

A Cycad Travelogue

March-April 2002

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In the early spring of 2002, my son Adam and I traveled to England and South Africa as part of my wife Randi's family and business trip to Europe. My wife and daughter traveled on to the continent, while Adam and I went to South Africa. This article will touch on a few of the places we visited.

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Situated in London, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew are home to an amazing collection of plants, including lovely *Encephalartos* that have been collected over several centuries. I had previously corresponded with David Cooke, whom I'd met at the 1999 International Conference on Cycad Biology in Miami, Florida. David is a curator at the gardens and has managed the Palm and Temperate Houses there for years. He has the distinction of having the palm species *Dypsis cookei* named for him. David was an incredibly gracious host, with an incredibly quick mind, and a delightfully humble sense of humor that is very rare among people as accomplished as he is. We shared a few *Dioon merolae* seeds with him and got a wonderful insider's tour of the cycad collection. Two highlights of that tour were specimens of *Encephalartos woodii* and *E. altensteinii*.

In the Temperate House, Adam and I had the chance to see the large *Encephalartos woodii* (Fig. 1). Kew considers this its rarest plant, a gift many years ago from the Natal (now KwaZulu



Fig. 1. David Cooke and Adam at Kew Garden in front of *Encephalartos woodii*

Natal) National Parks. It is one of the largest surviving specimens in the world. You'll see David's photo with Adam here. Adam is the younger one here...

We also saw the famous specimen of *Encephalartos altensteinii* in the palm house (Fig. 2). Kew believes this to be among the oldest potted specimens in the world. Originally collected in the 1770's in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, it was originally misnamed *E. longifolius*. Subsequent research and taxonomic analysis revealed it to be *E. altensteinii*. This is a HUGE plant, its trunk over 14 feet long, growing only about one inch per year. Apparently it has only coned once in the time it has been at Kew.

South Africa - The home of *Encephalartos*

Adam and I headed on to South Africa, a rather long flight that impresses because in our North-America-centric maps, the continent of Africa seems smaller than its true size. After an enjoyable stay with friends in the Johannesburg area, we traveled to the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal provinces, where we visited some of the most impressive cycad gardens I've ever seen. Three major highlights of that trip were visits to Charlie Hewson's Garden, the Durban Botanical Garden, and Douglas Goode's home and studio.

Charlie Hewson's Cycad Garden

In early April 2002, my son Adam and I had the chance to visit one of the most significant cycad gardens on the entire African continent, according to a knowledgeable South African. This was the garden of the late Charles Hewson, in Port Elizabeth, South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. We were visiting this garden, because he had passed away two years earlier and his sister Mrs. Alpha Hastings was arranging to sell the collection to some South African associates and me.

Charlie Hewson was a self-made entrepreneur who had built and sold a successful auction business in Grahamstown before moving to Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape Province. Upon moving to Port Elizabeth, he commenced his



Fig. 2. Kew's enormous specimen of *Encephalartos altensteinii*

second career in real estate, buying land and developing properties. He also began to collect exotic birds and cycads. His bird collection was renowned throughout the world, and created such a cacophony that his neighbors complained. So, he bought out all of the adjoining properties to his, and rented them out to people who did not have a problem with the birds' noise. In terms of cycads, Charlie traveled throughout South Africa, collecting plants under permit and bringing them to his garden. When you look at some of the photos here you will see literally hedges of cycads, islands of rarity in the lawns at the Hewson residence (Fig. 3).

Among the more amazing cycads in the Hewson garden was the large *Encephalartos latifrons* which seems to float above the *E. lehmannii* in this photo (Fig. 4). Its trunk is over 10 feet long, and has numerous offsets. The *E. lehmannii* was also noteworthy, having been collected from a rare stand with a unique recurving leaf form, found only in the Paardport Mountains of the Eastern Cape (Fig. 5). Other impressive plants included a ten foot tall *E. longifolius* (Fig. 6), a hedge of the rare *E. horridus* "Dwarf Form" (Fig. 7) and a most impressive *E. friderici-guilielmi* which was the largest I'd ever seen (Fig. 8). Greg Holzman, a fellow TCS board member, had visited with Charlie in the 1990's; his article recalling the visit can be found in issue no.5 (B&W edition).

Douglas Goode & the Durban Botanical Garden

We traveled to Natal that evening, and the following day, we visited the home, studio and garden of Douglas Goode, the renowned cycad horticulturalist, author and artist. Among the



Fig. 3. Hedge-like cycad plantings at the Hewson residence



Fig. 4. A large specimen of *Encephalartos latifrons* that seems to float above a nearby *E. lehmannii*



Fig. 5. A rare form of *Encephalartos lehmannii* from the Paardport Mountains of eastern Cape Province



Fig. 6. Adam with a ten-foot specimen of *Encephalartos longifolius*



Fig. 7. Adam with an impressive specimen of *Encephalartos friderici-guilielmi*

things we enjoyed were the large swing that Adam enjoyed at the bottom of the slope below Douglas' property, and the chance to see Douglas' studio, where we saw one of Mr. Goode's latest cycad artworks up close (Fig. 9). Quite different from any other Douglas had done



Fig. 8. A dwarf form of *Encephalartos horridus* with Adam for scale



Fig. 9. Douglas Goode holding one of his portraits with Adam



Fig. 10. Durban Botanical Garden's famous specimen of *Encephalartos woodii*



Fig. 11. *Encephalartos woodii* at Durban Botanical Gardens with Adam and Maurice

before, this work was a plea for conservation. It was subsequently sold at auction in the USA, proceeds going to nature conservation.

The Durban Botanical Garden

After visiting his home and atelier, Douglas Goode toured us through the Durban Botanical Gardens. Not only did we see a good number of beautiful and specimen-sized cycads, we also had photographic opportunities with three of the original *Encephalartos woodii* trunks brought to the "Durban Bot" from the wild (Figs. 10-11). Leaf details and aerial branches can be seen in Fig. 12. Some of the other impressive plants there were the *Plumeria rubra* next to which Adam almost seems to be dancing (Fig. 13), and *Strelitzia reginae* 'Mandela's Gold' (Fig. 14).



Fig. 12. *Encephalartos woodii*: view of aerial branches and leaf closeup



Fig. 13. Adam with *Plumeria rubra*



Fig. 14. *Strelitzia reginae* 'Mandela's Gold'