Introduction
The most recent survey of Somali aloes was by Lavranos (1995). He recognised 32 species for that country, one having uncertain status. Since then *Aloe elegantissima*, *A. heybensis*, *A. kahinii* (= *A. luntii* in Lavranos, 1995), *A. lindenii*, *A. miskatana*, *A. orlandi* and *A. rubrodonta* have been described as new species, whilst the tree species, *Aloe eminens*, has been transferred to a new genus to become *Aloidendron eminens*. The current total of true aloes in Somalia therefore stands at 37 species.

Diversity of aloes in Somalia is high with 84% of the species being endemic. These range from the very small and stemless *A. orlandi* to the 4 m tall shrubby *A. gracilicaulis*. Many of the Somali aloes are attractive and small-growing thus highly collectable. Notable amongst these species are those related to *Aloe somaliensis* having mottled or spotted, glossy leaves, namely *Aloe elegantissima*, *A. hemmingii*, *A. jucunda* and *A. peckii*. Another attractive, small-growing but unspotted Somali species is *Aloe cremnophila*.

My plant of *A. cremnophila* is a propagation of ISI 1450, originally distributed in 1984, which in turn was propagated from the type collection Reynolds 8450B that was used to describe the species (Reynolds, 1961). The plant was first collected by Peter Bally in October 1956 on cliff faces of the Daloh Escarpment at 1,970 m, about 20 km north of Erigavo, Somalia. It is currently known from no other location (Carter et al., 2011), so the species could be described as a narrow endemic with a very restricted distribution.

In cultivation
My plant was obtained as a single stem in 2009 from Brian McDonough of the BCSS Glasgow branch. As you can see (fig. 1) it has grown

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Fig. 1. *Aloe cremnophila* in a 40 cm diameter pan.
Reynolds (1961) described the flowers as being "scarlet, turning yellowish-green at mouth". The flowers on my plant have never been "scarlet" but my recollection is that the last time it flowered they were pinker than the most recent flowers.

Reynolds (1961) said that "Of several plants cultivated in my garden at Bryanston, Johannesberg, only one stem produced an inflorescence". Similarly, my plant has been a reluctant flowerer and in 10 years it has only produced three flower spikes. Brian confirms that his plant has never flowered in his care. From this I think it is safe to conclude that this species is indeed a rather shy flowerer.

**Relationships and habitat**

When Reynolds (1961) first described *A. cremnophila*, he said that his new species "appears to be nearest to *A. tororoana* Reynolds (from Tororo Rock in Uganda near the Kenya border) but differs in having slender stems, unspotted leaves, larger racemes, larger bracts as long as the 10–12 mm pedicels, while the whole plant is pendent on cliff faces".

Today however, with the benefit of further research, the closest relative to this species appears to be *A. jacksonii* from the Ogaden in Ethiopia, which has similar short, erect or procumbent stems which branch from the base to form clumps, whilst the leaves are similar in shape with a rough surface, but are spotted (Walker, 2017). Indeed *A. cremnophila* can be viewed as a more robust version of *A. jacksonii* with unspotted leaves and prominent floral bracts.

In their study of cliff-dwelling aloes from north-eastern Africa, Brandham *et al.* (1994) found another close similarity between *A. cremnophila* and *A. jacksonii* – these species are both rather unusual in being tetraploid with chromosome counts of 2n = 28. In contrast, the majority of other species of *Aloe* are diploid (with 2n = 14). Tetraploid species originate from either the doubling of the diploid chromosome number within a species or a doubling of a diploid interspecies hybrid. Such events are very rare in *Aloe* and which of these alternatives was the origin of *A. cremnophila* is unknown. Brandham *et al.* (1994) go on to speculate that for *A. cremnophila* "the best-known population of the species, on the cliffs of the Daloh Escarpment, north of Erigavo, is perhaps a single clone, a suggestion supported by the very uniform chemistry in the leaves of a number of accessions".

*Aloe cremnophila* was so named because it is 'cliff-loving' i.e. it is a cremnophyte (a plant that grows on cliffs). However, it is not unique as an obligate cremnophytic *Aloe* (i.e. a plant that will only grow on cliffs). Other species in Africa and Arabia include: *A. inamara, A. mendesii* (Angola); *A. ankoberensis, A. downsiana, A. elkerriana, A. jacksonii, A. pulcherrima, A. tewodzi* (Ethiopia); *A. amicorum, A. doddsiorum, A. tartarensis* (Kenya); *A. corallina, A. huntleyana, A. omavandae, A. pavalkae* (Namibia); *A. colleneetteae, A. whitcombei* (Oman); *A. squarrosa* (Socotra); *A. gilletti, A. hildebrandtii* (Somalia); *A. hardyi, A. meyeri* (South Africa); *A. confusa* (Tanzania); *A. tororoana* (Uganda) and *A. abyssicola, A. pendens, A. yemenica* (Yemen).

Additionally, further afield and in other groups of succulents, cliff-dwellers are also known. In Mexican Crassulaceae, for example, the two species of the genus *Cremnophila* were separated from *Echeveria* and *Sedum* partly because of their cliff-dwelling habit and most species of the more familiar genus *Pachyphytum* also grow hanging down from precipitous cliffs.

In southern Africa the wide range of species that have been discovered on cliffs were the subject of Ernst van Jaarsveld's PhD. thesis. Rumour has it that these will become the basis of a forthcoming book from this prodigious author, so we eagerly await further revelations on cliff-dwelling succulents in, hopefully, the not too distant future.

**References**


