

Giant water scorpions (eurypterids)

The largest animals known from the Ecca Sea were huge **eurypterids** or water scorpions which reached lengths of two metres or more – the largest arthropods ever known. These “gentle giants” were predators but specialised in sweeping up small invertebrates and organic detritus on the seafloor using comb-like structures on their walking legs (Fig. 4). Distinctive trackways and brush-marks made by giant sweep-feeding eurypterids as they simultaneously walked and fed on the Ecca seabed have recently been found near Laingsburg in the SW Karoo (Fig. 5).

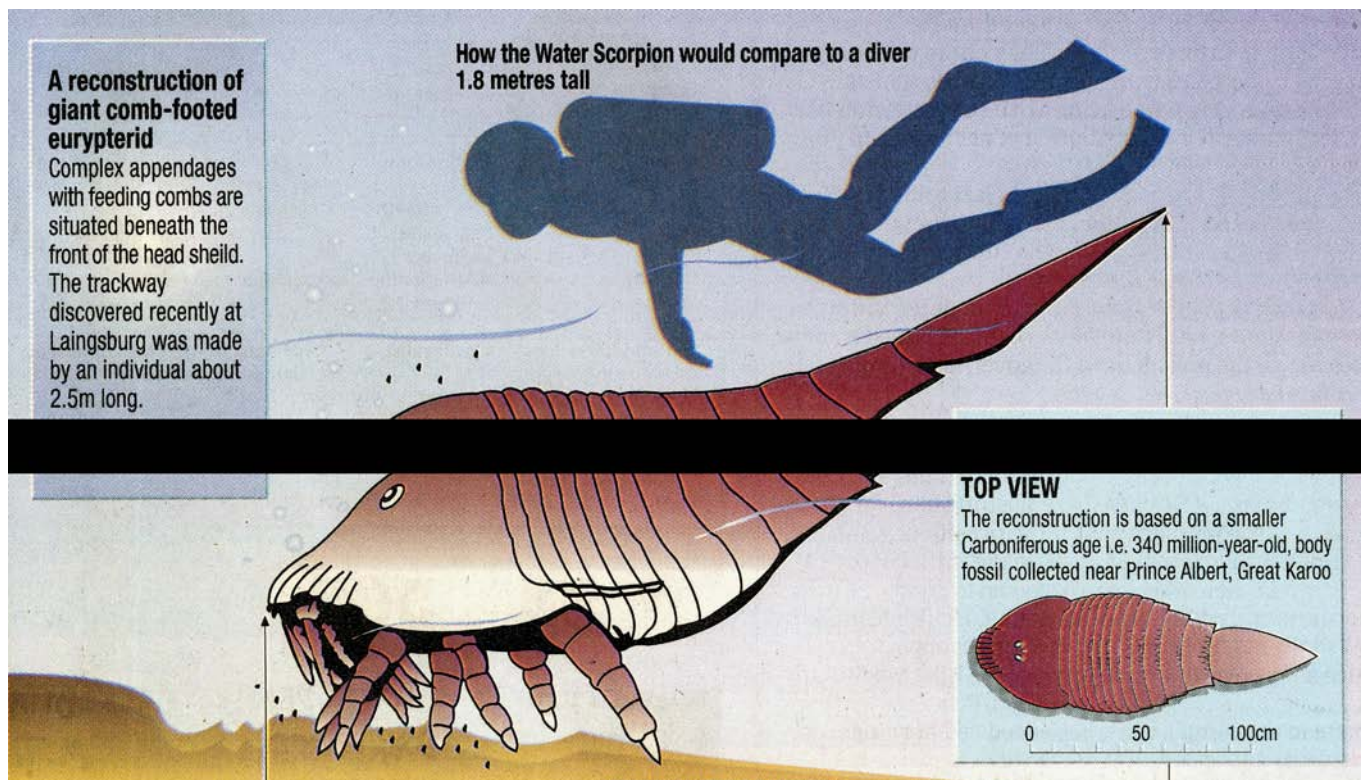


Fig. 4. Artist's reconstruction of a giant sweep-feeding water scorpion (eurypterid) on the Ecca seabed.

Fig. 5. Combined walking and sweep-feeding trackway of a sweep-feeding eurypterid, lower Ecca Group.