

Freshwater pearl mussel's path over millions of years



100 million years ago the world's first freshwater pearl mussels started making their tracks on river bottoms. This was the Cretaceous period, the golden age of the dinosaur. Dinosaurs waded through the mussel rivers while flying lizards glided through the skies.

85 million years ago the earliest ancestors of humans and other primates lived on Earth. They looked like voles. They were unlikely to know anything about mussels.

70 million years ago The Rocky Mountains in North America started rising up. This slow transformation had hardly any impact on freshwater pearl mussels.

20 million years ago the Indian Plate approached the Eurasian Plate from the direction of Madagascar. Their collision created the Himalayas.

40 million years ago the first ape-like animals were living where Egypt is today. Mussels took no notice.

48 million years ago whales started to evolve. The Alps were also rising up around this time as the African Plate pushed closer to the Eurasian Plate.

65 million years ago an asteroid hit the Earth. A large wave of extinctions followed and put an end to such species as the dinosaurs. Freshwater pearl mussels lived on in their river bottom homes.

15 million years ago the common ancestors of orangutangs, gorillas and humans were living in Africa.

8 million years ago the gorilla, the human and the chimpanzee started evolving into separate species.

6 million years ago primates learned to walk on two legs.

2 million years ago it is possible that three species of humans lived on Earth: Homo habilis, Homo erectus and Homo gautengensis.

0.3 million years ago our species, Homo sapiens, was born.

Start of the current distress of freshwater pearl mussels:

A few thousand years ago Homo sapiens started hunting for pearls. Around one hundred years ago we started having a negative impact on the quality of mussel rivers. Freshwater pearl mussels have made it from the Cretaceous period to modern times through massive natural transformations. They only have faced real trouble since coming into contact with humans. Those mussels that have survived are still following their ancient tracks, but for how long? This is something we can influence.

0.12–0.01 million years ago was the time of the latest Ice Age Freshwater pearl mussels could not live under the continental ice sheet, but elsewhere they were doing fine.