

Cactus abductor stuck

Rare plant safe; thief jail-bound

By Russ Hemphill
The Phoenix Gazette

An Arizona cactus dealer who was convicted of removing a rare crested saguaro from federal land will be stuck behind bars for six months.

U.S. District Judge Robert Broomfield ordered the dealer, Glen Edward Clontz, 53, to begin serving the jail term in March. He also was sentenced Monday to four years' probation, fined \$250 and banned from any business involving cactus.

Another defendant in the case, his wife, Karen Clontz, 29, was ordered to serve five years' probation and was fined \$250.

The Clontzes live at their Rattlesnake Ranch residence in Butler Valley in western Arizona. The cactus was uprooted near Quartzsite.

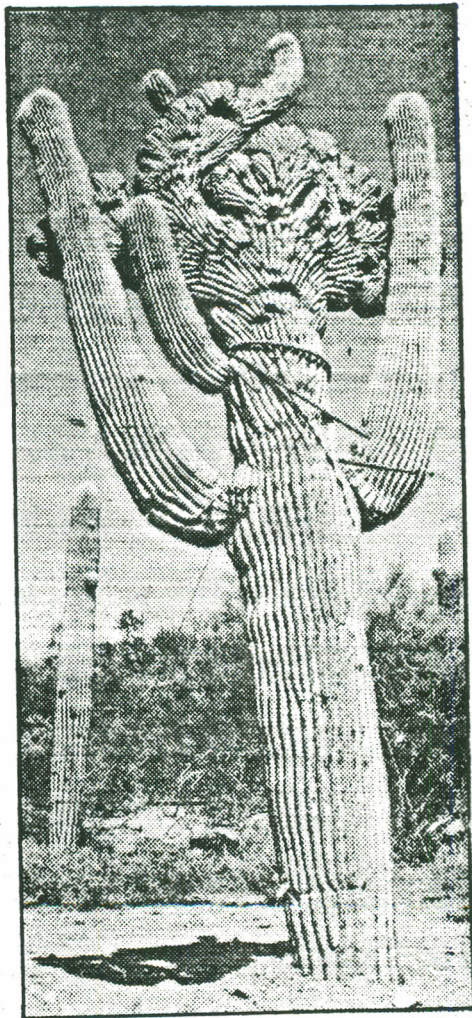
The cactus — 19 feet tall and perhaps 150 years old — bears a 7-foot-wide crest, an anomaly that occurs in only one of about 150,000 saguaros.

A Baker, Ore., couple were keys in clearing the case of the kidnapped cactus. Rosslee and Roy Crockett often drove to see the plant while wintering near Quartzsite.

The Crocketts saw the cactus in early January 1986. When they visited the site the next month, the plant was gone.

"The more I thought about it, the

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This rare crested saguaro, recovered after being stolen, has been donated to Desert Botanical Garden.

■ Cactus

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madder I got," Mrs. Crockett said. "So I called the sheriff."

The sheriff called state officials, who called federal officials.

A three-state search was launched, and on April 1, agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seized the cactus at a Las Vegas nursery.

The Crocketts were flown to Las Vegas to identify the plant.

The nursery owner told agents that he had bought the cactus for \$1,500 in mid-July. When agents located the cactus, it carried a \$15,000 price tag and

the nursery owner had rejected a \$7,500 offer, court records indicate.

The investigation climaxed with an October indictment of the Clontzes.

According to court records, they admitted digging up the saguaro but claimed that it stood in a 100-foot right of way for an oil pipeline, where Karen Clontz had permits to collect saguaros.

The saguaro was donated by the federal Bureau of Land Management to the Desert Botanical Garden, where it will be part of a Sonoran Desert display opening in the fall.

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