Diplacrum africanum, the Afro-American link.

By *Reinoud Norde and Feddo Oldenburger*

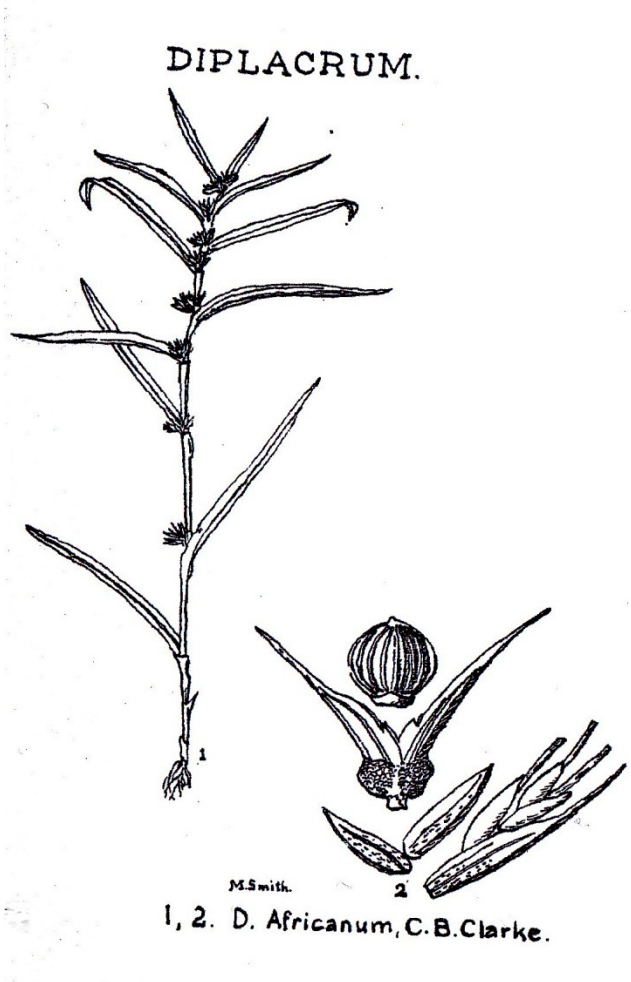
When we found a small nondescript sedge in a seepage zone at the foot of a dry Sipaliwini savanna hill, we didn't expect it to be anything special.
Growing amidst *Syngonanthus* and *Utricularia* species, it was regarded by us as just one of those -as yet unidentified- indicators of a sandy soil with an impeded water table.

Nothing unusual, we thought.

Back home after our 1968-69 expedition, we started to identify the unknown specimens in our plant collection and it was only then that the thrill of being on to something spectacular came home to us.
The small sedge mentioned before had all the characteristics of *Diplacrum africanum*, so far only known as an endemic to Africa**.**

Could this be true?

Our tentative identification was confirmed by Tetsuo Koyama, renowned expert on grasses and sedges at the New York Botanical Garden.

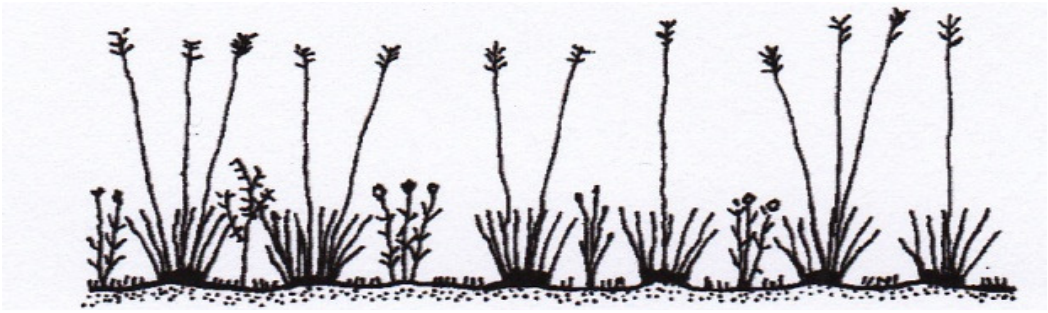


According to Koyama the previously known range of *Diplacrum africanum* covered Upper Guinea, Nile Land and Madagascar.
So our collection ONS 152 was a first for tropical South America.

Would you believe it?

In Ivory Coast our small sedge *Diplacrum africanum* has been found growing on prolonged waterlogged soils in two small savannas.

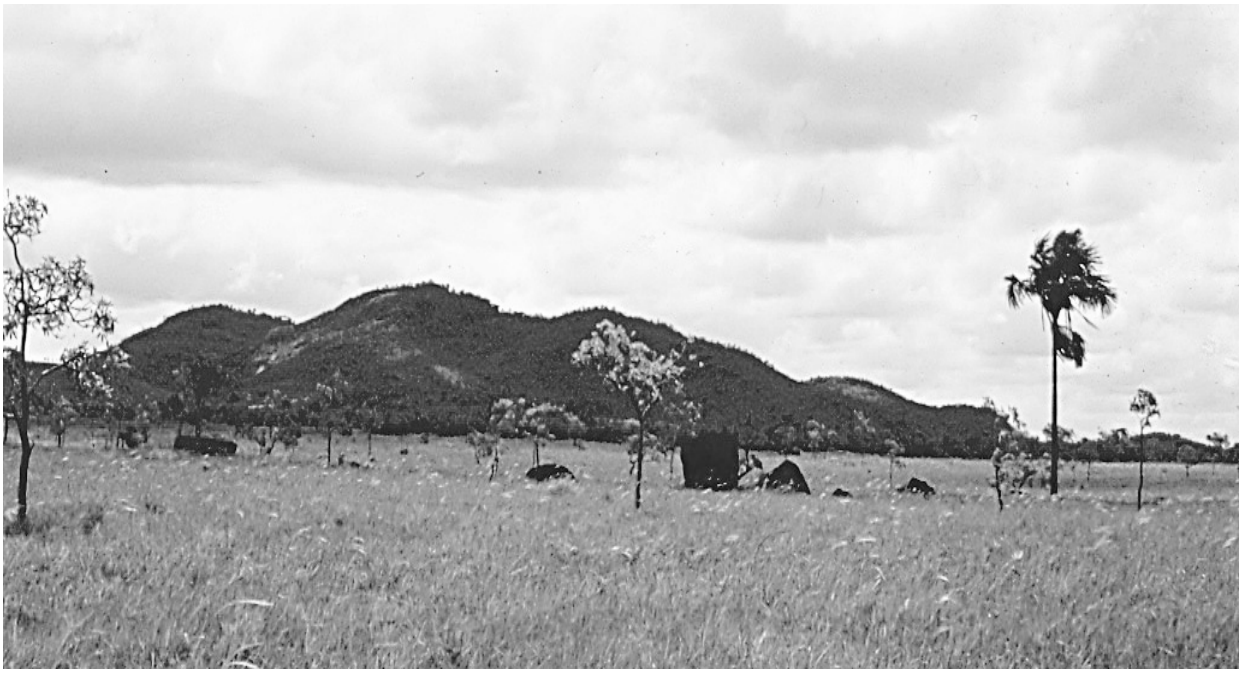
No surprise there.



Vegetation diagram with Diplacrum africanum and Fuirena glomerata, Ivory Coast.
From Bellier, Gillon, Gillon, Guillaumet and Perraud (1969). See 'References' below.

So there **is** a link, but how to explain it?
Is today's distribution a result of the Gondwanan break up 130 million years ago?
Was it part of the Colombian exchange?

We don't know…



Spaliwini flat valley with 'Vier Gebroeders' in the background.

REFERENCES

Bellier, L., Gillon,D., Gillon, Y., Guillaumet, J.-L. & Perraud, A. (1969). Recherches sur l'origine d'une savane incluse dans le bloc forestier du bas-cavally (Cote d'Ivoire) par l'etude des sols et de la biocoenose. Cah. ORSTOM, sér. Biol., n° 10 – décembre 1969.

Bremer,K. (2002). Gondwanan evolution of the grass alliance of families (Poales). Evolution 56: 1374 – 1387.

Koyama, T. & Oldenburger, F.H.F. (1971). Diplacrum africanum newly found in tropical America. Rhodora, vol. 73, 793.

Reinoud Norde & Feddo Oldenburger (1973). 200 Sipaliwini-savanne planten. STINASU-Nederland, no. 1