

## Memories of Erwin Evert

Interview of Bob Lichvar by Phil White

I had the privilege of meeting Erwin F. Evert in about 1979 or '80. I was with Don Despain in Yellowstone, and he asked me, "Ever heard of a fellow named Erwin Evert? He keeps wanting to get into our herbarium." So Don gave me his address for his cabin on Kitty Creek, and later I met him at his cabin. We became friends, and through the years my family sometimes stayed at his place in Chicago and he sometimes stayed at our place in Cheyenne.

He was a self-taught botanist, but you would never know it. He discovered four new species to science from Wyoming. I visited him once in Chicago early in our acquaintance. He showed me his 500-species rock garden. Later we looked at one of his specimens from Wyoming and could not identify it. We thought it might be a new species and he asked me how to go about describing it for science. I mentioned that some botanists count chromosomes to include in descriptions. He worked on that all winter. He amazed me when he bought a compound microscope and taught himself how to count chromosomes. He teamed up with an expert in Umbelliferae, Lincoln Constance, and they described it - *Shoshonea pulvinata* in 1982.

My most vivid memory is one spring morning he arrived at our house in Cheyenne on his way to his summer cabin near Cody and we immediately started talking about plants. We walked around the yard and talked about every plant. We looked at my neighbor's tulips, and he told me all about tulips, the wild ones, the cultivated ones. This went on all day. My wife Patty made a supper, and we talked plants all through supper, on into the evening. Patty finally went to bed. Around midnight one of us mentioned *Carex*, and he started into the characteristics of alpine *Carex*, their distribution, and so on. Finally it got to be about three in the morning, and my head starts nodding. He said, "Am I boring you?" I said, "No, but we are way past my bedtime." Erwin was one of those guys who could live on about four hours of sleep. I finally said, "Erwin, I gotta go to bed." So a while later in my sleep I hear, "*Carex, Carex* (in a ghostly like voice)," and I thought it looked like Erwin was standing by my bed still talking to me. But I woke up and realized it was me shouting "*Carex*" in my sleep. I thought I better shut up or Erwin would be in there joining the conversation.

He appeared fairly quiet and reserved and introspective if you didn't know him. I remember at one of the early Wyoming Native Plant Society meetings near Lysite people were straggling in to the campsite and I was in another long conversation with Erwin when a botanist from another state said hello to me and asked who my friend was. So I introduced Erwin and the guy said, "What do you do?" And Erwin replied, "I am a student of the flora of North America." The guy was left speechless and asked no more questions.

We went on numerous field trips together. On one memorable early trip, I was driving my brand new '81 Ford pickup. We were following a primitive road up one fork of the Shoshone along a sliver of land that was not part of the Absoraka Wilderness. At one point we were going along the river - not knowing it had undercut the bank - and suddenly the road collapsed, and we went into the river and were washed backwards downstream a bit. I had a chain and a come-along and we managed to winch that thing back up onto the road. A little farther along on this bulldozer road that was cut at an angle going up this scree slope to the alpine, we encountered a small little bridge across an avalanche chute. Erwin went ahead to check out the primitive bridge and he signaled me to come on across. We spent a couple of days up there

botanizing and on the way down I saw that bridge from the opposite side and noticed it was supported by about a 3" lodgepole. I said, "Erwin, you let me go over that???" He said, "We made it didn't we?" So I said, "Well, this time you're riding in the truck with me so if we roll down the mountain we roll together." But we made it again.

Our last adventure on that same trip we were going to the Beartooths to a swampy area marked on a quad map to find out later it was a palsa-fen. We were on a two-track going through subalpine forest through a boulder field and I finally bent the rear fender on my new truck a boulder. I said, "Erwin, that's it. I can't do this anymore. We went into a river. We almost rolled down a mountain, and now we hit a boulder. We're walking from here." No big deal to Erwin since every Saturday he walked 14 miles all winter long staying in shape.

The next day we were back at his cabin at Kitty Creek, and I was telling Yolanda about the trip. She said, "You should have asked me before you went." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because a few years ago he rolled his Karman Ghia off Pikes Peak while looking at plants instead of the road."

By the way, in 1984 Erwin was one of the three authors of an article in Arctic and Alpine Research entitled "Description of the Only Known Fen-Palsa in the Contiguous United States."

I remember one excursion with Erwin and his daughter Mara, who was about 12 at the time. He was giving her some devices to remember the plants. To help with *Penstemon whippleanus* he conjured up the Mr. Whipple from the old TV commercial for Charmin Bathroom tissue ads, who said, "Please don't squeeze the Charmin." So Erwin could be heard saying "Don't squeeze the Charmin" when they saw the *Penstemon*, and Mara couldn't remember the name.

You meet many people in your life's journey, but not all leave a lasting impression on you. In my life's journey, Erwin not only left a rich botanical memory with me, but he was one of the few people who enriched my life by just being who he was, and I feel honored to have had the fortune and pleasure to have known him. He was a big part of my fond Wyoming days, and I will miss him in many ways.

Bob Lichvar, Research Botanist  
National Wetland Plant List  
ERDC, Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory (CRREL)  
72 Lyme Road  
Hanover, NH 03755  
603-646-4657 (office)  
603-738-2181 (cell)  
FAX 603-646-4750  
[http://wetland\\_plants.usace.army.mil/](http://wetland_plants.usace.army.mil/)

Phil White, Attorney at Law  
1619 Rainbow Ave  
Laramie WY 82070  
307 742-9363  
[philwyoming@yahoo.com](mailto:philwyoming@yahoo.com)