

A FIELD TRIP TO PARADISE
By Ilene Feirman

One of the many benefits of belonging to the Colorado Cactus and Succulent Society is an annual foray to Grand Junction to look for and, with the appropriate permits, to collect cacti and succulents native to that region which are growing in the wild. The *Pediocactus* -- a small, round cactus winter hardy not only in Grand Junction but one that has survived our Monument winters as well -- was the primary species found during our exploration.

Described by Miles Anderson in his book, "The Ultimate Book of Cacti & Succulents," as a North American genus subjected in habitat to hot, dry summers and below-freezing temperatures in winter, most of the growth of the *Pediocactus* occurs in Spring. We were treated to a timely display, and with its lovely blooms in light pink, it was hard to resist taking some specimens home.

The long weekend included a hike skyward on the Old Gordon Trail in the Colorado National Monument; a lecture of the area's history by a local geologist with, as his blackboard, one of the more scenic views of the Monument; an excursion to the San Rafael Swell in Utah to see rock art, experience a view of the "Mini Grand Canyon" while eating a picnic lunch and, best of all, to search for and identify the various cacti. The *Pediocactus*, babies all, at the San Rafael Swell were just little grass green orbs barely visible above ground. The child in all of us was evident as we rushed about, each one of us trying to be the next to discover a precious specimen in its natural state.

A photograph would have to be wide angle to do the landscape justice, a narrative diverse and full of adjectives to describe the various isolated, majestic locations. In several places, I sensed an eeriness I couldn't shake, despite the comraderie of our small group. The endless sky and open, barren land is a far cry from the crowded apartment building in Brooklyn this transplanted New Yorker grew up in during the late '40s and early '50s, with the fire escapes and courtyard blocking all views and allowing little more than a tiny patch of blue sky to be visible.

In one cactus park located high above a narrow canyon which we had visited two years before, dead twisted burnt branches everywhere, spongy ground beneath our feet, and a strange quiet only added to an uneasiness, a sense of having

intruded on sacred land both times.

The postscript to this adventure is a jolt back into the everyday world of reality as I know it, sans exquisite scenery, but with the souvenir of living, blooming plants to enhance my cactus patch and several potted up to be able to take indoors to brighten a dreary winter.