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I have previously worked on aspects of the environmental explorations and transformations of the Cape of Good Hope by the personnel of the Dutch East India Company (principally in the second half of the 17th century). The first commander, Jan van Riebeeck, had worked in the East Indies and hoped to return there. Thus, identifications of local natural resources were influenced by this experience and were conducted with these markets in mind, rather than being primarily Eurocentric. Attempts were made to learn about useful plants and animals from the local indigenous peoples, with fairly limited success. They did acquire livestock from the Khoikhoi, along with the habit of burning grasses to refresh pasture. Later in the 17th century, Governor Simon van der Stel was encouraged in his natural history explorations by that great explorer of Malabar botany and botanical knowledge, Hendrik van Rheede. Aspects of this work were published in:
'Jan van Riebeeck as pioneering explorer and conservator of natural resources at the Cape of Good Hope (1652–62)', *Environment and History*, Vol.15 (2009), pp.3–33.

My later work on the uses and effects of fire in vegetation in the region took in the experiences and attitudes towards fire of Dutch and British colonists as well as European travellers and botanists. Ideas about fire developed by British colonial foresters (trained by Germans) in India were influential on fire management by plantation foresters in the Cape Colony and later the Union of South Africa, where they established extensive plantations of pines, wattles and eucalypts. The landscapes of the Cape were transformed by these imports, some of which proved invasive (notably Australian hakeas and wattles introduced to stabilise driftsands). These plants, favoured by fires, galvanised early plant conservationists into campaigns to protect the 'native' flora against invasive 'alien' plants. Much of this remains unpublished, but some is accessible in: 'Pressed Flowers: ideas about alien and indigenous plants at the Cape, c.1902–45', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.36, No.3 (September 2010), pp.599–618; and 'Recovering the lost history of fire in South Africa's Fynbos', *Environmental History* 17 (January 2012), pp.55–83.

In brief, I am interested in networks of expertise and biological exchanges across the Indian Ocean region, in particular South Africa, India and Australia. Debates about fire, desiccation and the role of trees in these are common to all these territories. I would like to know more about whether colonial foresters in India observed or learned from indigenous burning practices. Another introduction to South Africa, sugarcane, and the Indian labour brought to work on the plantations, have had an important impact on the ecological and cultural environments of my youth, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

My current research is pushing into a new area, as I'm working on a history of crocodilian conservation, with case studies in the USA, South Africa, India and Australia. The saltwater crocodile (*C. porosus*) originally occurred in Madagascar and from the east coast of India around to northern Australia. Skins of the Nile crocodile (*C. niloticus*) are traded from across Africa to (principally) France and Singapore.