

Book Reviews and Notices

BETWEEN THE TIDES: IN SEARCH OF SEA TURTLES.

by GEORGE HUGHES

Auckland Park, Johannesburg: Jacana Media 2013. ISBN 978-1-4314-0562-6.

ALTHOUGH not an autobiography *per se*, this book focuses, primarily, on Dr George Hughes's early years as a researcher investigating the distribution and abundance of turtles on the coast of southeastern Africa, Madagascar and the many islands of the western Indian Ocean. It is an easy and informative read and one that will be especially enjoyed by anyone interested in wildlife, reptiles and the ocean.

The early work was based on a variety of tags placed on nesting turtles, although more recently satellite transmitters have been employed. The former, which necessitated a massive amount of field work by the author and innumerable helpers, answered several basic questions about the movement of these marine chelonians. However, the satellite transmitters, which are very expensive, have also yielded many

answers. The amount and precision of information obtained is quite astonishing, and very significant for conservation biology.

Many will be envious of the localities and beaches explored by Hughes in his remarkable quest, initially for loggerhead and leatherback turtles, and later green and Ridley's turtles. However, times were sometimes tough, fighting off rats in his tent, or being stranded in remote places, including war-torn Mozambique, in his "Panda Van". He is a natural story teller, not unlike many conservation biologists, and he reports many anecdotes which will evoke smiles aplenty.

All those who read this book will enjoy the narrative, learn more about turtles and the many issues and problems concerned with the conservation of rare and threatened species, particularly those eaten for their meat or eggs, traded

for their tortoiseshell, and caught in shark nets. It is illustrated with several colour photographs and includes some maps and sketches.

Hughes came to be a world-renowned authority on marine turtles and the Director and CEO of what was then the Natal Parks Board. He started his career as a game ranger in the Natal Drakensberg but soon became a dedicated postgraduate student with a passion for sea turtles. He was fortunate to be mentored in his early days by Archie Carr, the then doyen in the field of marine turtle biology and research. He was also ably supported by the directors and colleagues at the NPB and the Oceanographic Research Institute where he was employed. Nevertheless, it was Hughes's passion and drive that resulted in a number of long-term monitoring studies of turtles in the southern

hemisphere. He has since fostered and aided the monitoring and research carried out on these threatened creatures. He also forged significant ties with the Turtle Specialist Group, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna.

Although the book contains information about the biology of marine turtles, particularly their breeding biology and movements, it is not a "scientific" treatise. My only reservations are about the use of some words; for example, "design", when referring to an adaptation (specialisation), "theory" (hypothesis) and "born" (hatched).

I strongly recommend that you buy this book.

MIKE PERRIN

HEALTH IN PIETERMARITZBURG (1838-2008): A HISTORY OF URBANISATION AND DISEASE IN AN AFRICAN CITY.

by JULIE DYER

Occasional Publications of the Natal Society Foundation. Pietermaritzburg, 2012. ISBN 978-0-99217-0-0.

JULIE Dyer's *Health in Pietermaritzburg (1838-2008)* is a unique history of the city. Readers may recall Julie Parle's *State of Mind: Searching for Health in Natal and Zululand, 1868-1918* (2007), also in the field of medical history. Both give us a new perspective on social development in the colony and province. They present an extension of social history beyond class, gender and education, which have characterised the post-apartheid literature. It is to be hoped that more books will follow, which will fill in as well as expand our knowledge of the new field. The Natal Society Foundation is also to be com-

mended, for its venture into the field of local social history with this book. Gone are the days when politics and economics dominated regional history.

Dyer studied medicine at the University of Leeds before coming to South Africa and studying Public Health at the University of Natal. She served as Medical Officer of Health in Pietermaritzburg from 1994 to 2005, when the municipality abolished the position, but retained her services as manager of the fresh produce market!

Health in Pietermaritzburg contains 14 chapters, including an Introduction and Conclusion, and an Appendix of

several tables and a Select Bibliography. Twelve chapters are topical: health service provision; infectious diseases and epidemics; sanitation and water-borne disease; diet and nutrition; murder, violence and accidents; refuse, rodents and vector-borne disease; housing, hostels, overcrowding and pulmonary tuberculosis; social development and health; chronic disease and cancer; air pollution and respiratory disease; sexually-transmitted infections, HIV and Aids; infant, child and natal mortality. The longest chapters are on housing (56 pages), sanitation (40) and services (27); the shortest are on chronic (16) and sexually-transmitted (17) diseases and violence (18), which seems rather out of place among the others. The list above is in sequence, and the reader may question whether or not some topics really follow on, but there is no question about the comprehensiveness of the list.

The reader will find the topics interesting or not according to his or her predilection. In any case the Introduction: overview of Pietermaritzburg, and Conclusions, a recapitulation, are interesting and useful, since they provide the narrative framework for the correlation of the topics. The chapters otherwise do not lend themselves to vivid prose: the book is not an easy read. However, Dyer's writing is straightforward and clear, and one can easily follow where she leads. The history is periodicised – as set out in the Introduction: origins, late nineteenth century, early twentieth century, apartheid, post-liberation – according to the dominant regime, in both terminal and also (which helps a great deal) topical chapters.

My only criticism of the book is in connection with housing, sanitation and social development, all of which

relate in some way to town planning. Although planning as a discrete unit in local government only came into being after the Second World War, it figured in the city's development before then, under the aegis of the city engineer. Of course, Dyer is not an urban geographer, but if she were, then she might have used models which probably would have given greater clarity to and shortened some long chapters.

Dyer is no friend of the old regime. She excoriates apartheid's insensitive policies and wasteful practices, although she recognises that even in bad times there can be good men. She is kinder to officials of the late colonial and Union periods, who appear as individuals with ideas of their own and able to influence a more pragmatic local government.

For the early period she relies on a variety of primary and secondary sources, but relatively few official publications. There appears to be no use of the Pietermaritzburg records in the local archives depot. For the late colonial, Union and early Republic periods the account is based very largely on the reports of the Medical Officer of Health in the *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Year Books*, published between 1902 and 1994, which in their way are classics of civic accountability. Dyer has read through the reports and sifted and sorted the data, which provide the bulk of her information; however, in consequence she proceeds with her topics much as the year books do, i.e. year-by-year, so that the chapters at times read like chronicles, and there is much repetition among them.

For the latest period there is no body of coherent records; consequently there are lacunae in her account and sometimes information is anecdotal. Indeed,

she really has no choice but to stop when the official year books end and she is removed from office, because the records become scarce and fragmentary. It is unfortunate that the transformation

of municipal government has produced such documentary disorder, which at this stage practically precludes a follow-up of the same calibre as Dyer's history.

PAUL THOMPSON

TOUJOURS PRET. THE UMVOTI MOUNTED RIFLES. The 'Mahoops' and its antecedent regiments: The Greytown Mounted Rifles, The Natal Hussars, The Zululand Mounted Rifles and The Northern District Mounted Rifles 1864-2004. The second oldest armour regiment in South Africa. A New History.

by MARK COGHLAN

Durban, Umvoti Mounted Rifles Comrades Association, 2012.

ISBN 978-1-930315-77-1.

THE Comrades Association of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles has produced this commemorative volume to mark the regiment's 140th anniversary. It is more than a regimental history: it is a souvenir of dedication and service, copiously illustrated and replete with personal reminiscences of officers and men. Author Mark Coghlan, of the provincial museum service, has written extensively on KwaZulu-Natal history. His work on the Natal Carbineers in the recent period made him the natural choice of the Comrades Association to write this history.

There is much ground to cover and the author does it methodically and thoroughly, consulting not only regimental records and veterans' accounts but also a wide range of official and unofficial publications which serve to contextualise and interpret the regimental material. The detail in all this is quite remarkable, and makes the book a source and reference for South African military history. This is particularly so for the recent period, which was not touched upon in the previous history of the UMR, written by A. J. du Plessis in 1975.

The regimental history makes up about two thirds of the book. The antecedent units are dealt with, and the story of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles begins with colonial self-government and militia reform in 1893-4. The regiment began as a mounted unit, was dismounted and became infantry, which was then motorised, and finally became mechanised, with a succession of stronger and more high-tech armoured cars. Part One ("The Early Years") covers the colonial period; Part Two the World Wars; and Part Three the recent period (until 2004). In each part the historical setting is given, followed by administrative and organisational developments, and then by operations. The chronicling of minor (and repetitive) operations year-by-year tends to break up the narrative.

The other third of the book is concerned with ceremonial events and regalia, biographies of varying length, and even an appendix on equipment. At the end there is a special section of photographs. Comrades, their families and friends, will probably find this the most interesting section of the book.

The UMR participated in many campaigns, but without fighting in any major battle. The battles of Mpukonyoni in 1906, Gibeon in 1915, and Bardia in 1941 were relatively small actions. The regiment was not called to serve overseas in the Great War, and its capture at Tobruk (which evidently still rankles) in 1942 made it miss the rest of the second one. (There is an interesting chapter on members' experiences as prisoners of war.)

The Umvoti Mounted Rifles' recruiting base historically was the rural white communities of the middle Thukela district – “a small country regiment”, “a family-oriented unit that ... relied on mutual respect and trust” – and it has been historically affected by and reflected inter-communal dynamics in that district. Under the new dispensation, discretion and tact are essential in the compilation and publication of what, after all, has been and is still largely (at least in respect of officers) a white regiment, especially when much of its active service consisted of guarding the border and policing the townships against the forces of its new political master.

There is a strong note of reconciliation. His Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini contributes a Preface and Oscar Zondi of the Bhambatha Centenary Committee contributes a Message to the book. The Zulu or Bhambatha Rebellion is sanitised as an Uprising (which makes it a bit difficult when rebels cannot be called uprisers). Rebellion (no

adjective) is applied only to Afrikaners in 1914. The recent transformation affecting the regiment is described fairly but succinctly, but even then there is more on women than black soldiers. Greater change is to be expected, and one may speculate that this is why the association decided to produce the new history now rather than wait for the sesquicentennial.

The book is not an easy read – quite literally, with A4 pages, 3.5 centimetres thick, and weighing three kilogrammes, it is hard to hold – but perhaps the Comrades Association had in mind a coffee-table memento. The reviewer is a student of military history, and he quite enjoyed it, especially the part on the recent period. He finds much to praise and little to criticise. The editorial committee could have been more economical with the material to hand – cutting some discursive text, reducing the many personal anecdotes, and pruning much-the-same pictures. (In this respect it is surprising that Just Done Productions, which printed the book, appears not to have given some practical advice on lay-out.) These may seem like quibbles. What is unforgivable is the omission of any bibliography.

PAUL THOMPSON

Editor's Note. The author prepared a full and detailed bibliography which was omitted by the regimental association when it published the book.