

The Ritter Collections: New Life for Old Data

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Friedrich Ritter (1898–1989) was an extraordinary German traveller, geologist, adventurer, amateur botanist, and cactus collector. He is best known for the cactus seeds he collected and that were sold by his sister Hildegard Winter, and for his 4-volume work *Kakteen in Sudamerika*, which summarizes the results of his many years of travel (1952–1971). Ritter's personal herbarium was deposited in the Museo de Historia Natural in Santiago de Chile in 1972. The material – mostly mere plant fragments associated with small scraps of paper with short locality data – remained in its original state (enveloped in newspapers, packed in boxes) until the early 1990s, when the Swiss National Science Foundation financed a project to compile a complete inventory. This was done together with Beat Leuenberger, and was published in 1996.

About 10 years later, the feasibility of geocoding Ritter's locality data was studied. In a trial, 901 collections from Chile were associated with latitude/longitude data with the help of ESRI ArcGIS software. Geocoded locality data can be used in a multitude of ways to visualize taxon distribution, and some examples will be demonstrated with taxa of the Chilean genus *Eulychnia*.

Recently, David Hunt was able to acquire an extensive set of Friedrich Ritter's slides. With the help of a numerical list of photographs present in the archives of the Sukkulenten-Sammlung Zürich, it is now possible to put dates and, in many cases, locality data to Ritter's published and unpublished slides. Using FR 479a (*Eulychnia saint-pieana*) as example, the intricacies of synchronizing the known herbarium collections and their localities with the data associated with individual slides will be explained. All available evidence corroborates earlier caveats concerning the problems of multiple localities associated with a single collection number. This is especially troublesome in connection with material cultivated under FR numbers, because no definite locality can be ascertained in most cases.