

Images of Cacti from the coastal valleys of Southern Ecuador

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The cactus flora of these valleys is a natural extension of that found in the adjacent valleys further south in Peru. The valleys are relatively dry compared to the higher land between them and to the east, becoming progressively less arid towards the north. The terrestrial cacti are largely confined to steep slopes or rock outcrops where competition from other plants is reduced, but even here they are often associated with dense growth of bushes and trees, especially in the rainy season. The three principal valleys from south to north are the Catamayo, the Rio León and the Rio Jubones.

The type locality of *Borzicactus icosagonus* is at Narbón, near to the Rio León where the plants differ from the commonly-cultivated form (from further south in Peru) by their finer spination, more upright habit and widely-opening pink flowers. The form of this species from the Catamayo valley is very similar to cultivated specimens of *Akersia roseiflora* Buining, originally said to come from Chala in Southern Peru. The climate of Chala would appear to be unsuitable, therefore I suggest that the Catamayo Valley is where the plant was actually originally collected.

The genus *Espostoa* is also present in these valleys, the plants becoming less tall in the north. In the south *Espostoa lanata* is a tall branched plant with a trunk, similar to the Peruvian plants but often with a red flower (var. *roseiflora*) rather than the usual white. The plants in the Rio Jubones Valley were described by Jens Madsen as *Espostoa frutescens* and differ from typical *E. lanata* by their low wide-spreading habit lacking a trunk and their white fruits (rather than pink).

The valleys also have a confusing assortment of *Armatocereus* plants which have been attributed to various species. The appearance of the plants is so variable that one is tempted to suggest that they are hybrids of *A. laetus*, *A. cartwrightianus* and perhaps others. The whole genus is poorly understood and it is difficult to know which characters to use to distinguish the species.