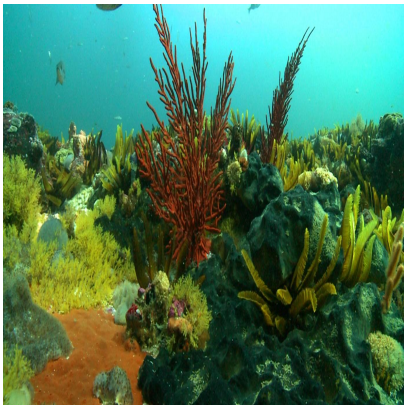


False Bay: A Place of Countless Opportunities

Description

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â??When a man is tired of False Bay, he is tired of life; for there is in False Bay all that life can affordâ?•: Adapted from Samuel Johnsonâ??s description of London in 1777.

Why, however much I travel and dive in exotic locations, do I love to return to the often cold and murky waters of False Bay? It is a place with which I never tire. It may be the fact that I learnt to dive there many years ago or the amazing reef biodiversity or the fact that I can see anything there from white sharks, dolphins, seals and whales to a baitball as intense as any to be seen on the famous Natal Sardine Run.

The kelp forests, that dominate the western shore of the Bay, support their own unique and complex ecosystems. Here may be found large sevengill sharks or small catsharks that roll into a ball, putting their tails over their eyes when held by a diver, thereby getting the local name of â??skaamhaaiâ?• or â??shysharkâ?•.

The reefs of False Bay may not host the colourful fish of the tropics but the vivid colours of the sea fans, sponges, sea urchins, sea anemones, nudibrachs etc more than compensate for this. These reefs are alive. Just drop a hydrophone into the water and listen to the crackle of the reef. This is often punctuated with the mournful songs of distant whales, the squeaks of dolphins and the characteristic grunts of cape fur seals. The reefs of False Bay can be noisy places.

False Bay is a large bay, flanked by Table Mountain to the west and the Hottentots Holland mountains to the east. To the north is the City of Cape Town while to the south stretches the southern Atlantic Ocean with the next large landmass being Antarctica. At the southernmost extremity of Table Mountain is Cape Point and further offshore the Agulhas Banks, the theoretical mixing zone for the cold Benguela and the temperate Agulhas Currents.

Geologically speaking, being part of Table Mountain, the rocks both above and below the surface of False Bay include hugh granite boulders. Granite, being an extremely hard rock, has withstood the onslaught of the sea for many millions of years. In fact, the geological process that formed Table Mountain began about 280 million years ago, making it one of the oldest mountains in the world (six

times older than the Himalayas). These geological features result in the impressive reef structures of False Bay.

Besides the reefs, there are a number of good wreck sites in False Bay, mostly vessels scuttled to form artificial reefs. In Smitswinkel Bay, a bay on the western side of False Bay, there are five such wreck sites, richly covered by colourful marine growth. This is underwater photographic heaven.



Whittle Rock in the Middle of False Bay



A Cape Fur Seal Pauses for a Good Scratch



A Typical False Bay Reef with High Biodiversity



The Red Roman a Well Known False Bay Fish



A Delicate Seafan Waves Gently in the Surge

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