

THE COLLECTING SCROLL: A PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE FIELD PRESS

Jane M. Bowles, Department of Plant Sciences,
The University of Western Ontario, London,
Ontario N6A 5B7

Many field botanists who do a lot of collecting find that a standard field press (such as the one described by Savile (1962)) is inconvenient for daily use. While it ensures that the plants are pressed in fresh condition and maintains order in the collecting system, it is unwieldy and time consuming to operate. The mechanics of opening and closing a field press and laying out the plants can seem excruciatingly laborious by the end of a long day. Hurried pressing which is not corrected before the plants are too dry may result in horrible looking vouchers. I find a field press very cumbersome to carry around in thick bush, especially in addition to a clipboard and other paraphernalia. Keeping it out of poison ivy is sometimes almost impossible.

In the past I have resorted to the time honoured (and to the purist horrifying) practice of stuffing each plant into a plastic bag and tying a knot. Worse still, sometimes several specimens get stuffed into the same bag. This results, inevitably, in mixed labels, lost flower parts, bends and breaks due to excessive folding and crumpling, and a characteristic curvature of graminoids which gives new dimension to the term "falcate-secund." Bagging is far from being an ideal method and on more than one occasion I have lost complete collections when the bottom was ripped out of a large bag which contained the day's catch. I know other botanists have experienced similar misfortunes.

A few years ago I developed a system of plant collecting which, for me, solves many problems of both the field press and bagging methods. It employs a roll of polythene, about as wide as a herbarium sheet is long, which is used like a scroll (Fig. 1).

As plants are collected they are folded to the appropriate length and then rolled up into the scroll. A numbered tag or label should be placed with each specimen, but if these are omitted at least the sequence of collection is maintained. This is a great memory aid later on. I use medium weight, transparent polythene

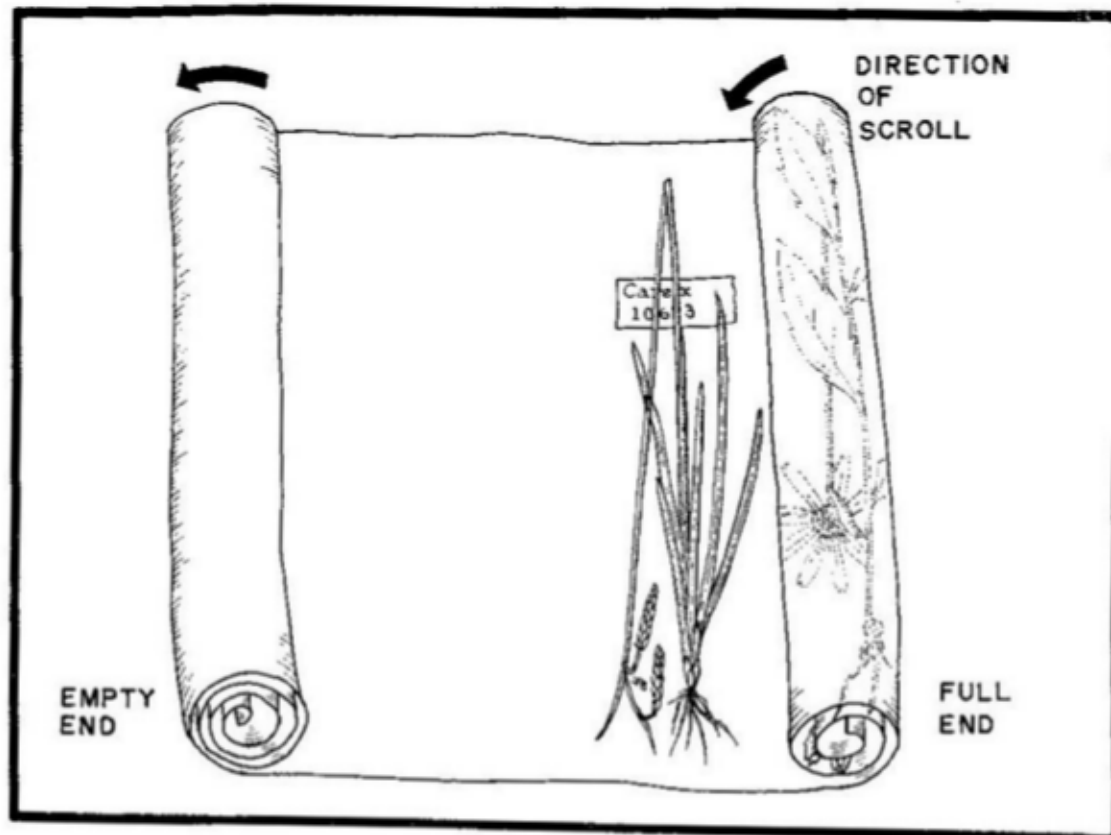


Figure 1. Diagram of a collecting scroll.

table covering for my scrolls. It can be purchased in many department and hardware stores and is quite inexpensive. A length of 2 m is enough for 5 scrolls, each 40 cm wide. The length of the scroll is determined by the standard width of the polythene. A scroll 1.5 m long will comfortably hold about 25 specimens.

In use the scroll must be secured at all times or it may unroll and spill the contents. I find that I can hold and carry it quite easily under one arm, which leaves both hands free. The completed scroll is compact and light. It can be secured with elastic bands or masking tape, labelled, and carried in a day-pack or quiver.

To release the plants one by one for pressing or examination, the scroll is merely reversed. The specimens are already conveniently folded to the correct length and somewhat flattened,

but remarkably uncrumpled. Record keeping is facilitated because the plants are presented sequentially and separate rolls can be used for each location or habitat.

One disadvantage, shared with the bagging method, is that specimens left too long in the heat may "cook" and be severely discoloured. I have never had problems with discolouration in scrolls which were processed on the day they were collected, or which were refrigerated if pressing had to be delayed, even for several days.

Reference

Savile, D.B.O. 1962. Collection and care of botanical specimens. Research Branch, Canadian Department of Agriculture. Publ. 1113. 128 pp. ♦