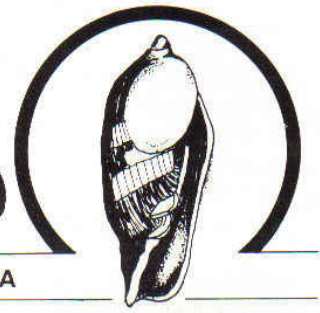


The Strandloper

BULLETIN OF THE CONCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA



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Page 1

LANGEBAAN LAGOON

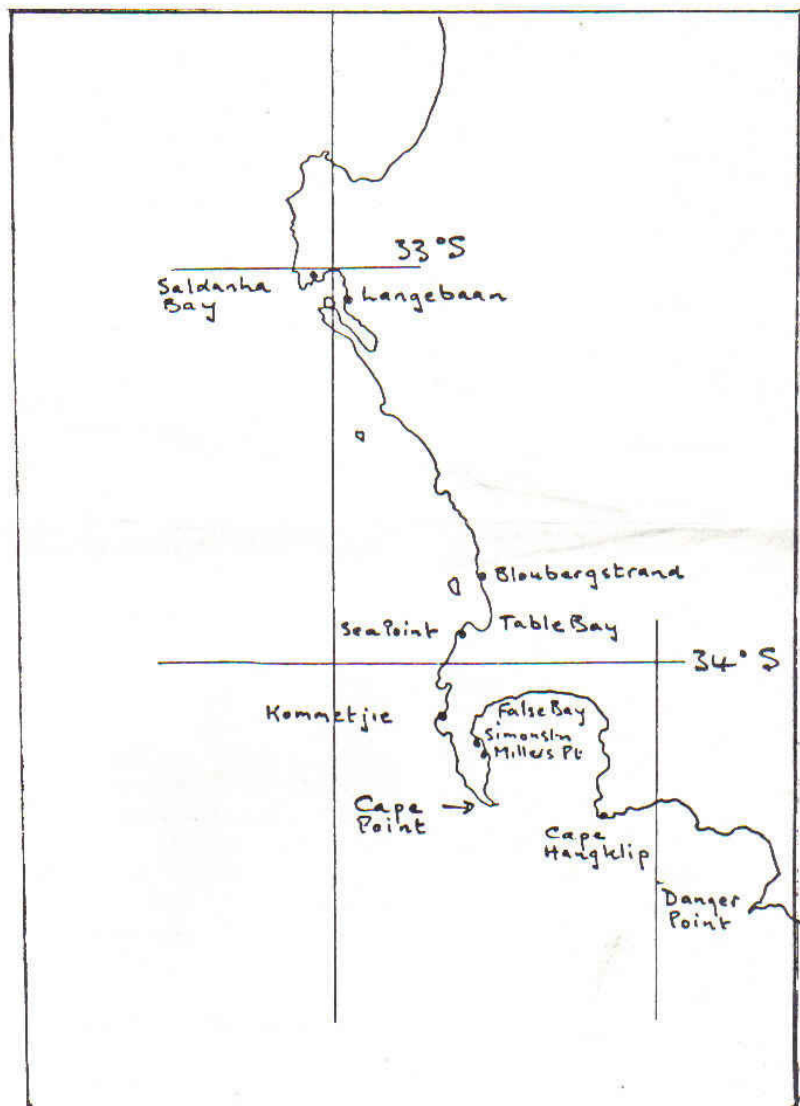
Travel north from Cape Town along the west coast road for about 150 km and you come to the town of Saldanha, tucked inside the top end of Saldanha Bay, near the 6 km wide entrance from the Atlantic ocean. This great bay is one of the few naturally sheltered anchorages along the South African coastline, and its co-ordinates are approximately 33° South and 18° East. In the old days of the Portuguese and Dutch East India Companies, the main obstacle to its becoming the principal refreshment station on the way to and from the East, was the lack of fresh water as no river flows into the bay. The fleets were therefore obliged to use Table Bay, and so the city of Cape Town was founded in 1652, leaving Saldanha Bay to slumber on for another 325 years until the world's need for iron ore forced the development of a modern ore loading terminal for bulk carriers a few years ago.

The new harbour operations are very efficient, quick and clean, and there is thus very little pollution, even in the immediate vicinity of the ore loading berths. Moreover, the voice of the conservationist is now heard in the land and some attempts to introduce dubious commercial activities into the area have so far been curbed.

Sail southwards across the bay for 11 km and you will find the rocky southern barrier opening up, with the village of Langebaan on the low-lying shore of the mainland to your left and two substantial but bleak and rocky islets and a network of sandbanks and channels to make your navigation interesting if you have the nerve to proceed.

(Continued on page 2)

THE PRESIDENT, VICE-PRESIDENT, GROUP CHAIRMEN
AND
MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
WISH ALL MEMBERS
THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON



(Continued from page 1)

For this is the entrance to the Langebaan Lagoon, stretching to the south-east for another 16 km. An incongruous long reach of sea water extending down into a bare and wind-swept landscape of bleak brown hills, seeming for most of the year to be as barren as the surface of the moon.

But for about a month in the spring-time, if the winter rains have been good, these hills are made less harsh with a carpet of wild flowers and the earth is transformed. Acres of blinding white and yellow daisies, clumps of dazzling magenta or orange coloured mesembryanthemums, shades of blue and purple from the scattering of lobelia and babiana half hidden in the mass of taller flowers. Some 800 species of flowering plants all clamouring for attention at once in the few weeks in which the world is hospitable enough for them to survive.

The effect is overwhelming and unforgettable and it is almost a relief to turn away from the prodigality on the hillsides to the visual calm of the sea and the shore. An ornithologist would be needed to do justice to the bird population especially at the southern end of the lagoon where the waterfowl find a home in the reeded channels of the swampy area filling the lower 9 km. But as this is a conchological magazine we had better abandon botany and birdwatching and bend our backs to the business of the bay and the beaches. One ought just to mention Hilda Mason's beautiful book on the Western Cape Sandveld Flowers, published by Struik, which deals specifically with this area.

But to return to the Lagoon itself, there are channels up to about 7 m deep extending from the entrance for about 7 km southwards between sandbanks that are exposed at low tides. For a further 7 km a few much narrower and shallower winding waterways penetrate the salt marsh and are not accessible to casual visitors.

For the purposes of this article our interests are confined to the top end of the lagoon around the entrance from the bay, opposite Meeueiland and Schapeueiland and the village of Langebaan. The tidal flow through this gap can be strong, particularly the outward flow in the summer months

when the prevailing southeast wind hurries it along. The big bivalve *Mactra glabrata* which lives in large colonies in sandy gullies is then tumbled about into heaps as they do not seem to burrow into the sand as does *Donax* and *Tellina*. Good specimens of all these bivalves can often be found on the main beach in front of the holiday cottages and northwards towards Saldanha.

Next month we will show you some interesting examples of a number of species from Langebaan which are a little different from those found on the shores of the open ocean elsewhere along the Cape coast.

BOOK REVIEW

MARVELLOUS WORLD OF SHELLS: Text by Donata Lucifora, translated by J. Peter Tallon, published by Abbey Library, London, 1977.

It is not clear what the author was trying to achieve with this book of 110 pages of brightly coloured photos and a very sketchy and badly translated text containing a number of careless errors. The illustrations are noteworthy mainly for the excessively bright colours of the backgrounds, but another distracting feature is the author's apparent ignorance of the generally accepted convention that shells should be illustrated with the apex uppermost. Most of these specimens are shown "upside-down" i.e. standing on their apexes, but there is no consistency about it and the general effect is untidy.

While most of the defects in the text and captions might be due to shortcomings in the translation from the original Italian, they go beyond what a tolerant reader should be expected to swallow. Statements like "Cowries of the arabica group make up one of the world's most precious collections" are meaningless and misleading. Idiosyncrasies in spelling, such as "Cymathium" and a number of other oddities and errors would exasperate anyone with a reasonable knowledge of shells, but one can only deplore the unnecessary problems that will arise for a beginner who is introduced to conchology through this book. Not recommended.

FRESHWATER LIMPETS

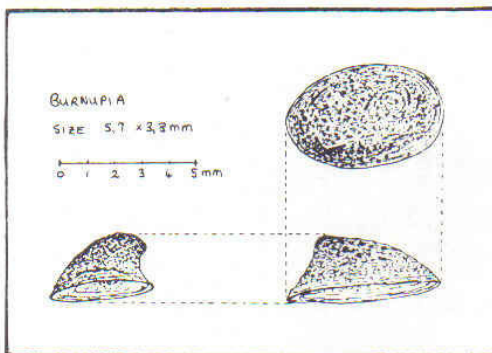
by
MIKE CORTIE

It is a strange quirk of nature that the Pulmonates, air-breathing gastropods, have evolved in a few cases to limpet-like shells living in fresh water. These "freshwater limpets" are without exception totally different to the well known marine limpets. Indeed, our South African freshwater limpets are more closely allied to that nuisance of the garden, the common snail *Helix aspersa* than to any *Patella*. Freshwater limpets are small (3 to 6 mm) and certainly not obvious to the casual eye, but are nevertheless fairly widespread both in Southern Africa and in the world as a whole.

The primitive *Latiidae* are found in Australasia. Two well known families of freshwater molluscs also include a genus each of limpet-like snails. These are *Patelloplanorbis*, a member of the *Planorbidae* or Ramshorn snails, and *Lanx* of the family *Lymnaeidae* or pond snails. This latter genus is found in North America. The *Patelloplanorbis* shells are said to look very like *Calyptraea*. By far the most widespread family of freshwater limpets, however, are the *Ancylidae*. The genus *Ancylus* is found in Europe and North Africa. *Burnupia* is an exclusively African genus but seems to be closely related to South American freshwater limpets. The genus *Ferrissia* is said to occur world-wide except for Europe, Siberia and South America. There are one or two rarer genera of *Ancylidae* as well.

In South Africa it seems as if we have three genera of freshwater limpets, all *Ancylidae*. The two common genera are *Burnupia* and *Ferrissia*. As far as shell shape is concerned, the differences between the genera lie mostly in the shape of the shell and the inclination of the apex.

Briefly, in *Burnupia* the apex points over backwards and to the right, while in *Ferrissia* the apex doesn't lean in any particular direction except maybe slightly to the left in some species. I refer the reader to Strandloper No. 116 for a more complete discussion. See also Barnard's Beginner's Guide. I have found that all the specimens in my collection are *Burnupias*. Either *Ferrissia* is less common locally, or I have



seen them but have assumed them to be *Burnupia* and have not taken any. In any case, the difference should be quite apparent with the aid of a hand lens. There is a third and stranger South African genus, *Kincaidilla* (Hannibal) 1912. The shell is said to be similar to *Ferrissia* except that a septum or shelf is formed at maturity over the posterior part of the aperture.

The next question is, how many species of freshwater limpets are there in Southern Africa? The answer according to ref. 5, below, is that the collector can expect to find six species of *Ferrissia* (9 if we include Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and Mozambique) two species of *Kincaidilla* (one in Natal and one in the Eastern Cape) and 12 species of *Burnupia* with four subspecies. The plate illustrating *Burnupias* in this reference book indicates, as I suspected, that the species are practically indistinguishable on grounds of shell shape alone. I will leave the splitting of hairs at the species level to the specialists.

In general, *Burnupia* may be found on submerged vegetation near the edges of streams, dams and rivers. Swift running water presents no difficulties to these curious little shells. They may also be found on submerged rocks, logs, roots or reeds. It is believed that the shells may breathe either water or air. This is probably one of the factors responsible for their widespread distribution. Typical places where I have found *Burnupias* include:

- i. Emmerentia Dam, Johannesburg: on submerged roots, leaves, stems, etc. near the shore (Sept. 1976).
- ii. Vaal River 20 km downstream from Barrage: found in their hundreds in shallow interlocking rock pools. The pools had an abundance of slimy green algae (June 1974).

iii. Vaal River 2 km upstream from Barrage: at the base of reeds about 25m below the surface. These limpets avoided the areas thickly covered with algae (Nov. 1973).

These latter limpets were unfortunate enough to be transferred to the dubious confines of my aquarium. Here the following bits of information were among the observations made. They crawl slowly but steadily, e.g. one specimen named Fred (we begin to see what you meant by saying they were "unfortunate" — Ed.) crawled 25 mm in 4 minutes. They were also somehow able to navigate the corners of the aquarium. Despite their deep diving characteristics in the Vaal, they refused to venture more than 10 mm below the surface in the aquarium. Indeed, the unfortunate Fred, or was it another as they are very difficult to tell apart, was pushed down the wall of the tank to about 100 mm under the surface to see what he would do. He very quickly ascended to his old grazing grounds.

When found alive, the limpets vary in appearance from all-over black to oval transparent shapes with a black patch at the apex. The "black patch" is the animal seen through the often translucent shell. In reference No 6 (below) the interesting fact is recorded that *Ancylidae* live only for one year. When mature they reproduce and then die soon afterwards.

I have found great pleasure in collecting these little shells. Whenever I come across a stream or dam I always try to spend a quick minute or two just to see if the *Ancylidae* are there. For those who have freshwater limpets in their collection and want to find out something more about them, the following may prove useful:

1. Strandlopers Nos 115, 116, 117, article by C. Appleton.
2. Molluscs by J.E. Morton.
3. The Oxford Book of Invertebrates by Nicholas, Cooke & Whitely.
4. A Beginner's Guide to South African Shells by K.H. Barnard.
5. The Aquatic Molluscs of the Belgian Congo by H. Pilsbry.
6. Pulmonates Vol. I edited by V. Fretter & J. Peake.

References 1, 3 and 5 yield, to my mind, the most information. Good luck and good hunting!

SHELLY BEACH TIDAL POOL

by

M.R. WALLACE,
Port Shepstone

This is to my mind the most beautiful tidal pool on the Natal South Coast. It is here that I do a lot of diving to collect specimens for my marine aquarium.

During the months of September and October this pool comes alive with *Hydatina velum* and *H. physis* as do many of the other tidal pools. During this time the animal which is a beautiful shade of pink with a thin blue fringe lays its eggs. The eggs are very small and are laid in a white lace-like cluster. *H. physis* eggs seem to be more compact than *H. velum*. *H. physis*' animal is a much darker colour than *H. velum*.

I have found *Cypraea annulus*; *Cypraea caputserpentis*; *Bullina zic zac*; *Bullina scabra*; *Hydatina velum*; *H. physis*; *H. aplustre* (?) *Natica marochiensis*; *Strombus Mutabilis*; *S. decorus* and many *Nerites* alive here as well.

The sides of the tidal pool are covered with brown algae. There are a few small growths of staghorn type coral as well as brain coral.

The fish life is very varied with beautiful Butterfly fish (*Chaetodon*) Lion fish (*Pterois volutans*) and iridescent blue Cleaner Wrasses (*Labroides dimidiatus*).

PHILLIP W. CLOVER

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(Founded 1958)

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ROUND THE GROUPS

PORT SHEPSTONE: The Southern Natal Group met in October at the local library's activities room. Shells for discussion were the family Buccinidae. The printing of Christmas cards bearing the Society's motif was considered and an outing to study the fossil shells near Port Edward was suggested. Pollution and its possible effect on the coloration of molluscs was also discussed. The finding of live *Oliva scitula* in the Transkei was reported.

PRETORIA: Hierdie groep se vergadering in Oktober is soos gewoonlik by die Hamiltonskool gehou. Wouter Wismeyer en Tom Duncan het oor hul onlangse besoek aan die see verslaggedoen terwyl die moontlikhede vir volgende jaar se uitstalling ook verder bespreek is. Die algemene gevoel is dat daar 'n mate van mededinging aan die skou verbonde moet wees. Ralph Isaacs het 'n interessante praatjie oor Ghana gelewer en Adv Mullan het oor sy Amerikaanse vakansie gerapporteer. Die 23 teenwoordige lede het blykbaar hierdie vergadering baie geniet.

PORT ELIZABETH: The October meeting was held at the Museum and it was reported that the Chairman, Mrs Mears, was in hospital for an operation. All members wish her a speedy recovery. Changes of address were noted (see elsewhere in this issue). Shells for discussion were the "Bubble" shells, and a field day for later in the month was planned.

EAST LONDON: The October meeting was held at the home of Mrs Linsdell. Mr Newman was co-opted to assist Mrs Pat Palmer with secretarial chores. The Department of Nature Conservation would be approached to provide a speaker for a future meeting. The shells for discussion and display were the family Naticidae, which would be the subject of the November competition. Stephen Olivier won the current month's competition on the Trochidae. The origin of many conchological names in Greek mythology was related by Mr Newman.

CHANGES TO 1979 MEMBERSHIP LIST:

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Miss C. Sher, 72 Cranbrooke Rd., East Barnet, Herts, England EN4 8UW (formerly Eastern Cape)
Mrs S. Silbernagl, 'Cool Springs', 27 Thistle Road, Newlands 7700.

Please note that up to the time of going to press, Zimbabwe-Rhodesia is still the officially accepted name of the territory previously known as Rhodesia. Members are advised to watch for name changes of countries as a result of political developments. S.W.A.-Namibia is another such instance.

EXCHANGES WANTED

Mr J. Trondle, B.P. 1753, Papeete, Tahiti, offers Polynesian shells in exchange for ours. Interested in Mitridae.
Mr Tom Chamberlin, P.O. Box 111, Hanalei, Kuai, Hawaii 96714, is interested in beach specimens of small S.A. cones for use in shell jewellery. Scientific data and uncommon species are not needed. Beach specimens of uncommon to rare Hawaiian shells are offered in exchange.
Senor Luis F. Lopez Jurado, C/Uceda No. 1, 2º, Cordoba, Spain, would like to contact members. Will Spanish speaking members please assist? He has written to us in English.
Mrs B. Collins, Secretary of the Cairns Shell Club, 40 Machan St., Machan's Beach, N.Q. 4871, Australia, would like to know if any member would be interested in exchanges with one of their members and also receiving their newsletter which is published twice yearly.

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