



GRASSHOPPER COUNTRY
*The Great Brak River
Museum News Letter*

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Editor Rene' de Kock

Dear Museum Friends

Issue 1 of 2010



It is hoped that we have reached the bottom of the current recession and we would like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers a Brighter and Better New Year.

The recession has affected all of us and if it were not for the Great Brak River Museum, the 150th birthday celebration might have gone largely unnoticed. Our village has also been hard hit which can be seen by the lack of local business support. We feel that despite this, we have done much to put Great Brak River back in the spot light. One company that provided us with a good deal of support was Bolton's, the present owners of Searle's; Marius Ferreira in particular put his hands deep into their pocket to assist various functions. A special tree planting ceremony was arranged late in November to thank Marius and the company. **The Photo shows Peter Searle thanking Bolton's.**

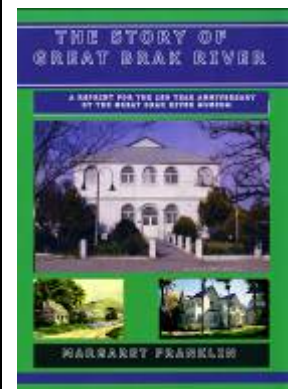


Despite the congestion on Mossel Bay's roads, our tourism season has been much quieter than normal with many holiday establishments having to return accommodation deposits as their water quotas are insufficient.

One apology I must make to our visitors is the non opening of the river mouth. The River Management Forum was served with an interdict preventing the use of a portion of our contractual quota of flushing water necessary to keep the mouth open and the estuary healthy. Whether this interdict was rightly or wrongly justified is another matter and will leave the estuary with substantial damage. We trust the Mossel Bay municipality will compensate us for these damages from the collection of rates to the many new developments that they have given and are still giving the go ahead to.

"OUR BEAUTIFUL BAY IS IN DANGER" 'Petrosa' is in the process of attempting

Except for the holidays, the Museum will be open from Monday – Friday between 9 am and 4 pm. and on Saturdays between 9.30 am and 12 Noon



We still have a few hard cover copies of the reprint of Margret Franklins book "The Story of Great Brak River". The book costs R250 in hard cover or R170.00 with soft cover plus R35.00 if you require the copy by post. This is a must have reference book on the history of the village.



to change the face of Vleesbaai, a beautiful sea side village close to Mossel Bay by installing an off shore Liquid Natural Gas connection. Whilst we are not against progress, the present proposed implementation could be the cause of a major ecological disaster to the Garden Route. For all of those who are interested in our environment please go to www.revag.co.za and if in agreement, lodge your objection. We would not like to see any job losses at Petrosa but there are much safer and proven ways to connect the natural gas to the plant.

Over the last fifteen years our local Garden Route weather patterns have been changing from a twelve month rain cycle to fierce dry periods with possible intense downpours when they occur. Previously the two weather patterns, that coming from the southern Cape and that emanating in the North overlapped. These days the two patterns are drifting further and further apart leaving a large gap in between where little rain falls. Remember when George was always cold and wet. Some fifteen years ago when still farming, we were warned that we should change our crops to dry land planting.

*"In the Northern Hemisphere global warming may actually benefit agriculture, as areas that are currently too cold to farm become warmer. On the other hand, agriculture faces an uncertain future in the Southern Hemisphere, where large areas will become as much as 3°C warmer and much drier. Higher temperatures are predicted over the whole of South Africa. January temperatures are expected to increase most in the central interior and Northern Cape and least at the coast. In general, summer rainfall will decrease by between 5% in the northern regions and 25% in the Eastern and southern Cape. Parts of the Western Cape may lose a significant portion of current winter rainfall. In other words, **over the next 50 to 100 years, the Western Cape will become hotter and drier**".*

From "The Western Cape Province Today" (a provincial spatial publication 2005)

Water Wisdom

Now that these hot summer days have finally arrived and many more months of dry weather lie ahead. Here are some tips to help you save water



- Choose plants with grey and silver foliage. Many of these plants originate from hot, dry areas, making them very drought tolerant. The grey colour is due to a layer of fine hairs that reflect sunlight or a wax layer that reduces water loss.
- Water wise plants. A few good examples are bulbine, crocosmia, osteospermum, fennel, scabiosa, shasta daisy, verbena and gaura.
- When in doubt, always opt for indigenous plants. They are better adapted to our local climate and generally require less water and feeding. (See our features on agapanthus and vygies below).
- Mulch garden beds with pebbles, gravel, pine needles, compost, bark chips or peach pips. This is essential to prevent unnecessary evaporation of moisture.
- Water well twice a week (preferably in the early mornings before the wind picks up) rather than watering lightly every day (if water restrictions allow it).

A local farmer has objected to us crossing his farm to gain access to the upper end of the Willie Searle Furrow. No reason has been given. We therefore have had to withdraw this unusual hike from our itinerary.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry reports that during the third week in December 2009, our **Wolwedans** dam is **40.40%** full. The bottom 15% layer is presently not suitable for purification.



Great Brak River's Wolwedans dam wall.
The only other very small dam of importance in the Wolwedans catchment area is the Ernst Robertson dam which due to the rains is 100% full.

The Museum has a large number of second hand books at R3.00 each

Hopes "Hands On" crafts workshop in January to raise funds for the museum will be held at the Great Brak River Museum at 9.30 am on Tuesday 19th.

Please call Hope de Kock on 044 6205124 or 083 378 1232 for full details.

Paging Through Recent History

IT IS ALWAYS INTERESTING TO READ ABOUT OUR WEATHER REPORTS & PREDICTIONS, ESPECIALLY WHEN WRITTEN BY THE SCIENTIFIC WORLD OR BY YOUR LOCAL MUNICIPALITY OR TRAVEL AGENT. THEY ARE SO FAR APART THAT YOU COULD EASILY BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE NOT IN THE SAME COUNTRY.

OUR MUNICIPAL MANAGER TELLS US THAT THE DROUGHT IN THE WESTERN HALF OF THE WESTERN CAPE WAS UNFORESEEN? THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE (JUST ONE OF MANY) IS REPRODUCED WITHOUT CHANGE OR COMMENT!

Ecological Requirements for the Maintenance of Western Cape Fynbos Biodiversity and Compromises Recommended to Meet Metropolitan Pressure

(IFFN No. 22 - April 2000, p. 76-78)

Introduction

The *Fynbos* vegetation of the southwestern and southern Cape in South Africa, also described as *evergreen sclerophyllous heathlands and shrublands*, covers 59,282 km², or 5.3% of the territory of South Africa. The exclusive area where the fynbos biome is found has a typical winter rainfall in the west, but further to the east spring and autumn peaks characterise the rainfall pattern. The annual rainfall in the area ranges from as low as 200 to over 3000 mm per year, and with such extremes it is clear that the rate of above-ground biomass production in the biome will also vary significantly (Huntley 1984). Kruger (1977) reported fynbos biomass values of between 2000 to 26,000 kg/ha in stands ranging from 2 - 17 years in age, with an average annual biomass production rate of 1000 - 4000 kg/ha. Natural fires in the biome occur within 6 - 40 year rotations (Kruger 1979, Kruger and Bigalke 1984).

In the Western Cape, fynbos shrubland covers the most prominent mountain catchment areas, and are managed for a variety of goals, the most important of which include maintaining sustained yields of high quality streamflow, nature conservation, fire hazard reduction, afforestation, grazing, tourism and recreational opportunity. Many areas are managed for more than one of these goals simultaneously, and as a result the role of fire between communities within the biome will differ significantly (van Wilgen et al. 1990).

During 1999 and 2000 there was a marked increase in the number of fires experienced (as well as size of areas burned-over) throughout the fynbos-covered part of the Cape regions. During Bergwind (Föhn wind-like) conditions in 1998 and 1999 most of some mountain ranges (such as the Outeniquas and Tsitsikamma mountains) were burned by wildfires, including thousands of hectares of adjoining industrial plantations. During mid-summer 1999, and again during January 2000, more mountain catchment areas were burned-over by uncontrolled fire, causing millions of Dollars of damage to urban houses, adjoining vineyards and industrial plantations. Tragically, some human lives were lost in the southern Cape during the 1998 and 1999 fires. The loss in fynbos biodiversity maintenance as a result of these too hot (and in some cases) too frequent fires, will be difficult to quantify, but was substantial.

The question now arises if we can still meet ecological requirements to maintain diversity in the fynbos biome, or whether these goals are now threatened by increased population pressure and access, encroachment of build-up areas (Cape Town and environment in particular), climate change and the spread of alien woody weeds?

Fire Frequency, Season and Intensity

Research achievements in the past now make it possible to determine optimum fire frequencies with an acceptable degree of accuracy, not only considering fuel dynamics, but also maintaining species diversity in the process. Fynbos is rich in species, and has complex requirements for survival. Almost 20% of plant genera are endemic (Bond and Goldblatt 1984), making nature conservation a high priority, and prescribed burning and weed control are important management tools to achieve this.

The optimum fire frequency for fynbos is 10 - 15 years, but fire intensity and season of burn also play an important role to fulfil ecological requirements in the fynbos biome. These requirements vary from region to region, and also with topographical and climate variation. However, these requirements have been published by scientists in the past, and we know what the optimum maintenance requirements are for the biome as a whole (e.g. Bond et al. 1984).

As a result of delays in the prescribed burning programme for various reasons (e.g. public pressure, staff shortages, a high staff turnover, lack staff with prescribed burning experience, weed infestation and urban expansion), fynbos in certain catchments was allowed to become too old, making it therefore impossible to apply fuel reduction by means of prescribed burning because this would now be too hazardous. The accumulation of fuels increased further by the spread of alien weeds such as *Hakea sericae*, *Acacia longifolia* and *Pinus pinaster*, until a situation was reached where serious wildfires just could not be avoided, particularly during abnormal weather conditions as experienced in Southern Africa during recent years.

The prescribed burning programme required was further disrupted by the sudden increase in wildfire occurrence, complicating the achievement of ecological goals even further. The intended mosaic of burns, that would have produced vegetation of different ages in plant communities was upset, with some areas burned too frequent or producing a fire of a too high intensity as a result of the added weed biomass. Where weed control measures were intensified, more tons of fuel were added to these systems which were already experiencing high biomass loading as a result of extended age. As a result, extremely high intensity wildfires will burn through these areas, which will trigger the seed beds of most weed species, and ensure that an ever larger alien weed problem than before will develop.

The Solution: Integrated Fire Management with some Compromises

There is no magic solution for the unacceptable status of the fynbos biome at present, but for a start it will help if we accept certain realities which are here to stay. They are:

- We have to live with the population pressure, and subsequent increase in fire hazard, as more and more people will in the future access nature conservation areas, resulting in increased fire hazard.
- Global changes in weather patterns will have to be accepted as a *fait accompli*, and planners will have to consider this issue in the future seriously.
- Urban interface problems must be identified, and a plan of action will have to be drawn up by local authorities as a matter of urgency.
- Although the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has an excellent weed control program going, more consideration should be given to the biomass created in the process (and subsequent fire hazard), particularly along lines with regular public access. This programme should also include regeneration control soon after wildfire.
- Optimum ecological requirements can never be reached, and recent wildfires in the Cape have underlined this. However, we must continue to attempt to come as close as possible to these objectives. Realistic compromises in the ecological burning programme must also be made to reduce the wildfire hazard to acceptable levels.

I would like to suggest the following to reach ecological goals for the fynbos biome in the region:

- Map the status of wildfires (fire perimeters), alien weeds and fynbos vegetation by approx. age for the whole Cape region where fynbos occurs. This should be done as soon as possible, so that future planning can commence. Adjustments in weed control programmes and prescribed burning programmes will also have to be implemented as soon as possible thereafter, as delays could have serious affects on e.g. future weed regeneration control.
- Map and evaluate fire hazard (for the present and over time) by considering the *status quo*, ecological requirements and fuel dynamics (both within fynbos communities and on bordering land).
- Draw up an integrated, regional fire protection plan which includes all the important role players and disciplines (more about this in the next section). Ecological burning programmes must form the core of this plan, but drastic changes in existing fire protection plans and burning programmes may be required.
- Start a public awareness campaign to educate the local population in the role of fire in maintaining the ecological balance, to stamp out (with stricter law inforcement) negligence with fire, weed control on private properties and the protection of dwellings bordering fynbos conservation areas.
- Provide specialised training for selected nature conservation staff in fynbos fuel dynamics, prescribed burning application and integrated fire protection.

Conclusions

The worlds' richest floral kingdom, the Cape Fynbos, needs to be conserved as best as we can. Changes in human population density, weather patterns and land-use, as well as an increase in alien weeds are the reasons why nature conservators are now facing new challenges, particularly after the recent disastrous wildfires.

Policy makers, nature conservators, municipal authorities, fire fighting organisations and other land-users such as forest managers and farming representatives, need to sit down and re-think a plan for the future that will be realistic, and satisfying all requirements. This plan will have to be fully integrated, as this is the only way in which all can contribute towards objectives, which all disciplines will understand and apply successfully.

Cornelius "Neels" De Ronde

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SOUTH AFRICA

During the next few months we'll be placing some of the remaining photographs we received for last year's photo competition.

This black and White photograph of Great Brak River was the competition entry of **Vicky-Lyn Schermbrucker**.

The title of the picture is: **"Sign of the times"**





Association Chairman's Chatter

Robert Smith

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Well, here we are into a new year – 2010, and your committee wish all our readers and families a happy and prosperous 2010.

During December the museum had many visitors and on some days our "museum ladies" were rushed off their feet with the volume of visitors exploring our museum and acquiring information about our part of the Garden Route.

As mentioned in the last newsletter we will be starting to refurbish three of our display rooms from the middle of January, once our visitors have returned home after spending time in our area, and we are looking forward to be able to see some meaningful improvements to the museum in due course.

If there are any aspiring painters amongst you then we would be grateful for any assistance in redecoration and also to help move our artefacts around in order to decorate and then relocate them to their new positions. The refurbishment will be done over quite a long period of time as progress will be dictated by our available funds.

We trust all our readers had an enjoyable and peaceful Christmas and are rested and ready for the year ahead.

			 
Heritage Program Calendar for 2009 - 10 Prepared by the Museum Monday, 26th October			
Month & provisional date	Description	Supported by	Contact person
083-448-1966	Program Organiser	Museum	Rene' de Kock
31st December Great Brak River is 150 years old.			
Late December, Early January 2009	Franklin & Searle Family Reunion	Family only	Info Peter Searle 082-561-3052
15th January 2010	2010 SOCCER The 2010 "Blow up Soccer Pitch" will be in Great Brak River.	Museum	Rene' de Kock 083-448-1966
February	Traditional Tea Party and crossing the river closing ceremony	Museum	Mrs Nisde McRobert 044-620-3783
For more details on what's on in our area email Junita van Wyk with a request for their news letter: shalom7@absamail.co.za			

SA Tourism Snippets

■ NEW SURVEY

The provision of quality service to the tourism industry is a national priority in South Africa. The purpose of this survey is to determine how business tourists travelling in South Africa feel about the quality of service delivery in the business tourism industry. It further aims to establish how satisfied business tourists are with the service delivery. The survey is anonymous and responses cannot be tracked to participants. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the statements in this questionnaire.

Follow this link to access the survey

http://takesurvey.com/statkon/business_tourism_now_media.htm

- The **World Travel & Tourism Council** says that although the global economy is making a slow recovery from its worst recession since the 1930's **we could experience a second dip early in 2010.**
- The **International Marketing Council** (IMC) has announced cabinet's approval of a new international marketing logo for brand South Africa.
- The Government has **changed several town names** recently *For example:*
Belfast is now eMakhazeni
Waterval Boven is now officially Emgwenya
And Nelspruit is now Mbombela
42 name changes have been approved by the South African Geographical Names Council.
- The new recreational **West Coast rock lobster season** opened on 15 November 2009 and will close on 15 April 2010. From 1 January 2010 to 15 April 2010 fishing is restricted to weekends and public holidays only between 08h00 and 16h00. The bag limit is 4 lobsters per person per day and the size is restricted to 80 mm carapace length.
- The Barberton –Makhonjwa Mountain land is aiming for the status of World Heritage Site. It contains the oldest and best preserved sequence of volcanic and sedimentary rocks on Earth.
- The **2009 Knysna Oyster Festival** has raised more than R1 million for local charities and non-profit organisations in Knysna.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

- ✚ If you have much, give of your wealth; if you have little, give of your heart. - Arab Proverb
- ✚ Love only what befalls you and is spun for you by fate. - Marcus Aurelius
- ✚ Let us move on, and step out boldly, though it be into the night, and we can scarcely see the way. - Charles B. Newcomb
- ✚ Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends.... Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. - Henry David Thoreau
- ✚ Know, first, who you are; and then adorn yourself accordingly. - Epictetus



THE GREAT BRAK RIVER CRAFT WORKSHOP.

During January 2010 the craft workshop under the auspices of the museum will start its next program.

We are looking for unemployed underprivileged persons who have completed school, who are under the age of 35 years and who have an aptitude for craft production (sewing, drawing, design, bead work, painting or marketing etc.). The museum will provide training on up to two days of each week. The object of the program is to start your own business and self sustaining manufacturing concern.

Please join us at the museum on the 12th and 14th of January 2009 for an aptitude and induction course. Work will mainly be completed at home however materials and full assistance will be provided.

Please bring an example of any work done and a copy of your I D document.

Learners will be funded during the initial training and for all satisfactory completed work done.

In Januarie 2010 sal die werkswinkel met die ondersteuning van die Museum sy volgende program loots.

Ons is op soek na werklose persone van onder 35 jaar wat hul skoolopleiding voltooi het en wat 'n aanleg het vir die maak van kunshandwerk (teken, ontwerp, kralewerk, naaldwerk, verfwerk of bemarking ens.) Die museum sal twee dae per week opleiding verskaf met die doel om studente sodoende op te lei om hul eie volhoubare vervaardigings-ensakeondernemings op die been te bring.

Kom sluit gerus by ons aan op 12 en 14 Januarie 2010 by die museum vir 'n aanleg-en bekendstellingskursus. Werk sal hoofsaaklik tuis voltooi word maar materiale en volledige ondersteuning sal verskaf word.

Bring asseblief 'n voorbeeld van enige werk deur jou gedoen asook 'n afskrif van jou ID dokument.

Studente sal vergoed word tydens opleiding asook vir alle bevredigende voltooide werk.

Please phone Hope on 083-378-1232 for further information.

OUR NATURE CORNER

Did you know that there is more than one Little Brak and Great Brak rivers. These rivers are actually tributaries to the Fish River. We have had a number of interesting and unusual bird visitors to our home on the hill in Great Brak River, these include a pair of nesting Malachite Kingfishers and I was looking for something to write about on birding in Great Brak River when I came across the following:

Mount Melsetter – A Birding Paradise

Mount Melsetter, a guest farm, is situated in the Upper Karoo Region, as classified by David Shearing, a summer rainfall area, comprising the late John Acocks' Veld Type 36, "False Upper Karoo" with fairly grassy Karoo veld, and hills and mountains more grassy than the plains. Mount Melsetter is situated 50 kilometers east of Middelberg (Cape) and is particularly fortunate in that its topography includes a mountain, hills, plains, and riverine country along the banks of the **Great Brak River**. Bird habitats therefore include mountain grassveld, hillside scrub, valley Acacia, and open mixed Karoo or grassveld. Such a rich natural environment brings with it an abundance of bird life.



Along the banks of the Great Brak River, when there are pools or running water, one can spend hours quietly watching a malachite kingfisher fishing in the pools, Egyptian Geese or various species of duck dabbling around under the watchful eye of fallow deer down to drink, and many other water birds. The **Great Brak** is, however, a perennial stream with periods of absolute dryness. Summer downpours then bring chocolate coloured torrents rushing downstream, leaving tranquil clear pools in their wake

During the spring and summer months, migrant White Throated and Greater Striped Swallows arrive to nest and launch their fledglings into the world from under the eaves of Mt Melsetter's Karoo House. Up on the crag of Mt Melsetter itself, a pair of Verreaux's (Black) Eagle nest. The nest has been there for more than thirty years. A strenuous clamber in July rewards one with a view of a pure white eaglet in the nest, it's sibling having been kicked out in the first few weeks, the 'Cain and Abel' process ensuring that only the strongest survive.



Go to www.greatkaroo.co.za for more information.

Sally Adam writes: AT the end of 2009 we tackled George Peak (elev 1337m). It was disappointing to be misted in and to have no view at all, but it did allow us to focus on the flowers instead. The proteas and ericas are in full flower at the moment and we were



constantly surrounded by Orange-breasted Sunbirds, Cape Sugarbirds and Victorin's Warblers.

The first floral delight was a single, spectacular George lily (*Cyrтанthus elatus*) on the lower slopes (above).

Despite the drought it was surprisingly damp on the mountain - we spotted this little orchid, *Disa tripetaloides*, growing in seeps along the path (on the right).



Another eye-catching orchid, *Disa cornuta*, was found almost hidden under taller fynbos. It is even more striking than it appears in the photos see below.

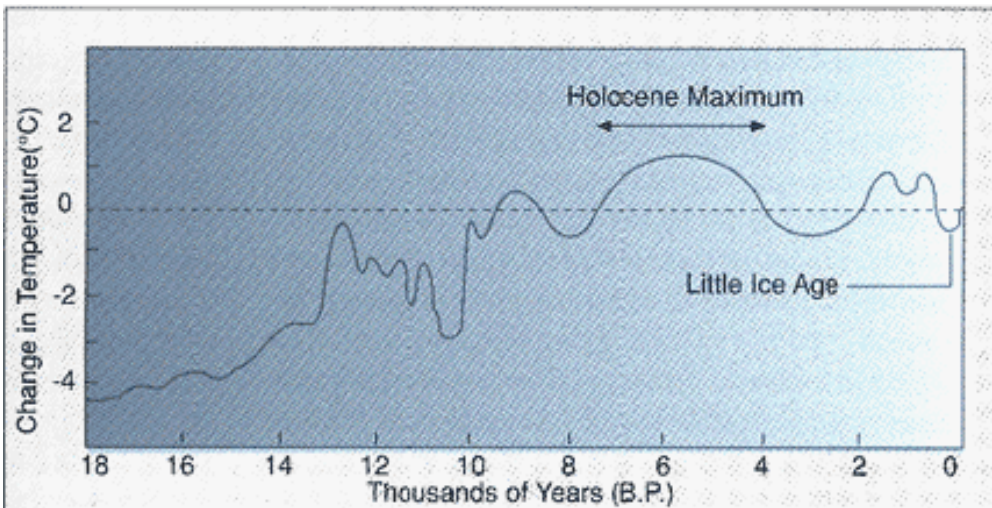


GLOBAL WARMING There has been so much in the press about global warming that we thought to add our piece. Many scientists believe that it is a natural process and that we can do little about it.

Global warming started long before the "Industrial Revolution" and the invention of the internal combustion engine. Global warming began 18,000 years ago as the earth started warming its way out of the **Pleistocene Ice Age**-- a time when much of North America, Europe, and Asia lay buried beneath great sheets of glacial ice.

Earth's climate and the biosphere have been in constant flux, dominated by **ice ages and glaciers** for the past several million years. We are currently enjoying a temporary reprieve from the deep freeze.

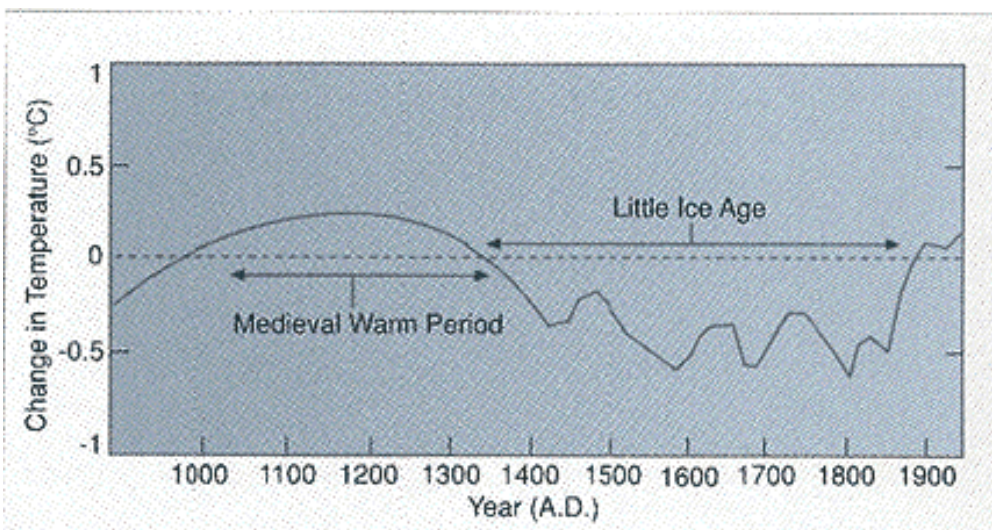
Approximately every 100,000 years Earth's climate warms up temporarily. These warm periods, called **interglacial periods**, appear to last approximately 15,000 to 20,000 years before regressing back to a cold ice age climate. At year 18,000 and counting our current interglacial vacation from the Ice Age is much nearer its end than its beginning.



The idea that man-made pollution is responsible for global warming is not supported by historical fact but of course we did not have the present amount of industrialization.

The period known as the **Holocene Maximum** is a good example-- so-named because it was the hottest period in human history. The

interesting thing is this period occurred approximately 7500 to 4000 years B.P. (before present)-- long before humans invented industrial pollution. Whilst these charts show the Northern countries, they are very similar to that South of the equator.



Example of regional variations in surface air temperature for the last 1000 years, estimated from a variety of sources, including temperature-sensitive tree growth indices and written records of various kinds, largely from western Europe and eastern North America. Shown are

changes in regional temperature in ° C, from the baseline value for 1900.

The present Global Warming is believed to be made up of two separate components, the first is natural and the second is manmade. By how much we can control and slow down the latter is uncertain. No one is sure as to the exact amount either causes, however it is estimated that the water level in the Great Brak River Estuary could rise by about 500 mm in the year 2100. Very fortunately most of our readers will not be around to witness the possibility.



Mossiness lane, Great Brak River from the air. A photograph of a portion of our November's Heritage walk. Some 5000 years ago Mossiness was an inland sea.

Some scientists believe that since the climate has always been changing and will likely continue of its own accord to change in the future, instead of crippling the World economy in order to achieve small reductions in global warming effects due to manmade additions to atmospheric carbon dioxide, our resources may be better spent making preparations to adapt to global cooling and global warming, and the inevitable consequences of fluctuating ocean levels, temperatures, and precipitation that accompany climatic change.

Some Extracts From Global Warming: a Chilling Perspective. _____ Various Authors, October 2007.



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