



Biography - Dr Jan C De Vynck

I have been living in Still Bay since 1996. Before then, I completed my BA degree at Stellenbosch University majoring in Archaeology and Anthropology. These interests accompanied me to the south Cape and I remained involved as archaeological representative of the Hessequa Society for Archaeology. I am now the vice-chairman of the society.

During my exploration journey in the south Cape, I was approached by a research team (2009) to become involved in a research project investigating early human existence and interaction with the area's nature. I subsequently completed my MSc exploring the ethno-botany of the area. The local people still retain an impressive wealth of environmental knowledge and their use of indigenous edible, medicinal and otherwise useful plants is astounding. I then proceeded with my studies and completed a PhD discovering the productivity and resilience of the shoreline resources to human exploitation. Humans here have been depending on shellfish for at least 160,000 years and this aspect of early human diet played an important role in the development of cognition.

My research projects also include the study of fossil tracks and trackways in the south Cape. For instance, we recently published a paper on giraffe tracks in the Still Bay area dating from around 125,000 years ago. These animals need a savannah landscape to exist in and the find gave insights into the ancient landscape which the people of my major interest co-existed with.

The people of the south Cape, present and past, and their relationship with their environment is a topic which gives me great joy. I learn not only scientific information from studying people, plants, animals and their interactions, but how these interactions affect human behaviour. We are unique because we interact with each other in a unique way. We tell stories, we learn, we co-operate and all these unique attributes are a product of our interaction with our natural environment.

After completing my PhD, I started working for Inverroche as Creative Brand Custodian. The position was very diverse and in a sense quite relevant to my academic training. I worked with people and aspects of the environment that we resonate to. The Fynbos Biome can be called the aromatic biome and so many plants are filled with flavour potential. I loved the stories being told to me by special people and the opportunity to pass these precious gems of information on to others.

I am now employed as research fellow at the African Centre for Coastal Palaeoscience, Nelson Mandela University and continue with human origins research. I am also an honorary researcher at the Evolutionary Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand and a research associate at the Botany and Plant Biotechnology Department, University of Johannesburg.