



# A Rough Sheller's Guide to the Northern Emirates

by Sandy Fowler



Copyright © 2005 Sandy Fowler

# A ROUGH SHELLER'S GUIDE TO THE NORTHERN EMIRATES

## Introduction



When I first came to the Gulf in 1987, there was no single book to which one could refer for the easy identification of local seashells. The Bosch book, "Seashells of Oman" published in 1982 was a help (if you knew it existed), but it was only in 1989 that the soft back "Seashells of Southern Arabia" made its first appearance. It's now out of print, and the nomenclature for some has changed, but I still have my original copy, much thumbed, battered and treasured. It was the first publication dedicated to the shells of the area, and made field identification so much easier. In 1995, "Seashells of Eastern Arabia" was published. While it is, and probably always will be, the definitive reference book for all serious or semi-serious shell collectors in the Emirates, its very range meant the inclusion of species not found in specifically UAE waters.

But, none of these publications told collectors **WHERE** to go. It was like telling birders there were vultures to be seen in the Emirates, but not that the top of Jebel Hafit was the place to go!

My work is not a shell reference guide to replace "Seashells of Eastern Arabia". Nothing can. Its function is to help shell collectors, principally those of my fellow members of the Dubai Natural History Group, find the beaches they want to access, and to help select beaches on which to collect particular varieties of shells. To help pick the best times of the year, or the tide, on which to visit, and how to take care of specimens once collected. I wish I'd had such help when I first started getting really interested 10 years ago. How much time I could have saved instead of hunting down one beach track after another, to hopefully find something at the end (usually not!). Because many of the beaches have no names on any map, I've been forced to give them nicknames. Some are shell-descriptive, some geographically informative, and some just plain whimsical. Perhaps so, but it's entered in my records, and that's what's

important – accurate records. So bear with me. I've included GPS locations where useful. Many people have one; they will be a godsend in precise locating.

Don't think for one moment, however, that this is another kind of Motivate publication. This is a personal, opinionated, unedited one man's view of shelling in the U.A.E., warts and all. You may disagree with some of my descriptions – fine! Argue with me. You may claim there's a better beach I haven't described – great! Tell me how to find it. You may have found shells I haven't in places they haven't been described before – super! Let's have a shelling workshop and share our findings. And if you still think this is a pretty amateur piece of work – no problem. Produce your own version, and I'll be the first to read and enjoy it!!

### Collecting in the Emirates

It really is impossible to estimate precisely how many different shells can be collected from the beaches of the UAE. Concentrating on one single world species is easier; cones - approximately 400/450 species worldwide, while cowries number just over 200, according to most books. Here in the UAE, there are complications. Donald Bosch's book lists 894 **identified** gastropods. But this includes shells from outwith the Emirates, and also lists microscopic shells down to and under 1mm in size. The latter is academically correct but, to collect, impracticable for the average sheller. How many of us have a scanning microscope at home? Excluding both, an approximate figure of 500 collectible gastropods results. The same situation applies to the bivalves. Now other problems crop up. Donald Bosch's book relied on past publications, surveys, his own findings, those of colleagues, and the findings of a few knowledgeable local collectors. I personally have found several not listed for the area, but recorded elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific area, and it's reliably guesstimated that probably not more than 70% of all the species here have been identified. I also keep finding shells recorded in other parts of Eastern Arabia, but not in the UAE.



From left to right: Costate miter, Latirus turritus, Volva volva and Cryptospira ventricosa.

Confusing, isn't it!!

The bottom line is, therefore, that nobody for sure knows precisely how many species there are out there, but it's fun to look, and it sure is exciting to find a first record for the area. I've done it twice on DNHG field trips. Even more exciting would be a brand new shell named after you! The Bosch family did it – why can't you?

I do have a “master list” of the gastropods of Donald Bosch’s book on computer. I haven’t had the courage to tackle the bivalves – yet. It’s on Microsoft Access (Office 2000) and it’s freely available to anyone who wants a copy to modify for his or her own use. I simply deleted shells under 5mm maximum length, and those not recorded in the UAE. But I then had to reinstate shells not on my modified list, as the shells have an annoying habit of turning up where they’re not supposed to be, and only my eyesight limits identifying the smaller ones! Do be especially nice to your dental surgeon from now on. The dental picks they discard are ideal for dislodging stones and things out of shells, and for sorting through specimens on a tray. If your dental surgeon by chance uses a magnifying loupe, beg, cajole, bribe or wheedle an old one out of him or her.



Loupes magnify 1.5 to 2 times, and the smaller world opens up for you; shells you would have missed jump out at you from the tray. Form, sculpture, colours and patterns in the smaller shells become a delight of their own. Check with the naked eye, but then go back and look again.

I would probably never have identified this shell, *Smaragdia souverbiana*, without visual help. The largest is only 3.5mm diameter. I could see its roundness with the naked eye, but on first impression without magnification, would have dismissed it as a “juvenile form of something”, and binned it. Something/experience made me check further. Even unaided, it was obvious there were markings I didn’t recognise. Close up, it’s a most beautiful little shell, and, according to the definitive book, is not found in the Gulf of Oman. I found 5 at Khor Kalba!



For those interested in the history of shell collecting, and some fascinating insights into the meaning of the names of some shells, don’t forget to read the introductions of major shelling volumes. It’s quite fascinating what you can find there, if you can contain your impatience!

The focus of this guide is on the Northern and East coasts of the Emirates. There are practical reasons for this. As you progress deeper into the Gulf, water salinity rises. In summer, so does the temperature, not surprising since the Gulf is nowhere more than 30 metres/100 feet deep. Both these factors are generally inhibiting to good shell

diversity and growth. True, there are shells found within the Gulf only and not outside, but for every such specimen, there must be fifty others on the East coast. There, water temperatures and salinity are much less, and the greatest variety of shells is found. From Hamriya north, conditions are in between, with specimens appearing that are not found deeper into the Gulf. It's tough luck if you're a keen sheller and live in Abu Dhabi, but take heart. The world's foremost authority on Architectonidae, Dr. Rudiger Bieler, is based in Chicago, and you can't get much further from the sea than that!

## OFF TO THE BEACH

Let's face it, if you want to go shelling, you'll go shelling regardless of weather or tides. I do. But if you want to make the most of your visit, check both. Check out the new Web site of Dubai Police (21 Sept. 2005 – <http://www.dubaipolice.gov.ae/dp/Home.jsp> and follow the weather link), which gives a weather forecast plus Dubai high and low tide times. I've tried to indicate under specific beaches the best times to visit them. Seasonally, winter and spring are the best times to go. High winds and storms kick up the sea, encouraging shells to be dislodged and eventually washed up on the beach. Combined with spring tides, this can make for a shell bonanza. I suspect that in the cooler temperatures, some shells move into shallower water to mate and lay eggs and that some then naturally die, increasing the numbers found. Personally, I think shell colours are deeper and brighter in the cooler months, but I've no scientific backing for this. Opens up a whole new can of worms, including why are shells the colour they are??



So the cooler months for the best shells, including some such as *Argonauta hians* (the paper nautilus), which is only found in early spring. Of course winter is the nicest time for everybody to go to the beach so be prepared to share with others.

I'll detail with individual beaches whether or not 4WDs are needed to access them, but once you reach the beach several things are useful. Dedicated beach trainers that live in the boot of your car keep unwanted beach tar out of your car (and your home!). Plastic bags are easiest to pop shells into and also for keeping specimens apart if you visit several locations the same day. I always wear a "bum-bag" to leave both hands free for shelling, and in it also carry a small container for small and fragile shells. Be nice to your physician, and beg some urine sample bottles from him – they're ideal.

Shelling in the summer months can be physically intimidating, and is **NOT** to be attempted by anyone with **ANY** significant medical problem. As a practicing physician

with over 30 years of experience and 13 of those of living and working in the Gulf, I begin to believe what I'm talking about! Dehydration to some degree is almost inevitable, but you do get the beach to yourself! Good head cover and body protection plus drinking lots of fluids **ON THE WAY TO THE BEACH** (pre-hydrating), and the generous use of isotonic drinks while there go a long way to keeping you feeling reasonably well.

I'll also mention "bagging-up" from time to time. When you're faced with a tide line of masses of newly washed up shells, there just isn't time to get down on your hands and knees and systematically check through them all. Filling a plastic bag with handfuls taken from various spots gives a representative sample, and can be sorted through later on a tray under a good light (Ikea sold a good one relatively cheaply). Don't feel guilty about taking the shells away; the tide'll do it anyway in a few hours time.



A hand lens and a pair of tweezers or forceps come in very handy, along with old dental picks and a discarded toothbrush or two for brushing and oiling.

I also have an extra-powerful double lens that gives about X6 magnification.

## THE BEACHES

### Abu Dhabi Corniche

I've never collected shells further southwest than Ghantoot, so can give no guides to individual beaches. Perhaps some enterprising Abu Dhabi resident can supply local information on this. In October 2000 I received a representative mixture of shells taken from the Abu Dhabi corniche. I was able to identify 24 distinct species in it, all except one, *Cerithium rueppelli* (161) commonly found nearer to and around Dubai. From that small sample, I cannot recommend driving all the way up to and beyond Abu Dhabi just to collect shells, although the sample was in itself very interesting.

### Ghantoot to Jebel Ali

This is the least productive of all the areas of the Emirates, for reasons mentioned earlier. Beaches here are generally sandy, with bivalve clams and cockles predominating.



*Glycymeris* cf *arabica* (938)



is found everywhere, as is

*Macra lilacea* (1094)



and *Acrosterigma lacunosum* (1090),



*Pinctada margaritifera* (970)and *radiata* (971).

Don't be misled by juvenile *Circe rugifera* (1195).  
The juveniles look quite different at first glance from the adults.

*Ctena divergens* (1022)and *Divalinga arabica* (1031)

will often be found at the high-water mark. A hand lens helps to see their pretty sculpture. Among gastropods,

*Hexaplex kuesterianus* (460),*Oliva bulbosa* (597),

*Thais lacera* (491)



and *tissoti* (494),



*Neverita didyma* (315),



*Ancilla castanea* (602)



and *Dentalium octangulatum* (865) are plentiful



and specimens of *Murex scolopax* (465),



*Rhinochlamys fasciata* (174)



and *Conus textile* (728) are occasionally found.



There seems to be two distinct colour schemes and patterns to *C. textile*. Within the Gulf, the shells are more slender, the colours orange rather than red-brown, and the pattern more open. On the East coast, the shell is squatter, patterns denser, and the colours darker.

One beach worth looking at once or twice a year lies SW of Jebel Ali hotel. I call it "Sea snake beach".

### Sea snake Beach

**GPS N24° 56'37.5" E054° 56'28.3"**

It's accessed by making for the Jebel Ali Hotel, but staying on the old Abu Dhabi road parallel to the beach instead of turning right to the hotel. 4.1km. on from the hotel turn-off, opposite a house with a walled garden full of trees, a wide, hard sand track leads off towards the beach. It's the only house on the left, so hard to miss. Follow the track, as it trends beach wards and slightly left, passes tall aerials on your right, and then runs parallel to the beach. The last part mile or so is softish going, and could be tricky for saloon cars.



Fishing hut(s) on the right are as near to the beach as 2WD cars can go.

4WDs can take the beach track to the left of the gate round the southwest side of the huts and reach the beach. Saloon cars, if you've made it, stop here. The beach is mainly sandy, with a very few small rocky patches. Low tide is best.

I often go once in the summer, just to break the boredom. This is the beach where I once stood on a live yellow-bellied sea snake. That really broke the monotony! Shells are typical of a sandy beach of the area, with occasional good specimens of *Rhinoclavis fasciata* (174). It's worth taking a bagful from the high-water line, for later checking. If you're nervous about the final track, make for the beach about 500 yards to the right (north) of the aerals. It's not so good, however.

## Jebel Ali to Dubai

This stretch has little to commend it, being heavily developed and trampled over by the public virtually every day. One little beach that is worth a trip however is near a sheikh's palace. Hence, sheikh's beach. (I've also heard it referred to as black palace beach).

## Sheikh's Beach

**GPS N25° 06'55.6" E055° 10'00.5"**

Head out of Dubai towards Abu Dhabi. Fastest way is via the Sheikh Zayed road to Intersection 4. Turn off towards the sea, and take the last turn to the left, heading for the hotels (Oasis, Radisson SAS and Meridiens) and the new marina. On the right is an obviously large "residence". A track several hundred metres before that gives access to the beach. Patches are soft sand, but lots of saloon cars use it. It's a pure sand beach, but the nearby breakwater provides a home for many gastropods so both are represented.



Its beauty is that it is reached quickly from Dubai, the beach is metres from the car, and it's an excellent one to grab a bagful from. Made for split- shift visits. Just after high tide is best, and I find neap tides better than spring tides. The end nearest the breakwater (above) is best, but it's worth walking up the beach for a few hundred yards;



I once found a nice specimen of *Gari maculosa* (1163) up there.

Sometimes the beach is bare, sometimes covered with shells, but better an empty beach 20 minutes from home than after a 2-hour drive! The shells tend to be bivalves more than gastropods, and small. Small but pretty.

You should expect to find specimens of:

*Sunetta donacina* (1216)



and *S. effosa* (1215),



*Callista florida* (1207)



*Corbula sulculosa* (1252)



*Diodora funiculata* (15) and



*Donax scalpellum* (1156)



Some are among the smaller ones often identified from checking a collected bagful at leisure back home.

### **"Russian Beach"**

Needs no directions or GPS readings. Normally to be avoided at all costs, since at weekends there is more humanity to the square yard than in Times Square at rush hour. But Chairman Gary Feulner explored the shallows offshore by snorkeling one summer (? equally bored in the heat) and returned a shell record far different from the few trampled and broken specimens he found on the shoreline. Interested readers should check out his Gazelle report.

## Al Khan

**GPS N25° 20'07.8" E055° 21'34.7"**

Al Khan beach in Sharjah has little to commend it, save being accessible. Drive from Dubai to Sharjah, and at the first flyover on the main road, turn to the left, following the signs for Al Khan and the beach. Continue straight until you see the beach in front of you. Totally accessible for saloon cars. But I revisited Al Khan in November 2000 and was pleasantly surprised to collect 35 separate species of shells within 10 minutes.

## Al Khan to Hamriya

There's no individual beach worthy of singling out here; they're all pretty uninspiring. Shells are predominantly bivalves, with the occasional *Thais lacera* (491) and *Hexaplex kuesterianus* (460). Nowhere really worth the detour.

## Hamriya Beach

**GPS N 25° 29'41.4" E055° 30'23.9"**

The first really productive beach north of Dubai, which can be excellent or bare, as it pleases. An easy 40-45 minute trip from Dubai, especially in high summer when you're really desperate to hit a beach! Take the road to Ras Al Khaimah out of Sharjah, and turn down to Hamriya village via the roundabout/longabout after the Hamriya Free Zone. It's well signposted.

Before reaching the village, turn right off the tarmac road at the seaward end of a long low wall, onto a fairly hard sand track. Trend diagonally right and seawards, aiming about 200 yards to the left of an area of low bare "sand dunes" on the horizon. This accesses the first breakwater. I've seen 2WDs get very close to the water, but it depends how happy you are in a 2WD! 4WDs have no problem.



Work back up the coast from the first breakwater. This area is the best hunting ground. Check high and low tide lines, they can both be productive. Low tides are definitely best.

If you want to extend the visit, it's worthwhile going south into the village itself and checking out the beaches between the breakwaters. Access to the village breakwaters is no problem for saloon cars. Good accumulations of shells often form by these breakwaters, and it's worth collecting a few plastic bagfuls for later checking.

Being mainly sandy, but with breakwaters nearby, its yield is surprisingly mixed. At a check trip in November 2000 to the northern end, I found nice specimens of :

*Emarginula peasei* (9),



*Ethalia carneolata* (42),



*Acar plicata* (908),



*Scalptia articularis* (680),



*Viriola corrugata* (397),



*Mitrella blanda* (536)



and *Conus textile* (728), not to mention, after nearly 10 years of shelling there, a first record for me of two specimens of *Pusia osiridis* (673).



I was able to identify at least 50 discrete specimens on that one-hour visit, including several *T. palustris* (187). I could see one embedded in rocks nearby. Was I finding old, washed-out shells?



## Hamriya to Ajman

No decent "hot spots" worth singling out.

## Ajman Beach

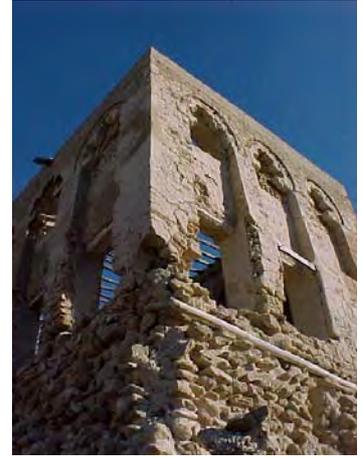
This beach needs no GPS location or photo, as it's not really worth going out of your way to visit. Shells are of generally poor quality and quantity, with little to commend them. Expats have been known, however, to visit this outpost for other social reasons, especially in the pre-Xmas season! A quick stop on the way therefore is worthwhile. Just follow the main road into Ajman, and stop at the beach south of the hotel.

## Jezirat Al Hamra

**GPS N25° 42'28.7" E055° 47'19.5"**

This once was a good beach to visit on two counts. The old village, deserted some say after a storm was worth a look, and the northwest end of the beach often had good specimens of *Cypraea grayana*. Sadly, the military decided to make the northwest end of the beach a restricted area, exactly why is not known. I can think of better places to invade this country, if I wanted to.





What's left is the fast crumbling remains of the village, and a beach that yields varieties of Cerithidae, Potamidae,

*Umbonium vestarium* (50)



and bivalves such as *Callista erycina* (1206) and

*Anadara uropigimelana* (922).



To access the beach, turn off the road to Ras Al Khaimah via the U-turn signposted Jezirat Al Hamra, and head for the sea. The precise track is not describable – twists and turns through narrow tracks in the old village – but it's hard to get lost in such a

small area. Saloon cars can make it to within 50 metres of the sea, and a hard sand track runs parallel to the beach.

Unless you're curious, or want to collect large quantities of *Umbonium vestarium*, ignore it and head for Rams beach. But of course, you might just get lucky, and find a paper nautilus or two in the spring.

### Jezirat Al Hamra to Rams

Just north of Jezirat Al Hamra is a long spit of sand enclosing a shallow lagoon.



I suspect this stretch of sand has never been shelled, but I've never made the specific journey to try. I once attempted to drive across at low tide. I got ingloriously stuck in glutinous mud in full view of the main road and had to be towed out by some friendly nationals. At least I had my own towropes!

Moral – always have 2 ropes in your car. The helper needs to keep far enough back not to get stuck himself. Obviously I took no photographs of the incident. There's not much worth visiting between here and Rams beach except Ras Al Khaimah Sailing Club beach.

### Ras Al Khaimah Sailing Club Beach

**GPS N25° 49'22.8" E055° 58'21.9"**

Probably best as a drop-in visit on the way home after Rams. It should offer the wide range of shells that Rams can, but doesn't. Reach it by taking the first right slip road barely half a kilometer after rejoining the main road on the way back to Ras Al Khaimah from Rams. There's only one road, and it's best to follow that to its end at a T-junction, turn right, head for the beach, then work your way to the right to access the track out to the sailing club. It's too complex to give precise directions.



Using the GPS or asking is your best bet! The beach is on your right. Park in one of the large passing places on the left opposite. Access is no problem for saloon cars. The shells should reflect the same variety as Rams, but don't. There is neither the same variety of both gastropods and bivalves, nor the quality. Nevertheless, if Rams were not close by, this would probably be a beach well worth shelling in its own right.

## Rams

**GPS N25° 53'04. 6" E056° 00'33.4"**

Rams beach is fairly easily located. Drive to Ras Al Khaimah. As you enter the outskirts of RAK, pass the "Kentucky Fried Chicken" on your right and carry straight on towards RAK town until the first roundabout (a tent). There, take the slip road to the right and follow it, eventually crossing the bridge over the creek, until the next roundabout (a hurricane lantern). Go three-quarters of the way round to turn north towards the town. **STAY** on this road all the way through town, and then follow the signs for Shams and Rams until you reach the U-turn at the village signposted "Rams", as the main road swings round to the right. You'll pass the football stadium on your left shortly before the turn. Go across into the village of Rams via the U-turn, and then work your way Northwest, i.e. towards the beach and trending right. When you reach the creek, turn towards the beach and coastguard station (the prominent structure) and carefully cross the very rickety bridge, keeping well to the right – this photo is taken looking back from the beach side. Turn left onto sand tracks just after the bridge and work diagonally to reach the main beach track and the beach. You can still access the beach directly to the left of the coastguard station, but there are now Restricted Area signs present.



Four-wheel drive therefore is now needed to access all that Rams has to offer, but saloon cars can reach almost to the coastguard station. We were denied access to the last 200 metres of the beach next to the breakwater at the end of October. What next?



As the beach is totally sandy, Rams shells tend to bivalves rather than gastropods, but there is usually a good mixture, due to the breakwaters which shelter gastropods, and corals offshore. It once was by far the best shelling beach in the Persian Gulf, and has given me more variety of shells than almost any other. Nearly 70 of my first record shells have come from this beach. It's a special beach for me (no, I didn't propose to my wife there – I was too busy shelling), for it was on

Rams I found two specimens of *Crytospira ventricosa* (on a DNHG field trip in 1995), and a costate miter in 1999. Both were previously unrecorded in Eastern Arabia. At the time of writing, the beach is desperately disappointing; shells are sparse and garbage plentiful. This can all change with a good winter storm.

The best sections of Rams are:

- From (almost) the Coastguard breakwater south for approximately 600-800 yards, the area in the picture above. This distance is variable, the location is not. This area seems to be a natural gathering point for shells to be swept in by the current. Here is where the greatest variety of specimens is found.
- Patches of shingle, which may be present just south of this. These are only seen at low tide. These tend to hold shells extremely well.
- The mini-beaches between the breakwaters further south.



These are good for *Cypraea grayana* (258)



and *Murex scolopax* (465),



often not just at the recent high water mark, but thrown much higher up onto relatively dry sand. I tend to go down the high-water line, and then trudge back through the desperately soft stuff higher up the beach. This can be most rewarding.

Cowries and *Murex scolopax* are interesting shells in their own right. Cowries are probably the most collected group of shells in the world, due to their colours, their gloss, and possibly their appearance suggestive of parts anatomical. Once used as money in parts of the world, cowries are caring parents, gathering their eggs up into their mantle to protect them. Few, if any others do this. If you're lucky enough to ever see cowries with their eggs, enjoy the sight, take your photographs, and leave them alone.

*M. scolopax*, on the other hand is a ravening carnivore, feeding mainly on bivalves, and sharing this carnivorous habit with the moon shells, *Neverita didyma* (315) in particular.



See where the carnivore has drilled an entry.

*M. scolopax* features in mythology too. It's the shell that the goddess Venus is supposed to have combed her hair with after her emergence from the sea hence its common name, "Venus's comb". And even at her birth, immortalised in Botticelli's painting "The birth of Venus", you'll see how she emerges from a scallop shell. Being a Northern artist, this is most likely *Pecten jacobaeus*, which the artist stretched laterally for artistic effect.



Apart from the shingle patches above, Rams can be shelled at any time of the tide. It's worth arriving just after high water to cream off the best of the tide's offerings, checking out the mini-breakwaters next, then waiting for the shingle patches to appear. That would be perfect timing! Don't just focus on the high water mark and below. Above it, thrown up by exceptional tides and/or storms can be *Cypraea grayana* and *Murex scolopax*, so check low, but check high too! Rams is also one of the main beaches on which to find *Argonauta hians* (894), the "paper nautilus". Anytime from January onwards is worth looking for them, and just around or after high tide the best time. Little is known about the lifestyle of the animal itself. My wife, Beryl Comar, has been keeping a database of paper nautilus finds to try and shed some light on their habits. Any data on your finds (where, when, tide state, size, with or without the squid) would be appreciated. What you might find at Rams? The list is too numerous to itemise, but good examples of the *Turritellidae*

*T. maculosa* (192)



*T. cochlea* (189)



*T. fultoni* (191)



## Strombidae



*S. decorus persicus* (202)



*S. mutabilis mutabilis* (200)



*S. gibberulus*  
(199)



*Cypraea nebrites* (270)



*Architectonica perspectiva*  
(779)



*Notocholis n. sp* (325)



*Melanella martini* (448)



*Bulla tranquebaria* (574)



*Scalptia cf fusca* (682)

And Cymatidae are not uncommon.



*C. pileare* (356)



*C. labiosum* (363)



*C. parthenopeum* (355)

Beautiful freshly dead specimens of big *Callista erycina* and *Tivela ponderosa* are common in winter, as are fine examples of *Phylloda foliacea*, *Cypraea turdus winckworthi* and *Siliqua polita*, and I found my only specimen of *Bassina calophylla* there.



*Callista erycina* (1206)



*Tivela ponderosa* (1203)



*Phylloda foliacea* (1129)



*Siliqua polita* (1115)



*Bassina calophylla* (1191)



*C. turdus winckworthi* (280)

And of course, *Terebralia palustris* specimens are regularly found. From living specimens, or washed out of shell middens or seaside rocks? Who knows? As I said earlier, I suspect the latter.



Our friend Joy once stepped out of the car onto the beach, looked down, and found a nice wentletrap at her feet. I still had to find my first one!

Last year (1999), I led the DNHG Field Trip convoy onto the beach, got out of the car, and found a nice specimen of *Malvufundus regula* (975) by the front wheel.

That's Rams, as it should be.



### Huwaylat

North of Rams is Huwaylat. Once accessible, it's been closed off by the police for – you've guessed it – security reasons. I'm presently investigating ways of obtaining a permit from Ras Al Khaimah police to obtain access. This is the beach that Beryl and I found 53 paper nautili on in 1997. The North end of the beach by the main breakwater was very productive for both gastropods and bivalves. It shared the wide range of Rams. Good specimens of Architectonidae and Cymatidae were common, as were prime specimens of Tellinidae



*Pharaonella perna*  
(1131)



*Gari amethystus*  
(1161)



*G. occidentis*  
(1165)



*G. weinkanffi*  
(1164)



*G. bicarinata*  
(1162)

I'll spread the word if I find out how to gain access.

### Huwaylat to Sha'am

From Huwaylat and the Omani border has little to offer in the way of good shelling, and the drive through the haze of the rock-crushing and cement plants does little to lighten the spirit. Between Ghalilah and Sha'am, several kilometers before Sha'am village, there is a blue and white supermarket on the beach side of the road, and a turn-off down to the beach several hundred metres on the R.A.K side.

## Supermarket Beach

**GPS N26° 00'34.8" E056° 04'41.6"**

Easy for all cars to get right down to the beach. It's a mainly sandy beach with a breakwater at the south end, and I found *C. turdus winckworthi* and *C. nebrites*, as well as *Oliva bulbosa* and the ubiquitous *Bulla ampulla*.



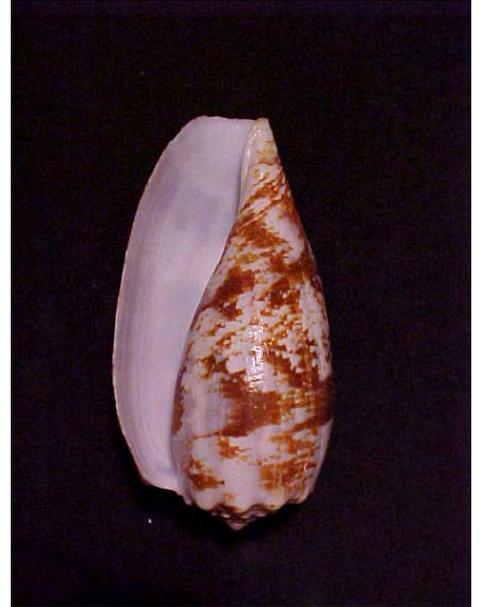
*Bulla ampulla* (823)

Not a beach to go out of your way for, but perhaps worth popping down to on the way back from a weekend in Khasab.

Sha'am village beach is very similar, and the Omani border post not far beyond.

## The East Coast

Here is the cream of the shelling, with a sandy/rocky coastline giving gastropods and bivalves in plenty. This is cone country. Be warned that there are potentially dangerous species of cones here, including *Conus geographus*, sometimes referred to as "the rattlesnake of the shell family". All cones possess the stinging apparatus, using it to kill small fish to feed on. Since cones can't move very fast, the venom has to be potent and fast acting. It's neurotoxic, paralyzing heart and breathing. I've only found live cones on the East coast, but did in 1997 see a young lad on his first DNHG shelling trip to Rams pick up a live textile cone with his bare hands, turn to me and say, "excuse me, but is this a good one?" Colin Paskins, a long-time DNHG member and familiar with cones advises picking live ones up with a pair of tongs. Don't, under any circumstances, drop them in your pocket or, heaven forbid, down the back of your swimming costume, as divers are wont to do. Down the front doesn't bear thinking about!! They can sting through fabric, and the sting is flexible to reach all round their shell, so handle with extreme caution.



*Conus geographus* (701)

### Dibba beach

Needs no GPS to locate it. Just make for Dibba either via Masafi, or head north from Fujairah. Make your way through the town up the coast in 2wd or 4wd until you run out of road, and park. It's a very popular beach, great for dropping into after a Wadi Bih crossing, but its popularity means shells tend to get trampled, or run over by 4wd's. Expect to find a fairly reasonable mix of gastropods and bivalves, but nothing outstanding.

### Village Beach

**GPS N25° 36'34.4" E056° 18'12.3"**

Just south of Dibba proper is a small beach only two minutes off the main road. Turn down the road marked "Dibba Seaport," take the first road right, then 2<sup>nd</sup> left, 1<sup>st</sup> right, and 1<sup>st</sup> left. You'll see the beach at the end of the road. Easy access for all cars.

It's a short beach, can be terribly trashed, and the kids play all over it, but you can be lucky and find cones, cowries and Cymatidae; In the past, I've picked up nice specimens of:



*Cypraea nebrites* (270)



*Cymatium vespaceum* (364)



and *Conus flavidus* (699)

On my last few visits there, I've not been very lucky.

## Rul Dibba Beach

**GPS N25° 36'17.4" E056° 19'26.1"**

Moving a little further south, turn left towards the sea at the village of Ras Dibba just where the dual carriageway ends, and turn left towards the sea via a track down the side of a block of shops.

The distance is short and you'll quickly find and reach a built out area/jetty. OK for saloon cars. The north side is stony; the south sandy. I've found a few cones to the left (the north side), and a pretty average mix of gastropods and bivalves to the south. I've

always felt this south beach should have more to offer, looking as promising as it does, but it hasn't. Yet.



## Hidden Beach

You may hear old-timers refer nostalgically to a place called hidden beach. This was located south of Dibba and really was totally hidden from sight, tucked in a secluded cove and reached via a gravel road over the surrounding high ground. I remember it nostalgically too, for the occasion my wife tried to kill our passenger, and us, by trying to persuade me to drive over the blind crest of a track that was supposed to lead to hidden beach. Oops! Wrong track! This track crumbled over the edge of a 25-foot sheer drop to the rocky beach below. Hidden beach wasn't too wonderful for shelling, but it sure was great for a Thursday night camp on the beach. Sadly, it's been blocked off for the sake of one individual's "privacy", so don't waste your time looking for it.

## Flats

**GPS N25° 33'40.1" E056° 21'13.4"**

This little corner is often worth a stop on the way. I've given the GPS location, but it's easy to find. The pictures should help. It's south of Dibba on the way to Sandy Beach Motel. The road swings close to the small spit of land with a few sad-looking palm trees. There's a U-turn just after the corner. Obviously 4WD is not needed. Park by the palm trees. Just to its north, where the old road runs on the edge of the beach, there are plenty of camping spots on the land side of the road for anyone wanting to make a weekend of it. Both the immediate north and south sides of the little headland are worth a look. It's obviously a good sand/rock mix, so gastropods are well represented. The immediate south can sometimes give cones and cowries



*C. coronatus* (696)



*C. nebrites* (270)



*C. pennaceous quasimagnificus*  
(718)



*C. felina fibula* (253)

while the stretch to the immediate north occasionally has nice specimens of *C. grayana*.



I found my only specimen of *Cerithium columna* here too. (The extensive area of sandy beach to the north of this, in front of the old coast road, is generally disappointing). Not uncommonly, *Terebralia palustris* is found here, but Gary Feulner has investigated, and tells me they are old, washed out shells from breakwater construction material nearby. Pity. The headland itself has rocky flats exposed at low tide (see above), and there are often aggregations of shells there. Quite a few have hermit crabs inside, so try and choose with

care.



Mainly Cerithidae are present,



*Cerithium columna*  
(159)



*Cerithium caeruleum*  
(158)



*Cerithium scabridum*  
(162)



*Cerithium nodulosum adansonii*  
(160)

and you can often also find Nassariidae,



*Nassarius persicus*  
(560)



*Nassarius albescens gemmuliferus*  
(551)



*Nassarius coronatus*  
(549)



*Nassarius fissilabris*  
(559)

And



*Modulus tectum*  
(151)



*Conus coronatus*  
(696)



*Morula anaraxes*  
(484)



*Morula chrysostoma*  
(485)

I once, but only once found a paper nautilus on the south stretch a few years ago. It needs low tides, preferably low spring tides, to fully expose the flats. Just a few hundred metres south of this are a couple of little "mini-bays." It's worth stopping for a minute or two to check them out. On one visit, I found a big complete specimen of *Periglypta puerpera* and a large *Conus striatus* within feet of each other.



*Periglypta puerpera*  
(1189)



*Conus striatus* (724)

## Conus Corner

**GPS N25° 32'58.1" E056° 21'20.3"**

This has got to be the saddest-looking, scruffiest little beach in the Emirates. It's only a few hundred metres long, and predominantly coral. It's hard to locate, hence the GPS reading and the photo, but it's just 50 metres south of the road sign and U-turn to Rul Dhadnah, heading south. It's sandwiched between an established residence and one nearing completion. A storm drain runs down the north boundary to the sea. It



needs 4WD to get right down to the beach, but it's only 75-100 metres from the road. Shells tend to be found up at the high water mark, amongst jumbles of coral fragments. For some reason, this beach commonly produces bigger specimens of both gastropods and bivalves than any other I know. It can be checked out at any time of the tide. Especially worth a visit after big spring tides or storms. The beach is obviously predominantly coral and rock, with a little sand.

I found my only specimens of *Lambis truncata sebae* here (juvenile – they look quite different from adult specimens), my best specimens of cowries *C. carneola*, *C. pulchra* and *C. nebrites*, and a broken *C. tigris*, also the only one I've ever found, *Pleuroploca trapezium*, *Nipponaphera paucicosta*, *Pisanea ignea* (also damaged), and *Pygmaepterys yemenensis*.



*Lambis truncata sebae* (208)



*Cypraea carneola* (245)



*Cypraea pulchra* (274)



*Cypraea nebrites* (270)



*Cypraea tigris* (279)



*Pleuroploca trapezium* (577)



*Nipponaphera paucicosta*  
(679)



*Pisanea ignea* (526)



*Pygmaepterys yemenensis*  
(478)

I've also come across *Tonna cumingii* (damaged specimens only), *Cerithium scabridum*, and some of my best examples of cones, *C. flavidus*, *C. pennaceus* *quasimagnificus*, *C. striatus*, *C. taeniatus*, *C. textile* - a 92mm long specimen, and *C. quercinus*. Among bivalves, the *Chlamys* specimens such as *Chama reflexa* are the biggest I've seen, and the often complete *Periglypta periglypta* are worth collecting. It's not been as good this year as last year, perhaps due to extensive villa construction along the shoreline.



*Tonna cumingii* (333)



*Cerithium scabridum*  
(162)



*C. flavidus* (699)



*C. striatus* (724)



*C. taeniatus* (725)



*C. pennaceus*  
(718)



C. textile (728)



C. quercinus (719)



Chama reflexa (1066)

## Wentle Beach

GPS N25° 28'52.6" E056° 21'42.8"



Guess how this one got its name! It's only a few hundred metres south of Sandy Beach motel (you can see the motel and snoopy rock in this picture), but while Sandy Beach motel beaches are uninspiring, this little patch can be a gem. It has given me over 40 first specimens for my collection, and can take 10 minutes, or an hour and a half to cover thoroughly. The surroundings are mixed rock and sand, with corals

offshore nearby but sadly, these are being increasingly damaged by intensive scuba diving and snorkeling. Its enclosed nature helps it act as a natural trap for shells to be swirled into it. Sometimes, the tar swirls in too, and the beach is unworkable. Heartbreaking, but if you see a good specimen, get it home and use lighter fluid on it. A bad day at Wentle beach and you'll understand the need for dedicated beach trainers! Driving south round Sandy Beach Motel, the road becomes single track. Ahead of you, the road rises to pass through a rock cutting, but before it does, there is a natural lay-by on the left, marked by a fine specimen of a crown of thorn tree. Pull off there on hard ground. The beach is on your right (south), 30 metres away. It's in two sections, both worth checking. Wentle is best at least two hours after high water, and neap tides are absolutely the best. I've recently seen the south section stripped totally clean of sand after a high spring tide, only to be reforming

3 weeks later, as the photo shows quite well. Poor pickings on a day like this! The nearer section can be very tarry, but suffer it, and check not only the obvious high water leavings, but also right up the beach almost to the storm drain. I've found wentletraps that far up. The high-water lines (often upper and lower) are worth getting on hands and knees for. There are often many smaller shells crammed into a foot of beach, so work slowly. You'll notice the striking number of immature cowries. I hope this is not ominous for the future. The south half of the beach is variable. Sometimes a tide line full of goodies, sometimes bare of shells even bare of sand, as I've mentioned. Cowries, cones, and wentletraps are the best finds, and wentletrap specimens I've found here have included *Epitonium aculeatum*, *E. jomardi*, *E. lyra* and *Gyroscala lamellosa*.



*Epitonium aculeatum* (406)



*Epitonium jomardi* (422)



*Gyroscala lamellosa* (437)



*Epitonium lyra* (425)

Wentletraps are among the hardest shells to collect, being so very fragile, and what a shame that such beautiful shells are parasites, living on sea anemones. I see less these days; could this be due to excessive diving?

That's not to mention the occasional *Mitrella blanda*, *Anachis fauroti* and *Morula anaraxes*, and I've found too many nice specimens of *Conus flavidus* and *C. parvatus sharmatiensis* here not to mention them too.



*Mitrella blanda* (536)



*Anachis fauroti* (529)



*Morula anaraxes* (484)



*C. parvatus* (717)

First gastropods finds for me here have also included *Haliotis pustulata*, *Granata sulcifera*, *Pagodatrochus variabilis*, *Vaceuchelus angulatus*, *Pyrene nomadica*, and *N. splendidulus*. The numbers are too many to show them all. Most of these you can often find on a visit, and don't be deterred by the frequent picnickers; they don't seem to do any damage to the shells.



*Haliotis pustulata* (6)



*Granata sulcifera* (27)



*Pagodatrochus variabilis* (52)



*Vaceuchelus angulatus* (29)



*Pyrene nomadica* (540)



*N. splendidulus* (558)

As for bivalves, look to find *Brachidontes variabilis*, *Musculus perfragilis*, *Musculus cf costulatus*, *Limatula leptocarya*, *Anomia acheus*, *Pillucina angela*, *Bathytormus radiatus*, *Irus macrophylla* and *Trapezium sublaevigatum*.

Once you check out the size of the place, you'll appreciate what an impressive variety of shells this beach can offer. This is a beach for bagging up and taking home par excellence.

The beach immediately south and "round the corner" should be good, but isn't. I've checked on a number of occasions.



*Brachidontes variabilis* (943)



*Musculus perfragilis* (953)



*Musculus cf costulatus* (958)



*Limatula leptocarya* (989)



*Anomia acheus* (1017)



*Pillucina angela* (1025)



*Bathytormus radiatus* (1073)



*Irus macrophylla* (1235)



*Trapezium sublaevigatum* (1185)

### Unnamed beach south of Bidiya mosque

**GPS N25° 25'22.3" E056° 21'49'.0"**

I located this beach a year or two ago. So far several visits have yielded little of interest; some grayana cowries, some Neritidae, not much of note. But I have a gut feeling it'll be interesting after a good winter storm, and plan to keep checking it out from time to time.



## Graffiti Beach

**GPS N25° 23'23.2" E056° 21'43.8" (north end)**

So nicknamed by me, as I haven't yet found out the name of the adjacent village. Those who joined me on the November 2000 field trip will have seen the writings on the wall (!) and some saw me find a specimen of *Volva volva*, not previously identified in Eastern Arabia. Coming south from Bidiya mosque, turn left to the beach at the roundabout before the road rises up through a rock cutting and drops into Khor Fakkan by the Oceanic hotel. Go straight to the beach over the second roundabout. The ground is hard and suitable for saloon cars at both ends. The beach itself is sandy, but the shells reflect the mixed rock, coral and sand seabed offshore. The south end of this beach is best at least 2-3 hours after high tide (reach it via a track round the new house off the second roundabout), but the north end, by the breakwater, can be shelled just after the tide turns. Low water is really best for both. After a good storm, as above in March 2000, this beach is Serendipity and Shangri-La rolled into one!



Shells naturally swirl in by the breakwater at the north end, seen in the distance here, and can form a bank several feet high and deep. The first time I saw it, I wanted to hire a mechanical shovel and take them all home! You can spend a long time working your way through the bank, and the tide lines nearby, and it's often worth "bagging up" from this area. The quality of the shelling falters a bit in mid-beach, but usually picks up again down here at the south end, where the big cones tend to accumulate. It's very worthwhile driving to one end, checking the tidelines, and then visiting the other.



This beach can also surprise you by throwing specimens up much higher than you would ever expect to find them. What to find? To date, over 80 new specimens for my own collection. *Latirus turritus* specimens, not before recorded in Eastern Arabian waters (I took one to the Natural History Museum in London to have it identified, and have now found 4 specimens here).

I also made a first finding of *Volva volva*, missed by the six people tramping the beach in front of me on the field trip in November 2000. That's twice I've found previously unrecorded species on a field trip.



*Latirus turritus*



*Volva volva*

Cones are the most obvious shells on this beach, and there is more variety here than on any other beach in the Emirates. Winter and springtime is definitely the best; they can still be found in summer, but in much less quantity. Big specimens of *C. betulinus* are commonest (I found a 105mm long fragment this year!), with *C. generalis maldivus*, *C. inscriptus*, *C. elegans*, *C. striatellus*, *C. milesi* and *C. achinatus* all likely finds.



*C. betulinus* (691)



*C. generalis maldivus*  
(700)



*C. inscriptus* (702)



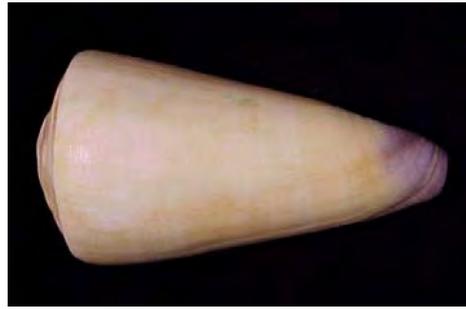
*C. elegans* (698)

I have also found specimens of *Conus virgo* and *C. ebraeus* here also. The markings are supposed to resemble Hebraic script, but what on earth is a shell named the Hebrew cone



*C. betulinus*

doing on a good Arab beach! Please remember that some of the cones, geographus, textile, and striatus in particular can be dangerous to humans so handle carefully in case they are still alive.



*Conus virgo* (730)



*C. ebraeus* (697)

Hope too to find good specimens of *Strombus gibberulus*, *Strombus gibberulus* and *S. plicatus siboldii*, more plentiful here than anywhere else.



*Strombus gibberulus gibberulus* (199)



*Strombus plicatus siboldii* (204)

And as for the Turridae, enjoy them!!



*Lophiotoma acuta* (753)



*Lophiotoma indica* (754)



*Inquisitor sinensis* (742)



*Ptychobela opisthocetos* (757)



*Tomopleura pouloensis* (746)



*Splendrillia resplendens* (745)

*Architectonica stellata* is common, along with *A. perspectiva* and occasionally *A. laevigata*, as is *Distorsio reticularis*, *Phos roseatus* and many of the *Costellariidae*.

*Domiparta filaris*, *Domiparta granatina*, *Swainsonia fissurata* with its beautifully delicate markings, and *Mitra mitra* – as the biggest miter in Arabia, that's a real eye-catcher to find, and the list of possibles goes on and on.



*Architectonica stellata*  
(781)



*A. perspectiva* (779)



*A. laevigata* (778)



*Distorsio reticularis* (367)



*Phos roseatus* (515)



*Domiparta filaris* (638)



*Domiparta granatina* (639)



*Mitra mitra* 627



*Swainsonia fissurata*  
644

Although primarily a gastropod beach, this is the only one on which I've seen *Anadara antiquata*, not yet found live in the area, *Cardita crassicosta*, and *Antigona lamellaris*. Back from the south shoreline are some spots suitable for overnight camping by dedicated shellers.



*Anadara antiquata*  
(921)



*Cardita crassicosta*  
(1059)



*Antigona lamellaris*  
(1188)

## Khor Fakkan

Near the Oceanic hotel, in a storm drain, there is a colony of live *Terebralia palustris*. This is a shell of deep interest to shell collectors and archaeologists alike, as it was a



significant food source in the Gulf several thousand years ago. Specimens are present in the shell middens of Tel Abraq and Julfa. *T. palustris* shells are commonly found on Rams beach, but no **live** shells have ever been found inside the Gulf. Archaeologists confidently state that the shell does not exist within the Gulf now (what do they know about shelling?). Are the shells we find on Rams from recently dead specimens, or simply washed out from old shell middens? Chairman Gary Feulner spent part of

one summer investigating the steamy innards of the mangroves of Ras Al Khaimah khor, without finding a single live one. He found other shells of interest, but that's another story. I've ploutered in the mangroves southwest of Ajman without success. Old dead ones, but no traces of living animals. So go look at the Oceanic colony, take photographs, but if you ever find a live one within the Persian Gulf, call Gary or me at any time, day or night!!



## Oidfa

**GPS N25° 17'12.7" E056° 22'21.8"**

This is the next beach of any note after Graffiti. The spelling is creative! Reach it by turning down an open dual carriageway just south of an Adnoc petrol station. The beach is in sight over 1km away, and the headland obvious to your right on arrival at the end of the road. Access is OK for saloon cars. It's an odd mix of sand beach to the north, with Sand and shingle to the south, separated by a little rocky headland with a single palm tree growing on it.



When I last checked the north side, I found few shells, but among those few were big, fine specimens of *Conus pennaceous quasimagnificus*, *Periglypta periglypta*, and *Thais bufo*.



North beach



Thais bufo (490)



South beach

Closer inspection of the slabby rocks on the immediate south side revealed many old embedded shells. Have some such as *Anadara antiquaria* and *Terebralia palustris* inside the Gulf died out and the washed out ones are all we're finding?

I think this beach has promise and is worth a look, especially after stormy weather, but it's trashed, especially the sandy north beach.



### Qidfa to Khor Kalba

From Qidfa to Fujairah are predominantly flat, sandy beaches, with little to single any one out, but the beaches just north and south of the Fujairah Hilton can give nice specimens of *Architectonica perspectiva* and *stellata*, sometimes *laevigata* too.

Check them out on a weekend indulging your spouse at the Fujairah Hilton, by drifting outside the hotel marker fences, especially the south fence.

Fujairah to Khor Kalba is much of the same, so make for the corniche road just after the Hilton, and **stay** on the corniche with the sea on your left, ignoring the tempting but unproductive beaches on your left, until you reach the end of the tar road at a roundabout. There is a large white building on your left, and the bridge over the khor is in front of you. This is the view back from "swirl corner".



## Khor Kalba

Cross the bridge and you have 3 possibilities; turn left along the khor, head straight for the beach, or bear right, following the khor as it meanders inland.



Heading left, accessible by saloon car (with care and a little common sense) soon brings you to a patch of gravelly, pebbly ground sticking out into the khor, just where the breakwater begins. Its precise location is:

**GPS N25° 01'31.0" E056° 22'03.5"**

This seems to be the "swirl corner." (The beach proper leads away south, to your right). Don't

miss out the bigger shells on the layered tide lines contouring the area, and look well above the obvious lines – I found a beautiful 55mm diameter specimen of *A.*

*perspectiva*, the biggest I've ever found, just here, thrown high above the high-water line. Cones, mainly *betulinus*, are usually plentiful, as are *Strombidae* and *Turridae*.

You'll see several small-shell tidelines on the sandy part. Take a bagful for later.

This little corner alone gave me many new specimens in October 2000, including the small but beautifully patterned *Smaragdia souverbiana* (yet another species not recorded here in the standard book), and careful scrutiny of collected material with a hand lens in good light will hopefully reveal the smaller shells of *Prunum terverianum*, *Ethminolia degregorii* and the fine sculpture of *Tellina* n. sp.



*Smaragdia souverbiana*  
(107)



*Prunum terverianum* (617)



*Ethminolia degregorii* (44)



*Tellina n. sp.* (1121)

The main beach is now off to your right. The sand-track might be a bit tricky for saloons. If you're not comfortable with it, go back to the khor bridge, and then either make straight for the beach, on a firm and wide track, or veer to the right and follow any decent track that takes your fancy to the south part of the beach. The track is generally O.K. for saloons, and you're never more than 75 yards from the beach. Going straight for the beach, you'll see a dumpster ahead. Make for it and park around there. I have seen locals take saloon cars onto the beach itself at low tide, but wouldn't recommend unless you know the beach and your car's limitations well. The main beach is obviously all sand with no rocky areas, and there are no "hot-spots" to home in on. A few hours after high tide is best, although you can find shells just after the turn of the tide.



Bivalves predominate, but I've found fine gastropods there too. Look for really good specimens of the ark shells – *Anadara uropigimelana*, *A. erythraeoensis*, *A. ehrenbergeri* and *Scaphara natalensis*. Big specimens are common, with the periostracum still intact. This group photo includes *Anadara antiquaria* in the top left of the picture.

You should have a fair chance of finding the wing oysters of the Pterioidea – *Pteria penguin* and *P. tortirostris*,



*Pteria penguin* (968)



*Pteria tortirostris* (967)

and members of the Mactridae family, *Mactras lilacea*, *aequisulcata*, *rochebrunei* and *ovalina*, and *Raeta pellicula*. *Tellinimactra angulata* is very common here too, along with *Siliqua polita*, commonly known as "angel's wings".



*Mactra lilacea* (1094)



*Mactra aequisulcata* (1095)



*Raeta pellicula* (1103)



*Mactra rochebrunei*  
(1096)



*Mactra ovalina* (1097)



*Tellinimactra angulata*  
(1148)



*Siliqua polita* (1115)

Common gastropods found are *Murex scolopax* (I found a 140mm long one in 1999), Trochidae, including *T. erythreus*, *T. firmus* and *T. scabrosus*, and you may be lucky and find *Tonna luteostoma* and *T. dolium*, *Nassa situla*, *Thais bufo* and *Vexilla vexillum*. I have, although I might have



*Tonna luteostoma*  
(336)



*Tonna dolium* (334)

wished for better specimens. I never ceased to be amazed as to how shells can be consistently damaged on this gentlest of beaches, while they turn up intact on a rough foreshore such as Conus corner. Is it the presence of rough ground offshore, combined with heavy currents?



Trochus firmus (39)



Trochus scabrosus (37)



Nassa situla (487)



Vexilla vexillum (496)

High water tide line is the usual place, but do check the higher flat areas above that. You'll often find Murex there, well above the high water mark. Never forget to check washed up nets. My better half homes in on old fishing nets, knowing them to be a prime trap for Murex.

As you wander innocently southwards down the beach, a spoilsport in the shape of an Omani border guard will emerge and stop your progress. Don't be too disheartened. I've checked the beaches south too, and they're not much different, they just have less traffic on them.

And last but not least, beware of land snails!!

For weeks, I beat my brains out over some shells I'd found on the beach, cautiously excited in the faint hope I'd found a totally new specimen. I checked all my books, dredged through the internet, only to have Steve Green glance at them cursorily and say "Oh yes, of course, this is Zootecus insularis, a land snail. Must've been washed off some cultivated field during winter rains." Be warned, and try and keep a sense of humour!



## First Aid and Common Sense

No guide to the beaches of the Emirates would be complete without some sort of first-aid guide. Just remember that this is NOT your territory. It is an alien environment, from the water's edge to the distant deeps. But it is well to remember that nothing, but nothing in these waters will deliberately attack us. Defend itself, yes. It can, and will do so, usually efficiently and sometimes with devastating effect. If we are its victims, then it is usually as a result of our own blundering ignorance, with no whingeing recourse to courts of law! I commonly find myself alone on a remote beach, with no more than a mobile phone, a first-aid box, and knowledge of the hazards and how to avoid them or, if unlucky, deal with them. And the list of potential hazards is formidable. From spiny murex that can impale bare feet on the beach, to sting rays lying in the shallows, stone fish in rock pools, Conus species which can deliver a serious, occasionally fatal, sting, sea urchins to leave a painful legacy of embedded spines in assorted parts of your anatomy, stinging jellyfish that hurt your attacked limbs or face, and beached sea-snakes to be trampled on by the intent sheller.

I wear stout trainers on the beach – keeps tar out of the house, and protects my feet. They live in olfactory splendour in the car boot. I shuffle into shallow waters, to warn stingrays of my approach and encourage them to move off. Stonefish can be lethal. Use a stick to poke around in rock pools, rather than with your bare hands to try to move them. They're notoriously sluggish fish, but don't give up trying. Dr. Jongbloed describes picking them up on a shovel without any reaction from them! Cones may not look at all live, but don't let a worn outer surface fool you for one minute – it might just be an old specimen – use your foot to move it, or a stick. Best of all, pick it up with a pair of tongs.

Jelly stings hurt, but don't kill. Aussies be relieved that we don't have box jellyfish here. Acid is the best treatment for jelly stings. DON'T rub them. That just triggers the stinging cells. Neutralise them with acid and the pain will go. This is when you find out who you're real friends are! The immediate first-aid source of acid is human urine, copiously applied! No, I'm NOT joking.

Respected sources recommend that shellers on remote beaches be versed in basic resuscitation procedure, carry a basic first-aid kit including pressure bandages, and a flask of hot water to denature the toxins of lion fish, scorpion fish and stone fish. I can't argue with that. Please remember that this is Arabia, not downtown New York or Chipping Sodbury.

Don't be put off by this formidable list of hazards. It's probably more dangerous driving the roads of the UAE to reach the beaches, than on the beaches themselves! Common sense and care, along with some basic first-aid knowledge will go a long way to keeping you safe and making your collecting enjoyable.

Please do respect the environment positively. DNHG members will always treat the countryside with respect, but treating it positively goes that little bit further. Return washed up shells that look healthy and active as they might have been washed ashore by some chance accident. In reality, if they're washed up in the first place, chances are they're probably dying anyway. Try not to take shells with hermit crabs still inside. Replace stones turned over in the hunt for specimens. I have a happy memory of a DNHG member on a field trip to Rams beach, pleading, arguing, and cajoling with local fishermen to return a turtle they had beached back to the sea. They did. We all applauded.

Happy shelling!

Dr. Sandy Fowler

Dubai London Clinic

## **Postscript – 2 years on**

Just over two years later and already some things have changed, mostly for the worse. Within the Gulf, the developments between Jebel Ali and Dubai have changed the shelling landscape out of all proportion. Access to beaches is becoming increasingly difficult, and the impact on the marine environment impossible to assess. Certainly there seem to be fewer shells than before, but this is a favourite cry of all old-timers.

Further up the Gulf, the access road to Hamriya beach has changed, but the directions still broadly stand. At Rams beach, a spanking new bridge has replaced the frankly dangerous old one, taking a little of the excitement out of a visit but the standard of shelling at Rams seems to be consistently declining. Even the numbers of Murex and grayana cowries in the breakwaters is less. I cannot explain why. Access to Huwaylat beach to the north is still blocked, and goodness knows what impact the building of a Free Zone will have there.

On the East coast, accelerating private house development and breakwater construction is encroaching on the shelling beaches. In particular Conus corner is about to be lost, already walled off for development with only an access gap remaining. The numbers and quality of shells there has declined steadily over the past two years, possibly for the reasons above. Another similar beach about 600 metres to the south is still accessible, but it is a pale shadow of what Conus used to be.

Graffiti beach (AKA Lulayya village) has changed. The north end has lost its huge bank of shells and is now not as productive as the south end. This, thankfully, still produces good shells in reasonable numbers.

The south end of Khor Fakkan corniche has emerged as THE place to find shells in quantity. No GPS readings are needed to locate it. Simply drive down the corniche away from the Oceanic hotel, until a roundabout at the port gates forces you to turn back the way you came, but now on the sea side. About 600 metres back from the roundabout pull in and park. Make your way to where a storm drain runs into the sea and start there. The best is in the first 400 metres, but it's worth going on for another 4 or 500 metres until the shells peter out. I've been lucky enough to find two species there, of which the book had only ever recorded one previous specimen.