

Paying a Call on Dealbata

by Tom Dodd III

The account in the Magnolia Journal by George A. Pfaffman of Citronelle, Alabama, of his exploration trip in Mexico a few years ago, and his collection of material of the Mexican deciduous magnolia, M. dealbata, at one of its scattered locations in that country, was so fascinating and provided such explicit details for others interested in seeing this rather threatened species in its habitat, that a group of southern Magnolia lovers decided to go in search of the Mexican Bigleaf last fall. They were joined during part of the tour by Harold Hillier, the British nurseryman, and his wife. We asked Tom Dodd III to give an account of the trip.

28 September:

I arrived at the airport in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico at 3 p.m. and, after clearing customs and immigration, was met by Steve Dodd, Bill Barnett and Barbara Heggie of Dallas, as well as Lynn Lowrey and Dr. Ray Jordan of Houston. After the usual difficulties with rental car clerks, I rented a Volkswagen Bus. I selected this particular vehicle because it can carry a lot of cargo, is fuel efficient, and has good ground clearance and traction.

As Mr. and Mrs. Harold Hillier were not to arrive from England for several hours, Bill Barnett and I remained at the airport while the rest of the party left and went to Motel Chipinque, south of Monterrey.

We picked up the Hilliers and started to the motel. On the way up the mountain south of town, we stopped to collect a few miscellaneous acorns and seeds and met Lynn Lowrey who was returning to the airport to pick up Gene Cline. Gene arrived from Atlanta on a later flight but his luggage was three days late.

We enjoyed an excellent meal at the motel and spent some time before dark collecting material around the adjacent area.

29 September:

We had a delicious early breakfast and departed Chipinque. Gene Cline, Harold and Barbara Hillier and the writer in one bus; Steve Dodd, Barbara Heggie, and Bill Barnett in the other bus; and Lynn Lowrey and Ray Jordan in Lynn's pickup truck, leading the way. We went south from Monterrey on Highway 85 for about 45 kilometers to Salto

Coca de Caballo (Horsetail Falls), near Santiago. After looking at the very impressive falls, we headed west into the mountains. Acorns of several more species of *Quercus* were collected along the way as well as cuttings of *Taxus* sp. and other plant material of interest. This particular portion of the trip was especially fascinating because of the diversity of flora encountered as we left the falls and gained altitude.

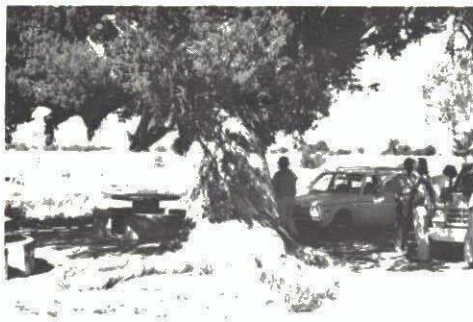
Well after dark we arrived at the Motel El Camino Real in Saltillo.

30 September:

We left Saltillo and headed south on highway 57 to San Roberto Junction. From there we went east to Galeana and then up through the mountains to Cerro Potosi, elevation 3800 meters (12,500 feet). Although Galeana is located on an arid, dusty plateau, the climate on Potosi is anything but hot. We found it chilly and windy during our visit. Anyone considering a trip to Potosi should be aware that the road up is gravel surfaced and very steep.



The old and the new on Cerro Potosi.



Juniper on Cerro Potosi.

Several fires had damaged thousands of acres of the forest but fortunately many areas were untouched. During our last visit in 1977, we saw *Pinus culminicola* but did not find any seeds. Our luck was better this trip and we spent a few hours gathering seed and enjoying the spectacular view from the peak. As Steve Dodd remarked, "Where else in the world could you see a modern television and telephone relay station, a juniper tree thousands of years old, a full moon in the early afternoon, and nine people gathering pine cones?"

At dusk we started down the mountain toward Galeana. We then headed east through the mountain passes on Highway 60 to Linares where we spent the night at the Escondido Motel.

1 October:

We left Linares and retraced our route west on Highway 60. The area was most interesting but the road should be considered dangerous. We saw numbers of unusual plants but few likely to survive in the Mobile or Atlanta areas.

Near Galeana we turned around, since Lynn Lowrey, Ray Jordan and Bill Barnett had to return to the United States. We wished them well and the remainder of the party headed toward Linares, then south on Highway 85 to Ciudad de Valles. As this is primarily a desert area, we made few stops.

We finally arrived at a beautiful motel about 15 kilometers south of Ciudad Valles late in the evening. It had been a hard, fast drive and the chance to relax and have an unhurried meal was appealing to all.

2 October:

We ate another early breakfast, loading the two buses and headed south on Highway 85 toward Chapulhuacan. We arrived about 10 a.m. and, referring to George A. Pfaffman's description, inquired at the local bus station

for directions to the home of Senor Agapito Pelcastre Oviedo. An older gentleman at the bus depot told Gene he would be happy to guide us, so Gene and I followed him to Sr. Oviedo's house. Although the home would be considered impoverished even by local standards, it was very neat and clean.

Senor Oviedo was at work but his daughter-in-law stated that he could take us to the site of the *Magnolia dealbata* stand on the mountain the following day. We were invited to return at 6 the following morning. We thanked her and went back to the bus depot to make plans with the rest of the group.

After a short discussion, it was decided that Mr. and Mrs. Hillier, Steve Dodd, and Barbara Heggie would head south to collect more material and that Gene Cline and I would stay over and go magnolia collecting as scheduled.

We went north to find accommodations in Tamazunchale. Until the Pan Am Highway was built during the 1950's and 1960's, this town was not accessible by car. The terrain is so steep that the upland gardens and farms can be cultivated only by hand tools.

We found a room, had lunch and walked around the town. The residents were extremely friendly and this was one of the most pleasant places we visited. The people had a good sense of humor and didn't treat us as tourists. Gene's Spanish was beginning to come back so he was able to talk with the people we met.

We purchased some gifts for our families and went to bed early.

3 October:

We met Sr. Oviedo at his home in Chapulhuacan at 6 a.m. as arranged. His daughter-in-law invited us to eat breakfast and we gratefully accepted. The food had all

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been grown in her garden. We were given a boiled, squash-like vegetable that grew on a large vine, some coffee made with beans from a tree near the door, and some oranges. It was a good meal and we were touched that they would take the best of their meager food supply and share it with us.

We left in the VW bus with Sr. Oviedo sitting in the front to guide us through the town. As we traveled, he would wave at everyone he knew and we think that in his 62 years he had met and made friends with the entire population.

We drove about one kilometer northeast of town up into some very steep areas and parked the car on the side of the dirt road. We gathered our gear and started out through some steep pastures and tree groves. After several kilometers, we left the trail and started up the mountain. As we cut our way through the brush and began the precipitous climb we both commented on the older gentleman's stamina and vigor.

About three kilometers later we came to a ridge and the going became easier. The flora had changed to larger hardwoods (oak, sweetgum, etc.) with less brush and many ferns.

We arrived at the peak of the mountain known locally as El Jarro ("the jug") and found a benchmark inscribed "1187". The azimuth from this benchmark to Chapulhuacan was one hundred ninety-six degrees (196°) and I judged the distance to be about five kilometers. We ascertained that the altitude was 3882 feet (1187 meters).

From that location we went about a hundred meters north and found our first *Magnolia dealbata*. Sr. Oviedo showed us the few trees there and said he knew of only one other area, which was very distant, where this plant could be found.

The numbers of this species are being diminished because the local inhabitants pick all the blooms to sell and therefore no seeds are produced. The flowers that cannot be picked by bending the tree or by chopping down the tree are shot from the upper limbs with a rifle.

We spent the trip down the mountain walking, talking and sliding. We all became good friends, thanks in part to Gene's linguistic abilities. We learned much about Sr. Oviedo's past and the lifestyle of the area.

We returned to Sr. Oviedo's home and said goodbye to him and his family. We then



At the site of the stand of *Magnolia dealbata* near Chapulhuacan, San Luis Potosi, Mexico, Gene Cline (photo at left) and the author Tom Dodd III (photo at right), shown with their guide Senor Agapito Pelcastre Oviedo (wearing hat). Sprouts of the Mexican Bigleaf *Magnolia* may be seen in the background.

started driving north to Ciudad Valles so that we could turn west through the mountain range and meet the rest of the party at the Cactus Motel in San Luis Potosi. This meeting was not to be, however, as Mr. Hillier had found many species of *Quercus* and many other intriguing plants. Consequently, they were delayed and we missed them.

4 October:

We headed south on Highway 57 to Santa Maria del Rio to purchase gifts for our families. We then turned around and headed north to Monterrey via Saltillo. We arrived late in the evening and spent the night at the Ramada Inn.

5 October:

After spending the morning in Monterrey shopping, Gene and I departed for home in the early afternoon.

This trip was an unforgettable experience for all of us. Harold Hillier was able to collect seeds and scions of over 300 species of plants during his travels in Texas, Mexico and Alabama. Gene Cline and I had the opportunity of seeing the native habitat of a species that is rapidly disappearing. We hope to return to this part of Mexico again.

High, Wide, and Handsome; Get Out Your Bragging Hat

We're going to throw our hat through the door on this one, then jump out of the way.

Do you know of a mammoth *macrophylla*? An ancient *acuminata*? A family size *fraseri*? A granddaddy *grandiflora*? A venerable *virginiana*? Or—pardon the expression—a tree-topping *tripetala*?

We're running out of alliteration already, but you get the idea. What we really want to say is, do you know of any king size native Magnolia, that is, a Magnolia that would tower over others of its species? The American Forestry Association, through its monthly magazine *American Forests*, has for the past 40 years compiled reports of the biggest native or naturalized trees in their respective species or recognized varieties for the entire country. Nine Magnolia categories are included in AFA's April 1978 National Register of Big Trees and *American Forests* has just come out with an update in its April 1980 issue. The currently recognized national champion Magnolias are listed in the accompanying table as reported to AFA.

Richard Pardo, programs director of AFA, maintains the National Register of Big Trees

and keeps track of the information given with each new nominee for greatness. If you know an extra large Magnolia in the categories listed, one you think may unseat the current champion, send the information to Richard Pardo, Programs Director, American Forestry Association, 1319 18th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The champion for each species is the biggest, as indicated by total points awarded for the most impressive combinations of trunk circumference (at breast height, or 4½ feet), height, and crown spread. You don't have to be a pro or a member of AFA to enter what you think is a champion. All you need to do is come up with the biggest.

AFA asks for the following information on nominations:

Correct species or variety name, circumference in feet and inches at 4½ feet above the ground, vertical height and diameter spread of crown to the nearest foot, location of tree, date measured and name of person who did the measuring, name and address of tree's owner, a photograph and the date it was taken, description of tree's physical condition and state of preservation, and name and address of the nominator.

In measuring circumference, if the trunk is branched at 4½ feet it should be measured at the point below this where the circumference is at its smallest (and this height noted).

The total height of the tree is the vertical distance between a horizontal plant passing through the center of the base of the tree and a horizontal plane passing through the topmost twig. This distance can be measured with a hypsometer—such as an Abney hand level, a Forest Service hypsometer, a transit, or other instrument.

To determine crown spread find the two

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Magnolia & Yr. Nominated	Circum. at 4½ ft.	Height	Speed	Total Points	Location & nominator
ashei (1971)	1'6"	35'	18'	58	Torrey State Park Fla. James Stevenson
macrophylla (1972)	9'3"	59'	62'	186	Baltimore; Maryland Forest Service
acuminata (1974)	18'10"	92'	88'	340	Bel Air, Md. Earl Yingling, Maryland Forest Service
acuminata var. subcordata (1970)	13'	97'	65'	269	Kennett Square, Pa.; John Swartley
fraseri (1979)	8'3"	72'	72'	186	Davis, W. Va.; Richard Salzer
pyramidata (1972)	6'4"	57'	37'	142	Newton County, Tex.; James Whaley & Leo Rawls.
grandiflora (1978)	20'3"	86'	96'	353	Bladen County, N.C.; Daniel Grimsley
virginiana (1971)	13'1"	91'	46'	260	Leon County, Fla.; George Apthorp
tripetala (1969)	9'8" (at 2' ht.)	45'	48'	173	Lumberville, Bucks County, Pa.; John Swartley

points at which the diameter of the crown is widest and those where it is narrowest, sighting upward with a plumb bob to find these points for measurements. Then add these two measurements together and divide by two to determine the average crown diameter or spread measurement.

Your proposed champion can be a cultivated tree or one in the wild. If you need any help getting the proper measurement maybe a state forester will help. Many state foresters are well aware of and participate in the AFA Big Tree program.

The formula AFA uses for arriving at total points is to convert the circumference into inches, add to this the number of feet in height, and add to this number one fourth of the average crown spread in feet. If two large trees come out very close to the same number of points, AFA may designate them as "co-champions."

Once you've entered your candidate, and AFA has notified you that the tree you nominated is a champion, be sure and notify us, sending along a picture if possible, so we can get it into our own records.



*Magnolia × thompsoniana 'Urbana' at
Gloster Arboretum.*