

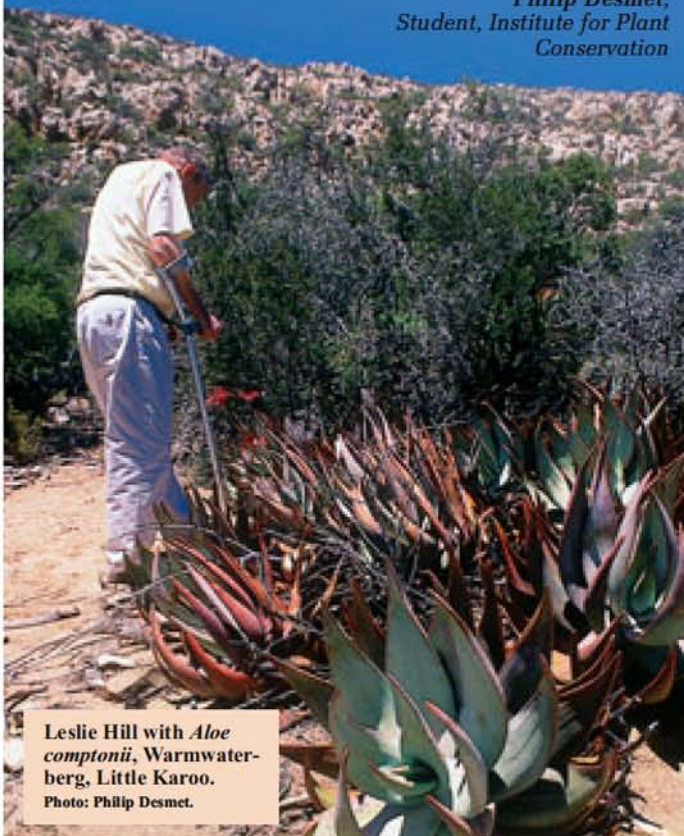
MY FRIEND LES

Les loved plants. He loved to grow them and he loved to see them in the wild. In his latter years nothing brought him more joy than to look at plants the veld. Not even the Karoo's finest barbed-wire fences could deter this 90-year-old gent from getting a closer look at the flowers on the other side. I remember one crisp autumn morning we pulled over on the side of the road outside the town of Doring Bay, on the west coast. Our sudden stop and frenzied state of behavior was precipitated by a large population of *Aloe framesii* in a crimson blaze of flowers next to the road. Richard, Colin and I were out the car and over the fence in a flash. Les opted to remain in the car, but after a short while his wonderment at the flowery spectacle got the better of him. Just then, a Doring Bay resident came stumbling down the road only to happen upon Les embroiled in the fence. We found Les and the merry passer-by attempting the door of the bakkie, and we rushed to Les's aid to discover that the passer-by, despite his Sunday morning vapors, had helped Les out of a terrible fix.

Dealing with crutches in the veld is difficult at the best of times. Occasionally Les would accidentally break a piece off a plant with his, and, upset to see even the smallest piece of succulent perish in the hot sun, he would invariably ask someone to pick up the broken sprig so that he could nurture it back to health in a pot at home. The more I got to know Les, the more I realized how deep and long his passion for plants has been. Many afternoons were spent on the stoep or next to the fire discussing plants. I will never forget that sparkle that appeared in his eye when the topic turned to matters of mutual botanical interest. His house at Simonsvlei bears testament to a lifetime of plant collecting and growing. By no mean only succulents, but almost any flavour of indigenous and exotic plant can be found in some corner of the garden.

I have to admire Les's foresight and generosity. As an investment manager, he was able through his endowments to invest in the future of both the people and land of this country. He was able to translate his passion for South Africa into a gift to all of us. Les was a modest man, but I think he derived great joy from seeing how his quiet efforts created opportunities for so many people. I have benefited directly from his generosity - through the Institute for Plant Conservation, cuttings from his garden, and simply from his stories. That is how I will remember Les, as a humble, down-to-earth man deeply passionate about the world in which he lived.

*Philip Desmet,
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Conservation*



Leslie Hill with *Aloe comptonii*, Warmwaterberg, Little Karoo.
Photo: Philip Desmet.