

THE ULTIMATE SAGUARO

The search for Arizona's
stateliest sentinel continues



BY FERN STEWART WELCH

In the 22 months since the Ultimate Saguaro was first introduced in from around the world, the intensity with which people have responded to it has been as "The Ultimate," from Cable News Network, has captured the winning spirit of the people who knew people appreciate the depth of the spiny sentinels.

Almost without exception, when a person is asked to extol the virtues of the saguaro in particular, self-interest envelopes also use the word so that we could receive photographs. Some of the best photos of the past, like the one on this page, that they were posthumously received well done.

We also learned from our readers know a lot about the saguaro. When one of our readers wrote about a saguaro with a strange "birth date" long before the time of the hot with calls. We times testily, that it is a rare and wonderful. What's more, if you win this search, we have about our majestic.

We know, for environmental stress every which way.

We also know that green giants that are estimated that only one lives to maturity by ants and other insects germinate. If they are prime fodder for the vulture, they slow grow and up to 4 inches croaching reside in the shade by vandals (by law, saguaro are Commission of the State of Arizona wonder that our protection.

In fact, what

In the 22 months since we began our Search for the Ultimate Saguaro, letters and snapshots have come in from around the world. That response, and the intensity with which people proclaimed their entries as "The Ultimate," was heartwarming. So was the call from Cable News Network in Atlanta, which plans to feature the winning saguaros on an upcoming program. We knew people appreciated the saguaros, but we underestimated the depth of their emotional attachment to the spiny sentinels.

Almost without exception, the entries were accompanied with a personal note or letter (sometimes multipage) extolling the virtues of saguaros in general and the entry in particular. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes also usually were included so that we could return the treasured photographs. Some contributors even sent photos of great saguaros of the past, like the one on the Contents page, that they thought should be posthumously recognized for a job well done.

We also learned that many of our readers know a lot about saguaros. When one of our writers described a saguaro with a strange outcropping as having a "birth deformity," it wasn't long before the telephone wires were hot with calls. We were advised, sometimes testily, that the "crested" saguaro is a rare and wonderful specimen. What's more, if we were going to run this search, we had better learn more about our majestic friends. We did.

We know, for instance, that environmental stress causes the arms of a saguaro to grow every which way but up.

We also know why it's so important to protect these green giants that are unique to the Sonoran Desert. It is estimated that only one saguaro seed in 40 million survives to maturity. Many seeds are carried off and eaten by ants and other creatures before they get a chance to germinate. If they do germinate, the tender plants are prime fodder for cattle and deer. Add to that delicate balance their slow growth rate (one-fourth inch the first year and up to 4 inches a year thereafter), the dangers of encroaching residential and commercial developments, damage by vandals and the illegal scavenging of these plants (by law, saguaros for sale must be tagged by the Arizona Commission of Agriculture and Horticulture) and it's little wonder that our state's most recognizable symbol needs our protection.

In fact, what PHOENIX METRO Magazine started as

a way to help people increase their saguaro awareness has turned into a commitment to help save saguaros. Our judges suggest that continuing our Search for the Ultimate Saguaro would be a good way to expand the community's interest and awareness, and we agree.

We've also rethought the parameters of our awards system. We stated at the outset that we "reserved the right to decide runners-up, amend the rules and change anything else we want." Well, in order to protect saguaros, we've nixed the idea of placing plaques near the winners, for the plaques would just advertise these prize specimens. Those who have found our winners will receive a certificate attesting to their superior saguaro-seeking skills. (The

certificate will bear the signature and seal of Secretary of State Rose Mofford.) Framed photographs of the winning entries will be on display at Desert Botanical Garden's plant sale Oct. 11 and 12 and will find a permanent home in the foyer of PHOENIX METRO Magazine.

Since the judges also decided that the Ultimate Saguaro has yet to be discovered, we were left with a need to categorize our widely varied entries. With the help of Steve Priebe of Desert Botanical Garden, we ended up with such categories as: Most Symmetrical, Most Environmentally Stressed, Most Arms, Most Disarming, Most Massive, Most Robust in a Natural Setting, Most Abused, Tubbiest in a Residential Setting, Most Anthropomorphic, and Wannabees (not saguaros, although they obviously

wannabee).

We heartily thank our judges: Rose Mofford, Desert Botanical Garden Curator Victor Gass, Saguaro National Monument Superintendent Robert Arnberger and Arizona photographer Dick Dietrich. Gov. Bruce Babbitt was with us in spirit only — he was out of town drumming up votes for the 1988 presidential election.

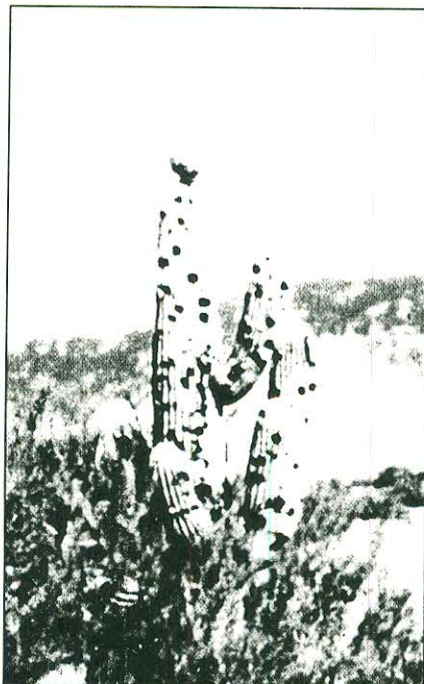
If you were among those who entered our Search for the Ultimate Saguaro, many thanks. You have the satisfaction of knowing that you helped us all become more sensitive to the value and beauty of our desert heritage. If your entry was a winner, congratulations.

For those of you who think you've seen even more exotic specimens, send us a color photograph of the saguaro, along with your name, address, telephone number and detailed information on the location to: Saguaro Sweepstakes, PHOENIX METRO Magazine, 4707 N. 12th St., Phoenix, AZ 85014.

*Obstacles to a
young saguaro are
formidable: if it
germinates, it grows
only four inches a
year — braving
cattle, deer, drought,
urbanization,
pollution, vandals
and profiteers*

THE ULTIMATE SAGUARO

Most Abused

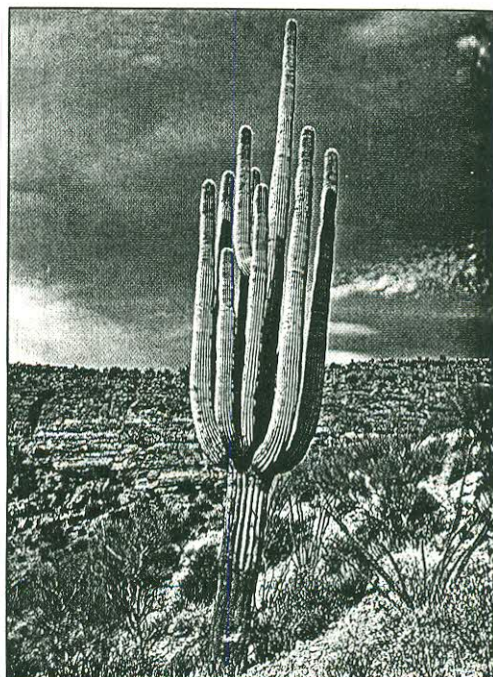


WINNER
David Rothberg
Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada

Most Symmetrical

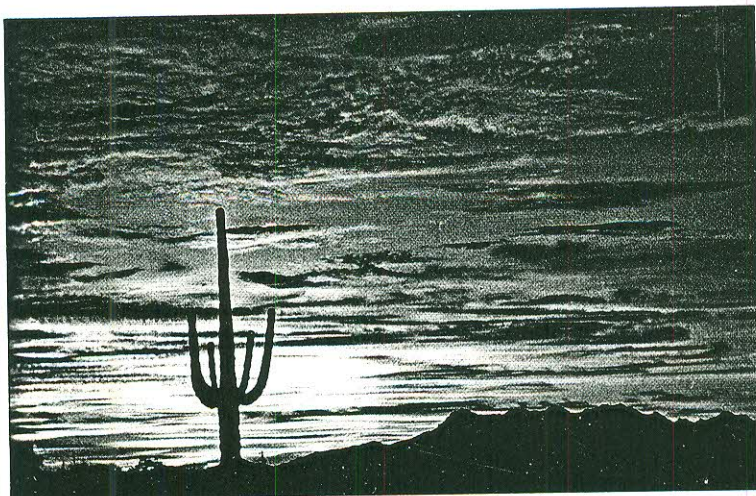


WINNER
Andrew S. Axelrod
Tempe, AZ

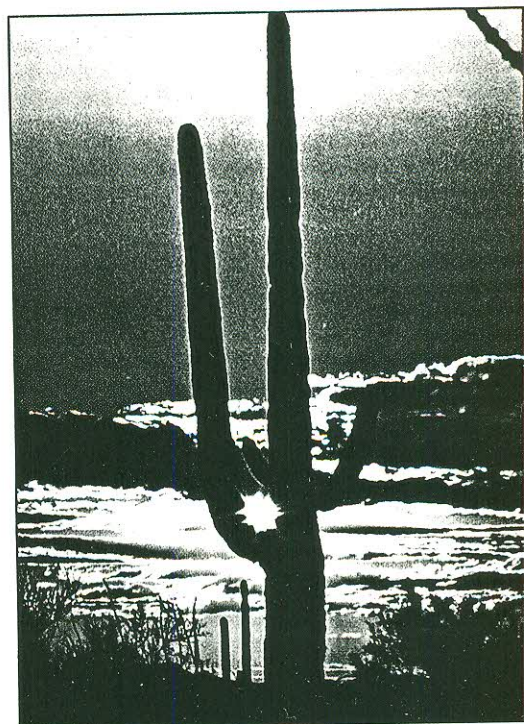


RUNNER-UP
Robert E. George
Scottsdale, AZ

Most Picture Postcard-like

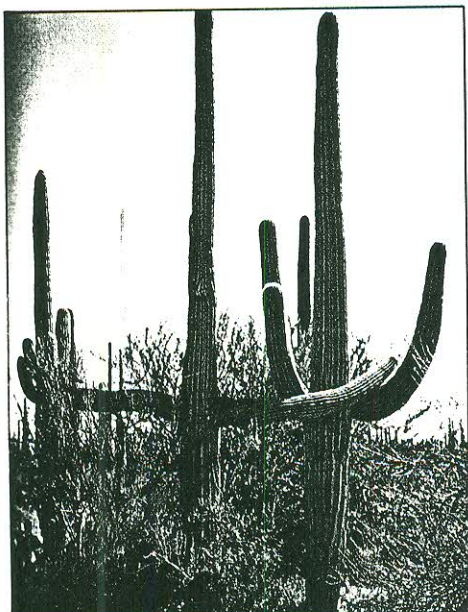


WINNER
Ronald Lorenz
Apache Junction, AZ

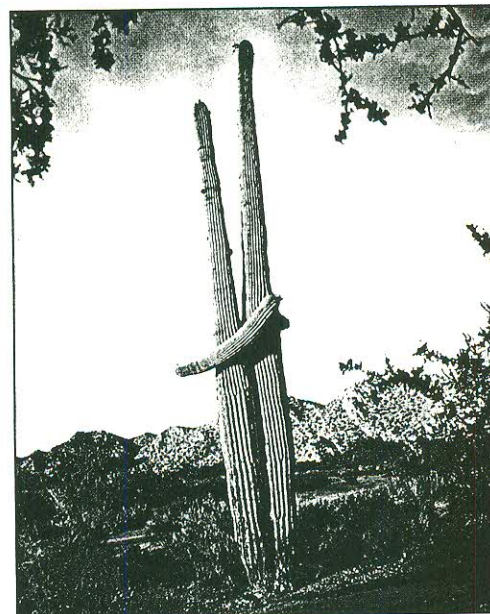


RUNNER-UP
Barry H. Schoenfeld
Hermosa Beach, CA

Most Anthropomorphic



WINNER
Cheryl Koskela
Phoenix, AZ



RUNNER-UP
Rock L. Earle & Linda B. Lococo
Scottsdale, AZ

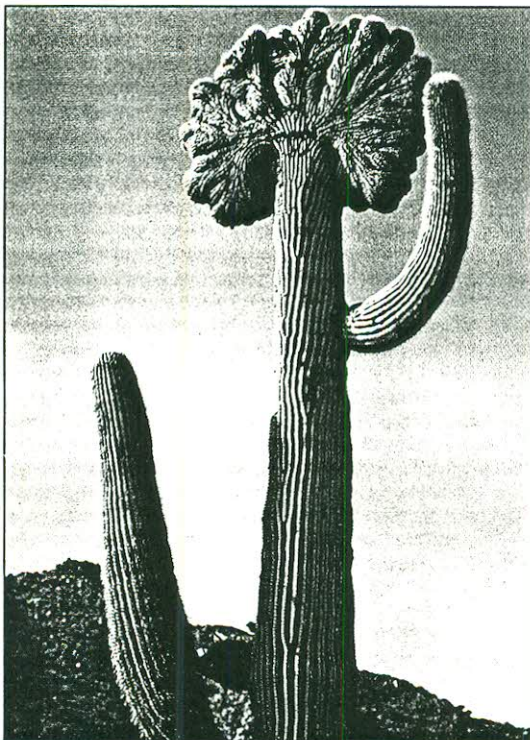
THE ULTIMATE SAGUARO

Wannabees

WINNER
E.B. Borg
Phoenix, AZ



Crested



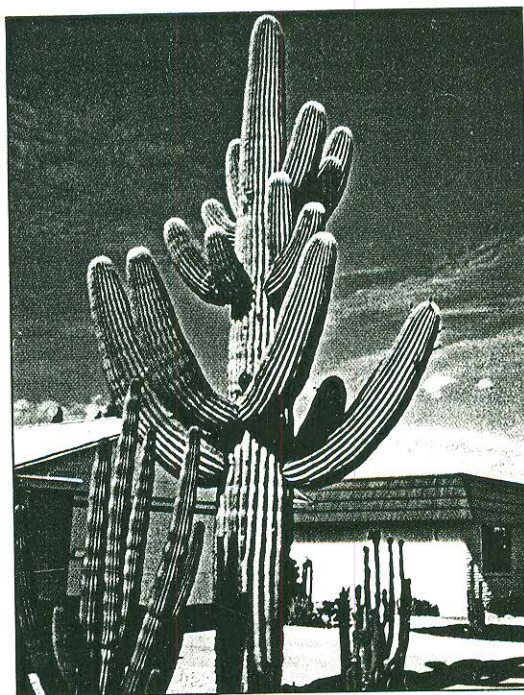
WINNER
Carol Askins
Wickenburg, AZ



RUNNER-UP
Pat & Bruce Snyder
Phoenix, AZ

Tubbiest

WINNER
H.D. Adams
Sun City, AZ

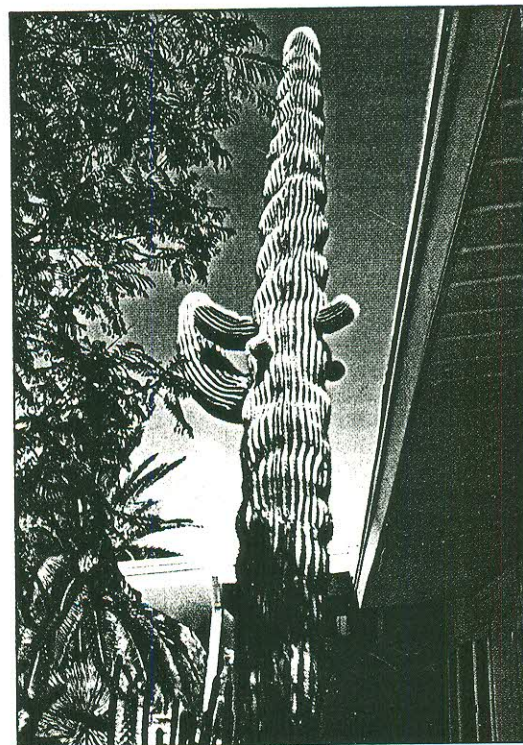


Most Unusual Growth Habit

WINNER
George E. Johnston
Apache Junction, AZ

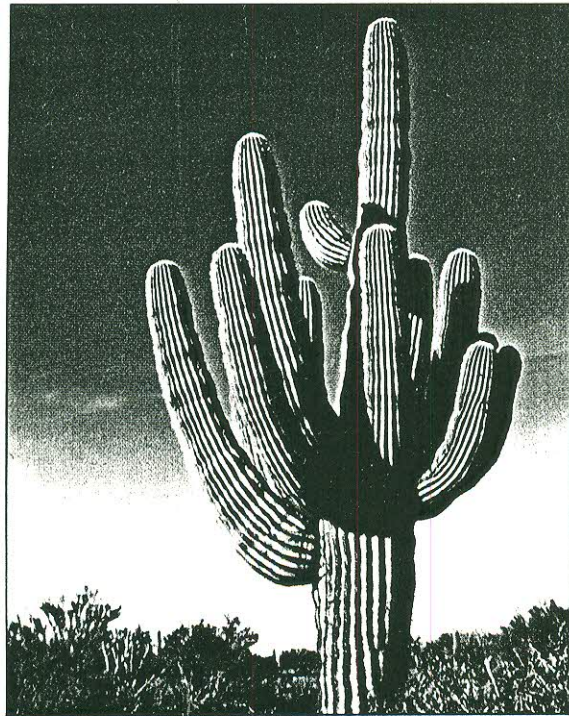


RUNNER-UP
Pat & Ray Stout
Scottsdale, AZ



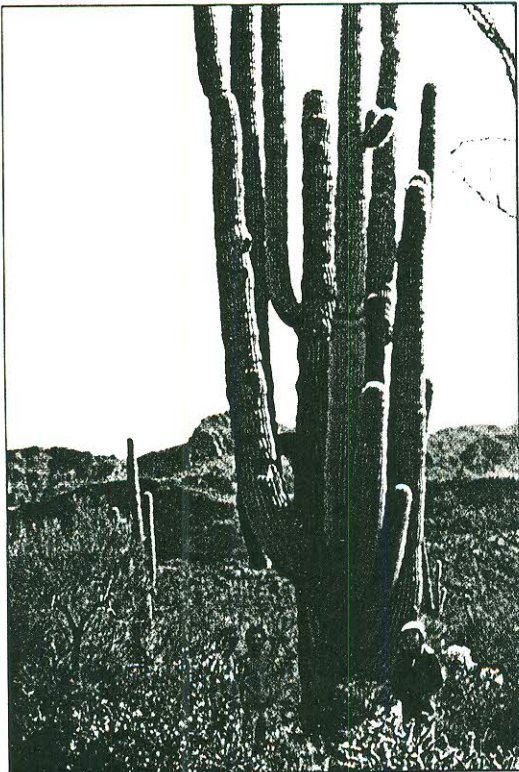
THE ULTIMATE SAGUARO

Most
Robust

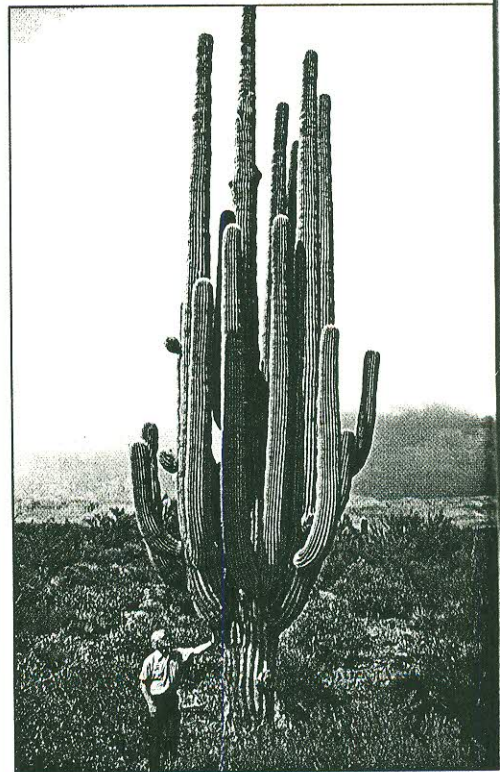


WINNER
Angie & Doug Sissons
Scottsdale, AZ

Most
Massive
Base



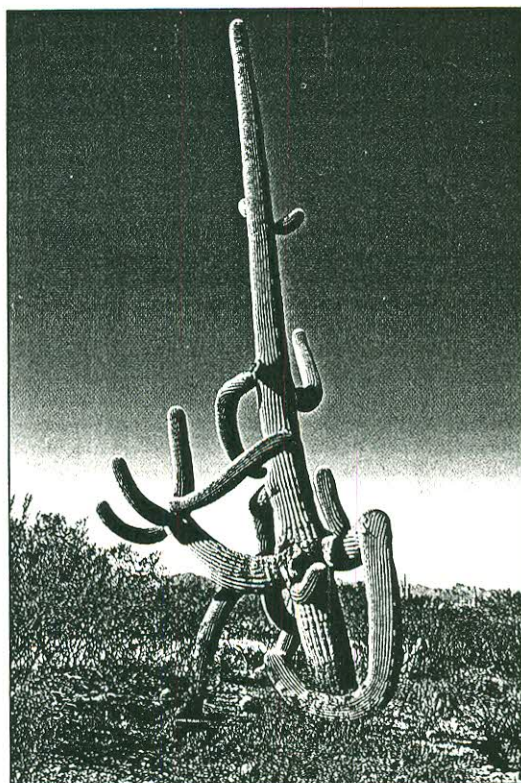
WINNER
Toby K. Ulacco
Phoenix, AZ



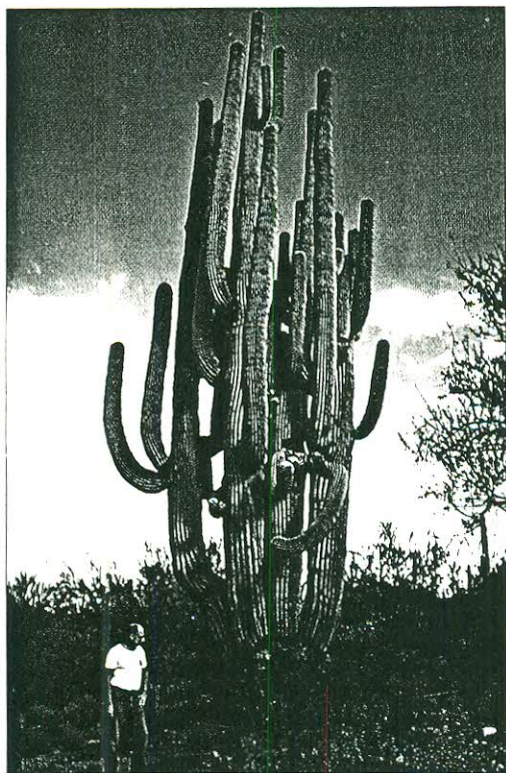
RUNNER-UP
Kaye Klein
Phoenix, AZ

Most Photographed

WINNERS
Shelley Kapp
 Mesa, AZ
Pam Henderson
 Moline, IL
Eleanor Nelson
 Mesa, AZ



Most Arms



WINNER
Charlene A. Sloan
 Phoenix, AZ

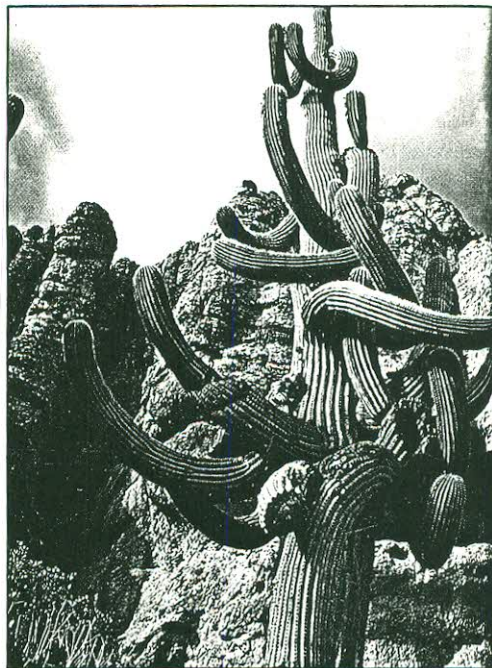


RUNNERS-UP
Ernest E. Snyder
 Mesa, AZ
Dale Swesey
 Scottsdale, AZ

THE ULTIMATE SAGUARO

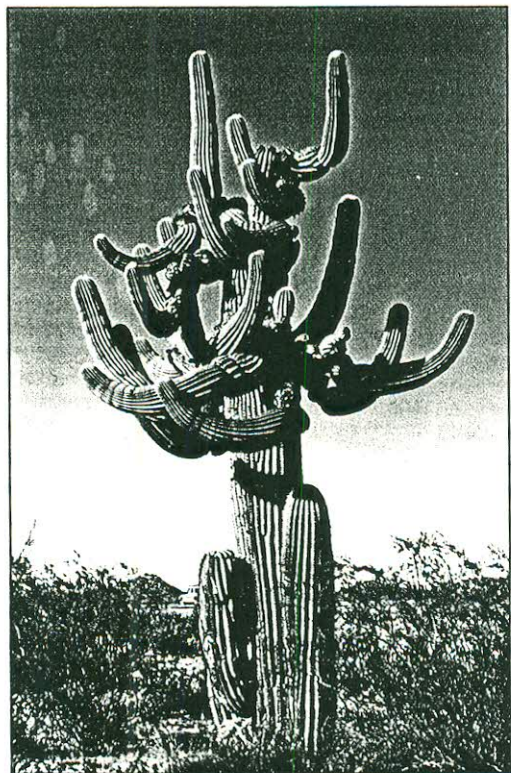


CO-WINNER
Paul & Diane Hanus
Mesa, AZ



CO-WINNER
Gwen Niemisto
Novi, MI

Most
Environmentally
Stressed



RUNNER-UP
Shirley Nash
Casa Grande, AZ

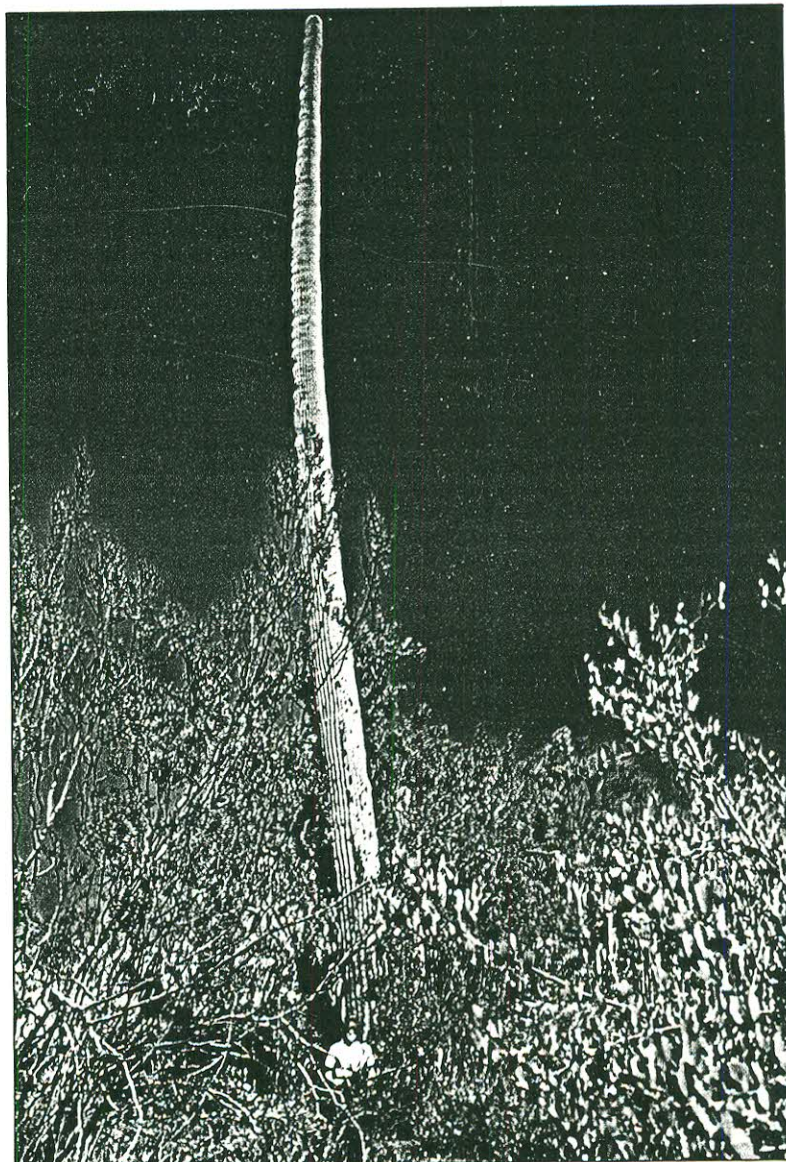


HONORABLE MENTION
Cynthia Seelhammer & Doug M.
Queen Creek, AZ

WINNER
Tom Augh
Phoenix, AZ

IN MEMORIAM

Most Disarming



WINNER
Tom Augherton
Phoenix, AZ

When the "Ultimate Saguaro" contest commenced, the tallest known cactus — so certified by the Guinness Book of World Records — stood in Cave Creek. Sometime in mid-July its 78-plus feet were brought low by a strong wind.

For at least the last fifth of its 150-year life the giant was well-known and much-photographed, which at least separates it from that host elegized by Gray: "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,/And waste its sweetness on the desert air." Majestic friend, ave atque vale.