



The discovery of *Dudleya pachyphytum*

Alfred Lau (In Memoriam)

It had been my ambition for many years to explore the islands of Baja California, both on the side of the Gulf as well as the Pacific Ocean. The kindness of the salt company at the Peninsula town of Guerrero Negro gave me the possibility to transport my station wagon on top of the salt of the large barges, so that we had the access to the little village of Cedros, the only possibility to shorten the way to the small boats that, we hoped, would take us to the Northern point of the island of Cedros.



Agave sebastiana near the lighthouse, Isla Cedros, Baja California.

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Agave sebastiana with *Dudleya pachyphytum* in the background, Isla Cedros.

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Ferocactus chrysacanthus, Isla Cedros, Baja California.

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We bought supplies although we had the possibility to eat lobster galore in the small cabin that gave shelter to the fishermen at certain times. The boatman was drunk and led us for hours on zigzag course, passing large nests of the kind of eagles that are endemic to this beautiful part of Mexico and the world. We were very happy to be on dry ground again and soon we saw the first cacti (*Echinocereus maritimus* LAU 0009) in full bloom in october.

The climate was excellent at this time of the year. The first marvellous specimens of *Ferocactus chrysacanthus* (LAU 010) with both yellow spines and yellow flowers, and in abundance.

Chinanteco Indian Alfonso led the group. He was always a great leader. Our first goal was the habitat of *Mammillaria goodrichii* (LAU 032) which we found in abundance close to the automatic light house. There is no real difference to *M. louisae* (LAU 1213). However, some 20 meters above we were able to correct a mistake. What is *M. goodrichii* v. *rectispina* (LAU 033)? What we found was a caespitose, small-headed and short-spined Mammillaria with small flowers, a miniature of the frequent *M. dioica*. The habitat was small but very distinct. My apologies for not having taken a photo. I have a photo, though, too far away but simply attractive with a large *Agave sebastiana* which crowd the island., with Alfonso besides.



Agave sebastiana & *Dudleya pachyphytum*, Isla Cedros, with Alfonso.

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Agave sebastiana, Isla Cedros, with Alfonso.

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Dudleya pachyphytum, Isla Cedros, Baja California.

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Dudleya pachyphytum, Isla Cedros, Baja California.

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From a distance we saw an abandoned gold mine with old trains and lots of equipment. I lifted a wine bottle (with the year 1850 on the bottom) All this was too temptacious to ignore or pass by. Of course, the bottle was empty, The story has been circulated that there had been in the solitude an American gold mine, and the mineral was transported by boat to San Diego. When the Mexicans round out, the mining was ceased because of lack of gold. An American grave still reminds of a bustling activity it its heyday.

On we went, and there was no trace of humans having climbed this mountain before. The coniferous trees giving the island the name started to engulf us with a few clearance areas, but no cedars. In name giving they had erred. The *Ferocactus* chrysacanthus here had no yellow but reddish spination. We shouted and a clear echo came back from the mysterious north mountain. And as I gazed on the bottom where I stood, my eyes did not believe. Could any representative of the genus *Pachyphytum* occur in Baja California? I explained to my companions that it was very unlikely for Pachyphytums to grow here, but to prove it, we had to find another specimen. And the search was on.

The boys ran like a weasel. Before this, however, I explained that any growth would be encountered on the moist side of the island, at the north-west, and we faced south east. They left me breathlessly following after.



Cochemiea pondii, Isla Cedros, Baja California.

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They disappeared beyond the ridge facing south east. They had heeded my advice and headed down hill, north west. And then came the shout: “Aqui hay muchos!”; What a moment! I do not know how I could have raced down a very steep slope. There were thousands, and my camera had a field day. An article was later published with beautiful backdrop of the ocean beyond.

Charles Glass urged me to write a story which was published by the U.S. Cactus and Succulent Society. Dr.Moran described the plant as *Dudleya pachyphytum*, being an expert in this genus. The plant is rare in collections and difficult to cultivate, like most succulents with a farina coating, probably to protect the plant from too much heat, very much like is the case with *Echeveria laui*, having this blue-white farina and is extremely succulent, sometimes confused one with another. It is very difficult in cultivation and slow-growing, not on the coast but on the high slopes I have seen some success in propagation of this plant in Japan, where *Echeveria laui* is almost venerated.

P.S. I had forgotten to tell about the presence of the most beautiful *Cochemiea pondii* LAU 008.

†Dr. Alfred Lau