

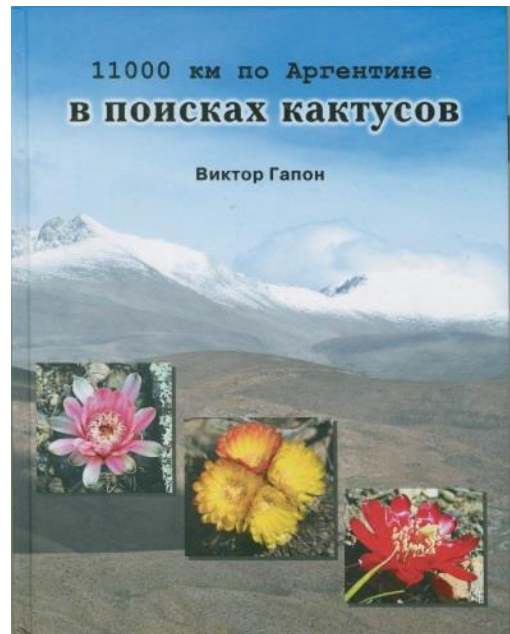


Book Review

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11000 kilometers around Argentina in search of cacti. Volume 1. Victor Gapon. Moscow: Luch, 2010. 288 p. ISBN 978-5-91909-004-5

Although this work is titled and written mostly in Russian, there is an English summary at the beginning of each chapter as well as English captions for the over 700 photos and illustrations to give non-Russian speakers an idea of the contents. It describes the author's experience of searching for cacti in Argentina with his friend and fellow cactus enthusiast Gert Neuhuber, among others. It is much in the style of old-fashioned tales of exploration and collecting, as would have been written by Darwin about his time aboard the Beagle or by Cook on his voyages in the southern hemisphere, but with the advantage of including copious images of people, plants and landscapes. All seemingly mundane details are captured, including his hiking shoes, the taxi driver in Buenos Aires, local people and architecture, and the various upsets that occur on any trip, such as a flat tire. Perhaps a hundred years from now those details will be as interesting to readers as tales of life aboard ships and eating sea-biscuits are to us now. No adventurous collecting tale is complete without a brush with death, in this case through sun-stroke, a hazard in the hot low hilly and shrubby countryside. Though the focus is on species of cacti the author wished to find on the trip, readers interested in vegetation and habitats throughout Argentina would also find use in the details given. Gapon advises where to stay, where to look for plants, how best to get around and even where not to go.



Along with the traveler's tales is information on growing and transplanting cacti, ideas for conservation, phenology, plant descriptions and ethical considerations of cactus collection. The style is very informal and conversational, with botanical and taxonomic lessons interspersed between discussions of specific locations. It is clear that the author gave a lot of thought into how the book would be used by botanists and included several appendices. He

gives explicit details of the equipment used for photography, sizes of coins used for scale in photos, a list of all the species mentioned in the work and detailed collection notes for specimens. For those with a taxonomic bent, five new combinations are made in the genus *Gymnocalycium*.

While an understanding of Russian would greatly enhance the details and the enjoyment of this story, the language barrier should not deter anyone that is interested in the subject material. There is more than enough material here to be of value for those studying cacti or interested in Argentina.

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