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Book Review

A history of plant collecting in Pakistan. Shortly before the first World War, R. R. Stewart made his first botanical excursion in what is now Pakistan. He was then in 1912 a recent graduate from Columbia University, living at Gordon College, Rawalpindi, and set off with a small hiking party to Kashmir and Ladak. Leaving Rawalpindi by bicycle on the road to Srinagar, carrying his vasculum across his back, he collected the first of his life's total of over 50,000 plant specimens. In later life he became the much-respected Principal of Gordon College, retiring from the post in 1960. Throughout that time, despite the numerous difficulties, frustrations and problems he must have faced—especially during the troubled times of Partition in 1947—he continued tirelessly with his botanical activities, collecting throughout the country, publishing many papers and, not least, encouraging others. When he was 70, as he puts it, 'it was time for me to retire to the USA according to the rules of the society to which I belonged'. But retirement means different things to different people and botanists often are different! In 1972 Dr Stewart's 1000-page *Annotated Catalogue of Vascular Plants of Pakistan*—part of the framework round which the *Flora of Pakistan* has been built—was published and now, in 1982, in his early 90s, he has the pleasure of seeing in print his history of plant exploration.*

It pulls together the knowledge and experience of a lifetime into a most readable blend of fact, comment, reminiscence, and the occasional side-swipe at people or beliefs. Dr Stewart acknowledges his debt to Burkill's *Chapters of the History of Botany in India* (finished when the author was also a nonagenarian and published in 1965) and although there are some similarities between the two botanical histories of the Indian subcontinent, Stewart's unlike Burkill's, takes us right up to the 1970s. Individual chapters cover the history of collecting within the various districts—about 17 in all—that the author recognizes in Pakistan. But this is much more than a book just about plant collecting. There are important observations on vegetation, plant-lists, the history of the country, useful references and personal observations. Any potential visitor to Sind, Hunza, Baltistan or any part of this very diverse country would be well-advised to read the relevant chapters before, and indeed during, a visit. Tucked away towards the end of the book are short chapters on ferns, mosses, hepatics and algae.

Although it is a most enjoyable book to read or dip into, it is not so easy to use as a source of reference. There is no index of places or names and if, for instance, you want to find out about a particular collector, you have to have a fair idea as to where and when he collected. It is not difficult to find lesser points to criticise, as in a work of this scope it is inevitable that there should be omissions and some errors. This in no way detracts from the value and interest of the book which only the remarkable R. R. Stewart could possibly have written. He must now derive great satisfaction not just from this work but from his numerous other contributions to botany, the existence of a National Herbarium based on his collections, and the steady progress of the Flora of Pakistan project. Certainly he has a very special place in Pakistan botanical history.

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**History and exploration of plants in Pakistan and adjoining areas*, by R. R. Stewart. Flora of Pakistan, E. Nasir & S. I. Ali (eds.). Available from National Herbarium (Stewart Collection), Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, Islamabad. March 1982. 186 pp.