

Stop 381 Adult Tour – *Cupressus dupreziana*, Cool Temperate House

Rob: “One of the rarest plants we have in our African section is the Sahara Cypress, *cupressus dupreziana*, and this is native to the central Sahara. It grows on a high plateau in the country of Algeria, and there’s only about 150 of these plants left. They’re very ancient – some of them are probably two or three thousand years old - and the regeneration of these plants in the wild is very spotty. It’s very rare to ever find a seedling, so it’s not known how much longer these plants will survive in the wild. So this happens to be one of the rarest plants we have in our collection.

Over harvesting the wood of this tree by native people during the past 150 years has left this species on the verge of extinction. There are only two recorded cases of Sahara Cypress seedlings ever having been found in the wild, which makes it even more amazing that the conservatory collections of Smith’s Botanic Garden include *two* trees that were grown from seed collected by garden staffers in 1985 on the Tassili Plateau, an area famous not only for the Saharan cypress but for thousands of prehistoric cave paintings.

After successful propagation of this endangered conifer’s seeds, cuttings were rooted from the seedlings in a series of experimental trials to determine the optimum growing conditions. As they grew, they were spread to botanic gardens in the United States, in Kuwait, in Israel and a number of other countries for study and conservation purposes.