Pasto, Sibundoy, and the Never, Never Land

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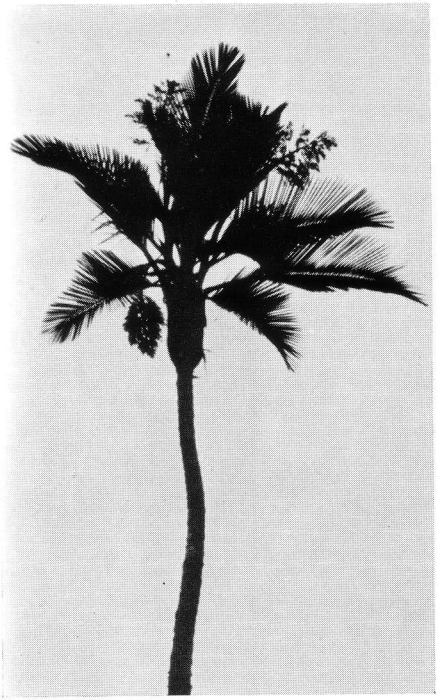
The party of 29 persons which journeyed to Colombia after the biennial meeting in Miami suffered two successive failures attempting the trip to Pasto. Rather than risk three days of cooling our heels at the Cali Inter-Continental Hotel, most of the group decided to go back to Buenaventura to collect palm seed and seedlings, but my heart wasn't in it because any material collected at that tropical an area was virtually useless in southern California and my ambition was to see more ceroxylons and possibly collect seed of some *Euterpe* species which could survive a light frost or two. After a bit of a heated discussion and some wild tales predicting our demise, we nevertheless received Ken Foster's blessing and Avianca's cooperation to allow four of us to try to fly to Pasto one more time.

On July 2nd, we had actually flown to Pasto but the plane returned without landing at Pasto; the day before that we hadn't even boarded the plane. So we considered ourselves lucky as we boarded, because on the way we saw a possible bad omen—a man had been killed as a truck had overturned. When our taxi driver insisted on looking at the accident, I feared missing takeoff at the airport. Our next big dream was of landing at Pasto as we looked at all the familiar faces in the DC6 who had tried the day before. The third try was as charmed as our party of four; we were overjoyed just to land. Don Hodel, Dr. Wm. D. Bell of Fairchild Tropical Garden, Cherie Darian, my wife, translator, and agent who did all our bargaining, and myself made up our party. In addition, we had our gear, especially the belt and spurs I had dragged around so uselessly up to now but which were soon to become very necessary.

At the Pasto Airport Cherie got us a taxi driver to drive us to and from the airport and Pasto and during our day and a half there for 900 pesos (about $35.00). Our driver recommended the Hotel Pacifica, which we would also recommend, and as quickly as possible we took off for Chiles, after seeing a few *Parajubaea cocoides* in town. At Tuquerres at 3500 meters altitude (about 10,000 feet), we spotted our first *Ceroxylon utile* with flower and fruit. Unfortunately, only one of 500 had a seed in it. Cherie found it and I "pray" over "our limited fortune" daily now. We also saw a *Geonoma* sp. which bore fertile fruits and these we collected and turned over to De Hull for distribution. After going almost to the Ecuadorian border within half a degree of the Equator we had to turn back because of a washed-out road. Along the road we saw and photographed the power line poles—trunks of *Ceroxylon utile.* An exhausting climb with belt and spurs up a miserable, weak, twisted specimen of *C. utile* failed to yield fertile seed, perhaps the result of dioecious palms spread too far apart for fertilization by nature.

On July 4th, we decided to make the run toward the Amazon, or as far as we could get and return by nightfall. On the way, we saw a *Parajubaea cocoides* in a yard. Cherie did some translating, we got inside the patio, and the handy



1. *Ceroxylon utile* at Tuquerres, Colombia.

belt and spurs enabled me to climb a 35–40 ft. tree and cut down several hundred seed in quick order. After taking pictures of ourselves we were off for the Sibundoy Valley.

Here after many continuous turns at 3600 meters, we entered the "Never Never Land." This mountainous region 16 kilometers from Pasto is covered by a constant cold mist, yet the ground is covered with the same type of plants we expected to see in the lower typical tropical area. We saw philodendrons, bromeliads, orchids, ferns, tree ferns, and palms—namely *Ceroxylon utile.* We jumped out and started collecting with our bare hands, managing to uproot four *C. utile* seedlings, one of which is now slowly showing life signs. I only lasted five minutes in this cold, wet vegetation and my fingers became numb from the cold, so numb that I gave up and re-

2. *Geonoma* grows at high elevations in Colombia.

turned to the cab. At 20 kilometers from Pasto we saw *C. utile* on a mountainside cow pasture at 3500 meters. We passed some very steep cuts, canyons, and sheer walls and started to drop in elevation. At 53 kilometers from Pasto at 2900 meters I spotted the one palm I was especially eager to find. On a curve in the road, up a canyon, I saw a suckering *Euterpe* sp. with the characteristic, large, spreading inflorescence which looked like an exploding firecracker.

3. Don Hodel, local women, and *Euterpe* sp., 53 kilometers from Pasto on road to Sibundoy.

We jumped out and crossed the road and started to look for seedlings. This palm is very slim with numerous suckers about 4 inches thick, trunks 15–25 feet high, and a 30-inch-long crownshaft. There were about 30 projecting, unopened inflorescences. When Cherie explained to the Indian woman what we wanted she left and returned with a beautiful 6-inch plant and when she found out we were willing to pay she returned with hundreds. These haven't started to move yet. We finally found two fertile stalks bearing all the fruit we would need and again several hundred seed would be given to De Hull for distribution. This made it four sets of palm

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4. Don Hodel climbed *Ceroxylon hexandrum*, 53 kilometers from Pasto on road to Sibundoy at 2900 meters altitude.

seeds from four different genera *Parajubaea*, *Geonoma*, *Euterpe*, and our next find—just down the road—a *Ceroxylon hexandrum* 40–50 feet high. This was to become Don Hodel's big kick as he belted up and tried the spurs. He made it to the fruit and cut down the first few hundred seed while we were content to photograph him. It began to rain as we gathered several hundred seed. I had to climb this same tree to get additional seed and a plentiful supply was cleaned by Cherie to save De Hull the chore of cleaning.

We truly felt victorious on this small trip and we still had time left so on we sped only to come to another washed-out road. Dr. Bell had been extremely interested in all the various flowering plants but was most keenly anxious to find cycads in this area. On our way back we saw what perhaps others before us may have claimed to be cycads. Actually they were small, almost stumpy, tree ferns which he collected, but he was denied his cycads. I suppose lady luck had decided to run out at this time, because Bell didn't find his cycads and just after we left the next morning for the market place we received an urgent message—return quickly, the plane will be leaving an hour and a half early. You guessed it, we rushed madly back to the airport so we could wait at the airport for over seven hours. They kept telling us it was easy to get out of Pasto; the difficult trick was to get into Pasto. So when we finally took off, we really weren't interested in the 15 wrecked planes at the end of the runway, only to get back to the main group and share our treasures.

News of the Society

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Excellent facilities are available including inexpensive dormitory rooms, a cafeteria, a banquet room and an air-conditioned auditorium. The Dent Smith Trail, an area of native growth with a brook is a delightful setting for the many exotic palms which are now becoming mature. Busses belonging to the Institute stand ready to take the group to Tampa to see Dr. U. A. Young's magnificent palm collection and other nearby points of interest.

The Nominating Committee, Chairman Otto Martens, member David Barry Jr. and Dr. Stewart Mathews, presented the slate of Officers for 1974–1976 as follows:

President—Dr. U. A. Young
Vice-President—Mr. Myron Kimnach
Secretary—Mrs. Lucita H. Wait
Treasurer—Mr. Brian T. Gaine

Directors for 1974–76:

Mr. Kenneth C. Foster—California
Mr. Brian T. Gaine—Florida
Dr. Jerome P. Keuper—Florida
Dr. H. E. Moore, Jr.—New York
Dr. John Popenoe—Florida
Mr. Toshihiko Satake—Japan
Mrs. Lucita H. Wait—Florida
Madame Ganna Walska—California

There being no nominations from the floor, Dr. Mathews moved that the slate be unanimously elected. Motion seconded and carried.

Dr. Jack Fisher, Plant Morphologist at Fairchild Tropical Garden, stated that he was very concerned about the problem of lethal yellowing disease and the possibility that The Palm Society might spread this disease to areas of the world not now infected. The Palm Society's Seed Bank is the most active distribution center for palm seeds in the world today and it would be a catastrophe if through its efforts new palm areas should become infected, either through seeds or through transport of plants by its members. He therefore proposed a quarantine on both seeds and