

A Mournful Passing

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I am a bit sad when a mighty maple tree that has stood in Charlotte, Vermont for more than 100 years is felled by an ice storm or severe wind. I think of all the people who have passed the tree, used it as a landmark, meeting place, or simply for shade.

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I am a bit sad when a mighty maple tree that has stood in Charlotte, Vermont for more than 100 years is felled by an ice storm or severe wind. I think of all the people who have passed the tree, used it as a landmark, meeting place, or simply for shade. Whenever I travel to northern California, I always visit a forest with giant sequoia and marvel at the size and majesty of the trees. Just as I have admired trees here in the United States, so too have Africans admired their own ancient trees.

Unfortunately, **as reported in *The New York Times***, the oldest trees on the continent, the baobabs, are dying. Baobabs, also known as wooden elephants, are deciduous trees common to arid portions of continent. They are iconic in that they develop massive, hollow trunks, and live for thousands of years. The oldest trees have become part of the local culture and have served as landmarks and the site of meetings and ceremonies. Researchers early in the 21st century began to date the trees. This was not easy, as baobabs do not make rings as most other trees do. Instead, baobabs often have hollow centers. The hollow centers develop as the trees make new stems and the stems then fuse creating a closed circle. While they found that the oldest trees were around 2,500 years old, more shockingly, they found that the oldest trees were dying. In the past several years, more than half of the oldest trees and five of the six largest have died or collapsed. The 2016 collapse of 1400-year-old Chapman's Baobab in Botswana, a national landmark, led to an outpouring of grief. Why the oldest and biggest trees are suddenly dying or collapsing is not known. Scientists speculate that climate change and global warming may play a role. The collapsed trees have much less water content than healthy baobabs. Without the water content, the trees can no longer support their massive weight. Fortunately, the younger trees are still surviving. As for me, I do hope that I have a chance to view some of these massive "wooden elephants" before they disappear.

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