

## INTERNET HERBARIUM ADVENTURES

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Have you ever dreamed, like I have, about adventures in exotic lands studying carnivorous plants, and making great discoveries? Are you like me, and can't afford to undertake grand botanical expeditions? While it may not be field work, one inexpensive way of exploring the world of carnivorous plants is to journey into the land of online or internet-based herbariums.

Recently, many herbariums have been placing searchable databases of their collections online. The ICPS forum has a growing list of online herbaria that you can explore from the comfort of your home or office.

Experienced botanists and scientists are well-versed in the use of herbariums (in-person or online), however the botanical research novice may not always completely understand the intricacies of their use. Embarking on online herbarium adventures, I find there are two tips that are well worth following. First, always read the herbarium's online tips or frequently asked questions. Second, always work with herbaria staff to address any unresolved questions or to validate records accessed if you plan to use the information in research or publication.



Figure 1 Scan of the *R. dentata* specimen, Division of Paleobotany, YPM164317. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA.



Figure 2 Scan of the original *R. dentata* specimen label, Division of Paleobotany, YPM164317. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA.

Here's a good example of how following the tips helps you avoid any embarrassment. In my Web Wanderings, exploring online herbarium collections for *Roridula* records, I accessed the Yale University Peabody Museum Paleobotany online catalog (<http://www.peabody.yale.edu/collections>). I reviewed a record for *Roridula dentata* with great excitement! The online database listed the specimen as being collected in Australia in 1897. An apparent discovery: A record of a species endemic to one continent collected across an ocean on another continent! See Figure 1.

Following the advice of the herbarium website, I contacted the collections manager to validate my discovery. It was good that I did before announcing my great discovery. At my request the collections manager and the curator reviewed the specimen and documentation, and after some research they concluded that there was an error in the transcription of the original herbarium label (Shusheng Hu, collection manager, personal communication; see Figure 2).

Reviewing the original label they noted that what was thought to be the collectors name is actually a location in South Africa (Bokkeveld) with a potential altitude of 5000 feet. The "Australia" label was transcribed in error and probably was meant to be *Africa australis* (South Africa in Latin) where *R. dentata* is endemic. In further reviewing the label contents, I found that a Latin translation of *regio occidentalis* is "western region". Putting all of the pieces together the specimen was probably collected in an area in the western region (*regio occidentalis*) of South Africa (*Africa australis*) where *Roridula* has been found.

So, while I didn't actually have a major discovery, I was able to make a contribution to the field by helping to ensure the accuracy of the specimen record—something I feel good about.

You can start your carnivorous plant adventure today by visiting the ICPS forum to explore the growing list of online herbaria. Remember the herbarium tips and have a great journey!

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