenters and experts who disappeared in all directions! It was a great morning wandering around (or chasing after different groups!) And the aloes had all behaved impressively and flowered on cue! One of my favourites was the new bed of *aloe globuligemma*, a most attractive and unusual species, which occurs in dense colonies on the way to Birchenough Bridge. The species is named in reference to its conspicuously globular buds. Another treasure was to see the incredible WHITE *aloe ferox* in its secret hidden location.



Prof Piet Vorster and Prof Philip Rousseau



Tom McCoy and Obety Baptista



Aloe vanbalenii and aloe arborescens



Euphorbia ??



Aloe globuligemma



White Aloe ferox



Aloe chabaudii variations



ZIMBABWE PARKS AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

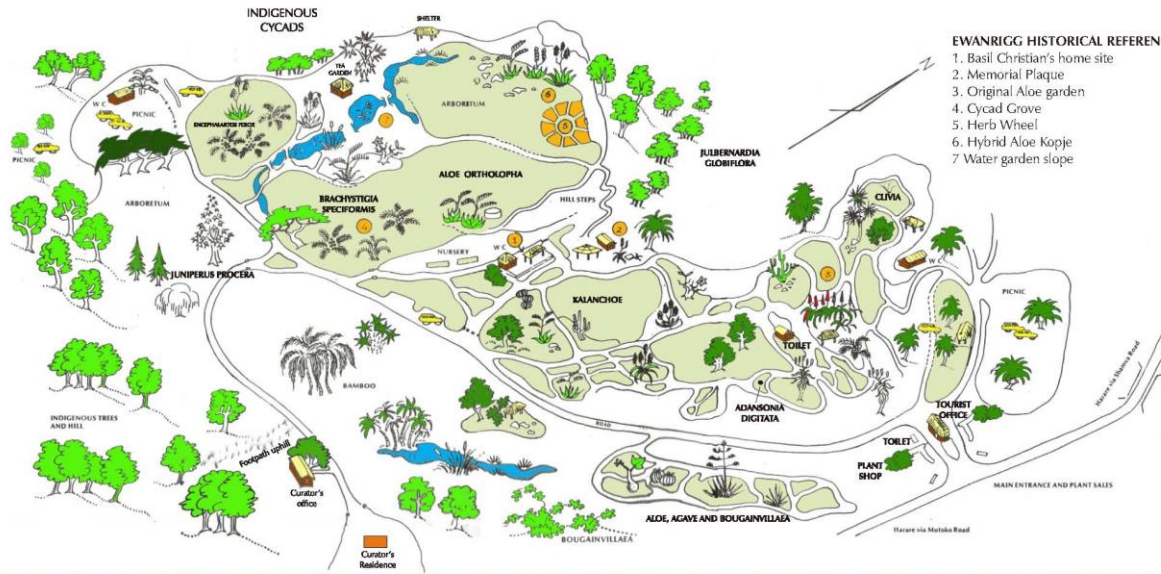
EWANRIGG BOTANICAL GARDENS

SITE MAP

IN HARMONY WITH NATURE



ZIMBABWE PARKS AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

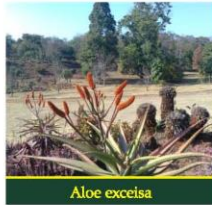


EWANRIGG HISTORICAL REFERENCE

1. Basil Christian's home site
2. Memorial Plaque
3. Original Aloe garden
4. Cycad Grove
5. Herb Wheel
6. Hybrid Aloe Kopje
7. Water garden slope



Mammillaria germinispina



Aloe excelsa



Encephalartos manikensis



Aloe aculeata



Encephalartos natalensis



Echinocactus arossonii

WELCOME TO EWANRIGG

Here a garden was born

HAROLD BASIL CHRISTIAN

1871 to 1950

Harold Basil Christian was a Zimbabwean pioneer botanist who bequeathed his farm, Ewanrigg, to be given to the nation as a national monument. Born in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in 1871, he was educated at Eton and was later employed in Kimberley and on the Witwatersrand as a mining engineer until 1910. He had a cousin in Rhodesia and emigrated there in 1911; subsequently he purchased the 662 morgen farm which he named EWANRIGG after a family property on the Isle of Man. He immediately set about developing a garden.

Spacious lawns were laid out in front of the homestead and where one large immovable rock interfered with the continuity, a surveyor moved a large clump of *Aloe cameronii* from the nearby hills to hide the unsightly rock. When this plant flowered the next year without having been watered, Christian with delight devoted his attention to aloes. From that humble beginning in about 1916, more and more rockeries were constructed and aloes were collected or otherwise acquired until, in 1939, G.W. Reynolds deemed it "the finest and most complete collection of aloes in existence". Inevitably a new *Aloe* would be named after him. The description of *Aloe christiani* was written by G.W. Reynolds in 1936, the species having been originally collected by Christian at Ewanrigg.

By 1943, the Aloe garden, much extended, covered some seven acres and had gained a worldwide reputation, and Christian was regarded by botanists, both amateur and professional, as a leading authority generally. He stated that his work had been in the nature of a hobby and that his success could not have been achieved had it not been for the cooperation of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in England and the Division of Botany in Pretoria.

At his death on 12 May 1950, the farm and his complete collection of scientific records and research were bequeathed to the nation with the request that the collection should remain intact and that the work should be continued. This policy has been followed by the successive curators since that time, and the garden now covers many acres. Christian's garden is his memorial, and any elaborate edifice would have been out of place.

ZIMBABWEAN CYCADS

Cycads are members of the Gymnosperm group. Gymnosperms were once the dominant plants in the tropics. They are characterised by their cones within which the seeds lie exposed on the scales.

Zimbabwe has only six species of Gymnosperm; one conifer, two cypresses and three cycads. The conifer, *Banksia latifolia*, is the commercially used indigenous yellowwood. The cypresses are *Juniperus procera*, which is very rare, and *Widdowsonia procera*, the mountain cedar of the Eastern Districts. The three Zimbabwean cycads are difficult to distinguish from each other. *Encephalartos manikensis*, from the mountainous area north of Mutema, usually has prominent prickles on the leaflets.

Encephalartos chinamanianensis, found along the entire eastern mountain border, has longer (15cm+) leaflets which are more widely scattered than in the other two species. *Encephalartos caecus*, which is found only on exposed slopes around the Bellingwe, Sude and West Nicholson areas in the south and southwest of the country, has short leaflets closely packed together.

Cycads can be either male or female plants, and sex is usually distinguished by the difference in the cones. Cycads are wind-dispersed and, under favourable conditions, the pollen grains burst within the female cone. The fertilised seeds are red, borne on orange scales, and when ripe the whole cone disintegrates. Seeds germinate close by or are carried away by seed-eating birds. Germination occurs at the onset of the rainy season.

All cycads are pinnate-leaved (i.e. they have leaflets borne on a central stalk). Cycads can be distinguished from the tree ferns by their lack of spores.

The cycad collection at Ewanrigg was begun by Basil Christian and includes specimens of the Zimbabwean cycads together with species from neighbouring countries.

ALOES

Aloes are basically African plants but, because of their popularity, they are found in public and private gardens throughout the world. More than 300 pure species have so far been described, with more being found every year, mainly in Africa, with the largest concentration being in South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana and Tanzania, but also in Madagascar and the Arabian Peninsula.

Of the 30 that occur in Zimbabwe, four are unique to this country, and a further seven only occur on the mountains which form the border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

The five aloes which are endemic to Zimbabwe are: *Aloe ballii* - found in the Hippo River Gorge; *Aloe inyangensis* - which occurs in the Nyanga and Bulawayo mountains; *Aloe musasaensis* - from Musasa Mountain; the spectacular *Aloe ortholopha* - from the Great Dyke and *Aloe tauri* - from the Mwenzi area and only named in 1962.

Five of the six aloes shared with Mozambique are found in the Chimanimani Mountains. They are: *A. batesii*, *A. baurmannii*, *A. guschii*, *A. pluvialis* and *A. widdii* - all named after their discoverers in the 1950s and early 1960s. *Aloe christiani* is widespread in the eastern mountains and is also found on Gopong Mountain in Mozambique.

The remaining 19 species are distributed not only in Zimbabwe but also in neighbouring countries:

- Aloe aculeata* - the thorny red-hot-poker Aloe
- Aloe arborescens* - the bushy, branching Aloe
- Aloe cameronii* - the copper-leaf red Aloe
- Aloe chabaudii* - the common pink rock Aloe
- Aloe christiani* - Basil Christian's Aloe
- Aloe cyathopoda* - Dr Kirk's Aloe
- Aloe excelsa* - the noble red or orange-tree Aloe
- Aloe globuligemma* - the poisonous Aloe
- Aloe greatheadii* - the woodland Aloe
- Aloe littoralis* - the Luanda tree Aloe
- Aloe lutasensis* - the Lowveld Aloe
- Aloe gnympsioides* - the miniature grass Aloe
- Aloe pectinifera* - the *Lawyer's* spotted Aloe
- Aloe pretoriensis* - the misshapen Aloe
- Aloe maculata (sagax)* - the "soap" Aloe
- Aloe spicata (bottlebrush)* - the yellow bottle-brush Aloe
- Aloe suttonii* - the climbing Aloe
- Aloe sylvatica* - the eastern spotted Aloe
- Aloe zabrina* - the zebra-leaved Aloe

THE TREES

In the garden you will find among the indigenous trees many exotic trees from other lands. These were introduced for the reason that it was considered that the gardens should be attractive and interesting to visitors at all times of the year and thus exotic flowering trees would add to the beauty. Indeed, it is so and to mention but three - at Christmas you will find the *Cassia javanica* from Indonesia in glorious display at the entrance. In April the indigenous *Cordia alliodora* spreads a carpet of white papery blossoms near the water lily ponds and in September the *Bostrychia speciosa* present a great spectacle of colour with their new leaves.

The gardens are surrounded by a fringe of indigenous forest and a path leading off the road to the office will lead you into the unspoilt forest of indigenous trees, many of them labelled.

Listed below are some of the trees in the garden with Shona names in brackets:

- Adansonia digitata* - Baobab
- Acacia gerrardii* - paperbark Acacia (Mwanga)
- Acacia gerrardii* - grey-haired Acacia
- Bostrychia speciosa* - (Mwanga)
- Bostrychia speciosa* - Prince of Wales feathers (Mwanga)
- Cassia javanica* - winter Cassia (Muzungu)
- Cassia javanica* - winter Cassia (Muzungu)
- Croton tiglium* - leopard tree
- Crotalaria siliqua* - locust tree - Levant
- Chalapa boerhaavia* - curry leaf - Ceylon
- Cuscuta aborea* - octopus cabbage tree (Mwanga)
- Erythrina abyssinica* - red-hot poker tree (Mutis)
- Erythrina filata* - South America
- Erythrina speciosa* - South America
- Gynerium amaranthaceum* - propeller tree (Mwanga)
- Jubbernardia globiflora* - (Mwanga)
- Psidium cattleianum* - kudu-berry (Mwanga)
- Pterocarpus angolensis* - bloodwood (Mwanga)
- Pithecellobium thomsonii* - monkey bread (Mwanga)
- Salween aculeatum* - poison apple (Mwanga)
- Tabebuia cocopa* - Central America
- Tabebuia cocopa* - Brazil
- Tournefortia bicolor* - silver tournefortia (Mwanga)
- Rhus longipes* - large-leaved chus (Mwanga)



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Lunches were packed and awaiting distribution as the noon day approached, and “Xerophytica” branded water was handed out to all to keep hydrated during their adventures around the Gardens.



Around 1pm, everyone gathered around back at the tea/lunch site and tucked into their picnic packets with much enthusiasm. Picnic packets were dissected and slowly demolished, with numerous delegates bartering for their favourite item! A few drinks under the msasa and munondo trees and much chatter and appreciation of the incredible feat of Basil Christian and his generosity in bequeathing the gardens to Rhodesia on his death in 1950.



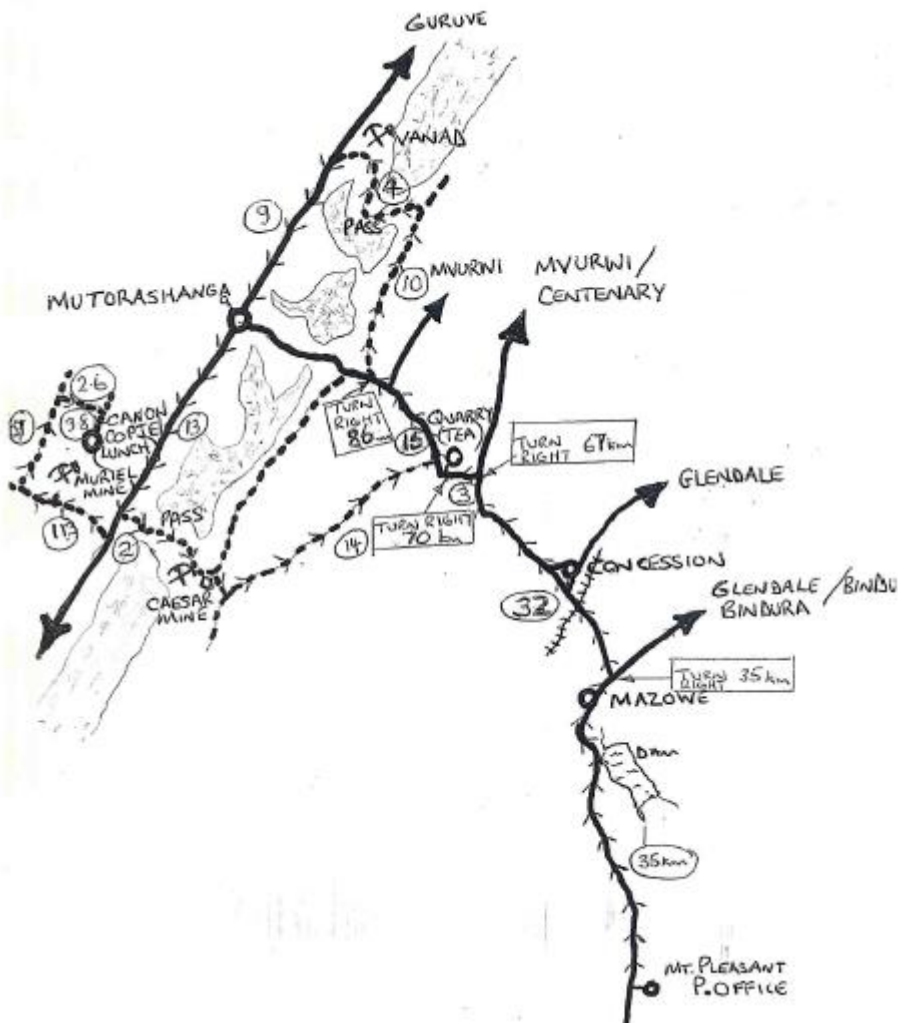
Xerophytica Post-Congress EWANRIGG Tour
We hope you enjoy your picnic lunch!



After some sitting around, laughter, chatter and debate, the buses left for a tour of a magnificent garden in town, belonging to Brian and Barbara Terry (Brian was the first Chairperson of the Aloe Society of Zim, and has an amazing garden of aloes, many of which are hybrids that he has created – a hobby of his.) What a day jam-packed with aloes in full winter flower!

POST-CONGRESS TOUR 2: THE GREAT DYKE

We were all up early for The Great Dyke Post Congress Tour, and headed to the meeting point, Mount Pleasant Post Office, where cars and delegates were to congregate for the day trip to the Great Dyke. Our steering committee members in charge of the route were notoriously 'interesting' at directions and distances, and we set off with a number of maps, google images, hand-drawn directions and written instructions for the drivers.



Each of the vehicles was filled with a variety of fascinating passengers, from presenters and experts to delegates and members of the Society. What a magic day stuck in a car with fascinating people! We headed off out of town and stopped at a glorious venue for our early morning tea, coffee and nibbles.



After a cuppa and a piece of buttered home-made banana bread, the Botanising began...

Now "botanising" has many meanings from my recent experiences – in general, the experts jump out of the cars as soon as they come to a near halt, and head off into the hills to places no-one would go to, to see aloes and plants 'in habitat', they take incredible photos, get very excited and are typically impossible to herd back into the cars. There are the normal people, who follow the leader and see what has been planned for them (which included incredible aloe chabaudii, lovely euphorbias and some fascinating rock paintings), take lots of photos with much oooo-ing and ahhh-ing. Then there are the few that do both, but include a moment or two of going off the beaten track (a little) and sneak a little botanical sample or two!



All car occupants having been successfully accounted for, we commenced on the off-road part of our trip. It was definitely a privilege to be in one of the front vehicles, as the dust kicked up was enormous, and I think that the last cars were caked in it by the end of the day. Much jostling for position, as you may imagine!

The next stop was halfway up the Vanad Pass section of the Great Dyke. There had been fierce fires through the week before, so we were a little concerned whether we'd be able to serve up the incredible aloe ortholophas for our delegates. The chrome mining on the Dyke is distressing, as you witness whole sides of mountains dug up and destroyed. It was fascinating to observe that this does not seem to impact the aloe ortholopha too gravely, and little babies and small plants are abundant on recently mined and ore-d material. There was much discussion among the authorities as to the importance of recently dug up minerals, and the lack of grass which protects the small plants from fire and other competition. At the first sighting of our aloe ortholopha, the convoy came to an abrupt halt for "botanising"! There were people hanging off all sorts of parts of the mountains – quite terrifying and definitely a need for head counts before proceeding on the journey.





After the traditional herding of botanists into cars, we continued towards our lunch venue. At this stage we were only running about 2 hours late - botanising is clearly not synonymous with clock-watching! On our way to the lunch venue, through the dust clouds, we spotted a small grouping of majestic *Aloe christianii* and jumped out for a look, several debates and photo opportunities. *Aloe christianii* was named for H. Basil Christian, owner of the farm that includes the type locality collected in 1936. *A. christianii* thrive in wooden grassland and light open woodland. In most years, the plant are burnt back during the dry season by grass fires and they thrive under these conditions. *A. christianii* is not known to thrive under cultivation.



Our lunch venue was at the homestead of a very kind farmer, Rolf Hangartner, who opened his lawns up to us. After the day's corrugated roads, much dust and climbing, the packed lunches of chicken-mayo and lettuce sandwich or ham and gouda sandwich, along with mini chicken pies, enormous naartjies and a stupendously rich slice of millionaire's shortbread, went down extremely well. The bar was suitably tucked into and after a well-earned rest, a tour of the breeding wattled cranes and a quick hike, we assembled back into our vehicles (with some swapping around of heads!) and proceeded towards the highlight of the day, the Caesars Pass. A dash of 4x4 driving to get up the pass, with the vehicles finding resting places dotted around the road wherever a small safe spot appeared! Sincere botanising ensued!!! The sun was slowly going down and the pure, golden light that we had on the hills was heavenly.



Aloe ortholopha are incredible – their flowers can vary from a dark dusty pink to bright red and in rarer cases, a peachy orange. The books say that aloe ortholopha have up to 4 horizontally branching racemes – well, our Great Dyke specimens had up to 7 racemes – another example of hyperinflation in Zimbabwe!





The sun set (most inconveniently, as I believe that all of us could have stayed there all night.) We headed back along some tough roads back to Harare – a long trip in the dark negotiating dirt roads and then the horrendous night traffic along the Mazoe/Bindura Road. Back to the Mount Pleasant car park with exhausted eyes and drivers' hands shattered from their death grips on the wheel for the past hour or two. What a privilege to experience such splendour and beauty with a group of enthusiastic and fascinating people.