AN EXTRAORDINARY NEW SPECIES OF ALOE FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE

In the south east of the African continent, the Republic of Mozambique is a country, perhaps best remembered as having been plagued by a long civil war. Once known as Portuguese East Africa, Mozambique was ruled by the Portuguese for over four hundred years. Colonial rule came to an end in 1975, but soon after, the country fell into civil war, which lasted for the next fifteen years. This of course made any kind of fieldwork for botanists very difficult during that period. Recently though, Mozambique’s situation has stabilized and the country has become less problematic to travel in. With its great range of ecotypes, high biological diversity, and location, being a mere 286 miles, (460 km) across the Mozambique channel from Madagascar, itself habitat for a large number of Aloe species, Mozambique has relatively few compared with its neighbors South Africa and Madagascar. Despite being a quite a large country geographically, there are only four endemic species of *Aloe*: *A. cannelli* L.C. Leach, *A. decurva* Reynolds, *A. mossurilensis* Ellert and *A. torrei* I.Verd. & Christian.

For many years, the senior author (McCoy) had desired to visit Mozambique to further investigate the aloes occurring there and search for possible new species. Part of this desire was driven by photographs he had seen, many years ago, of the cycad *Encephalartos turneri* Lavranos & Goode, found on Mount Ribaue, that also showed an aloe in the background which seemed to be different from currently described species. Due to the prior unrest in Mozambique, it was only recently that it was possible to undertake the visit. It was as McCoy prepared to make his first visit that he made contact with the other two authors of this article, Rulkens and Baptista. This was indeed very fortuitous, as they also had a great interest in the genus *Aloe*, and botany in general as well. Perhaps the most exciting fact was that they too were aware of the aloe on Mount Ribaue. Baptista had already taken more photos of it.

Mount Ribaue is an isolated, granite mountain that rises up to an approximate height of 5,800 ft (1770 m) not far from the town of Nampula in the north of the country. Here the climate is tropical and the higher reaches of the mountain are covered in mainly intact moist Afro-montane jungle. This vegetation is supported, not only by the high rainfall that the area receives, but also by the fact the upper elevations are often covered in clouds. In July of 2013 McCoy and Baptista travelled to Mount Ribaue to explore the mountain and during that time the new aloe was encountered and field studies undertaken.

The first population of aloes (Fig. 1) were found growing at an elevation of 3300 feet (1000 m) on small areas of granite which provided open sites in otherwise thick forest, comprised of a large number of different tree species. It is of great interest that even though the aloes grew there, the area was moist enough to allow members of various plant families such as *Nephrolepis* ferns, *Selaginella* sp. mosses and other non-xeric species to thrive. Also growing in association were *Oxytenanthera* sp. bamboos, *Phoenix*