

Malacological reminiscences (the Lonely Collector)

R.G. Noseworthy

*Department of Marine Life Sciences, Jeju National University,
Jeju-si 690-756, Republic of Korea
e-mail: rgnsheils@yahoo.ca*

Personal history of the mollusk collecting and study in Canada, Republic of Korea and other countries since the 1960s, meetings with malacologists and amateurs.

Key words: reminiscences, mollusks.

Воспоминания малаколога

Р.Дж. Ноусворти

*Кафедра наук о морской жизни, Национальный университет Чеджу,
Чеджу 690-756, Республика Корея
e-mail: rgnsheils@yahoo.ca*

Воспоминания канадского малаколога Р.Дж. Ноусворти о личной истории изучения моллюсков в Канаде и Республике Корея с 1960-х гг., сборе коллекций в других странах, встречах с малакологами и любителями.

Ключевые слова: Р.Дж. Ноусворти, воспоминания, моллюски.

I have always been interesting in natural history. As a boy, I remember my father taking me to a beach near our home town of Grand Bank, Newfoundland, Canada, to collect whelk and bivalve shells. We would take them home and paint them. When I was older, I would collect rocks and minerals, and butterflies and moths, and had a nice local collection. Even after marriage, I would collect and photograph wildflowers; later I donated all my collections to our provincial museum.

However, my exposure to mollusks happened accidentally. During my freshman year at Memorial University of Newfoundland, my geology professor announced that we were going to study fossils, and recommended that our class should get some books from the university library to begin learning about them. I decided to get some books on fossil shells, but accidentally also got a book on recent mollusks, *American Seashells*, by the famous malacologist R. Tucker Abbott. I was fascinated by the variety of color and form of the mollusks and decided to begin collecting shells. The day after I returned home from university I collected my first shell, a specimen of *Stagnicola elodes* (Say, 1821), on April 29, 1964. (I kept good data from the beginning!).

Lacking a car, as I was a «poor student», I would ride my bicycle along the coast and collect from the rocky and cobble beaches nearby. I had no books, and no knowledge of shells – I didn't know a *Buccinum* from a *Nucella*! However, I would sort the shells

I obtained by color and shape, and made plans for obtaining information about them when I returned to university. During the next four years my English and History studies were only a slim priority, with every spare minute I could spare or steal concentrated on obtaining information from the university library, collecting wherever I could, and beginning an extensive international trading program. At first, there were no photocopiers at our university so I copied by hand from *American Seashells* all descriptions of mollusks that were reported from Newfoundland and Labrador, the mainland portion of our province. I also drew or traced illustrations of shells from various publications. Later, when the university acquired its first photocopier, kept in a special locked room for library staff only, I managed to trick one of the librarians into copying for me some plates and descriptions of Arctic mollusks.

I acquired many species of deep water shells from the fishing trawlers on the Grand Banks, off the southeast coast of Newfoundland, and also some species from the local fishermen who fished for lobster and cod along the coast near our town (Figs. 1, 2). They thought I was crazy when I asked them to cut open the stomachs of the cod to take out *Buccinum* and other species. Gradually, with Christmas and birthday gifts, I began to buy shells and build up a small library of shell books. Then, in 1966, I made my first trade with Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan, a well-known malacologist



Fig. 1. Grand Bank, Newfoundland (my hometown).



Fig. 2. Burin Inlet, Newfoundland (a favorite dredging locality) (used by permission of Verna Snook, Burin, Newfoundland).

at the University of British Columbia, who send me many species from the west coast of Canada. To say that I was excited would be an understatement! Later that year I began trading with American collectors, and began building a nice collection. I had no cabinet to keep them in, so I used shoeboxes, divided into smaller sections to place the shells in. I learned to identify mollusks all by myself as, at that time, there were no other collectors that I knew of in the province. I was still in university, and worked at the local post office in the summer to pay for my expenses. When I opened the mailbags to take out the packages, I always looked forward to seeing the boxes of shells sent by my trading partners. After I graduated with English and Education degrees, I chose my first school in a part of the province where I had never been; not for a new experience but to collect land and freshwater shells there!

My deepwater collection kept growing, but brought with it a sad memory. In 1965, an acquaintance of mine, a deep-sea trawler fisherman on the Grand Banks, gave me a large bag filled with shells he had obtained for me from the nets when the men were removing the fish. Among this bounty were my first live-taken *Volutopsis norwegicus* (Gmelin, 1791) and *Neptunea despecta tornata* (A.A. Gould, 1839). Both were in perfect condition. That following winter, his ship was lost at sea with the entire crew. For many years, every time when I was examining my Buccinidae, I would stop and look at those shells, and remember him and the summer he gave me that wonderful gift.

In 1970, while in graduate school for my Master's degree in Linguistics, I met Joy, my wife-to-be (Fig. 3). We shared the same love of nature, and spent many happy hours roaming through the hills above the town where she lived; of course, any land and freshwater shells that we happened to find went into my collection. About three weeks after we met, we went on our first field trip, to a small island with a sandy beach where I found a dwarf population of *Lunatia heros* (Say, 1822). We were married in 1972, and went on a honeymoon to Jamaica. Why Jamaica? Lovely beaches, palm trees, tropical sunsets? No! Jamaica was reported to have the greatest diversity of operculate land shells in the world, so that became our destination. We stayed in Jamaica for a month, rented a car, and then travelled around the island collecting everywhere we went. By this time Joy was beginning to regard the vacation as more of a field trip than a honeymoon, and she refused to go into the forest to collect shells. My most vivid recollection of the honeymoon was at a place called Porus, where I saw a small limestone cliff close to the road. I climbed up to the cliff and began collecting Annulariidae. Then I heard a rustling in the trees around me, looked up, and saw that the leaves were full of red ants. I gave a scream, made a jump out of the trees and down to the road, and began frantically brushing my clothes. Joy asked me what was wrong. I shouted «Ants!», and she said, «That's what you get for turning our honeymoon into a field trip, and leaving me alone in the car!»

We collected so many specimens in Jamaica that we mailed four ten kilo boxes back to Newfoundland. The specimens could only be partly cleaned in the hotel rooms, so I planned to finish the cleaning when I got home. I had left the shells to dry before I packed them and blowflies laid their eggs in them. In the time it took for the packages to reach our home, the flies had hatched. My father knew that I was mailing some packages of Jamaican shells and he was anxious to see what they were like. When the first box arrived, he was very excited. He took it home from the post office, placed it on the kitchen table, and opened it. To his surprise, a great cloud of little brown flies puffed up out of the box into his face. My mother was horrified at having all those flies in the house and they spent a long time trying to get rid of them. They placed the rest of the boxes out in the garage until I came back. The rather large Jamaican land and freshwater collection is now at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, U.S.A.



Fig. 3. Ron and Joy Noseworthy (1972).

I began my high school teaching career in 1968 before obtaining my Master's degree in Linguistics. After that I returned to my home town and to my old high school where I taught for twenty-five years. Needless to say, my students were encouraged to donate shells to a worthy cause, my collection. They gladly contributed many species from eastern Canada and the U.S.A. Most prized were the species obtained from their relatives and friends at the local fish plant and on the fishing trawlers. I also collected stamps, so one student stamp collector whose father was able to obtain many small species from fish stomachs made a deal with me: five stamps for every specimen. I had lots of stamps so we able to build up our collections together. I had my first shell cabinet made by a local carpenter, but then I built the rest of my cabinets myself, as the collection kept growing and growing.

In 1975 I published my first article on land shell collecting in Newfoundland, followed by a checklist of the marine mollusks of Newfoundland and Labrador. By now, I was building a nice library of books and research papers, subscribing to two journals, and was also a member of the American Malacological Society. When I received my journals, I did my best to read every paper, trying to teach myself as much as possible about malacology and research techniques. I was now trading extensively internationally, especially with European and North American collectors. I traded with collectors in Czechoslovakia, and also corresponded and traded with the eminent Hungarian malacologist Dr. Laszlo Pinter. I now had nice collections of mainly land and freshwater shells from Eastern Europe and the Middle East, which few North American collectors had at the time. I also took advantage of every opportunity to collect shells. One of my acquaintances was a coastal fisherman, and I accompanied him several times. I would get the chance to examine the stomachs of codfish for shells, and once I remember pulling up a holdfast containing two species of *Musculus*. He also fished for lobster, and I remember the many species he obtained for me from his lobster traps, including my first live *Aporrhais occidentalis* (Beck, 1836). On one occasion he took me dredging in his boat, and I remember the many chitons we obtained from gravel and small rocks covered with the pink coralline *Lithothamnion*. Now, when I visit the provincial museum, to which I donated my Newfoundland collection, I will think of him when I see those specimens.

At that time I made my first dredge, following some instructions found in the AMU pamphlet «How to Study and Collect Shells». This was a rather large, triangular affair, and was quite difficult to haul up by hand, but I dredged a lot of species never found on the Newfoundland beaches, which have a rather limited fauna. Joy usually came with me on the dredging trips, and helped me haul the dredge and sort the material; she had great strength for a woman. Her father, a big, very strong man with a big heart, was intrigued by my efforts to dredge for shells in the deep inlet near where he lived. One day he decided to take us out to see just what I was so interested in. The old motor on the boat he was using did not work so, being a very determined person, he took me to a «dory», a small, open boat used by inshore fishermen. It was operated only by oars,

so he announced that we were still going dredging, and he would pull the rather large dredge, by rowing! When we arrived at a spot with muddy sand, according to my chart, I threw the dredge over the side and «The Boss», as I called him, rowed along pulling the dredge. It filled quickly and he helped me pull it up. When he saw some of the shells in the dredge, he became excited and wanted to row some more. He was in his late 60s and I was afraid that he would have a heart attack or stroke, but he insisted on another haul, this time on fine gravel. Different species came up, and Joy, who was with us, had to rather forcefully persuade her dad not to dredge again and take us back. When I used to examine the *Yoldia* and *Crenella* that we obtained for the first time that day, I would always think of «The Boss», and his strength and enthusiasm.

Another dredging experience centered on chitons, which are rather scarce intertidally in Newfoundland, but are often found on gravel in deeper water. During one of my dredging trips in the bay near my home town, I obtained three species of chitons from moderately deep water. They were fine specimens but I had no ethanol to preserve them, so I tied and dried them, and placed them on a small table; there were 120 specimens. We went out to visit some friends but, when we came back, the chitons were all gone. The string that was tying them down was on the floor. This was a mystery. What happened to all my chitons? While I was searching for them, I heard a sound like someone vomiting. I ran to where the sound was coming from and found Scratch, our big tomcat, vomiting up the chitons. It appears that he was hungry and smelled the drying chitons. Regarding them as food, he consumed them all but they made him sick. While he was throwing up the chitons, I saved as many as I could, rinsing and tying them again. I saved 87 of them I traded some of them later, but did not tell anyone that they had been in the digestive system of a cat!

I was still a lonely collector, so I invited several fellow collectors, whom I had corresponded with, to visit me at my home in Grand Bank for field trips and dredging. Some, I remember, were from Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and New York. It was wonderful to have kindred spirits with me to talk about shells and help them collect something different for their collections. They also gave me good collections of shells from their areas. I had only one bad experience with a visiting collector, a guy from Nova Scotia. He was with us for several days collecting shells and, instead of keeping the shells he found in a bag while collecting, he would put them in his mouth. During his visit we lived in our country cabin, where there were also many more country homes. He would get up at 6:00 A. M., and walk up and down the road through the cabin area playing tunes on a pipe and waking up everyone. One old gentleman was rather angry, because people there were on vacation and wanted to sleep longer. «If you don't stop him from playing that pipe», he said «I'll fire a shotgun at him!» I was glad when he left but later, when I checked my collection, I discovered that he had stolen some shells from me.

My loneliness was finally over in 1979 when I received a letter from John Maunder, the new curator of natural history at the Newfoundland Museum. He had my check list and wondered if I would donate some shells to the museum. Within a few weeks I had

prepared a nice collection for him and went to visit him at the museum. We soon became friends, and I helped him build up his mollusk collection. Now I had someone to talk to who was interested in my precious phylum. We went on field trips in southeastern Newfoundland, which has more introduced terrestrial species than native ones; most of the snails and almost all of the slugs are introduced from Western Europe. Our friendship and collaboration continues to this day, and we have co-authored several papers. As far as we know, we are still the only two malacologists in the province; however, thanks to the Internet, we are now members of a closely-knit international fraternity of fellow researchers.

In the summer of 1982 and 1983 our family toured all around the province in our camper van. We took my parents with us, and my father was quite interested in collecting mollusks. We also travelled to southern Labrador, which is well-known for its huge numbers of blackflies and mosquitoes. One day, as we were driving along the coast on our way back to the ferry to Newfoundland Island, I saw a small pond. I announced that I was going to collect in the pond but Joy and my mother tried to persuade me not to go because of the biting flies. However, I put on a jacket with a hood, took my collecting kit, and went to the pond. Of course, before I even reached it, I was attacked by a cloud of flies. I ignored them and collected around the pond, and even obtained some land shells. When I returned to the camper, the women were horrified. My face and neck were covered in hundreds of bites. The flies had also crawled under the hood and jacket and bitten my shoulders and chest. «You'll be disfigured for life!» my mother exclaimed. Joy counted the bites, and I had exactly 750. However, I am immune to fly bites, so three days later they were all gone.

One summer my wife and I visited some friends on the east coast of the island. I took a field kit with me, including a «Walker dipper», a kitchen sieve at the end of a long pole. I used it to collect mud samples containing freshwater shells from some of the streams in the area. Before we left to go home, I found a small stream near the coast. I used the dipper to collect a large mud sample, placed it in a bag, and took it home. The next day I began drying the mud samples in the oven on one of Joy's cookie pans, so I could take out the shells they contained. When I was drying the last sample, a bad smell went through the house. The stink was coming from the sample in the oven, and later I discovered that what I thought was a stream was actually water from a sewage plant nearby. It took a long time before all the stink was gone, and her best cookie pan was ruined. Joy was not happy! Surprisingly, several live specimens of a species of Sphaeriidae were found in the stinky mud.

I also remember a summer field trip to an island in the middle of a large bay on the southern coast of Newfoundland. I went there for a week with two French researchers, a botanist and a mammalogist. This island is a wildlife sanctuary and we needed a special permit to go there. I especially remember one evening, near sunset, when I was doing some low-tide beach collecting. A small herd of bison (buffalo) had been placed on the island several years previously as an environmental experiment. Only two, a male

and female, had survived and they decided to stroll along the coast that evening. I heard them coming and snuggled in close to the low bank near the beach. The two huge beasts walked by, just above me, and to say that I was as quiet as a mouse would be an understatement.

In 1985 our family went on a five-week camping vacation in Newfoundland, mainland Canada, and the northeastern U.S.A. We collected all through our trip, boiled the mollusks over campfires, and then cleaned and packed them. In Prince Edward Island, eastern Canada, we collected a small oyster which would not open, even when boiled. We decided to keep it and maybe it would open later. We placed it under one of the seats in the car and then forgot all about it. Two days later we began to smell a rotten-shell smell, so we know that something had not been cleaned and began looking for the cause of the stink. We found nothing and the stink got worse. For several days we searched, taking everything out of the car, and finally found the rotten little oyster, now open on its rock. We were surprised that so small a bivalve could make such a bad smell for so long. During this trip, I attended my first malacological convention, the 1985 American Malacological Union meeting in Kingston, Rhode Island, U.S.A. I enjoyed meeting some of the malacologists I had corresponded with, as well as meeting new people. I attended many of the presentations and also went on a field trip. It was a great treat for me to finally meet others who shared the same desire to collect and study mollusks. In 1988 our family went on a month-long vacation to Florida. While there we attended the annual meeting of the Conchologists of America, and I gave my first presentation, on the mollusks of Newfoundland and Labrador. I made contacts with some collectors and malacologists, and I still correspond with some of them to this day.

In 1990 Joy and I went to Vancouver, British Columbia, where we rented a car and camping equipment. We travelled and collected through the Vancouver area, Vancouver Island, and the Olympic Peninsula, Washington State, U.S.A. We always combined our love for travel with my desire to collect and study the mollusks of the places that we visited. After I retired from high school teaching in 1998, we decided to combine travel and teaching, which I really enjoyed. So, in 2000, we travelled to Jeju Island, South Korea, for one year of teaching in a private school. I looked forward to studying a brand new mollusk fauna and Jeju Island did not disappoint me. Within a short time we had fallen in love with the island and I was deeply involved in a new challenge, becoming acquainted with the rich mollusk fauna of Jeju Island (Fig. 4). I became associated with Jeju National University as a research associate, and authored or co-authored several papers and a book. Shortly after we arrived, Angela, my older daughter came for a visit, fell in love with our young best friend, and was married two years later. Now they have two children who, though young in years, have become avid collectors, and have already contributed some choice specimens and new locality records. Lori, my younger daughter came to live with us for eight years, and enjoyed collecting microshells (Fig. 5). Once she accidentally collected



Fig. 4. A Jeju beach.



Fig. 5. Lori collecting microshells.

a species of Triphoridae that was stuck in one of her toenails; a species I had not previously collected! During the past two years I received my first formal training in marine biology, obtaining a M.Sc. degree (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Ron's graduation (2015), and my family.

So, after fifteen years of living here in Korea, the lonely, self-taught collector is now part of the international family of malacologists, and looking forward to making a greater contribution to the knowledge of those fascinating mollusks.

Published online December 24, 2015