

The Strandloper

BULLETIN OF THE CONCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA



Strandloper 267

April 2002

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My dad, the micro-mollusc man

by Alwyn P. Marais

It all started in 1972 during a July holiday at Pennington along the Natal South Coast. My sister Carien, then only nine years of age, showed my dad some beach-worn shells she had collected. To my dad, Johan P. Marais, this brought back old childhood memories of him playing with Jeffreys Bay shells in his parents' home in the small Karroo town of Cradock, where he was born in 1938. These shells formed part of his general collection of birds' eggs, fossils, stones, stamps, animal skulls and model aeroplanes. He was particularly fond of a *Charonia lampas* Linné, 1758 which his parents cooked on the stove to clean out the animal, during a holiday at East London. Now, having become a Biochemist/Plant Physiologist, he had a much better knowledge of the diversity of life forms in nature and thought shell collecting would be an interesting family hobby enabling us to learn more about life in the ocean. Back home in Pietermaritzburg after the Pennington holiday, we visited the Natal Museum to compare our finds with the museum shells on display. There we met Dr Dick Kilburn, head of the Malacology Department, who has ever since been a great help in identifying our shell finds.

Those original beach-worn shells, which were kept in egg cartons in a drawer, have long been discarded and replaced with better specimens in a proper shell cabinet. The first shell of real interest my dad collected was a live taken *Supplanaxis acutus* (Krauss, 1848). Although this 10 mm shell was not uncommon in Natal, live specimens had not been reported previously. This find sparked his interest in micro-shells. In order to collect micro-shells on a large scale, he designed and made a set of sieves which he still regards as essential for successful micro-shell collecting. Although he became well known for his interest in micro-shells, he specializes in all South African species, regardless of size.

Our first major shell collecting trip was to Port St Johns and Mbotyi in 1975, where my dad collected many interesting species. This collecting trip was followed by many others to good shelling spots along our coast line, from the west coast of South Africa to the Tongaland coast in the east.



Mitromorpha maraisi, photo courtesy of Natal Museum

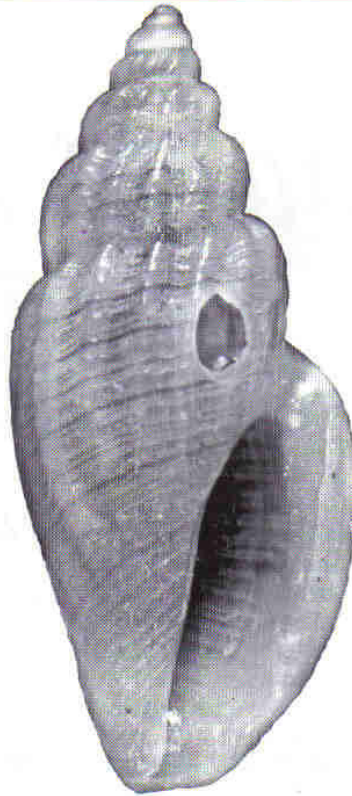
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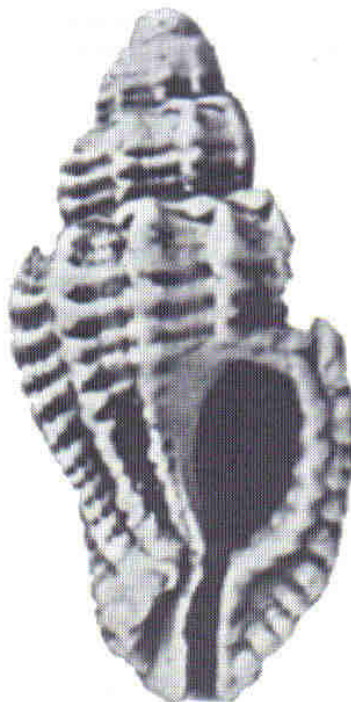
For micro-shells, few places can match Mzamba south of Port Edward. Over the years many bags of shell grit have been collected there and have been sorted under the microscope back home. My dad is the only person I know who has the temperament to sort a ton of fine shell grit, half a teaspoon full at a time and at the end still retains his sanity! Many new species, some of which have already been named, came from Mzamba grit. These are the little cap-shaped *Acmaea maraisi* Kilburn, 1977, relatively common in Natal grit, the rare *Pterynotus (Pygmaeptyrys) maraisi* Vokes, the little Scissurellid, *Sukashitrochus maraisi* Herbert, 1986, *Epitonium maraisi* Kilburn, 1986 and the Turrids *Mitromorpha maraisi* Kilburn, 1986 and *Gingicithara maraisi* Kilburn, 1992.

In addition, he also discovered or provided the type specimen of the rare *Couthouyia mzambana* Kilburn, 1977, *Epitonium brachyspeira* Kilburn, 1985, *Epitonium mzambanum* Kilburn, 1985, *Epitonium psomion* Kilburn, 1985, *Epitonium anabathmos* Kilburn, 1985, *Nucula subluxa* Kilburn, 1999 and *Nucula planiculmen* Kilburn, 1999. Furthermore, he provided paratype material of *Epitonium falconi* Kilburn, 1985, *Epitonium parvonatrix* Kilburn, 1985, *Mitromorpha amphibolos* Kilburn, 1986, *Priotrochus iris* Herbert, 1988 and *Eucithara marerosa* Kilburn, 1992. He also provided additional locality data for many other species described by Dr Kilburn and Dr Herbert and discovered what appears to be a shallow-water population of the deep-water *Limatula exigua* (Thiele, 1920) at Gericke Point near Sedgfield.

Much of his success as a shell collector can be ascribed to the fact that he has a very understanding wife. My mother is not a collector, and yet, she does not mind him peering down a microscope for days on end and until late at night, or when he invades her kitchen to test his latest invention for separating micro-shells from bags of beach drift. Heath Robinson would have been proud of these contrap-



Gingi maraisi, photo courtesy of Natal Museum.

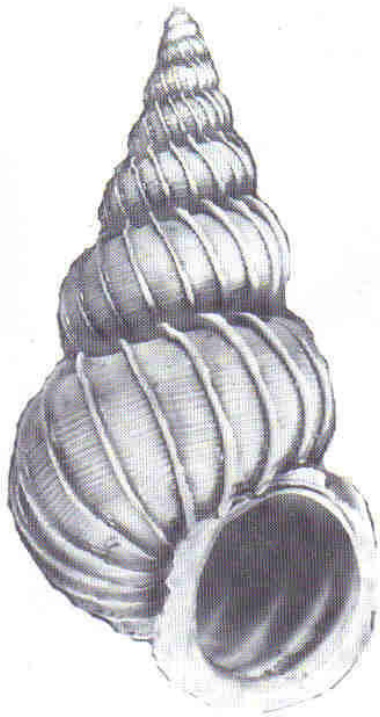


Pterynotus maraisi, photo courtesy of Natal Museum

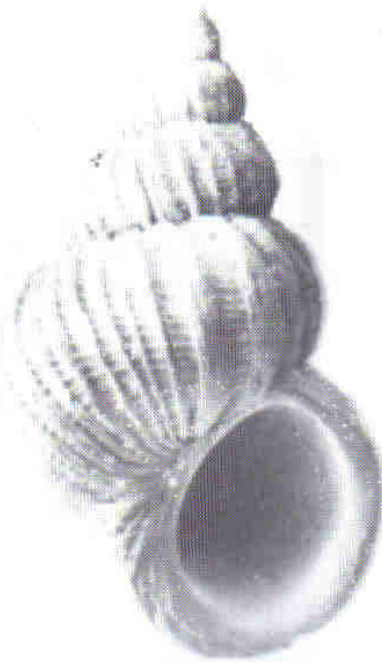
tions! She even tolerates the occasional box of smelly shells from the trawlers, although, his cleaning table is situated in the furthest corner of the garden, away from the house!

My dad always tried to instil in us an appreciation of nature and the wildlife around us. He encouraged my sister to study the eating habits of the carnivorous land snail, *Natalina cafra* Férussac, 1821 and to enter the results for the annual Skaife Competition for young biologists, organised by the South African Museum. For a few years we had an enclosure in the back yard teeming with hungry *Natalina cafra* which my sister had to feed regularly on the common garden snail, *Helix aspersa* Muller, 1774. She won the Skaife Competition and to this day the *Natalina cafra* still terrorise the *Helix aspersa* in our garden.

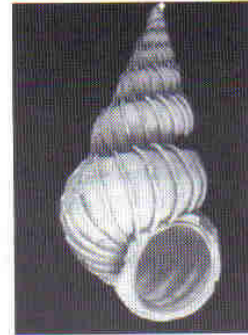
Thanks to my dad I also won the Skaife Competition a few years later by entering the results of a study on a small limpet, at the time generally regarded as a juvenile *Patella barbara* Linné, 1758. What intrigued us, was the smooth curved edge of the shell, which suggested that the limpet lives on a curved surface. But where in the sea would one find such curved surfaces? We decided to tackle the problem during a springtide low at Port Edward where many of these dead limpets could be found in beach drift. We systematically combed the rocks in search of curved surfaces and live limpets! The problem was solved when we reached the mussel zone. A large number of the brown mussel, *Perna perna* Linné, 1758 hosted one or more limpet on their curved shells. Closer investigation showed that the body of the limpet was a uniform light cream colour whereas *Patella barbara* had a cream body with black flecks and did not live on the *Perna perna*. We were clearly dealing with a new species. My sister and I were also keen photographers at the time and recorded all the relevant information on film which enabled me to enter an interesting project for the competition. This information was passed on to Dr Kilburn who arranged for an M.Sc.



Epitonium maraisi, photo courtesy of Natal Museum.



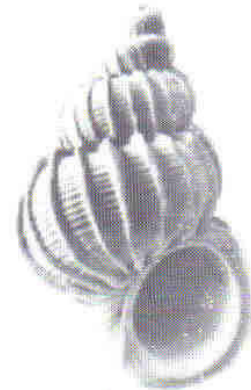
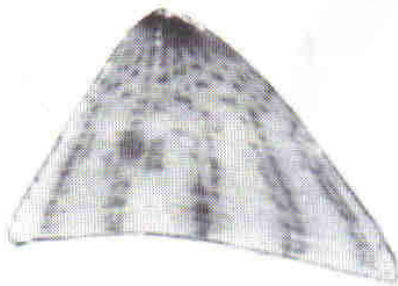
Epitonium brachispeira, photo courtesy of Natal Museum



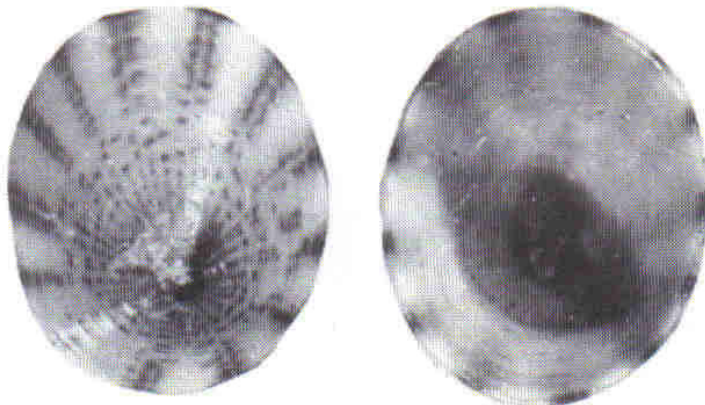
Epitonium maraisi, photo courtesy of Natal Museum



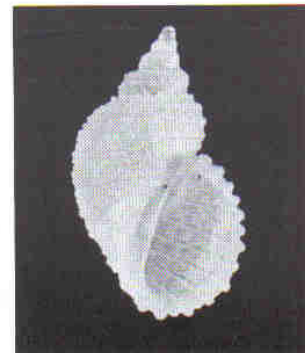
Epitonium anabathos, photo courtesy of Natal Museum



Epitonium emzibanum, photo courtesy of Natal Museum



Acmaea maraisi. Photo courtesy of Natal Museum.



Couthouyia mzambana, photo courtesy of Natal Museum

student in Zoology to conduct a full scientific study on the limpet. It was named *Patella aphanes* Robson, 1986.

Over the years my dad wrote several articles for the *Strandloper*, dealing with the family Planaxidae and the genus *Austromitra* in South Africa, and on some fossil shells from a raised beach at Sedgfield.

The most significant event in the shelling history of South Africa was certainly the Natal Museum Dredging Programme (1981-1993). During this period my dad was often invited to join the Expedition on board the CSIR research ship, R.V. *Meiring Naudé*, on their annual 10-day dredging excursions on the continental shelf and slope. He gained much experience helping to sort the large number of bottom samples obtained, and regards this as the highlight of his shelling experiences. In 1990 he was appointed an Honorary Research Associate in Malacology by the Council of the Natal Museum. He is now looking forward to his forthcoming retirement, hoping to be able to spend more time pursuing his favourite hobby.

Acknowledgments: I am indebted to Dr R.N. Kilburn of the Natal Museum for providing the photo's used in this article.

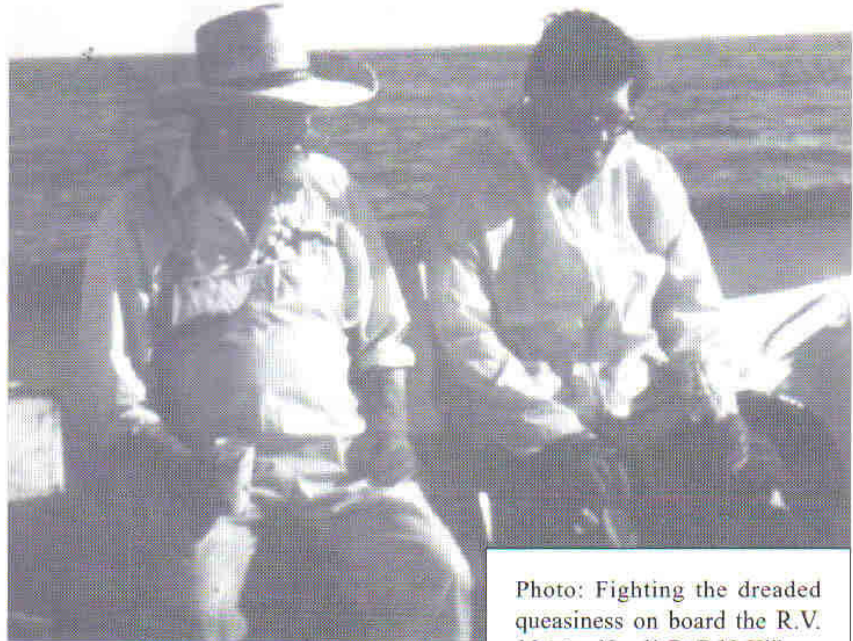
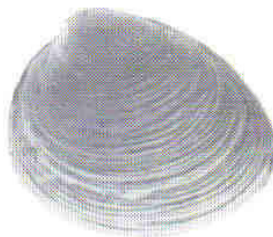


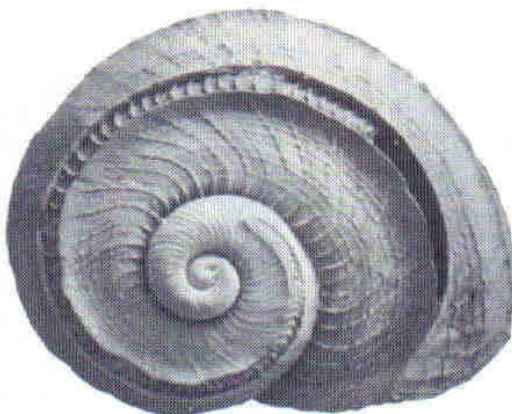
Photo: Fighting the dreaded queasiness on board the R.V. *Meiring Naudé*. Dr R.N. Kilburn (left) and my dad, Dr J.P. Marais



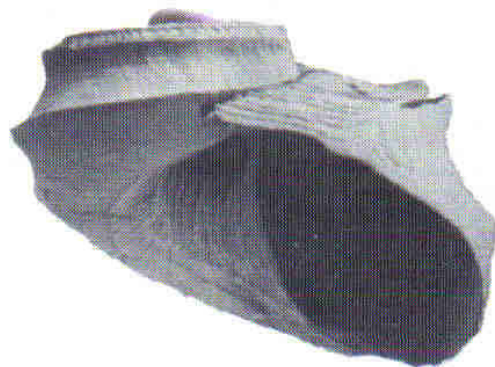
Nucula subluxa, photo courtesy of Natal Museum



Nucula planiculmen, photo courtesy of Natal Museum

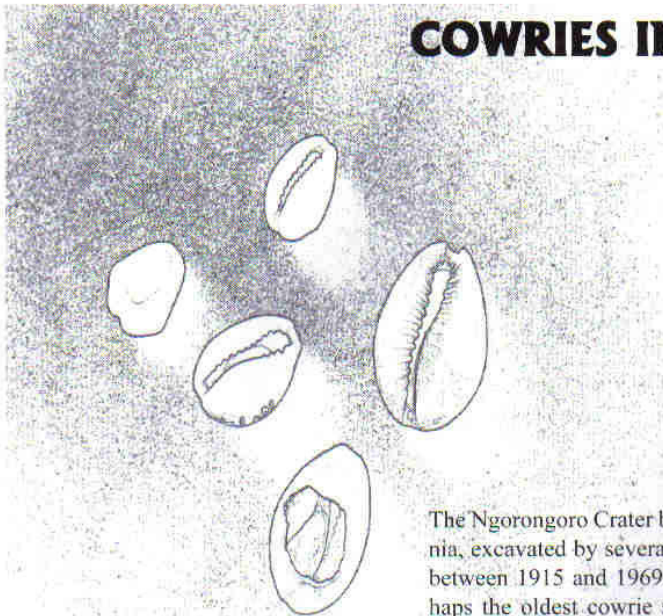


Sukashitro maraisi, photo courtesy of Natal Museum.



COWRIES IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND MARITIME RECORD

By Sian Tiley* and Elizabeth Burger†
 *Centre for Indigenous Knowledge,
 †Department of Archaeology,
 University of Pretoria



The cowrie shell is one of the most remarkable primitive currencies ever used before the advent of gold and silver coinage. This shell extended its range further than any form of money before or since, spreading from China and India to the Pacific Islands, travelling across and encircling Africa and then penetrating the New World.

In Africa, the cowrie shell is not only a symbolic allusion to wealth but of itself constitutes wealth and prosperity. For thousands of years it was used as the main medium of exchange. Although not used anymore as money, these shells are still believed to have occult or supernatural powers, so they are used in divination, traditional medicine, fertility, ancestor worship and rituals. Cowries formed the common currency throughout this vast expanse of the trading world and Africa. Money is the medium in which value is expressed, however money possibly originated out of religious and social custom rather than directly out of barter or trade. The objects used as currency were usually chosen to conform to the 'ideal' properties of money: portable, durable, easy to count and difficult to counterfeit – anyway who can forge a cowrie shell?

From 2000 BC in China, under the Hsia Dynasty cowries were used as money during early feudal times and they were also used in India about 400 AD. *Cypraea annulus* in Africa preceded metals like iron and copper by centuries if not millennia.

The Ngorongoro Crater burials in Tanzania, excavated by several archaeologists between 1915 and 1969, contained perhaps the oldest cowrie shells (*Cypraea annulus*), known in the archaeological record, as the site was radiocarbon dated to the second half of the first millennium BC. The earliest document recounting trade on the East African coast and cowries as currency was called the '*Periplus on the Erythraean Sea*' and was produced in 943 AD by El-Masudi, a well renowned Arab explorer and merchant.

The name cowrie is believed to be a derivative of the Hindi word *Kauri*. Among other names by which this shell is known, is that of *porcelette*; when Marco Polo travelled (1271-1291 AD) to Yunnan in China, he came across the cowrie shell called *porcelette*. The word *buzio* was also an ancient word used by the Portuguese for the money cowrie, otherwise known as *Cypraea moneta*. Furthermore the Spanish word *peso* came from a common term meaning cowrie currency, and the Swahili word *pesa*, and the Indian word *pice* are also derivatives meaning cowrie shell. Even as late as 1859 AD the Arabs trading in central Africa called cowries, *kaure*. This linguistic observation leads one to believe that the currency cowrie was used throughout Africa and the Indian Ocean trade network.

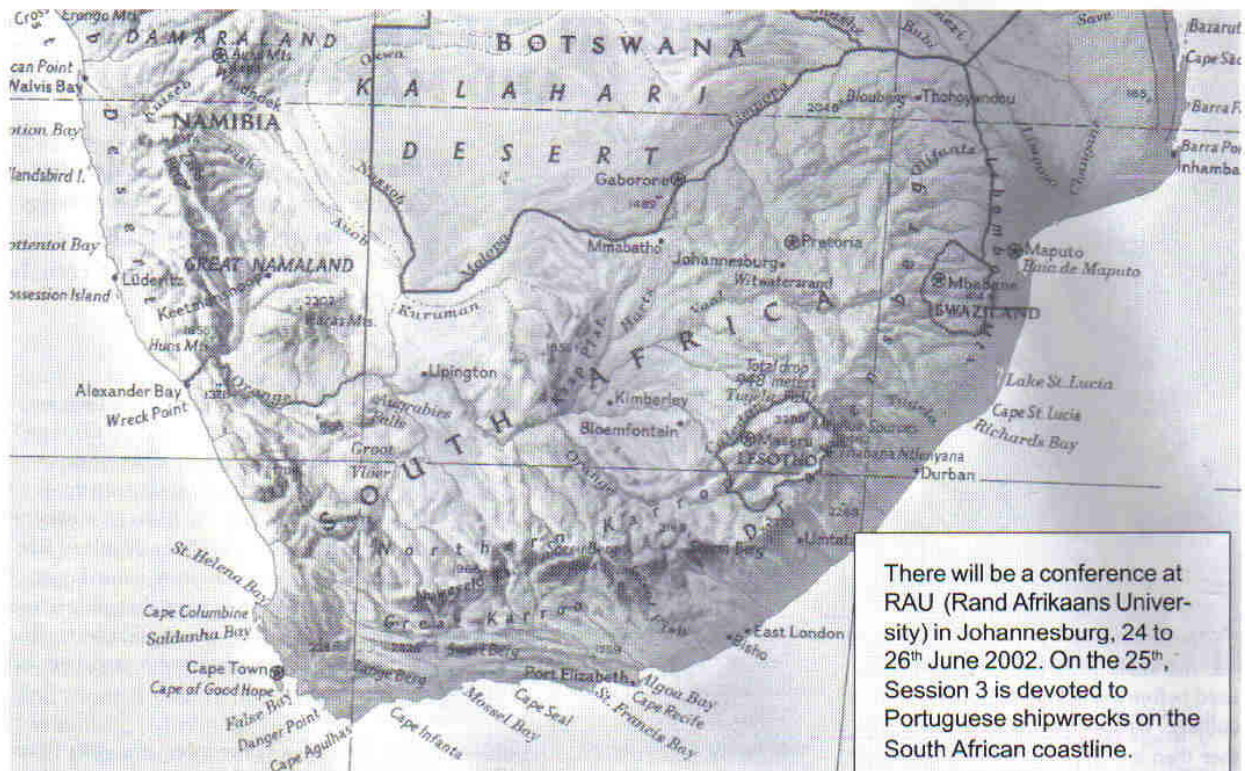
Cowrie currency is not necessarily only *Cypraea moneta* but could also be the *Cypraea annulus*. However, shells of *Cypraea moneta* have become the most widely recognised African 'money cowrie'. The main origin of these shells, until the relatively recent Portuguese period,

was the Maldives Islands, which once were known as the "*Isles of the Cowries*". The inhabitants of these islands harvested the cowries using intensive methods of aquaculture, and used them as money in exchange for rice with the people of Bengal. After the Portuguese gained control of this supply, they were then able to use the cowries to buy slaves and goods, first on the East African coast, and later on the West Coast.

Actually, *Cypraea moneta* also flourishes at selected locations along the Mozambique coastline, where the cowries are found in rock crevices and among marine grasses on protected mudflats. However, they seem not to have ever been the target of deliberate aquaculture there, and harvesting of the natural resource was presumably not able to deliver sufficiently large numbers of the shells to make an economic difference to the trade from the Maldives.

Cypraea annulus have been found at numerous prehistoric Iron Age archaeological sites in southern Africa, but the first conclusive use of *Cypraea moneta* as local currency comes after the written record began with the arrival of Portuguese merchants. The use of money cowries (*Cypraea moneta*), in Southern Africa at least, appears therefore only to have occurred after trade and exchange had been established with Europeans, and the maritime record stands testimony to this.

Africans prized many materials such as iron, copper, gold and ivory and they traded these with the Arab merchants of the East African coastline long before Portuguese explorers rounded the Cape in 1497, in pursuit of a share of the lucrative Arab trade with the East. Over the



There will be a conference at RAU (Rand Afrikaans University) in Johannesburg, 24 to 26th June 2002. On the 25th, Session 3 is devoted to Portuguese shipwrecks on the South African coastline.

For further information on this event please contact - 2002 Historical and Heritage Focus, C/o Department of Historical Studies, RAU, P.O. Box 524 Auckland Park 2006, or Valerie Esterhuizen at 012-420-3100, Van Tilburg Collection, University of Pretoria

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD & PORTUGUESE SHIPWRECKS ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN COASTLINE

- 2000 BC Chinese used cowrie currency
- 400 AD Cowrie currency used in India
- 500 BC Ngorongoro Crater burials in Tanzania contain cowries
- 200 AD Use of Iron in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Early Iron Age First cultivation of crops and domestication of animals
- 250 Bantu-speaking people extend into Southern Africa
- 600-1500 Extensive slave trade from Sub-Saharan Africa
- 900 Gold and ivory trade established
- Late Iron Age Establishment of African kingdoms
- 1100 Swahili civilization
- 1220 Mapungubwe and K2
- 1271 Marco Polo in China recorded cowrie currency
- 1325 Rise of Great Zimbabwe
- 1488 Bartholomeu Dias rounds Cape of Good Hope
- 1498 Vasco da Gama opens trade route to India
- 1551 São João de Bescoinho (vicinity of St. Lucia)
- 1552 São João (Port Edward, Southern Natal, KwaZulu)
- 1554 São Bento (Msikaba, Eastern Cape)
- 1589 São Thomé (Off the coast of KwaZulu)
- 1593 Santo Alberto (Sunrise-on-Sea, Eastern Cape)
- 1608 Santo Espírito (Probably Haga Haga, Eastern Cape)
- 1622 São João Baptista (Cannon Rocks, Eastern Cape)
- 1630 São Gonçalo (Plettenberg Bay, Western Cape)
- 1635 Nossa Senhora de Belem (Port St Johns Eastern Cape)
- 1643 Santa Maria Madre de Deus (East London)
- 1647 Nossa Senhora da Atalaya do Pinheiro (Eastern Cape)
- 1647 Santissimo Sacramento (Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape)
- 1652 Van Riebeeck establishes Cape colony

following century, numerous Portuguese vessels made their way along the South African coastline. Some were wrecked here, and direct contact between the Portuguese and Africans came with the bands of shipwreck survivors who either set up camp in the hope of rescue, or tried to make their way northward to Portuguese settlements in Mozambique.

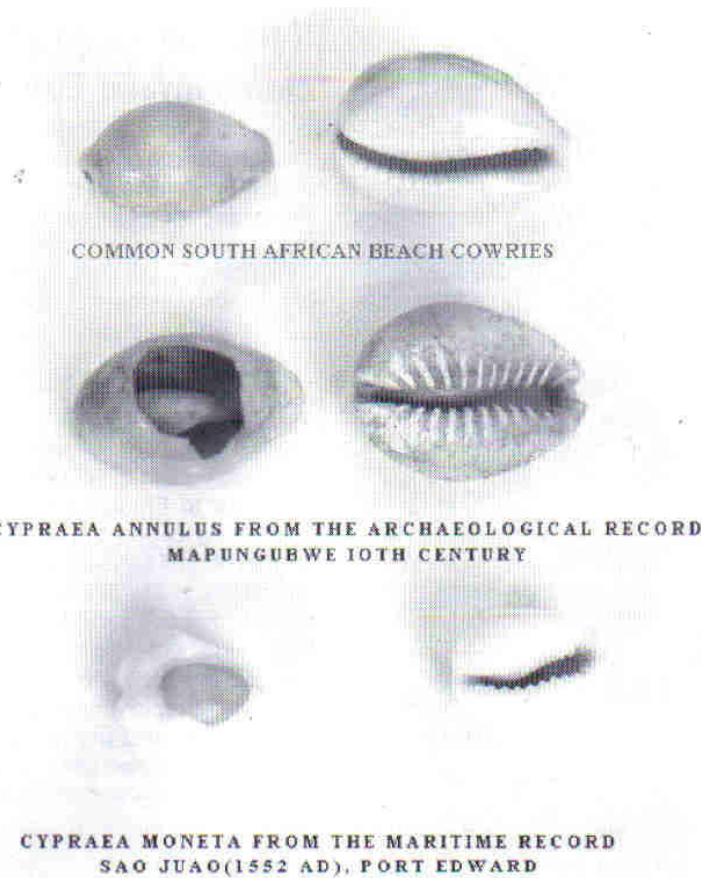
Although live *Cypraea annulus* are relatively common along South Africa's eastern coast, live *Cypraea moneta* are exceedingly rare. Most of the *Cypraea moneta* shells found along our coast are believed to originate from the holds of old shipwrecks. For this reason the *Cypraea moneta* that are washed up near the coastal town of Port Edward are viewed as important links in identifying a wreck site of the Portuguese

galleon, São João that wrecked off the coast of South Africa in 1552 AD.

The São João is one of the greatest enigmas in South African history, not only because so little is known about its cargo, passengers and crew, but also the exact location of the wreck, which has puzzled researchers from the early 20th Century. This Portuguese vessel is an important part of South Africa's maritime history, as it was a richly laden cargo ship carrying, cotton goods, pepper, money cowries, carpets, Chinese porcelain, carnelian beads and precious stones that was homeward bound from India. It was also the first ship ever found with an Oriental cargo destined for Europe. The galleon was victim to the great storms of the Indian Ocean and with badly torn sails it wrecked off the Natal coast in 1552 AD.

The tragic story of its survivors and the historical significance of the São João inspired researchers to look into the survivor's accounts in search of clues to the chain of events prior, at the time of, and after the wrecking of the galleon. Research on the location of the wreck of the São João was done, and it was noted that Chinese ceramic fragments, carnelian beads and *Cypraea moneta* were being washed onto the beaches of the Natal South Coast in the vicinity of Port Edward. Only two wreck sites on the South African coastline reveal Chinese ceramics with styles datable to the mid-sixteenth century: the wrecks of the São João (1552) near Port Edward and the São Bento (1554) on the Transkei coast.

Maritime archaeological research on these wrecks began in 1978 and was aimed at confirming the date and identity of these two Portuguese shipwrecks. A comprehensive archive and literature study has also been gathered to try identify the precise wreck sites. Through this research, the discovery was made that most of the ships that foundered on the South African coastline before 1650 AD were Portuguese, on the homeward bound voyage and that some of them carried blue-and-white Chinese porcelain on board. And so a detailed beach survey from the Mozambique/ South African border to Plettenberg Bay was initiated.



Ongoing investigations on the locations of the wrecks have produced material remains such as the Chinese ceramic evidence dated to about 1550 AD, a fragment of a sixteenth century Portuguese cannon, carnelian beads and *Cypraea moneta*. In the past, all efforts of locating and identifying wreck sites were aimed at identifying the ceramic shards that are washed on to the beach. This is an excellent but painstaking way of wreck site identification. However, the presence of *Cypraea moneta* presents a new opportunity in identifying early Portuguese shipwrecks on the South African coastline.

Cypraea moneta and other cowries present an interesting field of research in both the maritime and terrestrial archaeological records. However, together with gold and silver, the cowrie has additional, and even greater, historic significance- as one of the very first truly international currencies.

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Skateback drawing 1995
Broken shell from Port Macquarie, N.S.W.

Flotsam

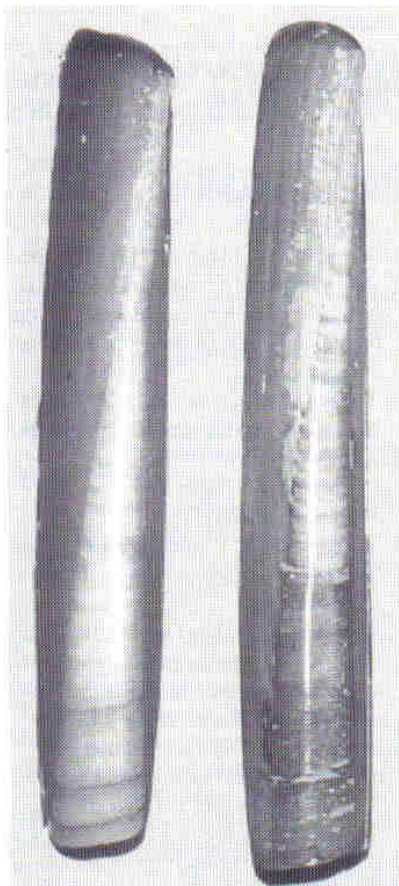


Illustration from Severijns, L=155 mm

North American razor clams invade Europe !

The latest issue of *Gloria Maris*¹, the official publication of the Belgische Vereniging voor Conchylologie, contains a fascinating account of the recent appearance and subsequent proliferation of the North American razor clam *Ensis directus* (Conrad, 1843).

This bivalve previously dwelt only in fine sand or mud along the North American Atlantic coastline, from Labrador to Florida. In 1979 live specimens began turning up near Cuxhaven in the German Bight, at the mouth of the river Elbe. It was thought that the mollusc had come from ballast water that had been discharged by a ship. In any event, it proliferated rapidly, and has spread north, south, east and west. In the north it has reached Oslo in Norway, and across to the western end of the Swedish coast line. It has spread southwards at a fierce pace, and has reached Le Havre on the French coast. In west, the mollusc succeeded in getting across the Channel, and now may be found along the English coastline from Newhaven in the south to the Humber in the north.

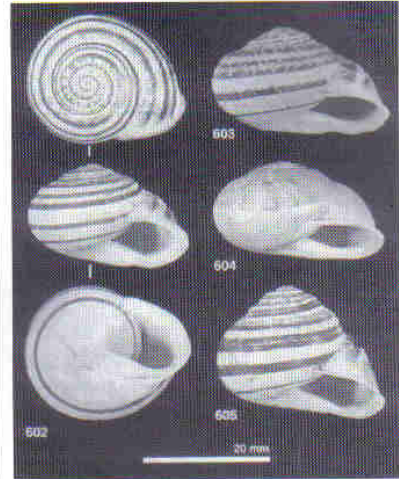
Shells of this creature are now cast onto Belgian and French beaches in vast numbers, especially after storms, and at times outnumber all other beached shells by a factor of one hundred or so!

Surprisingly, this population explosion seems not to have an adverse effect on the populations of the indigenous razor clams, the most representative of which are *Solen marginatus*, *Ensis ensis* and *Ensis arcuatus*.

Reference

1. Severijns, N. Distribution of the American jack-knife clam *Ensis directus* (Conrad, 1843) in Europe, 23 years after its introduction, *Gloria Maris*, vol.40(4-5), February 2002, pp.61-111.

And, closer to home...



There is probably not a gardener in the country who does not know what *Cantareus aspersus* (formerly *Helix aspersa*) looks like. This European landsnail has spread to almost every corner of the temperate world (see page 2 of *Strandloper* #261 for a picture of this species).

However, there are a number of lesser known garden invaders too, and it would be very interesting if members kept their eyes open for them. In particular, look out for *Eobania vermiculata* (Müller, 1774) (pictured above, from ref.1). This snail, which is a relative of sorts to *Cantareus aspersus*, was first discovered² in Victoria Park in Port Elizabeth in 1987, and has since then spread widely through the suburbs of that city. It has also been reported from Cape Town, George, Kimberley and Potchefstroom. The snail's native habitat is the dry coastal countries around the rim of the Mediterranean sea but it has evidently found the conditions in some parts of South Africa to its liking!

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Musical strombs! by Mike Cortie

(compiled from information trawled off the 'net by Kobie du Preez and from articles in *Vita Marina* and *Spirula*)

An amazing archaeological discovery was brought vividly to life in Lima, Peru recently when musicians performed to a large audience using 3000 year-old stromb trumpets. According to an article in a newsletter of the prestigious Stanford University¹, archaeologist John Rick arranged for twelve of these ancient stromb trumpets to be played as part of a public awareness lecture. The strombs had been unearthed earlier in the year in an underground chamber at the ancient Peruvian centre of Chavin de Huantar.

Rick was quoted as saying, "This was not a quiet concert. It was a din. It was literally wall-shaking. The large audience was stunned"

The stromb shells are associated with a very early pre-Columbian culture which flourished from about 1400 to 400 BC. Oddly enough, the site itself has been known for years, especially for a huge stone sculpture there called the Lanzón. However, the discovery of the hoard of shells in a previously unknown underground chamber has attracted great interest. The shells, some of which measure over two kilograms, and which are inscribed with intricate patterns apparently depicting trophy heads of sacrifice victims, are perfectly preserved on account of the peculiar calcareous geology of the site. Their spires had been carefully modified to make mouthpieces, through which the performers rendered their sombre racket.

The shells were not identified in the article but appear to have been specimens of *Strombus galeatus*, the large species that inhabits the west coast of Central America. A related species, *Strombus gigas* from the Caribbean, has also served as a trumpet, but



Archaeologists at work on the dig.



John Rick demonstrating how to blow a trumpet, compare him to the Mayan gentleman on far right!

in this case, for the inhabitants of the ancient Mexican civilizations².

The presence of *Strombus galeatus* trumpets in Peru, hundreds of kilometers south of Manta, Ecuador, believed to be the southern extremity of their range, suggests that some relatively long distance trading took place³. In general, the shells appear to have been used in Peru, and later, in the Mayan empire, for ceremonial and religious rites, especially of a funereal nature.

However, the far more warlike Aztecs appeared to made use of stromb



Ancient stromb trumpet, with surface covered with complex engravings.



Mayan blowing a stromb-shell trumpet, from painted drinking cup, 600-900 AD, Art Museum at Princetoon, USA

trumpets in times of war, probably to urge their warriors forward. Bernal Diaz, a Spanish soldier who accompanied Cortés to Mexico, describing the final conquest of Tenochtitlan on August 13th, 1521, wrote that he could hear "the devilish music of the drums, the shell trumpets, and the horrendous, hideous sound of the large pauk of the Great Temple"³.

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Photographs courtesy of Linda A. Cicero, Stanford News Service, 425 Santa Teresa St., Stanford, CA 94305-2245, USA

Time to hand on the baton



Dear ALL,

I have had an absolutely splendid time editing the *Strandloper*. However, as of 1st July this year, I will be starting a new job in a new city (Sydney) and new country (Australia), and it will no longer be practical for me to edit our bulletin. I am very pleased and quite relieved that a suitable candidate

for the position of Editor is at hand in the form of Kobie du Preez. So after this issue, the next ones for the foreseeable future will be produced by Kobie. However, I will not be dropping out of the picture altogether. I plan to remain a member of the Society and also to become Kobie's 'editorial consultant'. Sydney might seem a long way away, but it is only about 10 minutes by email.

When I took over the job from Olive Peel in 1993, we took the decision to go for producing the electronic document ourselves rather than hand it over to a repro house. At first I used rather primitive methods and the pictures were placed onto the positives by hand, after first making printer's half-tones. Today, everything has changed and we produce

an all-electronic document, scanned pictures and all, which goes to the printers on a CD-ROM, ready for printing. I have learned a massive amount about shells and publishing over this time and would quite cheerfully have continued with the job of producing the *Strandloper* if I could have

It is worth reminding you that the job of an editor is always marvellously facilitated by the receipt of a continuous stream of stuff to publish. Reports on special shells, name changes, interesting finds, families and genera, and new books, to mention only a few of the possibilities, are needed to keep the bulletin interesting. Members and others who submit such articles will get the recognition from their peers that comes from sharing their knowledge, and hopefully the satisfaction of a job well done. Plus, the *Strandloper* has a reasonable international distribution and your submission will reach a wide audience, including many professional scientists.

Best regards,

Mike Cortie

Strandloper

Submission of material

The Editor welcomes original articles, news, shelling reports, feedback, adverts (rates on application) and other material likely to be of interest to Society members.

Correspondence

Send material for publication in the *Strandloper* to Mrs Kobie du Preez, P.O.Box 51694, Wierda Park, 0149, South Africa, or e-mail her at peabrain@global.co.za.

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The Collector reflections by the Ed.

We know the 'type' don't we? In fact, if you are reading this then you have probably been there too (and probably still are). The 'collector' is a certain type of individual who delights in tangible objects, not because they are useful, but because they are beautiful or rare or interesting. One of the 'species' of collector is a person who is fascinated by the natural world around us. This individual is wont to assemble little collections of rocks, minerals, shells, fossils, crab carapaces, rat skeletons and who knows what else, usually by self-collection. Scientific accuracy is often rather important to this individual. Another 'species' of collector would collect Persian carpets, coins, or rare vinyl records just as readily as he or she would collect shells. Perhaps this is an example of the 'fully urbanised' collector. Not surprisingly this species of collector is probably more prone to buy their shells than to go and scratch around on the beach for them. Both types find a home in our Society.

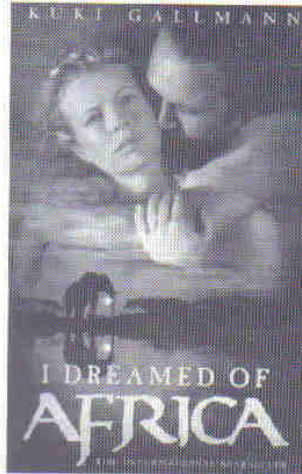
Now and again some author or other finds a little space in their book to describe us shell collectors. A splendid example was previously given in *Strandloper* 257, p.7 (March 1999), in which author Anne Lindbergh really captured the experience that we have when first 'hitting' a good shell beach. The quotation below also struck a chord with me - and it is reproduced here for your pleasure. It is from an autobiographical book, published by Penguin in 1992, and has also been made into movie.

'Emanuele was a born collector. He had started with minerals and assorted shells. Later he used to spend days cataloguing and updating his extraordinary cowrie collection. When he travelled to exotic seas like those around the Seychelles, the British West Indies and Madagascar, his specific aim was to find a particular variety of cowrie. Over the years, Paolo, Emanuele and I went a few times to visit Mario, who was living in

Antigua in an exquisite old yacht, moored in the English Harbour, in which he had crossed the Atlantic many times on his own. We sailed down to the Grenadines and up to the Virgin Islands. I remember on one occasion searching with Emanuele the chilly waters of the Atlantic for the cowrie-related *Cipboma*

gibbosa, whose peculiar habitat is the sea fans growing in the shallows around an islet south of Virgin Gorda. When he finally found the first one, small as a smooth pebble and half-covered with the slimy orange snail-like mantle, stuck to a lacy purple gorgonian, his triumphant grin, even through the goggles, was unforgettable. He had read all the books worth reading on the subject, including some very rare ones which had taken years to locate, and knew absolutely all there was to know about cowries.

When he was twelve, I brought him to London for a small nose operation intended to clear his sinuses, and for a week or so after it he was not allowed to fly. To occupy his days, he chose to go to the Natural History Museum Shells Department - where he spent hours and hours looking at the exhibits. He finally asked to be left there in the morning, with some pocket money for a snack, and picked up in the afternoon at a pre-arranged spot. One day I found him with a sort of curious glint in his eye: he had discovered one cowrie which had been wrongly labelled - some varieties were easy to confuse with almost identical ones - and he had



managed to find one of the curators and had pointed it out to him: he was right! His bonus had been to be allowed to inspect boxes of cowries of all sorts waiting to be identified and labelled.

With the money he had received as a gift for his operation, he decided to buy shells. A friend suggested a place close to Foyles, the bookshop. I was somehow disappointed to find what looked to me like a seedy little shop, crammed with cabinets and accumulated boxes. Emanuele cast an expert look around, asked the shop assistant some key questions, establishing an immediate link with him, and, turning to me, said in the quiet, determined voice I had grown to respect, 'That's fine, Pep. You can leave me here for the day. I'll help around. This is just paradise.' He went every day and managed to pick up fantastic bargains and to acquire some rare specimens of shells, particularly the famed Aurantium, the Golden Cowrie he had coveted for years.

Emanuele had kept a diary since he was nine. Infallibly, every single day, he wrote about whatever event had taken place. In his diary he noted that day, 29 September 1978, in his typical dry style:

I bought Cypraea Schilderorum, Spurca, Decipiens, Edentula, Acicularis, Pulchra, Eburnea, Humphreysi, Irrorata, Nebrites, Xanthodon, Comptoni, Ursellus, AND an Aurantium for 300 dollars. Decipiens and Pulchra were a gift. I spent all the 500 dollars I had got from Mario. I have now over 87 different species of cowries in my collection. Pep went for dinner at Mireila [Ricciardi]. Today the Pope has died.'

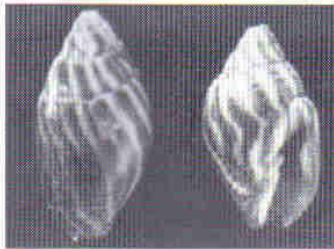
Shell beads tell a tale of ancient trade routes....

by Mike Cortie, from information trawled off the 'Net by Kobie du Preez

M*itra paupercula* (Linnaeus, 1758) is a reasonably common Indo-Pacific mitre, the range of which extends down to KwaZulu-Natal². It is similar in appearance to *Mitra litterata* Lamarck, 1811. Some authors have placed both species in the mitrid genus, *Strigatella*^{2,3}.

The shells of these molluscs captured the imagination of some of the Neolithic inhabitants of East Africa over 4000 years ago, and they were apparently the most common choice of shell used to make beads⁴. According to the archaeologist Dr Nelson, '*Strigatella* beads were manufactured by grinding away the surface on the face opposite the mouth of the shell in the same manner as the money cowry is prepared for sewing onto clothing. Usually the ground opening is formed by a single facet parallel to the ventral face of the shell, but sometimes there are two facets forming the opening as if the bead were designed to be laid in the angle between two intersecting surfaces or doubled side-to-side with a second bead. The specimens from Jarigole are carefully ground and were probably sewn on articles of clothing....⁴.

However, it should be noted that sea shell beads were quite uncommon, and the greater proportion of East African beads of this period were made from ostrich shell⁴, a practice reminiscent of that prevailing in the Kingdom of Mapungubwe in our Limpopo Province some 3000 years later⁵. Other materials used for beads in Kenya at that time included ivory, bone, amazonite, carnelian, agate and fluorite. Curiously, some sites in Kenya have only stone beads, suggesting that various kinds of cultural or religious factors must have influenced the



fashions of those times. In any event, the presence of shell beads in archaeological sites always tells an interesting story. For example, beads made from *Mitra paupercula* shells have turned up on the shores of Kenya's Lake Turkana, which is 840 km from the sea. It appears as if the local pastoralists had extensive trading networks, extending to the coast. This was at least two thousand years before the first coastal trading ports were established along this coastline. However, it is not thought that the pastoralists inhabiting the shores of Lake Turkana necessarily travelled to the coast to trade, or vice versa. Rather, the relative proportions of artefacts found has suggested to scientists that the shells were passed from one trading group to another, as a kind of primitive medium of exchange, before eventually ending up as beads in some important person's grave, deep in the interior.

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