Trichocentrum Genus Summary

Trichocentrum is a genus of about 70 species native to tropical America. The genus ranges from Florida, the Caribbean and Mexico to Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil. Before 2001, the genus was characterized by small, squat plants with tiny pseudobulbs with a short, unbranched and sparsely flowered inflorescence. With the break-up of the huge catch all genus Oncidium, the Lancinium or Mule-ear Group and the Cebolleta or Rat-tail Group were moved to Trichocentrum. The Mule-ears have diminutive pseudobulbs bearing a single, broad, mule-ear shaped leaf which is thick and fleshy and folded at the base. There are 16 species in this group. The Rat-tail group, containing 8 species, is characterized by cylindrical or teret leaves that are also thick and leathery.

Trichocentrum flowers are resupinate, spur-less to long-spurred, pink, purple, yellow, cream or brown, often with brown spots. Sepals and petals are free and of similar size. Many species have a trilobed lip with the apical lobe sometimes bilobed. The base of the callus, in some species, forms a tubular spur that does not bear nectar. The column often has a pair of wings on the sides of the anther cap.

Phylogenetically, the Rat-tails and Mule-ears were part of the genus Oncidium for many years. A cladistical analysis by Williams et.al in 2001 revealed the two groups formed a clade with Trichocentrum embedded within. It made sense to expand Trichocentrum to include the two groups. Although these and other groups within Oncidium could have been assigned their own genera, splitting the Oncidium Group to that degree would have resulted in 150 genera rather than the 69 genera we have now.