

taSauwur
Sultanate of Oman

Photographer Gerald Mclean



In Celebration
on the occasion of the
Fortieth National Day
of the
Sultanate of Oman



His Majesty
Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id
Sultan of Oman

Photograph: courtesy of Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Information

taSauwur
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Gerald Mclean





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Cover: Portrait of Dagmar Al-Busaidy - 1991

for my parents:
Maurice and Grace
for their encouragement in pursuance of my dreams

for my wife and children:
Elizabeth, Dean, Adrian and Elizabeth,
for their constant support throughout
my many absences in creating this book

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But, I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.
Adapted from W. B. Yeats, 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven'

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A Brief History
of
The Author
and
taSauwur
Sultanate of Oman

Acknowledgements

I wish to extend my gratitude to the Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Tourism for their guidance, support and endorsement of this book.

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Finally and worthy of special mention; Jessy Zakaria, for her unwavering friendship and counsel throughout my time in the Sultanate of Oman.

Born in North West London in the early 1960’s, I am the third of five children to British Nationals of Jamaica. I spent several years being schooled in the West Indies, before returning to the United Kingdom to complete my secondary, vocational and university education.

I have always had an enquiring mind and remember at the age of ten writing poetry, based on my observations of relationships and the world, during my long walks home from school, whilst in Jamaica. Although I do not consider myself a writer, I do believe, as a member of this human race, my observations are as valid as any other, and I, endeavour to gain the eloquence to better communicate my thoughts. It is possibly, this desire to express myself, which first attracted me to the visual arts. Yet, it was not until at the age of fourteen, when I was introduced to the art of photographic printing, as a means to complete an art portfolio, for my secondary school examinations that photography, became the catalyst of my voice, and eventual profession.

My professional career began in 1980, when I outgrew my Black & White darkroom - kindly built in the garage of the family home in Cricklewood, London, where I spent most of my adolescent life. I accepted an apprenticeship with the photographic firm of John Maltby; a man who had risen to some prominence during the 1950’s in England, as an Architectural Photographer. Though he showed some surprise, at my only condition, which was to be vocationally trained, in order to gain formal and recognizable certification to appease my father, whom, I knew would disapprove of my choice, as photography has always suffered from the perception of an idealistic trade on which to base a career. Nevertheless, John Maltby gladly agreed, and I remained with his firm until 1985.

As it turned out my father was right. In 1985 the photographic industry experienced a period of flux, aided by a financial recession, and I found myself at first freelancing and then running my own photographic business; working for some of the best architects in England, until in 1991 I arrived in Oman.

As a young man, I had set myself a goal to live in another country at the age of thirty. A few months after my thirtieth birthday, I came across an

advert in a photographic magazine, for a Photographer for the Sultanate of Oman. Although I had never heard of the country, I carried out basic research and it fitted my criteria. So, I applied, and approximately six months later, I was in Oman, working for Mohammad Al-Kharusi at PhotoCentre, based at Wadi Al-Kabir. PhotoCentre was, at that time, the foremost photographic studio in the Sultanate of Oman, striving to achieve international standards that would, provide the country’s budding photographers, with a profession that may be considered more than a hobby. After an extremely difficult three months, worthy of a book in its own rights, I was promoted to develop a new division within Colorlab LLC - PhotoCentre’s subsidiary professional colour laboratory. Thus, I embarked on the photographic assignment of a lifetime. This was to create photographs for, and initiate the first, professionally run photographic library in the Sultanate. And so, during 1992, I set out to visit as many locations as possible. And at the end of the year, we launched a library of over eight thousand images, culminating in an exhibition, at the Al-Harthy Complex in the capital, Muscat.

‘*taSauwur*’; translates ‘to Picture’ or ‘to imagine’, and is the phrase I often use in seeking consent to photograph people.

The photographs; which are still used in many aspects of media both nationally and internationally; along with my diary of events, form the basis for the first section of the book ‘*A Photographer’s Dream*’.

Having left the employ of Colorlab at the end of 1992, I continued to return to the Sultanate of Oman. My experiences, and photographs, taken during these trips, form the basis of the second section of the book ‘*Interim*’.

The last section of the book, entitled ‘*Modern Oman*’, describes numerous changes that have taken place since 1992, thus replenishing my photographic stock, and bringing the book up-to-date.

On going through the book, the reader will find that only full page photographs are titled. I have deliberately omitted titling inlay photographs, to encourage reading of the text, which contains information pertaining to the images.

You see, if, ‘*a picture is worth a thousand words*’, there are instances where, selected words can enhance a picture. And that, is an honest photographic observation.

A Photographer's Dream

Introduction

During 1991 I travelled to the Sultanate of Oman. After spending the first three months shooting hotel brochures and advertising assignments, I began the project. To 'go anywhere, and photograph anything, that showed Oman's beauty, its people, and progress; under the wise leadership of, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id Al-Sa'id'.



So, I set off with the intention to visit as many inhabited places, irrespective of how awkward or inhospitable the journey proved; across some of the most dangerous roads that I had ever experienced, in a four-wheel drive vehicle, in which I had little to no experience. In the back of the jeep were the best camera systems available; Lica, Hasselblad and Sinar, needed to get the job done. 'A Photographer's Dream'.

This is a chronological account of the project, and trips to the interior, expressed through anecdotes, of my experiences.

January 1992



Ruwi Plaza, Muscat - January, 1992

25th January 1992, Nakhal

Today is my birthday, and the beginning of a series of tests carried out before the real task begins. As it's raining (once a rare occurrence), I head off to Nakhal, as within a small area I'll find a fort, wadi, village, falaj system, and mountains with heavy rain clouds looming overhead. This is crazy; in England, with this kind of weather it's hardly worth getting out of bed, if you're shooting exteriors. Yet, I have driven for two hours through bad weather conditions, purely because it is raining.

I'm here, with my oil skins on, bare-footed, and hoping to get the steam rising off the Wadi. The rain is warm, but not as warm as the water in the Wadi, which is hot. Some shots of Nakhal Fort are already in the bag. I had believed that light-levels were generally the same all over the world, yet here I am with an extra f/stop on sunny days. This may not seem significant at first, but it does mean I can use a smaller aperture and improve my depth of field.

Before heading off on regular trips into the interior, I wish to spend some time in the capital, familiarizing myself with some of the idiosyncrasies of the region, as I've never been to the Middle East before, so have no idea what to expect. I will also apply for a local driving licence, and take my time to get the kit sorted. It looks like the word is out, I find myself shooting too many commercial assignments. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad for the practice; but the clients are getting a bit demanding of my time, and I'm likely to get side-tracked at this rate. I'm going to have to find a balance, if I'm ever going to get work done on the main project.

Yesterday, I managed to get a shot of CBD (Central Banking District), as one of the clock faces

within the new clock tower, at Ruwi Plaza, was being hoisted into position. As it is unlikely to be removed for many years; this should prove to be a unique image.

Couple of good things to come out of spending so much time in the capital are; I've been gaining valuable contacts, and advice on areas to visit. Additionally, the colour lab, where I'll be processing all my film, and I, have improving confidence in each other's abilities. This will save much time in the future, and reduce the amount of sleepless nights I tend to experience, waiting for the processed film. And means I can continue my experiments in crossing film and chemical types, to achieve various effects.

The sunrise / sunsets here are amazing.





RGO Mosque, Seeb - January, 1992



Mutrah Fort, Muscat - January, 1992



Jelali Fort, Muscat City - January, 1992



Jelali Fort, Muscat City - January, 1992



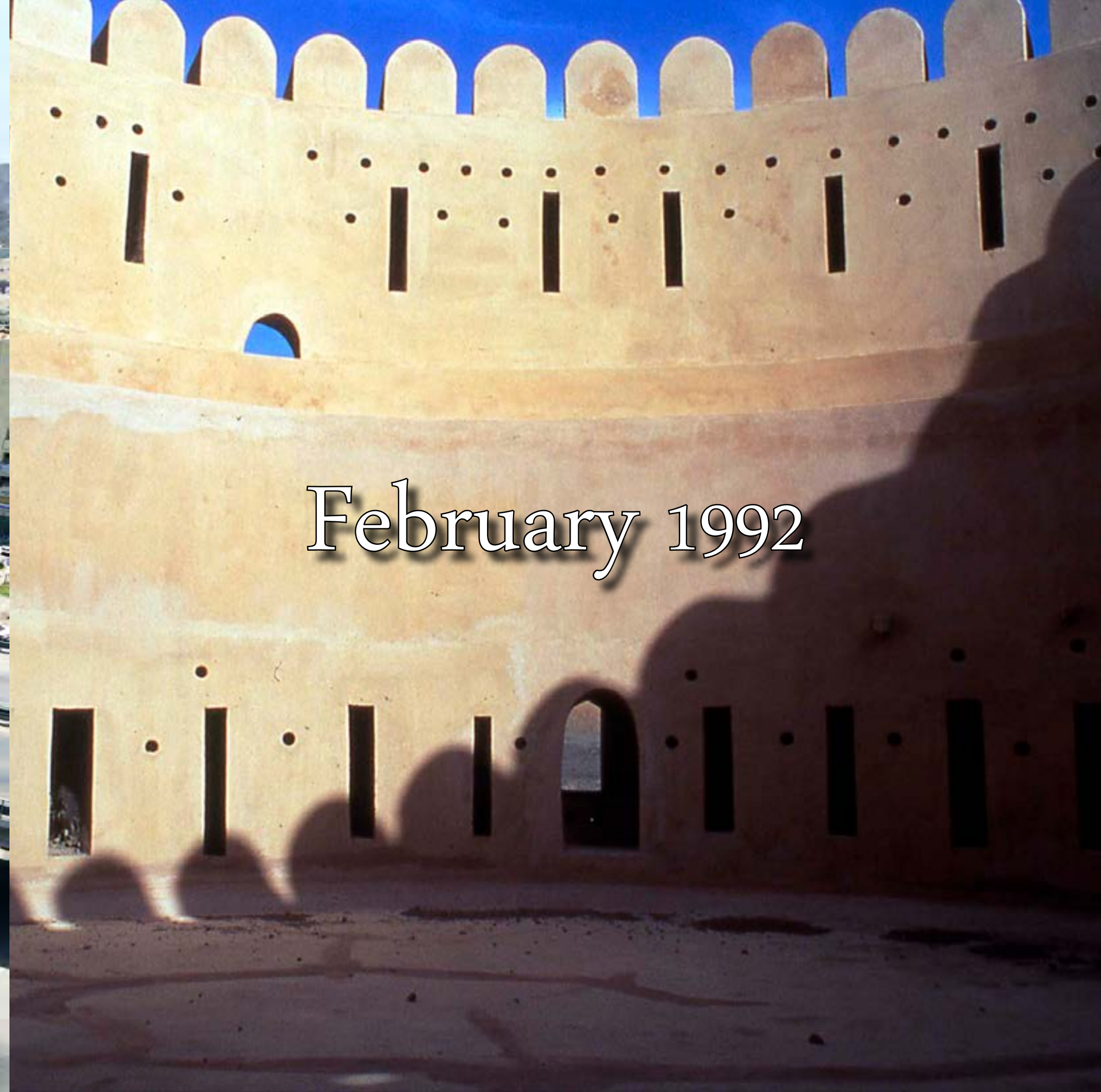
Nakhal Fort - January 25, 1992



Wadi Nakhal - January 25, 1992



Ruwi, Muscat - January, 1992



February 1992



Muscat - February, 1992

February 1992

I'm still in the capital, shooting studio and location assignments, such as the new Al-Harthy Complex. Nevertheless, I keep busy, by continuing to photograph as much as possible for the project, in and around Muscat, in my spare time.

Two people have requested to join me on some of my intended trips. But, I don't want to set a precedent, and risk offending someone else later on when I decline them, and I eventually would. Anyway, I don't really know what I'm doing, so don't need any witnesses to advertise the fact. Or maybe, on some subconscious level, I don't want to share

the prize; the opportunity to get 'The Shot', which incidentally, would probably spell the end of my career as a photographer. Anyway, from past experiences, having someone around will only serve to slow me down, or alter my decisions, as I take their needs into account. Well, whatever the reason, I hope I've arrived at this decision for the right reasons, and don't end up regretting it.

When I'm on my own, I find that people I meet are more receptive; I think they feel less threatened. Furthermore, it's always easier to accommodate an individual; far less of an imposition.

I can barely contain myself; thoughts of days filled with adventure, and nights under the stars. I want to get going.





Alam Palace, Muscat - February, 1992



Mutrah, Muscat - February, 1992



Alam Palace, Muscat - February, 1992



Kalbuh, near Mutrah, Muscat - February, 1992



March 1992



Khalfa Abdula, Al-Ashkara - March 9, 1992

5th March 1992, Wadi Makhl (Wadi Bani Khalid)

265km from Muscat and 800 metres above sea level; Wadi Makhl has water all year round, and is suitable for swimming. It's not sign posted in English and therefore, can be hard to find. The nearest map reference is Wadi Bani Khalid, on Route 23 to Sur from Muscat. Then, turn left onto a dirt road through the mountains. Then, left again, at the beginning of the first village you come to on the other side. Welcome to Wadi Makhl. A 'Wadi', for those who don't know, is a steep-sided watercourse; a seasonal river that runs between mountains. When it rains in the interior (I'm told), you can hear distant 'warning shots', as millions of gallons of water, gush through wadis to lower lands. Taking with them, anything in their path. In many cases, everything is back to normal within forty-eight hours.



I found Wadi Makhl by firstly going to Wadi Bani Khalid, and then being guided by a local, having ended up on a dead end road. I was somewhat, apprehensive at first, as we seemed to drive forever, along a very rough graded path. But eventually, it opened up into a place of natural beauty, with large chalk white rocks, which supported a tree next to a waterfall refilled from a sapphire pool, warmed to the delicate temperature of 30°C. To think I get paid for this!

Finally; I've actually started the project, I now hope to begin a series of three day trips within a couple of days.

8th March 1992, Al-Ashkara

350km from the capital area, approximately four and a half hours drive, with tarmac roads all the way. I headed along Route 23 to Sur, then turned right after 280km (3hrs), onto Route 35, then followed the road to Al-Ashkara. There I met Thbit Hamad Hassan, who teaches English at Ras Qumayla Primary School, and his friend Mohamed Salim, who showed me around the town.

At dusk, I attempted to rescue a man whose vehicle was stuck on the beach, but ended up getting stuck myself. Firstly, I unloaded the camera equipment to safety; then started to dig out the sand around the wheels. This didn't help. In fact, it left me with all four wheels spinning free, the chassis resting on the sand. With the tide now a couple of metres away, and edging nearer, the prospect of losing my jeep, within the first week of shooting, was a tangible reality. Just then, two Omani men came to my aid. The first thing they did was to replace the sand, which I had spent my time removing from under the wheels. They then let half of the air out of the tyres, put the jeep into 'four-wheel high', and drove it off the beach. After reloading all the cameras back into the jeep, and thanking them a thousand times, I found somewhere safe to park, and went to sleep.

9th March 1992, Al-Ashkara

This morning, I photographed Khalfa Abdula, the local maker of fine carved wooden doors. Mohamed Salim, showed me his collection of dried shark fins on the roof of his house, awaiting a buyer. At 12:45pm, I met with Thbit again, to go on a tour of Ras Qumayla, about 12km away.





English and Religious Studies teacher at the local school. Afterward I headed off to a mosque on the beach, next to where the fishermen leave at dawn. This is my second night out, I've driven 588km and it's 9:15pm. I'm about to take my nightly shower, using no more than four 1.5ltr bottles of water, then I'll bed-down.

10th March 1992, Ras Al-Ruwais

Woke at 5:00am to the irritating sound of my alarm clock, wondering where the night went, in between turning the jeep on and off all night to run the air conditioning unit, and trying to find a comfortable position to sleep. After refreshing myself with what was left from the water the night before, I photographed the sunrise through the mosque's doors. These face eastward, as the faithful must face



Mecca, westward of here. Went on to photograph the local fishermen leaving, plus a group of boys catching squid or octopus, along a nearby rocky shoreline, using long lengths of wire.

9:30am. I've come across the first group of Omani ruins I have ever seen, and photograph them enthusiastically.

1:30pm and 657km recorded on the trip-meter. I'm now in Ras Al-Hadd. On my way here I briefly stopped to shoot a view of the road and cliffs. The jeep's temperature gauge was reading 40°C! Ras Al-Hadd is another fishing village, in fact, the largest in the area. It has a fort, school and other amenities. I photographed the fort and a few of the dhows berthed in its natural harbour before leaving for Sur, which was to be my next stop after collecting a few more images along the way.

Still on the coastal route I reached Sur at 6:20pm. Sur is a small city split in two by a natural sea inlet. On one side (where I entered), are small





boat yards; here the main industry is Dhow Building - for which it's famous. Most of the dhows used in Oman are manufactured here. A half-hour drive around the bay, or a mere five minute journey by boat straight across the bay, brings you to the other and larger section of the town where all the amenities are. From what I could gather there is also a hotel here somewhere and I'm determined to find it because I just can't spend another night trying to sleep in the jeep.

At 7:00pm after driving around the town to see what to photograph in the morning, I returned to Sur Hotel where I had a dinner that consisted of a tin of fish and a piece of bread.

When I get back to Muscat I really should see about getting a larger allowance for these trips.



11th March 1992, Sur City

5:00am and there goes that lovely alarm clock across the room, but bouncing it off the wall doesn't turn it off. I'm out photographing dhows, now sat in mud at 5:30am awaiting the return of the tide near a dhow building yard.

Gave up waiting for the tide and headed off to photograph a Mosque, Hospital, Sur Hotel, Sur Beach Motel, Roundabout Beautifications and other bits and pieces of interest.

8:12am. I'm on route to the other section of Sur where I first came in last evening.

11:50am, 38°C. I've shot a group of camels breast feeding, and a story board of Dhow Construction in one of the yards. Again, I'm waiting for the tide to come in for images over-looking the city.



2:27pm. I've spent most of the day awaiting the right conditions for shooting a composition I think will work, but now the sun's in the wrong position. I took a number of shots to create a panoramic image, from the top of a hill on 35mm, E6, plus a view from ground level looking out to sea.

It's 2:30pm, 801km recorded on the trip-meter, I've got a full tank of gas and it's 31°C in the shade, I'm off to Muscat, via Qurayat.



Now back in Muscat, arrived late as I had to go slow. The jeep's Master Brake Cylinder sprang a leak and dripped fluid with every bump. Bearing in mind that I was on a graded road, with death traps at every turn, and trying not to press the brakes, as this made me lose even more fluid. It was not an enjoyable trip. At times I would be on a stretch of road which seemed to be straight and flat, bar a few bumps, so I would accelerate to 30km per hour, only to find that the last bump I went over, has a forty-five degree hill going down on the other side, with a ninety degree turn to the left, and a sheer drop to the sea straight ahead and to the right. You know those moments when you call on God to get you through. At one point I



was practically out of brake fluid. I spotted a man by the road. He had stopped to give prayer, after which, he gave me about 250ml of fluid. This was worth more than gold to me, given the state of affairs. I don't think I could complete this project without the help of the locals, who are always surprised that I should attempt such a task, travelling on my own. This does not help to build my confidence, and it is only my bullheadedness and enjoyment of adventure that keeps me going. In truth, I believe an angel rides with me.

By the time I reached Qurayat at sunset, with its tarmac roads back to the capital, I was exhausted from being shaken and stirred, plus petrified from the experience. With all that going on, I hardly had time to comprehend some of the beautiful sights along the route. Thereafter, I just had to continue using the gears and avoid the brakes, as I cross the mountain range back to Muscat.

17th March 1992, Sur City

Back in Sur City for a second visit; woke at 5am again and headed off to shoot one of the fortifications that I visited on the way here. Got some good views of the sun rising just in front of a cannon, as if a cannon ball had been fired, also a silhouette, which I find I prefer. After revisiting a couple of locations to carry out ideas that I had on my last visit, I headed for Wahaybah Sands.

Al-Wahaybah is a large expanse of sand dunes, south of the capital. Although it's not the only desert area in Oman, its proximity to the capital makes it the one most frequently visited by expatriates. Who drive all over the desert fodder, much to the annoyance of the Bedouin tribes that subsist here. This small scrub-like plant is an important food source for their livestock. I know this as I was told by a woman who didn't speak English, but made herself very clearly and loudly understood, by ranting in Arabic, making hand gestures, grabbing at the plants and waving them at the goats. By the way she didn't want to pose for a photograph either.

Before entering Al-Wahaybah I first stopped at Al-Mintrib, which was my entry point into the desert. Here I found some of the finest standing ruins made of mud bricks in one and two storey villas, which gave a real feel of what it must have been like to live in Oman prior to the accession of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

A particularly hot day for March I'm told, at 43°C. I could have done without the unsightly overhead electric cables that seem to criss-cross most towns in the interior as a sign of impending progress. On entering Wahaybah Sands; feeling quite confident due to the vehicle tracks left

by numerous comings and goings, I paused to take a few shots of a Kanja (ceremonial dagger made of silver and worn by Omani men), which I brought with me for this very purpose, using the sand as the perfect prop. Then I headed off into the desert. After driving for some time and not finding any desert-like landscapes to inspire me (with all the small plants around it looks too green to give the feel of a barren desert landscape), I decided to follow a couple of jeeps which had headed off across a dune, away from the main path. I soon found myself stuck yet again, with the vehicle dangerously close to tipping over on its side. Allow me to point something out here; it's not that I'm such a bad driver, or unduly unlucky. And just because a vehicle has four-wheel drive doesn't mean, should one wheel get stuck the other three will get you free. For this you need a vehicle with differential wheel lock, which I of course don't have. So, I jacked up



the jeep and packed sand under the wheel - always carry a piece of wood to put the jack on - then let some air out of the tyres. I slowly reversed back to the safety of the main track (that's when I got told off by the Bedouin woman I wrote about earlier), and headed back



to Al-Mintrib to get the tyres inflated; changing a punctured wheel on the way, for my troubles.

10:37pm, got the puncture fixed and all the wheels inflated, drove 44km back into the desert (nothing short of death can stop me), had my cheese and bread dinner, whilst exposing a shot of the jeep by moonlight on the Hasselblad (F/5.6, 17mins, 100ASA, C41,

50mm lens). The desert on a full moon night, is something that I'd recommend to anyone, wishing to sit quietly and collect their thoughts. Away from distractions.

18th March 1992, Al-Wahaybah

6:13am, 19°C. Woke at 5:00am, at which time it was 15°C, and photographed a large bush with the sun rising behind it. As there was no one about, I had some water for breakfast, and with 624km recorded since I left the capital two days ago, went off in search of something to photograph. Let me explain about the water for breakfast. Muslims around the world, fast for approximately one month during a period known as 'Ramadan'; food and water (even a cigarette) can only be taken during the hours of darkness. Non-Muslims can eat, but should not do so in public, as this will cause offence.

8:08am. Still haven't found anything of interest to shoot, even though I've now travelled a total of 80km into the desert. I've decided to park not too far from a couple of trees growing in the middle of a plain with a water tank by them. Maybe I can do something with them.

Took some shots of the trees then noticed some activity on the surface of the sand, half way up the side of a large dune with animal tracks. On investigating, I found a group of dung beetles, about the size of

a thumb, rolling goat-droppings with their hind legs to soft patches of sand, where, they then set about digging holes to bury their finds. Here was something to photograph. Now as luck would have it, a camel walked into view from, what I can only explain as nowhere, and gave me the opportunity to get some shots of a camel in the desert - which is not as common as most people think. Lady luck was obviously on my side as a Bedouin husband and wife then arrived at the water tank by the two trees and he began to wash. Within a couple of clicks of the shutter, whilst trying to avoid the Coke tin by the camel's front hoof, I had a shot that made the journey and the trouble that I'd gone through the night before finally worth it.

After a respectable period, once the man finished his morning bath, I went down the dune to meet him and the other Bedouin who had just arrived. After the formalities were over, I photographed the three men, then asked if I could get a picture of one of the men's wife. This was an opportunity not to be missed. It's extremely rare to photograph women, whom normally shouted "no pictures", in Arabic "la Sauwur", as they run from my evil eye. Anyway, after the reputable amount of refusals by his wife, and with him insisting she didn't really mind - 'after all, she is his wife' - she allowed me to photograph her, as she stooped washing his clothes in the midmorning desert sun. After thanking him and not making the mistake of speaking to her - after all, it is his wife - I took my leave of Al-Wahaybah, stopping only to get a shot of the sun-bleached bones of a camel.



On leaving the desert, I felt confident enough to consider re-entering, but this time from a different starting point. So turned off the safety of the tarmac road and headed cross country for the desert,





Al-Wahaybah - March 18, 1992



Al-Wafi - March 18, 1992

and duly got lost. Then spent most of the day trying to find a safe way out, before I ran out of petrol. This was to lead to one of my best discoveries to date, because this is how I came to find Al-Wafi, with its large Falaj system. This will be the starting point of my next adventure. A Falaj is a water irrigation system, bringing water from wadis’, and or, underground sources to supply lower fertile lands.

23rd March 1992, Al-Wafi

2:37pm, 287km from Muscat, 40°C. I’m at Al-Wafi, the weather is extremely overcast, I’m going to take a chance and wait until tomorrow, for better conditions. Again, I’ll sleep here in the jeep.

24th March 1992, Al-Wafi

Once again I was up at 5:00am hoping to get a spectacular sunrise shot, which didn’t happen. It was foggy, or is it misty? How about, miserably murky. Tried in vain to find something to shoot, so I waited with fingers crossed and this seemed to work. The skies cleared at 8am allowing me to expose 9 rolls of 35mm E6, plus 3 rolls of 120 C41, covering; Agriculture, Falaj systems, Ruins and Town scenes.

4:00pm and the skies are once again heavily overcast. I have been invited to shoot inside a local mosque, by one of the villagers. However, the contrast and light levels are too flat and low. So with the intention to return in two months or so, when the Dates are ripe, I set off, towards Al-Qabil, in search of a Wadi with flowing water to photograph.

5:00pm. It’s raining with a vengeance, this is definitely not a safe time to venture into a Wadi; if I value my life.

25th March 1992, Al-Qabil

10:45am. Well it rained for most of the night leaving me with the problem of where to park and sleep, as I don’t want to wake up and find myself floating out to sea. Tried to book into Qabil Motel, but it was full; of course it was, why wouldn’t it be? It was only after suggesting to the manager that I could sleep in the jeep, in the car park; that he offered to put me up in the workers quarters in the attic of the main building, but to excuse the mosquitoes that fed all night, leaving me feeling tired and anaemic by morning. For once I was more than happy to get up at 5:00am.

Climbed a large hill at 6:45am in the hope that the weather would break and I’d be able to get an overall view of Qabil. Unfortunately, the skies stayed overcast and bland. However, for some reason a young woman was up there and for some reason I

decided to ask her if I might take a few photos of her. “*Sauwur?*” And to my great surprise, she replied “*Zen*” (okay). You can’t even begin to imagine my excitement. The opportunity to photograph a beautiful Omani woman. My prayers had been answered. And against a backdrop of a vast landscape... I grabbed the Hasselblad, slapped on the C41 back and started shooting, trying to hide my obvious delight. Carefully, I chose each composition, I had the feeling this wouldn’t happen again for a long time, if ever. Twelve shots done and I reached for the E6 film back. Alas, her tolerance had run out. She gestured, goodbye, and left. But that was alright, I’ve got twelve excellent shots, that’s enough. Only one problem; when I opened the C41 back, there was no film in it! I’ve been taking photographs since I was fourteen, I’ve heard such stories, yet, nothing like this has ever happened to me before, even with a 5”x 4” DDS. I’m devastated. I go to call her back, even though I know she won’t come; and then it struck me. Even if I had the pictures, I couldn’t use them. If I did, I’d certainly get into trouble with one of her family members. And I have no ‘Model Release’. As a photographer, my main aim is to share the images I experience. What just happened was God answering my prayers. But for my eyes only. The images were never meant to be shared. I’ll forever have to carry them inside.

3:00pm. I was on the road to Wadi Namm. Turned off the main road, and had been travelling along a graded track that leads into the wadi. In many cases you have to go quite deep into a wadi until you find the water source, before it goes underground. Having paused to take a photograph, I decided to turn back to a bush I had seen about 2km along the way. If I pour some of my reserve petrol from the jerry-can attached to the back of the jeep, over the bush / small tree, and set it alight; I can take a photograph of the ‘Burning Bush’. You know like in the Bible! I’ve had God on my mind since this morning’s experience – this sort of thing happens when one spends too much time alone in the Interior. So, there I was speeding along trying to fight off a few killer flies that wanted to hold the jeep to ransom, until it was cleaned; and loss control going around a sharp corner, made even sharper, by trying to avoid a camel, who decided to pause in the road, for a chew, from a tree. I hit gravel and found myself screaming “NOooo...” as I lay on my left side desperately hanging on to the steering wheel, with the ground rushing towards me, until I finally came to a stop, with the engine still revving. Not believing what had happened, I checked the onboard level indicator in the dashboard. That confirmed it. I was lying on my side, in the middle of nowhere. I’d finally found my limit.





Wadi Namm - March 25, 1992

As in the movies, I climbed out the passenger side of the torn jeep. Then I got all the camera equipment out. Thankfully, I always carry them packed in cases. As I sat under a tree, a few metres away, wondering what on earth to do, with my only other source of transport, wiggling its arse, as it wondered off into the distance. Luckily, some minutes later, an open-back pickup van, with a live goat in the back, pulled up. And out jumped six Omani men, who, first off, all made sure I was okay. Then told me, I shouldn't be travelling alone. After confirming I was English, they set about roaring with laughter, which carried on for a minute before we all pushed the jeep back on its wheels. Not wanting to leave me stranded, they decided to make sure the jeep was drivable. By this point the engine's air-filter housing was full of fuel. Fearlessly, the men kept trying to start the jeep. Now, as this didn't look very safe to me, using the universal hand-waving technique, I beseeched them, to wait for the petrol to evaporate. But they were in a hurry. Fortunately, the jeep started without incident.

Again, I had been saved by locals. But this time I was able to repay them in sorts. You see, they were on their way to get a knife to kill the goat. So, I gave them my Ratchet-knife, which I'd bought in Jamaica two years before, but had yet to use. I swear that goat just spat at me. We parted, and I headed for the nearest police station, to report the accident. When you have an accident in Oman, you're suppose to leave the vehicle exactly where it comes to rest, until you're told otherwise by the Royal Oman Police. I think it's an offence to do otherwise, but under the circumstances, I think it'll be alright.

When I got to the station, the police were more concerned that I had not hit the camel, and wanted to see the scene of the accident; just to make sure. Subsequently, we all piled into their patrol car and

headed off. But the car couldn't make the journey, and we were forced to turn back. At which point, they asked me, what exactly was I doing in the area. I explained, "*taSauwur wadi mayya*", (to picture valley water). They also set about laughing, saying that Wadi Namm was nearly always dry, but there was Wadi Tayin not far from here, and they'd be happy to spend a day with me on another occasion, making sure I completed the journey safely. So, we returned to the station. Armed with the accident report, I headed for home. You know, given that trees take quite a long time to grow here, due to the lack of water, setting one on fire, might not have been the best idea I've ever had. Don't suppose God's hand was at work here...

And so ends another three days of adventure. How am I going to explain this one to the boss?





Enroute to Wadi Bani Khalid - March, 1992

April 1992





Wadi Nakhal - April 4, 1992

4th April 1992, Nakhal

Today is Eid (Id-Al-Fitr), marking the end of Ramadan. It's been raining since yesterday. Saw a car and its driver washed away. Only the heroism of two bystanders prevented the driver from being carried out to sea. When it rains, it rains. Muscat is nestled between the coast and the Hajar mountain range. The rain water collects into roaring bodies of H₂O that has to pass near, or through, populated areas to reach the sea. A number of storm drains have been built, with more planned, but as nature is not completely predictable...



Set off to Ibra, but was slowed by helping to push cars stuck in loose gravel and fast flowing water. It was starting to get dark over the mountains that gave life to wadis, which crossed the only route home. So, I turned back and headed for Nakhal. On reaching Nakhal, the place was swarming with people. The only shot to be had was from the surrounding hills. That's where I spent the afternoon.

Between 5th and 27th of April, I spent most of my time in and around the capital, photographing Al-Bustan (off shore), Mutrah, and Muscat City. Stocking up on; city scenes, souqs, mosques, hotels, cityscapes and architecture in general.

28th April 1992, Al-Khuwair

I'm doing a dusk shot of Al-Zufa Mosque, which is typical during day light hours, but at dusk, with the hypnotic call to prayer, it's particularly beautiful.

29th April 1992, Tanuf

5am. In a car I've got on loan, whilst the jeep is still being repaired. Came across a village no longer inhabited, but with the buildings



still standing. Here you get a real feel of walking through history. Then, went on to shoot a falaj system that overflows, making an attractive waterfall.

30th April 1992, Nizwa and As'Seeb

Visited Nizwa and As'Seeb. As'Seeb is a built up town on the coast. Here the task is to get a few images of local fishermen casting their nets from the beach, with the sun setting in the background. At this time of the day, thousands of tiny fish dash in and out of the surf, Fishermen wait until they see a few bigger fish joining in the dance of life, and then with knowledge handed down - and a lot of trial and error - throw out their nets, pausing only to answer the call to prayer. I think they are asking to get rid of the annoying photographer, who is probably scaring the fish, in any event I get some great shots.



Muscat City - April, 1992



Muscat City - April, 1992



Al-Zufa Mosque, Al-Khuwair - April 28, 1992



Muhalab bin Abi Sufra Mosque, Muscat - April, 1992



Touring from Qantab beach - April, 1992



Touring from Qantab beach - April, 1992



Overflow from falaj at Tanuf - April 29, 1992



Fishermen out from Bustan - April, 1992



As'Seeb - April 30, 1992



May 1992

4th May 1992, Rustaq

Today I'm off to Rustaq which is inland from the north coast, towards the base of Jabal Akhdar (a Jabal is a mountain). The points of interest here are the souq, hot-water springs and Rustaq Fort.



6th - 12th May 1992, Muscat, Barka, Rustaq and Nakhal

I have shot day and night views, sometimes until midnight of beautifications in Muscat, including further visits to Rustaq. On the second visit to Rustaq, I got some interiors shots of the Fort. Shot Nakhal Fort at dusk, which entailed climbing a water tower. Anything for the shot. I have learnt to carry a thirty metre length of nylon rope with me as part of the kit, as it's not possible to climb with the cases. So I tie the camera cases and tripod to one end and once I've reached a safe platform, I pull up the equipment. This is how I managed to get the 5"x 4" kit on top of the water tank.

Tried to visit a Wadi, but it was no go. The car was just too low to cross the rough terrain. The rocks kept rubbing underneath and I was getting stuck every time I tried to cross water. I really need a jeep, mine is still being repaired.

14th May 1992, Nizwa

Shooting the new souq built by Gulfar. The Architects were Cowi Consult, who have supplied information and plans to assist me. Got here at 9:00am, after a two and a half hour drive, Started on the exterior, and a new bridge that crosses the Wadi. Sneaked up in the Mosque's minaret overlooking the Souq, and got a couple of shots. Plus a 'detail' of the Mosque's dome with the Fort in the background. Then it clouded over and started to rain. By this time the call to prayer went out and I was stuck up there, with no water and no way



down. A Minaret is the tallest structure in the Mosque. In the past, the 'muezzin' would give the call to prayer from it. These days a tape system is used, wired up to tannoys placed in the top. They're loud! When it stopped raining I shot; 1 roll C41, as a panoramic view to be pasted together after printing. This is the only colour negative shot today, the rest being E6. So I hope my light meter is working.



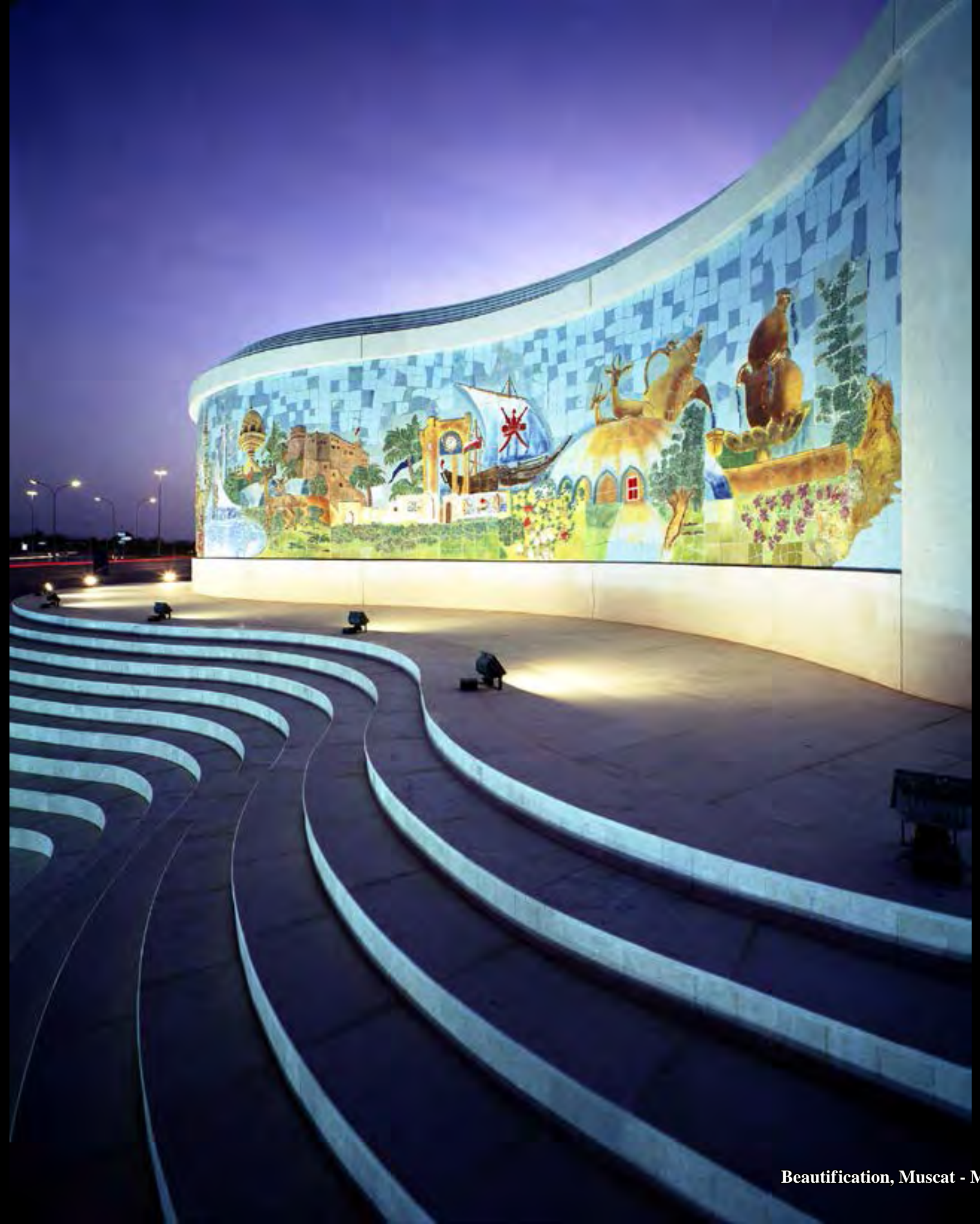
12:45pm. Started to shoot the souq's internal courtyard. Then while it rained, shot interiors of the fruit and vegetable souq.

6:16pm. Set up for dusk shot of main entrance to the courtyard. Then drove the 174km home in the dark. Time now 7:30pm.





Beautification, Muscat - May, 1992



Beautification, Muscat - May, 1992

Muscat-London-Muscat

During the last two weeks in May I returned with my family to London to attend my youngest brother's wedding. After six or so months in Oman, London felt like a different world of which I was no longer a part. When we landed it was a hot sunny day and by the time we got into London the differences were all too obvious. Women's chests were rhythmically dancing as they walked, unaware of the effect that this was having on my eyes. I tried desperately to keep my head straight. Men drank beer openly on the streets, pubs on every corner outnumbering the places of worship. I'm not sure I like it and apart from the chance of seeing the family again I could do without it. Don't get me wrong, I love London, it's the place of my birth. It's just the initial culture shock.

When I returned to Oman after an incredibly difficult flight, which included an overnight stay in Kuwait, I got roughed up by Oman Airport Security, who mistook me for an Omani Muslim, and had spotted the bottle of Southern Comfort in my luggage, I had to resist the urge to kiss the ground once outside.

I always thought it important to learn some local dialect, such as greetings, please, thank you and farewell, and my accent has become believable through practice. So now I know enough Arabic to get into trouble, but not enough to get out. I think it best if I only speak English when going through customs in future.



Roundabout Beautification - May, 1992



Rustaq - May 4, 1992



Nakhal Fort - May, 1992



Nakhal Fort - May, 1992



Nizwa - May 14, 1992



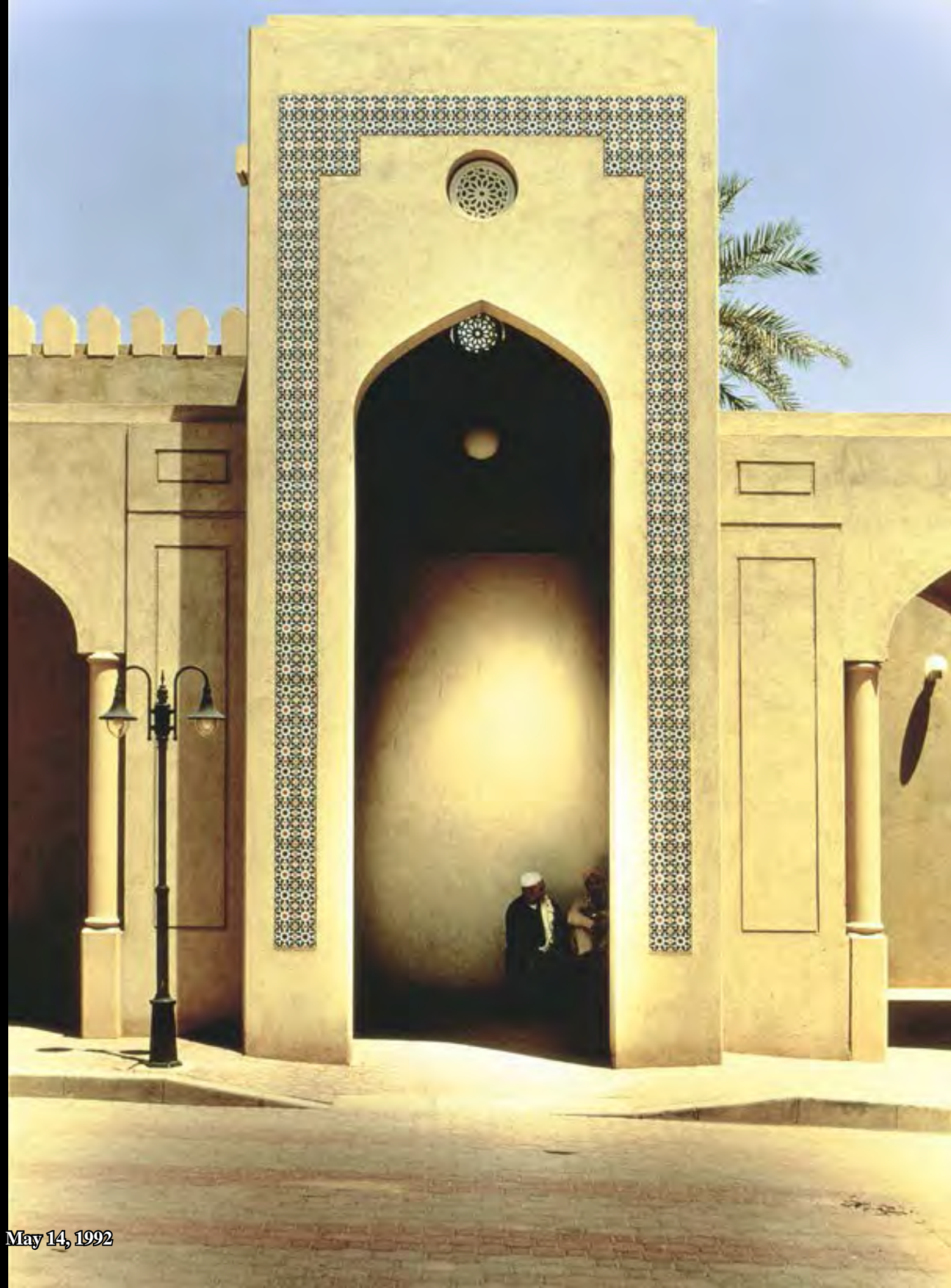
Nizwa - May 14, 1992



Nizwa - May, 1992



Nizwa - May 14, 1992



Nizwa Souq - May 14, 1992

June 1992



10th June 1992, Al-Qabil, Al-Mintrib, Al-Wahaybah

11:40am and 237km from the capital. My family have remained in the UK for an extra two weeks, and I intend to get as much done as possible before they return. I'm on my way to Wahaybah Sands. My jeep is still being repaired after the accident in March. I have the loan of another jeep to continue the project, with strict instructions to return it in one piece. Stopped at Al-Mintrib and done various shots including Date harvesting.



5:03pm, 350km. In Wahaybah Sands. I'm still looking for a good C41 shot of sand dunes. Thought by now most of the plant life would be gone. I was wrong. Looks like I'll have to work at it.



So having spotted a couple of trees half way up a sand dune, devoid of shrubs, I started to climb, and instantly found the going hard.



Although it can be done, it's not easy to show heat in a landscape photograph. I can't adequately express just how hot it is. Let's just say, it's so hot, your skin tingles. Slight sweat dries on contact with the air, so one might not realize just how much fluid is being lost. Not me though. I really sweat. On climbing the dune I have to stop every four steps, emptying hot sand from my boots. I mean I have to! Ten minutes later, my aim is to get to the trees, to rest in the shade for twenty minutes. When I finally get near to the shade of the trees, a swarm of flies, which must have been in the trees, instantly land on me, and start to drink the sweat I'm drenched in. Somehow, I find the energy to complete the rest of the climb to the ridge, in seconds.

8:10pm, 385km. I'm at a BP petrol station. In Wahaybah Sands, shot tree, sand dunes, etc. On my way out I ran over a large lizard (at least 50cm, top-to-tail), in the middle of the track. Luckily it survived. I photographed it, as it wasn't quite recovered or able to move. Several minutes later, it started to slowly make its way up a sand dune, and I returned to the jeep, which now had a dead battery. No, I did not leave anything on. When I checked, there was no water in the battery. To think this jeep was just serviced. So, I had to sit, and wait for someone to pass by. Soon after, a Bedouin, driving a pick-up gave me a pull start. I gave him half my rope, which has saved many people I have met on my journeys, and myself once again. I tend not to worry when I get into trouble anymore. In fact, I almost expect it. Now, with the tyres re-inflated, (I regularly deflate them to approximately 20psi, when entering sand dunes these days. I just got so fed up getting stuck), and after topping-up the battery, I'm off to Al-Wafi for a shoot at dawn.





Al-Wafi - June 11, 1992



11:10pm. Arrived at Al-Wafi at 9:30pm. Then, tediously got stuck in sand again, and didn't get free until 11:00pm. About to bed down after showering with three bottles of 'Tanuf' water.

11 June 1992, Al-Wafi

9:02am, 454km. Woke at 5:00am. Dawn must be at 4:30am, because it was already light. Today is the second and last Eid of the year, Id-Al-Adha. At 6:00am shot horse and camel races, music procession, plus people celebrating. I have never been this close to so many camels before. I was not prepared for the smell they can give off in the early morning sun. The horses look magnificent in their silver trimmings, which the locals dress them in for these occasions.



4:41pm, 629km. After leaving Al-Wafi, I had to stop and rest. The heat, bad diet, and general lack of sleep, are taking their toll. Went on to Wadi Tayin, and photographed; a man and boy picking dates, a story board of a young cow being slaughtered for the evening festivities, women packing dates for market, Wadi, etc.

9:05pm, 910km recorded. Safely back home in Muscat. The lights of the city are always exciting, after a few days in the interior. My bed's calling to me.



12th June 1992, Musandam Peninsula

4:50am. I'm in the jeep, now leaving for Barka. Then, on to shoot solar energy panels in use for street lighting, at Sohar.

11:41am. Stopped at Barka this morning, but alas no bull fight this time of year it seems. So I parked and grabbed a couple of hours sleep, before starting the long drive.

Now 1213km since 10th June. I'm at Oman / UAE border. The ROP (Royal Oman Police) wrote something on my papers, to ensure I don't have any trouble getting back in the country with the camera equipment. A lot of people tend to go shopping in the UAE to avoid paying Omani taxes. In order to make this trip to Musandam - like all non-AGCC nationals - I had to get a road permit from the ROP, plus carry my passport.

Musandam is the most northern point of the Sultanate, separated from the rest of Oman by the UAE. To drive to Musandam is easy. You just travel along Oman's north coast, keeping the sea to your right. I've wanted to make this trip for some time, and feel very excited about the idea of driving from one country to another.

12:54pm, 1257km. Just drove into the UAE.

2:53pm, 1351km. Now in Musandam. WOW! What a buzz. Mountains and mountains. 110km to Al-Khasab. Should be there



by 5:30 - 6pm. I hope. Driving through these mountains at night is foolhardy. Even for me.

10:45pm, 1460km. At an Omani checkpoint in Musandam earlier today, I met with a few people who work for the ISS (Internal Security Service). You can always tell when someone is working for the ISS here, especially the westerners. They're always so vague about what they do. And ask a lot of apparently unnecessary questions. I'm tempted to give unnecessary answers. I met them again at Al-Khasab Hotel. Yes, there's a Hotel here, although I haven't enough to stay. My new found ISS acquaintances turned out to be fun company, and invited me to dine with them. I declined, and went in search of somewhere to eat my, 'À-la-carte in a bag' meal, and sleep, in my four-wheel room. At least this jeep is big enough to stretch out in. I'll wake at dawn. Now it's time for a wash. It's very hot and humid. I'm parked on rocks right by the sea, don't know how I will manage to sleep. Tomorrow is going to be a long hard day. Driving here was quite dangerous, and mentally exhausting. But well worth it. They have everything here, including a school, hospital, road lights, signposts, airport, harbour, tarmac roads, etc. After what I just went through to get here, and considering how isolated this place is, I'm impressed. On the way, I stopped to take various mountain views and at one point came across an old man in a hut, by the side of the road. In the middle of nowhere. He was sitting by the entrance making bread, and I stopped to eat with him. I don't think I will ever find people who are as hospitable as the Omanis.

11:54pm. I considered taking my nightly wash in the sea, but didn't think I would be able to climb back up the rocks to the jeep. So stuck with the bottled water method. Now I'm extremely happy with that decision. You see, whilst gazing, by the light of the



Musandam Peninsula - June 12, 1992



Musandam Peninsula - June 12, 1992



Musandam Peninsula - June 12, 1992

full moon, I heard a lot of splashing in the sea and tried to use the torch to see what was happening, with little success. Then, I noticed movement close to where I was going to wash. When I used the torch again, to get a better look, I saw a shark, about the size of the jeep, (you remember the one I can stretch out in!), as it slowly swam past. As it turned out, they were feeding. Just think, no one would have known what happened to the photographer.

13th June 1992, Al-Khasab

9:07am, 1482km recorded. Woke at 4:10am this morning and completed a dawn shot. Then, took a high view of Khasab, from the side of a mountain towards the sea. Shot a fort, road ways and town views. Now going to shoot the hospital, harbour, hotel, etc.

12:00pm, 1500km recorded. Tried bathing in the sea whilst keeping an eye on a baby shark, who wanted to play. I was more concerned as to where mama might be. Of course the soap doesn't

work in salt water. Found a beach / harbour that was a hive of activity, with small high powered boats and Iranian money flying around. Electrical goods, non-alcoholic beer, and cigarettes wrapped in black plastic bags, plus stories of the power boats being stopped and searched by Iranian gun boats. I was told that this was a smuggling operation and the goods are from the UAE. But, this is only hearsay. This is really an exciting place. I'm about to leave Khasab for the mountainous journey back to Muscat. Approximately, 110km and 5hrs drive back to the UAE.

6:53pm, 1606km recorded. At Musandam border of UAE / Oman. Will try to make it back home tonight. 6hrs to Muscat.

14th June 1992, Muscat

2:00am 2035km recorded. Now back home. That trip I shot 97, C41, and 534, E6 images. Next trip out I'll go to a Wadi for two days. Photographic stock is now over: 500 C41, 3,000 E6.



Musandam Peninsula - June 13, 1992

15th June 1992, Muscat

Last night, after getting home from the office, I couldn't sleep, so went back out to shoot a couple of Beautifications near Seeb International Airport. Got back home at 1am.

20th June 1992, Quriyat, Muscat

Expecting a non-taxing trip, I headed off at ease just after 12 noon on the 16th June. I reached Quriyat, no problem. Found a Wadi, no problem. Drove slowly over rocks that made the jeep moan and groan, no problem. Any time I thought the going was getting too rough, I got out and checked on foot first, no problem. Every time I came to a point where I would have to cross over the meandering stream, left by what once was, and will be again, as soon as it rains, a valley of life and death, I got out and checked on foot first, approximately fourteen times, no problem. Didn't check the 'fifteenth time...'

At 12:40am, 17th June, I was in a Wadi in Quriyat. The jeep was stuck badly, and the battery was flat, again. This is where I find out I'm not indestructible. The closest reference point I have is, 'somewhere near Quriyat'. I heard of a wadi containing a waterfall near here, and that was the next shot on my list.

It's only now, that it's all over, that I feel I can record the events of the 16th and 17th June.

At around 5:20pm, on the 16th June 1992, I didn't check the 'fifteenth time...' Here was a crossing that didn't need checking. I can see where the tracks go in and come out. It's getting late, and just on the other side of this crossing, is where I will sleep tonight, and hope it doesn't rain. But then, rainy season is gone. So through I go. Without checking first. I was still tired, so had been playing it safe all day long. Now, if there is a large rock around which water flows, chances are, the flow of water will have removed most of the earth close to it, before it finds a new direction to flow. Of course, this makes sense now. I drove the jeep straight into a hole. Being quick-off-the-mark, I realised what was happening, and started to drive out of it. The jeep felt like it was going to make it, then one of the wheels lost grip and the other three won't move. The front wheels are out of the hole, with only the rear right wheel still on the edge of it. But the front left wheel was spinning free. And then, water started to come through the doors. The equipment is in cases, (some of them water proof), but the water is beginning to reach them. Mindful only of the cameras and film, I get out of the jeep, and then get the equipment to safety, then everything else. By this time the seats are totally submerged and FISH ARE SWIMMING IN THE JEEP. I'm not a happy man.

I stacked everything safely in between rocks. So even if it rains, they should stay where they are. Then I start to contemplate my dilemma. If I jacked up the rear right of the vehicle, and packed rocks under the wheel, plus built up the path for the wheel to run on; this should cause the front left to begin to grip. Especially if I pack the earth under it. I spent the next four hours trying the theory. But it did not work.

The jeep had sunk yet deeper. But by swimming under it, I was able to use the jack and pack sufficient rocks, under all wheels, to secure my release. I had a bad moment when the jeep slipped off the jack, whilst I was under water next to it. Anyway, I got in the driving seat and after a while managed to start it. But when I released the clutch, nothing happened. The clutch pad was sodden. When it finally bites, the engine stalled. Then the battery died. There was no way I was going to get out of this one without some major help. So I started to weigh up my options. My deep thought / daze was broken with the sound of an engine, and I realised there must be a track in use on the other side of the Wadi wall. So, I decided to climb, taking a bottle of water, the torch and a towel. I sweat at night too. Also, I could use the towel as a flag to get attention. It was now about 11:30pm.

When I got to the top, I used the torch trying to find the track. I saw nothing but hill peaks. There was no way a vehicle could drive up there. And then, I heard the sound again. So I listened carefully and realised, the sound was still coming from above. High above. It was coming from aircrafts. It was now past midnight, 17th June 1992. I had drunk most of the water and headed back down.

About 1:00am, having made good progress down to the Wadi floor, I was trying to sleep, on a make shift bed of rocks. Content to see what tomorrow would bring. Then, it suddenly dawned on me. It's going to get hotter in the morning, and there's no guarantee that someone may happen to pass, and I only had two and a half bottles of drinking water left. I had to get help, and I had to leave immediately! With the temperature around 30°C, I started walking. Remembering my way out was easy. There was only one possible direction. And I had the torch to light my way. At dawn, I finally reach the tarmac road and a bus shelter. Someone was sure to pass this way. Having fallen over half asleep, plus being passed on the graded road in the early hours, by a vehicle that was never going to stop, and may not have even seen me, then almost running out of water, and my boots in shreds; I was sort of safe.

Around 6:00am I got a lift in the back of an open-back van, which transported workers. Then, on a bus, on the same mission.

By 7:30am I was in Quriyat. Gasping for water, something to eat and a cigarette. Mine were still floating in the jeep. The water I got, but all the shops were closed. There was no AC. I had arrived during a power blackout. I headed to the police station for help. After listening to my story, they tell me, 'you should not be travelling alone', and, there is nothing they can do. I should try the local municipality. So they gave me a lift, and left me there. The municipality listen to my story, they tell me 'you should not be travelling alone', and, there is nothing they can do. I should try the road-works company up the road. So they gave me a lift, and left me there. The local road-works company send an operator with his path clearing machine, weighing several tons. After some time, we almost got close. But there was this one section of soft sand, and if we did not turn back, we would have definitely got stuck. As we got back to the dirt track, the manager turned up. We tried to use his jeep to go, but his balloon tyres were not well suited to the terrain. And he turned back. That's when I spotted them. Europeans, brave / mad. Just like me. They had the larger version to my jeep, which is still being repaired back in Muscat. They were out touring the interior, looking for adventure. Just like me. Now, I just had to put it to them right, to get them to go. It worked.

I entertained my four new friends (a KLM captain 1st and 2nd officer and Cabin Service Director), as I guided them where no sane person would go. And kept them going with "*it's just around the next corner*". Just as that began to wear thin, there it was, and they couldn't believe it. They were really enjoying themselves. After they took all the photographs necessary, to show what could be achieved by an Englander, a jeep, and a relatively small amount of water, we used my newly acquired knowledge and got across the fifteenth stream. We tied a towrope between the jeeps, and with the CSD driving the lead vehicle, and the four of us men, pushing my jeep from behind, we finally got it out and started. I'm a happy man!

With our mission accomplished we headed off, stopping to swim in one of the deeper parts of the stream. And I really enjoyed myself. I guided them, whilst my wet seat kept me awake, on a fairly easy journey back to Quriyat. Then stuffed them with swhamers (kebab lambs meat in japatta bread), and lots of cold juice, at a local restaurant / cafe. After a relaxing walk along Quriyat's beach, we headed off in convoy, back to Muscat, where we parted company at the Intercontinental Hotel. With a promise that, I would return later to buy them drinks. And take them sightseeing around Muscat (18th June).

Now I am beginning to see real danger in the project I have undertaken. And my boots need repairing. Think I had better play it safe for a while, until I get my confidence back.

24th June 1992, Bahla

3:45pm, 430km. Just got back from Bahla, where I shot pottery factories. On Saturday 27th, some local village potters will be placing pots in their mud / clay kiln. Firing on Sunday, and opening it on Monday. Think I'll return to shoot that. Tried to get shots of government pottery works, but I'll need permission, from the Crafts section of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, in Muscat, near Al-Khuwair. After something to eat, I'll go find any local museums to see what's on show, and available for shooting. The weather is very overcast, making it bad for landscape photography. Why waste film? I'll shoot the local pottery works and Bahla Fort when I revisit on Saturday 27th, if the weather is better.





Bahla - June 24, 1992



Bahla - June 24, 1992





27th June 1992, Bahla

5:00am, 0km. About to make the second of three 430km round trips to Bahla, to shoot pottery works. Must leave Bahla by 10:30am. Then stop at BidBid, for information pertaining to handcrafts.

4:15pm. Back at the lab and I've just received a call from an advertising company. They want to know if they can see my shots of GTO Tower in Ruwi, Muscat. Made an appointment for them to view shots at 10:30am, 28th June. So now I'd better go take some.

28th June 1992, Muscat

At 7:00am went to GTO Tower for morning shoot. Then to lab for 8:05am to get film processed. Then to architects offices for 9:30am meeting. Then back to the lab, for my 10:30am appointment with the advertising agency. And they love the shots. I made a great sale for the sole usage of a few of them. Spent the rest of the day sourcing a new flash unit, and researching equipment to create a slide show, for PhotoCentre's forth coming photographic library exhibition.

29th June 1992, BidBid

2:00pm, 208km. Just returned from Muscat Sea Museum, on the way back from Bahla, via BidBid where I got some handcraft shots of date palm leaf weaving.



July 1992

4th July 1992, Bahla, Samail

The 1st of July was the Arabic New Year.

7:40am and I'm about to leave for the government run pottery factory in Bahla. I will call in at BidBid again on my way back. Whilst exploring the area of Samail, I came across, and took some test shots of a falaj system and wadi.

5th - 22nd July 1992, Muscat

I have been shooting Beautifications, Hospitals, and getting a road permit to travel to Jabal Akhdar. Quoting, and shooting advertising and commercial assignments, and creating metadata for photographs, etc.



23rd July 1992, Jabal Akhdar

Left the capital for Jabal Akhdar at 8:30am, with Mr Al-Riyami, Sahlim, Kahlim and Rashid, whom are my guides to this mountain top community. With the temperature increasing to over 40°C on a daily basis in Muscat, the 29°C temperature here at 2000mtrs above sea level, 185km from the capital, is more than welcoming. As are the people who live here. Made more so by the fact that my guides are all part of one of the tribes here. But the going has been slow. We spent most of our



Beautification, Muscat - July, 1992



Muttrah Corniche - July, 1992



Beautification, Mutrah - July, 1992



time observing customary visits, as we made our way through the town. After some time, I began to worry that I was not going to get any shots before sundown. Thus, when we visited, what I thought was one of the last homes for the day, and they brought out food, which no one seemed to be eating, I decided to take action. My theory was, if I eat all the food we'll be free to move on to the business of photography. I was unaware that the food had only appeared, because they'd now had time to prepare it. And so had all the other homes. Now that I'd eaten so heartily at one, all other families would be offended, if I didn't eat with them. By now the word had gone round that, the foreigner had a healthy appetite. So extra food was rationed. This is how I came to suffer the indignity of having to refuse everything at the last home. There was no space left in my stomach. Now I know why Mr Al-Riyami and the others found my insatiable appetite amusing. After a while, we headed off to take a few shots of local farmed lands. But with all the eating, and visiting that had gone on, it was now too dark to shoot anything. So I followed my





Jabal Akhdar - July 24, 1992



Jabal Akhdar - July 24, 1992

hosts as they headed off for prayer, and was allowed to observe whilst they answered the call. I have never felt so at ease with a religion, as I do with the Muslim faith. Somehow, somewhere deep down inside it touches, calms and fills me, which is what I think all religions should do. Don't ask me to explain more than this. Maybe it's the surroundings. Or maybe the uninhibited welcome, I've been shown.

24th July 1992, Jabal Akhdar

This morning I rise determined to get some shots in the bag. I can't go back to Muscat without any photographs! We went to eight homes for meals last night. I feel as if I could use my stomach as a platform to load the camera. When I get back to Muscat all hell's going to break loose. I was invited to breakfast with a family and the menu was oats with ghee. I took a finger-full (if you know what I mean) of the oats, and dipped it in ghee, and put it in my mouth. Well, it slipped down my throat without touching the sides. As if it had a life of its own. This is the second time I'm refusing food. Sorry if anyone's offended, but I'm not eating anymore of that.

Finally, my hosts take pity on my plight, and I'm given the grand tour of the surrounding farmlands, and wadi. I've exposed 8 rolls 35mm and 1 roll 120mm E6, plus 11 rolls 120mm C41. Then, would you believe it. They've killed a goat. And there is a big meal planned for later. Now I'm in trouble.

Later at the meal, two large platters of rice supporting a quarter of a goat each, are served up. The younger men - including me - are to eat from one, and the elders, from the other. So, there I was enjoying a little broth, and picking at the rice, when, the elder host eating at the other end of the room, sees that I'm not tucking into the meat. Well, as the meat was boiled, it still has a lot of fat on. I don't fancy it. "Eat", he says, and now I'm the centre of attention. "I like the rice", I reply. And with that, he wrenches off a chunk of goat from their

platter, and with fat, still dripping between his fingers, he hurls it through the air. Every eye watches it, as it makes a perfect arc across the room, and lands on the rice, directly in front of me. Now no one is eating. All eyes are transfixed on me. So I tear off a piece, place it in my mouth. As I go to bite it, it slides pass my throat, as if it knew where to go. This was enough to please my host, and I'm left alone for the rest of the meal. The things I do for the art.

In the evening we descend the mountain, on our way back to Muscat, stopping only briefly, to greet more friends and family members, ascending the mountain. We keep a check on the inboard thermometer as the temperature raised with each 100 metres, until we're back at sea level. It's in the forties again. It was a good trip. I'll need to revisit this Jabal. But with photography taking priority.



1st August 1992, Sumail

7:00am. Heading to Sumail. The skies have been increasingly overcast since June. I have shot all the beautifications in the Muscat area, and it's not worth using colour film to shoot landscapes with such flat lighting. So, on dull days, I'll shoot Black and White film, and create an album. Thus, allowing me to continue the project.

4th August 1992, Nakhal, Rustaq

6:30am. In jeep about to leave for Nakhal, then off to Rustaq.



7th August 1992, Wadi Bani Kharoos

Spent this morning shooting at Wadi Bani Kharoos. I think it must be time to rest up again as everything is beginning to look the same.

20th August 1992, Nizwa

4:00pm. In Nizwa on an assignment that will consume my weekend, (in Oman the weekend is Thursday and Friday). Stayed at the home of the project architect of Nizwa Souq, who lives locally and had a beautiful rustic home, in a village near the wadi.

21st August 1992, Nizwa

The project architect and I were on site shooting, all day from 5:00am. Without a break. Then I drove home at night. I don't like driving through the interior at night. I find it extremely exhausting. Trying to stay focused on the road. With fast oncoming traffic, blinding vehicle lights, and no road lighting.



22nd - 25th August 1992

I've been preparing for a trip that I've been looking forward to, with some excitement. But, as it's so far away, I will be gone for a while. So, I'll be taking my family with me.

26th August 1992, Salalah

5:00am, 0km. We're in the jeep, my wife (Elizabeth) and my four year old son (Adrian). Now leaving for Salalah.

5:00pm, 1034km. Arrived in Salalah, and met with the manager of Hamden Plaza Hotel, to begin arrangements for an assignment. A local contact had gone out of his way to rent an apartment for us. However, it was not adequate. I need someone to clean in my absence, not to have to do it myself.

Salalah, the second capital of the Sultanate of Oman, is located in the south of the country. This area is often referred to as, 'Dhofar'. It's green, with an East African feel. This time of year is the rainy season here. It's chilly and covered in a constant mist that, I'm told, will clear by September.



Bahla - August, 1992



Al-Mazarah - August, 1992



Al-Mazarah, Wadi Daiqah - August, 1992



Nizwa Souq - August 21, 1992



Nizwa Souq - August 21, 1992



This period is locally referred to as the `Khareef'. And I have an aversion to it. Too much like a European winter for me. But I need to be here to record the change, and photograph south Oman in its most lush state.

27th August 1992, Salalah

9:00am. The first order of today is to check into one of the two hotels we have selected. After much discussion, we decided to stay at Haffa House. Mainly because, Hamden Plaza has very dangerous windows at floor level, which my son could easily open and fall through. I understand they intend to rectify the matter.

28th August 1992, Salalah

With the fiasco of moving into suitable accommodation yesterday complete, I headed off at 9:30am this morning to begin shooting. It's still covered in mist here, but with improved visibility. I shot what I could, and then spent the remainder of the day scouting, and shooting the surrounding areas until 5:00pm.

29th August 1992, Salalah

Spent most of this morning looking for a good road map of the Salalah area, and produced a schedule of things to do. I'm not sure just how much I can get done. There are only so many shots I can take in this mist. Back in Muscat I'd gone through much discussion, planning, and placing phone calls to Salalah, to check the weather. So I would arrive just as the mist was lifting, which, I'm told, produces magnificent images. At 4:00pm I went to Salalah Enterprizes, to meet the manager regarding photographing the factory, and a few location shots of their work in situate. Yes, another assignment. This time for a publishing company. Drove around Salalah to choose my locations, and timings for Salalah Enterprises shoot. Then went to photograph the Ministry of Labour and Commerce Building. Yes, another assignment. Back at Haffa House at 9:00pm.

30th August 1992, Salalah

I don't have enough time to explore Salalah at leisure. I've been trying to find someone to guide or inform me as to the best places to visit. We went to the British Council, and met the Director, John. Made a date to dine later this week with his family; wife Joe, daughter Polly. Then off to shoot Salalah Enterprises factory.

2:30pm. Returned to Haffa House for lunch, and await a call from the Ministry of Heritage, for authorization to shoot within their museum at 10:00am tomorrow.



31st August 1992, Salalah

Completed shots of railings at roundabout, and at Salalah Heritage Museum, for publishers in Muscat. 3 rolls 35mm E6. In London I work as an Architectural Photographer, and have always thought that

any work of a serious nature had to be done on nothing smaller than 5"x 4" film. However, due to small budgets, and low expectations, at least 30% of the commissioned assignments, I have carried out in Oman; have been on 35mm, and 120mm film. Unusual for me.

Salalah - August 28, 1992



September 1992



1st September 1992, Dhofar

Today is my Elizabeth's birthday. So, as to amuse her, and continue working, we all jumped in the jeep, and decided to head off in search of sunshine, visiting; Mirbat, Taqah, and Jabal Samha. Then, Mughsayl with its sea blow holes, plus Jabal Qamar. We promised ourselves to return to Jabal Qamar and follow the road, getting as close as we can to Oman's border with Yemen.





Mughsayl - September 1, 1992



Bin Ali tomb and cemetery, Mirbat - September 1, 1992

2nd September 1992, Salalah

8:00am. Went to Hamden Plaza, still trying to get the shoot of the hotel done, which is providing its share of problems, spent most of today trying to sort them out. I've been unsuccessfully attempting to contact a man called Omar, to guide me in Dhofar.

4th September 1992, Dhofar

Met with Omar at 2:30pm. Felt bad interrupting his weekend, but I'm running out of time; I must be in Muscat on 9th September. Omar and I head to Wadi Darbat. But wouldn't you know it. It's too wet. If we, I'm informed, were to drive down into the Wadi, the jeep would most certainly get damaged. And we wouldn't be able to drive back out. No longer the hero, I think it's best we don't try. So, we head off to Taqah, to meet a friend of Omar. Maybe we can do something about the last shot I have to do for the Publishers. A woman making incense burning pots. Considering that Omani women don't like to have their photographs taken, at the best of times, getting someone to pose for me, in her own home, is a formidable challenge. This took some time. But I got it.



5th September 1992, Dhofar

8:30am. The whole family's out today. Left to shoot at Ain Jarziz. At 12:30pm returned to hotel, to await a phone call from Omar, as to when we will be going out again. Then we headed off to see if we could find the remains of the Queen of Sheba's Palace. I'm told it's near Taqah. Ended up facing a locked compound. So we went to visit Ayn Razat, a botanical garden, where the Sultan Qaboos rose is grown.

6th September 1992, Dhofar

7:30am. Omar and I leave to shoot any Frankincense trees that may be on the road to Hijayf, then visit An Nabi Ayub (Job's Tomb).
At An Nabi Ayub, I wanted to get a shot from the minaret of the mosque overlooking Job's tomb. So we made contact with the Imam. He informed me that, as I'm not a Muslim, he can't allow me access. So, with Omar translating for me, I asked him. '*Job is sacred to all religions, yes?*' "*Na'am*" he replies. '*And the mosque is a house of God, yes?*' He looks at me puzzled for a second and then says, I can go up. But I must remove my shoes and clean my feet first. I

thank him, and he leaves us to it. Omar has no desire to go up. So I do so, on my own. It's the Khareef. Everything is wet. And every step I take, the cold wet gooey moss covering the steps, squishes between my toes. It's not very pleasant. I have to hold onto the minaret wall to stop myself slipping. But finally I get the shot.

Given that there's only 22 hours before we must leave for Muscat, I've overcome my aversion to the damp gloomy weather, and whilst trying to keep the camera gear dry. I just keep going. Somehow, I have the feeling this will be my only experience in Dhofar during the Khareef. So I'd better make the most of it.

18th September 1992, Muscat

Once I'm back in Muscat, I seem to get held down with quoting and shooting assignments. And today is no exception. Although I need to take a day off, which I explained to the Ministry, my client. Oh well, looks like I'm off to Nizwa on another shoot at the souq. Better get back to Salalah soon, as the mist must have lifted by now. Marking the end of the monsoon season.

22nd September 1992, Salalah

Left Muscat at 5:30am, now back in Haffa House. Reached Salalah at 5:30pm. On route into Salalah, I stopped to take a few landscape shots, plus camels and cows feeding. At dusk, went to shoot a coconut tree using flash, with the sun setting behind it. These days I get specific requests for stock shots. Returned to Haffa House for 8:00pm.

When we drove across the border into Salalah today, the difference in the climatic conditions was remarkable. Gone was the heavy mist that had shrouded everything. Now you can see for miles. The Jabals are completely covered in green, and the temperature is around 27°C. This is almost reminiscent of the West Indies. I think I'm going to have fun this time.

30th September 1992, Salalah, Muscat

Over the last week, I've been prolifically shooting. Unconcerned with the amount of film being used, or when I should return to Muscat. It took a request for information from Muscat, to awaken me from my vision of Dhofar. Today I'll return to Muscat with bags full of film for processing.



Woman potter producing frankincense burners, Taqah, Dhofar - September 4, 1992



Dhofar - September 5, 1992



An Nabi Ayub / Job's Tomb, Dhofar - September 6, 1992



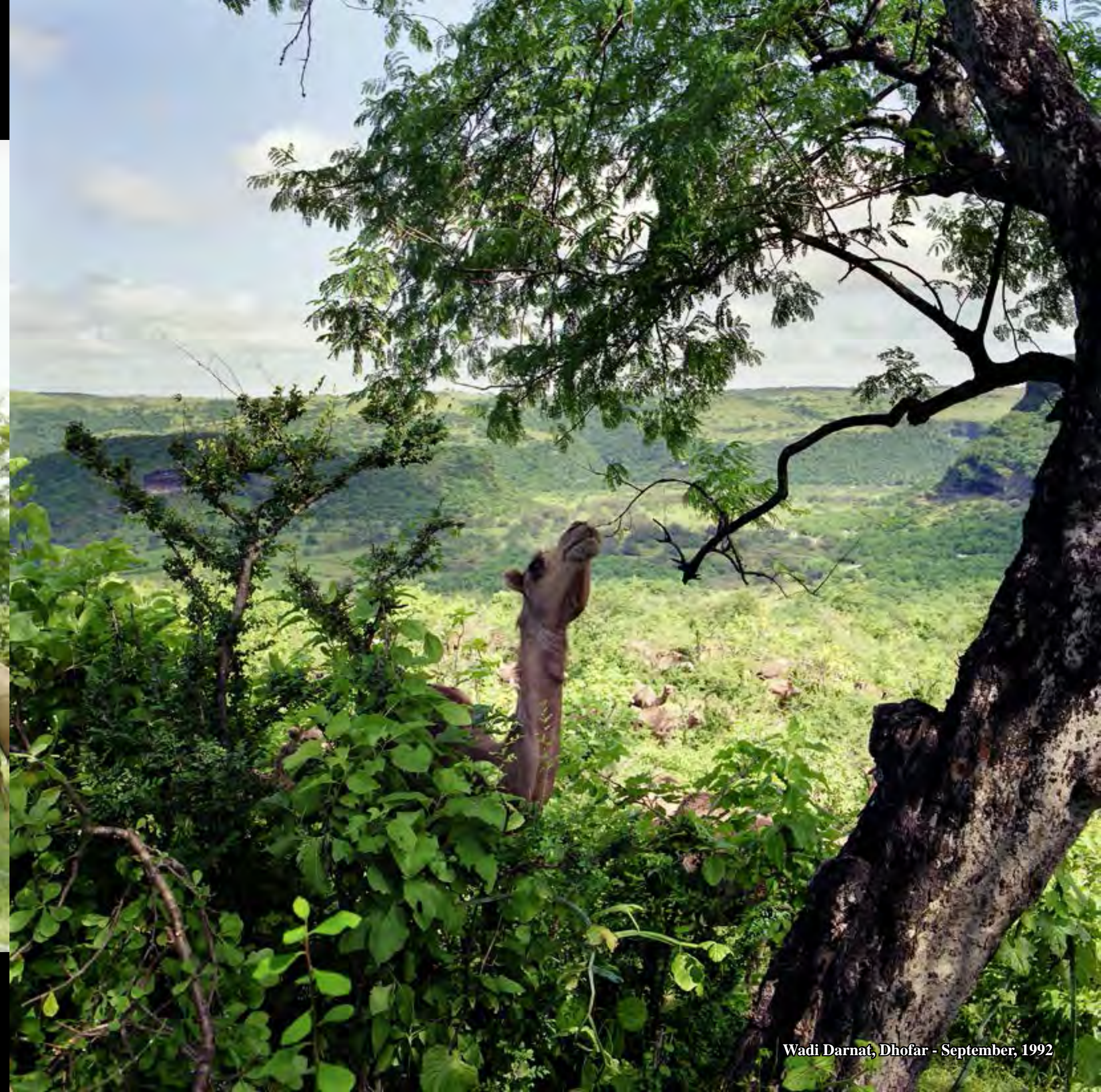
Wadi Darbat, Dhofar - September, 1992



Mosque, Salah - September, 1992



Dhofar - September, 1992



Wadi Darnat, Dhofar - September, 1992



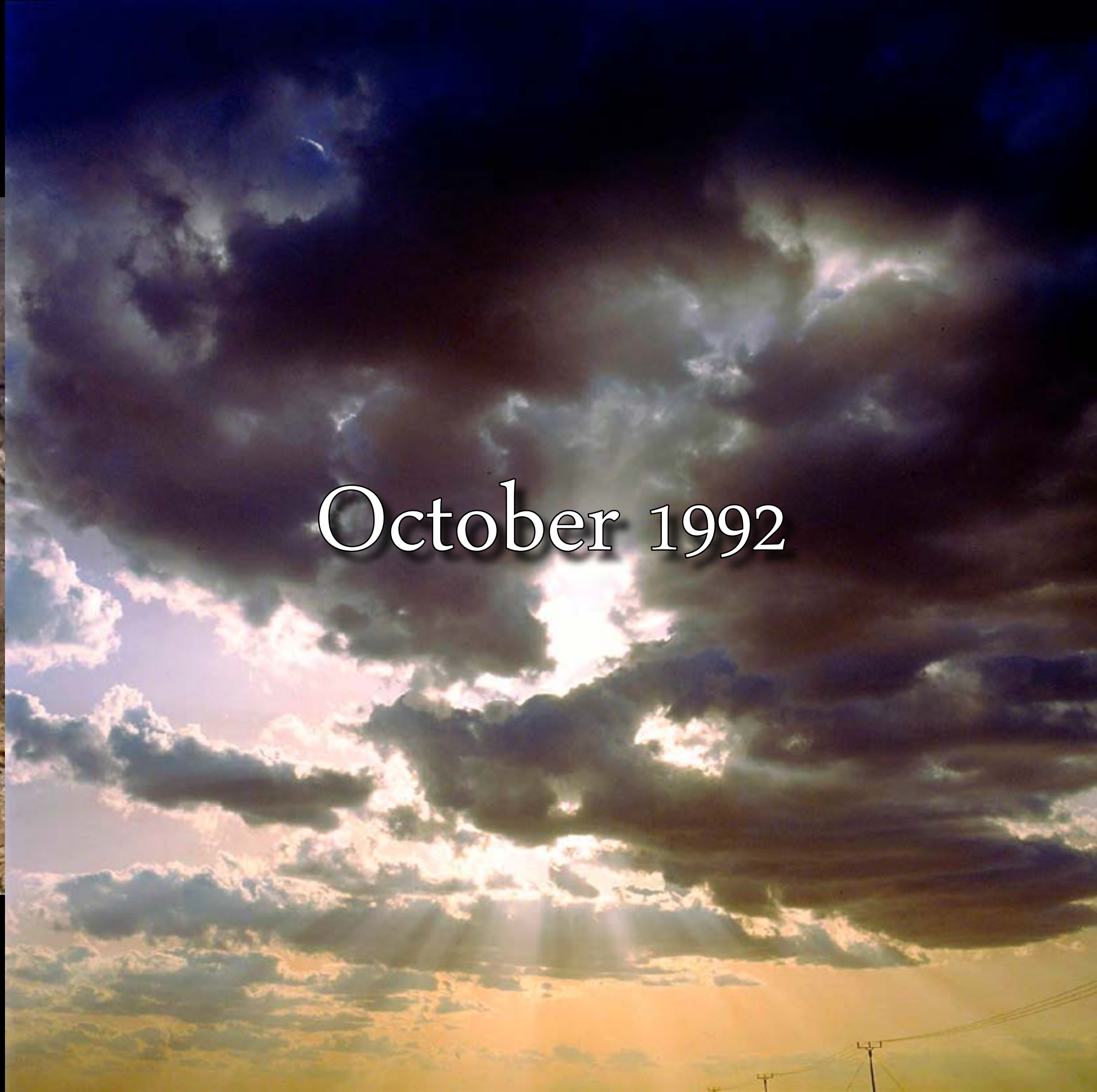
Salalah - September, 1992



Salalah - September, 1992



Road to border with Yemen, Jabal Al-Qamar - September, 1992



October 1992



October 1992

Life here in Oman is quite different. We often say that, 'family is important', and a whole load of other well meaning phrases. But no one ever means them. And this is proven by ones actions. In Oman they live it. And even more so in the interior. God, family, and caring for others, seems to come naturally. I begin to treat my family to many of the trips I make. There are however sacrifices, and compromises that have to be made. Such as, completing trips in a day, and no sleeping in the jeep. This basically means having to prepare a better diet, and more water / drinks, taking fewer risks, leaving earlier and getting home later. All-in-all the trips are harder. But these are the choices one makes between self gratification and sharing. Achieving the right balance is the hard bit. The task now is, to produce specific images I would like to include in the forthcoming photographic exhibition, of the work done so far. This is now due to coincide with National Day, in November. The weather has been improving and I am pursuing butterflies. There's quite a few here. But it's no fun running around in this heat.

Once again, I'm back in the capital engaged with quoting and shooting assignments. I have spent the last few weeks at base, shooting for the Ministry of Interior, plus assignments for Muscat Municipality, and the Royal Oman

Police. The assignment for the Ministry of Interior was, to produce two albums, to be presented to a Minister, at the official opening of Nizwa Souq. This entailed revisiting the souq yet again, with a lot of hill climbing, and long hours. Serves me right for suggesting it. The assignment for Muscat Municipality was, to photograph all the new Beautification Monuments as far afield as Sohar, where the official celebrations, for Oman's National Day, will be located this year. This of course meant working through every day-off I have. But came with a print order, worth enough to repay the investment in the project so far. I comply.

Well, if I thought I was busy before, the run up to National Day has just about finished me off. What are the commercial photographers here doing? I love it, and know that the commercial assignments will tail-off by the 20th, leaving me free to spend a few days making leisurely trips with the family, and socialize.





Wadi, Quriyat - October, 1992



Falaj System - October, 1992



Ministry Building - October, 1992



Ministry Building - October, 1992



Sohar Fort - October, 1992



Sohar Fort - October, 1992



Sohar Beach Hotel - October, 1992



Sohar Beach Hotel - October, 1992



Mosque, Sohar - October, 1992



Roundabout Beautification - October, 1992



Sultan Qaboos Sport Stadium, Muscat - October, 1992



Ministry Building - October, 1992



Al-Bustan Palace Hotel, Muscat - October, 1992



Alam Palace, Muscat - October, 1992



Nizwa Souq - October, 1992



Nizwa Souq - October, 1992



November 1992

18th November (National Day) 1992, Al-Mintrib

Today we are all in the jeep; we're heading to Al-Mintrib to see their celebrations for National Day. By going to the interior, we should be able to gain a greater experience, a more rural celebration. Without the city pomp-and-ceremony. I believe this will produce better

needed to get my wife, I find her with a look of 'help, I don't know what I'm eating', on her face. And for the first time ever in her life, she is only too happy to pretend that, she has no choice and has to leave, as she is a dutiful wife. Yeah right. I have to go to the desert to continue taking photos, but should have left her there, until she promised to actually be dutiful. Anyway, we find the jeep and head off to take a few shots, at an abandoned mud-brick villa and then head into Wahaybah Sands.

It feels like a holiday with the family at the moment. We make a number of trips into the interior, visiting Wadi Makhhl, Bahla, and a few beaches close to home. Of course, I spend a lot of time at the exhibition, but as I have organized someone to cover for me, I am more-or-less free to enjoy myself.

The exhibition, 'Beautiful Oman', was opened by His Highness Sayyid Barghash bin Sa'id al Sa'id, Deputy Governor of Muscat, on 14th November, at the Al-Harthy Complex, and ran for three weeks. It was very well attended. Even more requests to join me on trips are now pouring in. But my time here is almost at an end.



images for stock. When we get there we are not disappointed, and are welcomed by the locals. In fact, whilst I was off taking photographs, my wife, Elizabeth, was looked after by some of the local women, along with our now five year-old, Adrian. I spent my time trying to get natural images of faces, and a general record of what was going on. By the time I finished, I had to track down Elizabeth and Adrian, who had been invited by the women to the fort, and were sitting down for a mid-morning meal. After convincing the guard at the gate that I



National Day celebrations Al-Mintrib - November 18, 1992



National Day celebrations Al-Mintrib - November 18, 1992



National Day celebrations Al-Mintrib - November 18, 1992



National Day celebrations Al-Mintrib - November 18, 1992



National Day celebrations Al-Mintrib - November 18, 1992



National Day celebrations Al-Mintrib - November 18, 1992



National Day celebrations Al-Mintrib - November 18, 1992



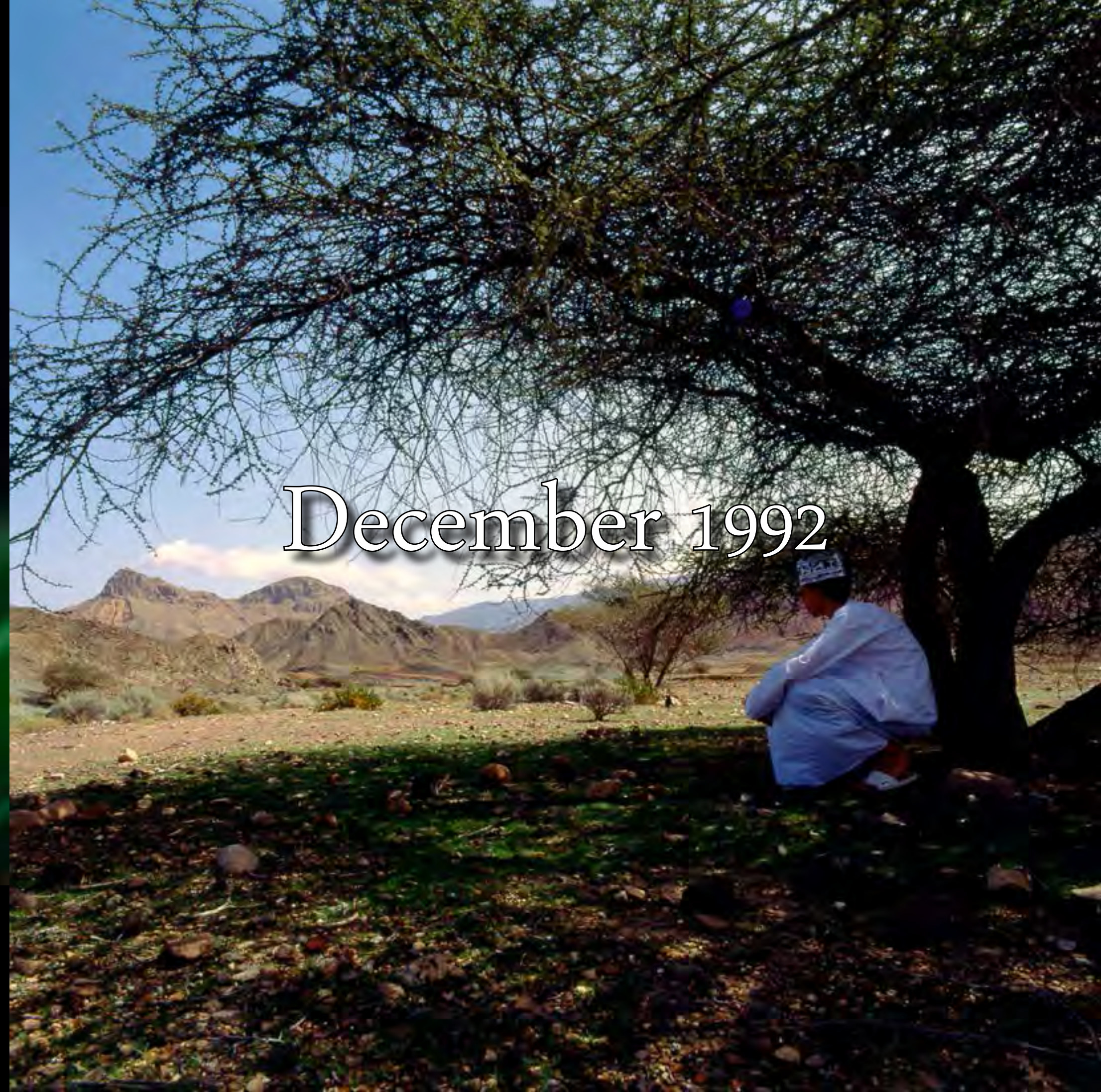
Route to Wadi Bani Khalid - November, 1992



Wadi Makhl - November, 1992



Dates - November, 1992



December 1992

7th December 1992, Jabal Shams

511km round trip to the 3000 metre (plus) high Jabal Shams. Otherwise known as, the Grand Canyon of Oman. I head off alone at dawn. This is one of the places I never got around to. The temperature drops quickly as you ascend, and I climb and climb. Taking great care not to stall the engine, as the power assisted brakes would fail. The graded road trails up the side of the mountain and is covered by a thick layer of gravel and dust. Given just how narrow it gets in places, you need to stay very alert. Finally, I reach the top. What a view. It is peaceful here, and I try not to spend too long, looking down through the camera at a small settlement in the valley below, as I feel a touch of vertigo coming on. The air is clear and I can see for what must be a hundred miles. Just wish I had more time here, but I've got to get back to Muscat tonight, for another trip tomorrow. Jabal Shams is not that far from Muscat, and the trip can be done in a day. But try not to drive down it at night, if you are in a hurry, as I was.

8th December 1992, Rustaq

Today I am off to visit the Date factory in Rustaq. This is one of the things I have wanted to shoot for some time, but had to wait for permission. Now, it hardly seems worth it. At this factory, they pack dates for national and international sales. I am told the UK buys a large proportion of the dates grown in Oman, for use in sauces. I like the Dates they split, and replace the seed with almonds.

I have been making a couple of last minute trips to the interior, and have finally got a few shots, of a deserted villa at Al-Wafi that I have been after

for a long time. In the past, every time I set out to shoot it, the weather changed by the time I got there. I am still amazed at how high the mud-brick building is, and how cool the interior stays.

Had an offer to visit a Beekeeper from an Omani the other day. Here I am packing to leave Oman and still I am learning of new subject matter. You think someone might have mentioned this months ago. I had no idea anyone kept bees here. The hollowed out trunks of date palms are used as hives, as they are plentiful and stay moderately consistent in temperature.



Jabal Shams - December 7, 1992



Jabal Shams - December 7, 1992



Jabal Shams - December 7, 1992



Jabal Shams - December 7, 1992



Jabal Shams - December 7, 1992





Beekeeper, Rustaq - December, 1992



There are now over 8000 images on stock. And I think it's time to call it a day, and return to London, just before Christmas. Content in the knowledge that I have achieved, above and beyond, my original projected goals. I have had the experience of a lifetime, and my heart is extremely heavy when leaving. During my time here, I can truly say that I have gained great affection, for the beauty of this land and have never felt so welcomed, or at ease.

So ends 'A Photographer's Dream'.

Beekeeper, Rustaq - December, 1992



List of places visited, 1992:
this list is not exhaustive

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Al-Ashkara | BidBid | Quriyat |
| Al-Khasab | Darsayt | Qurum |
| Al-Khuwair | Hagaif (Dhofar) | Ras Al-Hadd |
| Al-Mazarah | Ibra | Ras Al-Rawis |
| Al-Mintrib | Jabal Akhdar | Ras Qurmaylah |
| Al-Qabil | Jabal Samhan (Dhofar) | Rusayl |
| Al-Sawadi | Jabal Sayq (Dhofar) | Ruwi |
| Al-Seeh (Qurayat) | Jabal Shams | Salalah |
| Al-Wafi | Mirbat (Dhofar) | Samail |
| Al-Wahaybah (Wahaybah Sands) | Mughsayl (Dhofar) | Sohar |
| An Nabi Ayub – Job's Tomb (Dhofar) | Musandam | Sur |
| As'Rustaq | Muscat City | Tanuf |
| As'Seeb | Muscat Municipality (all areas) | Taqah (Dhofar) |
| As'Suwayq | Mutrah | Wadi Al-Huqaeen (Rustaq) |
| Ayn Jarziz (Dhofar) | Nakhal | Wadi Bani Khalid |
| Ayn Razat Gardens (Dhofar) | Nizwa | Wadi Bani Kharoos |
| Bahla | Qabil | Wadi Darbat (Dhofar) |
| Barka | Qalhat | Wadi Tayin |
| | Qantab | Wutayyah |

Interim

Introduction

Returning to Oman in 1997, for what I thought would be, an opportunity to say farewell to a few friends, and Oman, I found myself making several trips, sharing Oman with a few selected friends and family members. Oman, for me, is one of those places that gets' under your skin. And, it has the same effect on everyone I know. I keep thinking '*this is my last trip*', but, in the 'Interim', there's always one more thing to do, one more place to visit.

One more sunrise to see.

1997





January 1997

Since leaving Oman, I don't think a week has gone by, when I have not spoken to someone about the country, and my experiences. And never forty-two hours, without wanting to return. 1997 and I'm back for a ten day visit, but this time, it's purely for pleasure. I've deliberately only brought a 35mm SLR with me, and intend to shop. I am surprised how many people I meet, whom I remember from so long ago. And even more surprised that, they remember me. I've got the loan of a convertible Ford Mustang, 5-point something litre. I enjoy the sound it makes, and spend as much time as possible, driving it with the top down. At this time of year, it's cool enough.



1998





May 1998

Fourteen months later, and I'm in Oman again. This time, my son Adrian, who is now nine, has joined me. We were kindly met at the airport and driven to the hotel, compliments of the embassy in London, who sorted out our visas.

Adrian and I are looking quite dapper in our designer waist-coats. After checking into the room, we headed off to the restaurant, which had a band playing. On reflection, the band must not have been doing so well, and may have expected to be replaced, because as soon as they finished playing, they approached us, and wanted to know if Adrian and I was the new band. Blasted waist-coats. Anyway, we see the funny side, and pack the waist-coats away, never to be worn again.

Once again, this is just a break away from the office for me, and a holiday for Adrian. A bit of a shopping trip for us both. Thus, we spend all our time in Muscat visiting friends. We accompany Mr Al-Rhyami on a visit to see his brothers. One of whom keeps racing camels. The camels are worth a bit, so are well groomed. Adrian, who is taken with them, spends too long in the sun feeding them, and we had to rush him inside to the shower, and then to rest. He began to suffer from mild sunstroke. Finally, he begins to listen to me, starts to drink more water, and wear a cap when in the sun. He is a good lad, but can be terribly headstrong. He's the sort that has to learn, instead of being taught. I wish he

would select safer subjects. I cannot stress the importance, of staying well topped-up on water. Most people, don't even notice they've stopped passing urine, as a result of dehydration, until it's too late.

Construction work on the Sultan Qaboos Mosque is in full swing. By Omani standards, it's enormous, expected to be impressive and the biggest in the country.

Our time here, as always, seems too short; gone in the blink of an eye. But we have had a fantastic time. Shared a number of experiences that bind us. As for my part, although I have spent over twenty days here recently, I have not had my fill. I'll have to find a way back.



October 1998

I find another excuse to visit Oman. Work in London is failing to interest me and the weather is so dull. Maybe I just needed to get away again. And with that, here I am, completing assignments for a number of architects in Oman. One of them being Huckle and Partners. A British group that has been here for around twenty five years.

Now that I have my cameras with me, and am actually working; the changes in the capital are becoming visible. Short-cuts between roads have become blocked, by buildings that seem to appear overnight. There is a significant increase in construction throughout the capital, and much discussion of things to come. Maybe I could organize it that, I could work here during the winters. But I would have to have a long term project, such as the creation of an on-line stock agency, which could provide an outlet for local photographers.



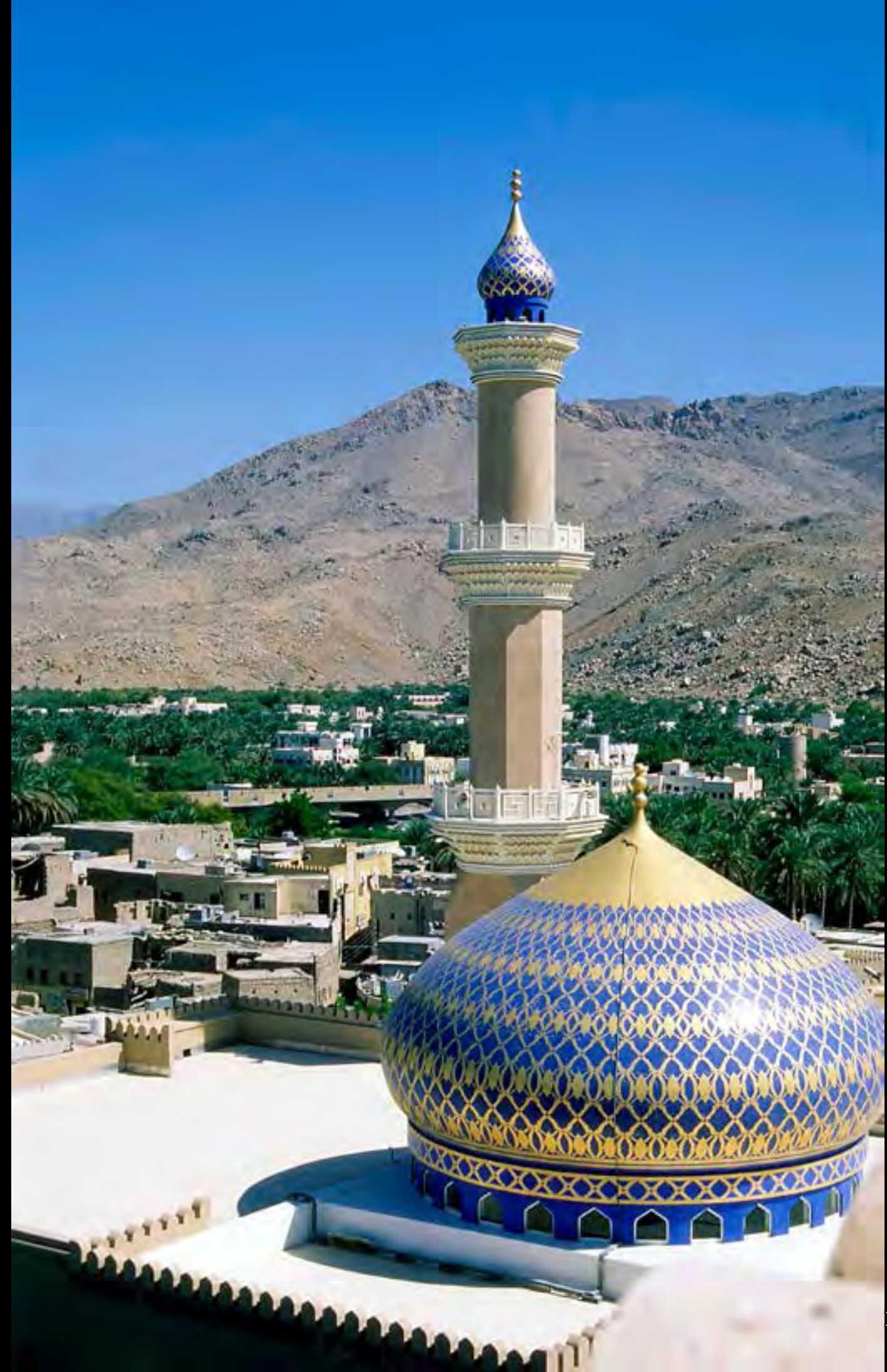
A friend of mine, (Kenny Lumsden), is also visiting for a couple of weeks. I get him to pose in a test shot, for a local publications company. They are trying to get a shot of a non-Arabic speaker, getting directions from an Omani. The idea being that, hand-gestures, can help people of differing languages, convey directions. So, whilst we were visiting Sultan Qaboos Sports Stadium, I asked a man to help us with the test shot. Occasionally, I find it useful to do a test shoot. Then, dissect it, in order to identify the elements required, to communicate the ‘thousand words’, a picture is hypothetically worth. This (the above) shot doesn’t work. The culture of the subjects

(models), are not diverse enough. The location is all wrong; it’s not sufficiently Arabic or typically Omani. A scene in the interior would be better. The models are not animated enough, or at least the camera angle is all wrong. Additionally, it’s not clear what their discussing; maybe a map would help.

Anyway, so there we were doing this shot, that is not working, and we attract a crowd of Asian workers. Once we’ve finished, the workers persist in knowing who Kenny is, they would not leave me alone, convinced that Kenny must be some sort of royalty. So, in an attempt to appease them with some information, I tell them Kenny is Jamaican, and they, mistakenly, fill in the rest. This is how Kenny became known as the, ‘Prince of Jamaica’.

In between jobs we find time to visit Al-Wahaybah, Nakhal, Nizwa, (I see the decorations, on the dome and minaret, of the Central Mosque in Nizwa, has been changed, and the exterior has recently been painted), Rustaq, (where we almost boil ourselves, in the hot mountain water, of the public baths. It’s suppose to be beneficial to health), Wadi Makhl, plus in and around Muscat. Kenny loves it here. He, like me, finds the people welcoming, respectful and helpful. Take for instance; we were heading to the interior and saw a man hitching. We decided to do the decent thing, as we are not in a hurry, and offer him a lift. We only have a rudimentary amount of each other’s language, but, still we manage to find out; he is a police officer, on his way home, he has a few days off. We take him right to his house. He then, insists that we join him for morning coffee and dates, and introduces us to his five sons. Kenny is fully enjoying himself. This is the sort of thing that, sometimes I take for granted. It takes someone else to point out, just how similar Omanis can be to rural Jamaicans. I really wish more of my friends and family would make the effort, to visit Oman. Especially when I was living here. I have yet to meet a single person who has not come to like Oman, given the opportunity to explore. You can’t get a real feel for a country, without going to its interior, meeting the people. I never understand people, that claim they have visited a country when, all they have done is get off a plane, check into an international hotel chain – that looks the same as any other, anywhere else in the world – and never leave the hotel grounds.

Kenny and I are staying with friends here in Oman. It’s like sharing a dormitory, filled with singing late into the night, and tired eyes when the house maid starts her chores in the mornings. But the month ends, the weather back home improves and I am missing the family. It is time to go home.



Nizwa - October, 1998



Official Residence, Muscat - October, 1998



Private Residence, Muscat - October, 1998



Private Residence, Muscat - October, 1998





April - June 1999

When I was last here, some five months ago, I was approached by individuals wishing to create a photographic business. As many had no real interest, lacked concept, and or, commitment, I declined their offers. Yet, there was one company with potential, so I am here, to assess their sincerity and aims.

Been here a few weeks now and there does not seem to be much going on. Spend most of my days preparing a business plan, and trying to communicate to my hosts that, I will not work for them, only in association. Furthermore, I have no desire to become a jobbing photographer. Unless it paid really well, and gave me enough time, to pursue the creation of an outlet, for Omani photographers, in the guise of an on-line stock agency. It seems all they want, is a route to quick profits, without an eye to the future. I am losing patience.

A couple of issues I have with professional photography in Oman are that; the company I was originally working with here, during 1991 - 1992, has stalled. Now, there is no real drive, to pursue the investment needed, to continue to grow the profession. This is compounded by the fact that, some larger companies, whom hold international franchises, employ Managing Directors, many of whom, have no true concept of the industry, no interest, vision, or desire to step-up. Such managers see their roll more as caretakers, saving the company money, basically accountants, as opposed to leaders, improving, or growing, and diversifying the

companies in their care. In truth, they are more interested in keeping their jobs as long as possible. For this who can blame them.

Secondly, others who are interested in photography are not prepared to become professional. In that they wish to earn money from photography, but are not ready, or able, to work at it full-time, as their main source of income. Maybe they lack the confidence to dedicate themselves. Thus, they tend to have full time jobs, and play at being photographers in their spare-time. This is a profession that requires full commitment. This means during start-up, at least, foregoing instant profit, enables longevity. There is a saying in Jamaica; 'If you wan good; you nose afee run', (if it's worthwhile, you must be prepared to make sacrifices). Photography is not an easy profession, no matter how glamorous it may appear. Yet, it can be profitable, and is satisfying, if you truly have it in your blood.

I have decided to return to London, pick up my equipment, and return under my own visa. I can no longer have my hands tied, and now I have offers of assignments I wish to undertake.



Hotel, Muscat - May, 1999



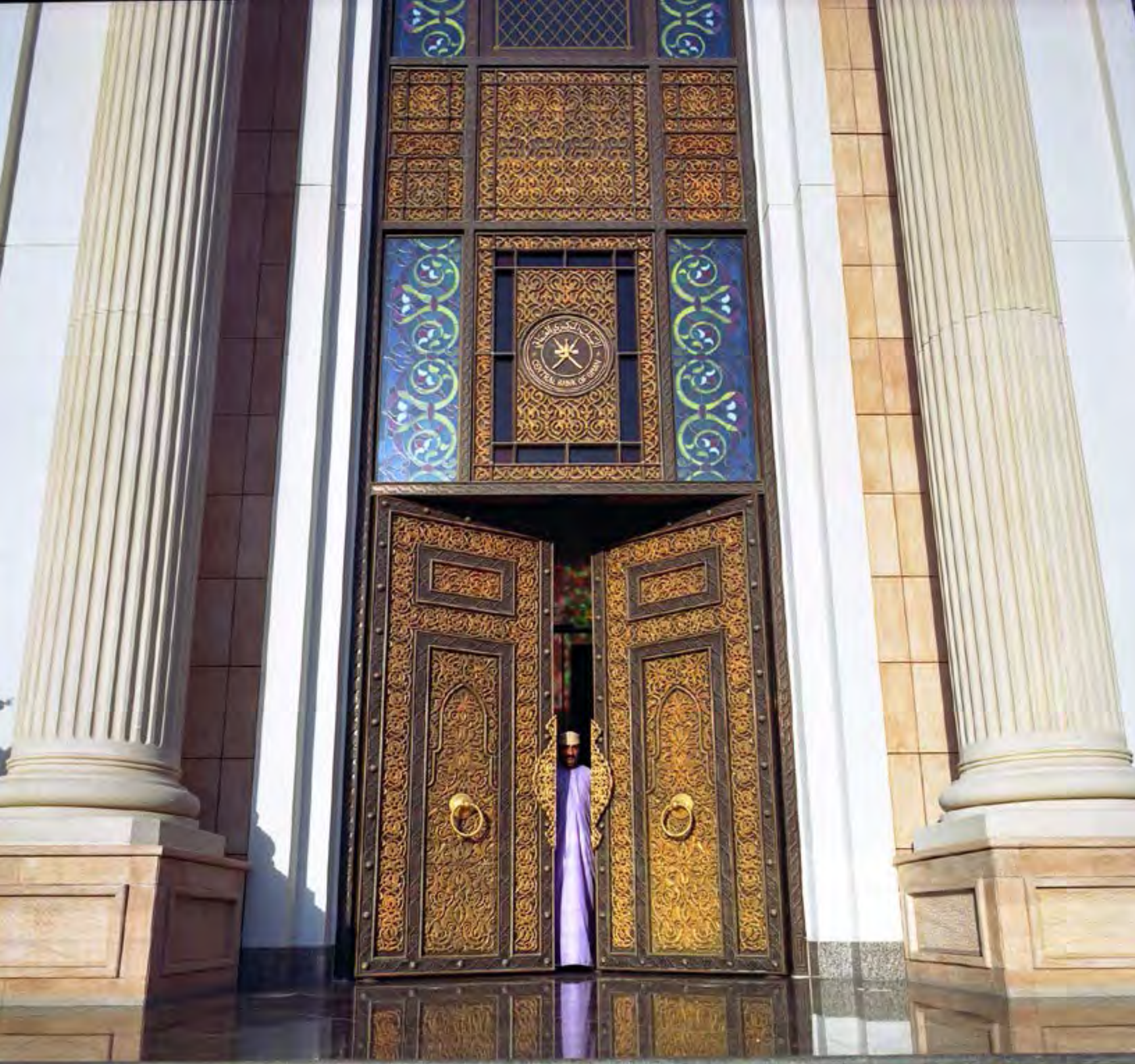
Ruwi, Muscat - June, 1999



Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque, Al-Khuwair - August 11, 1999



Central Bank of Oman, CBD Ruwi, Muscat - August, 1999



Central Bank of Oman, CBD Ruwi, Muscat - August, 1999



Central Bank of Oman, CBD Ruwi, Muscat - August, 1999



Central Bank of Oman, CBD Ruwi, Muscat - August, 1999

July - August 1999

Back in Oman and already finished a few projects. Now I have confirmation on an assignment, to photograph the CBO (Central Bank of Oman) in its entirety, for Ole Larsen of Cowi. This will take a couple of weeks, it's big. I understand it's up for an award.

Before beginning the shoot, I went to Dubai, to see if I could get the extra film stock I need. Whilst there, I met with some of the band members that were contracted to the English bar, at the Intercontinental Hotel in Muscat. They're coming back. Anyway, now that the assignment is a go, and I am back in Muscat, I will have to acquire the film from my suppliers in London.

The band is back at the Intercontinental, and I spend a few evenings in their company. They are from South Africa, and are a mixed group, with a female lead singer. I think they like me as I actually go to the bar to watch them, and know just about every song they play. Well, it's EWF (Earth Wind and Fire) and music from that era. And that's what I grew up on. They seemed a little down. They have been here a while and have spent all their time at the hotel. So, I offer to take them shopping in Ruwi, and they love it. On their day-off I hired a large jeep and we, all six of us piled in, and headed off to Al-Wahaybah and Wadi Bani Khalid / Wadi Makhl. Mossa, (Mosses) – the base player – a Muslim, insists on having a photo taken with five Arab day-trippers', we met at Wadi Makhl. Later, I take him to meet an elder I know, who is very knowledgeable and well-read. We spend an afternoon discussing religion and life in general, and Mossa gets some insights into Islam in an Arab society. We attend the Mosque for 'Maghrib' (evening prayer). Now they're all looking happier.

I have started a project to produce a 'Millennium Edition' of a corporate catalogue, for prestigious jewellers, in Muscat. Okay, so it isn't architectural, but is within my scope of abilities. A 'Concept-to-Print' job, I like those, and it pays well. The project entails a month of retouching, so I am heading back to London now that I have the product shots. I can complete it there, plus spend time with my family; I've been away for two months.

October 1999

I've been back in Muscat for about three weeks and have approved the printing of the catalogue. It looks great. The client is as happy as can be. Everyone is surprised at the

quality of work and printing that has been achieved within Oman. Can you believe that?

I met the president of Zanzibar (H.E. Dr. Salmin Amour Juma) a couple of weeks back, when he was visiting the Hyatt Hotel (8th October 1999), and ended up in Zanzibar having tea with him. He came to know of the body of work I completed in Oman, during 1992, and wanted me to do the same in Zanzibar, and produce a Millennium Book'. But this would have to be completed within three weeks, so I declined. Let's be realistic, it would be impracticable to complete such a project, to a given standard, within the time frame, without a budget and logistics already in-place. It was a fantastic offer though, and a project that I would definitely be interested in, sometime in the future.

In Zanzibar I spent a whole night, from sunset to sunrise, smoking Shesha by a huge fire on a beach, whilst discussing life with a local, and listening to music from a bar. The tourists were doing cartwheels in the moonlight – till they got tired, drunk, and went to bed. I know I keep mentioning Jamaica but; Zanzibar really is like a smaller version, complete with its own Rasta man.

The end of the year is almost upon us. As soon as I have packed up my equipment, I am heading back home, in a couple of days, for Christmas and New Year holiday. I will return to Muscat early in the New Year, to continue with plans here.





Wadi Makhl - September, 1999



2005



August 2005

Having left Oman in late 1999 with the intention to return shortly after the New Year, I've just made it back. Over five years later.

When I returned to London in 1999, and saw the improvements in digital photography, in the short time I had been away, I felt like a dinosaur. So, when I was accepted to complete a Masters in Digital Imaging, at the University of the Arts London; this took precedence. I threw myself into study, re-training myself, making the transition from analogue to digital photography. My major project for the MA was to create an on-line Data Storage and Retrieval System (DSRS) for images. On completion, I continued studying, completing a CCNA Academy Course, achieving an OCR in Computing for ICT Practitioners, City and Guilds in Constructed Images (Photoshop), and Desk-Top-Publishing (DTP). But I think that's enough for now.

The children have grown fast over the past few years. I'm glad I was there to see it. Sometimes, you have to return home, to experience what you left to find.

It is summer, it is hot, and the whole family is here on holiday. Some days it feels as if it hits 50°C. On our first day, at the Intercontinental, Elizabeth completely burnt her back, by spending twenty minutes in the pool. I'm so glad I don't have such problems.

We spend time visiting long lost friends, and travelling around Oman, visiting Al-Sawadi, Nizwa, Jabal Shams, Bahla, Tanuf, and lots of shopping in Muscat. That is, whenever we can get the children out of bed. We're pleased to see Tanuf has a new Dam, but sad to

note the picnic area, where the Falaj use to overflow, is gone. Even though it was an inefficient use of water, it was pleasant. Amazingly the graded dirt track, to the summit of Jabal Shams, is now tarmac. There is also a camp up there. So visitors can now stay overnight. These are changes, since I was last here in December 1992.

There are so many new road systems. The capital has expanded yet again. Most of the city of Muscat is under reconstruction, looks like major changes at Alam Palace are in progress. The Grand Mosque is complete, and we visit it. Very impressive. The number of cars on the roads have increased substantially, and some people are still going too fast, taking unnecessary risks. One of the things I particularly dislike is a practise that has greatly increased here, this is the number of drivers that tailgate. You see them along the main highway, three or four cars at a time, travelling around 140kmph, and the speed limit is 120kmph. Maybe they should be made to work in hospitals caring for patients of RTAs (road traffic accidents), or be made to watch hours of footage of the results of poor driving practices. It is one thing to injure yourself, but placing others in danger...

And as always it is the police, other emergency services and families that are left to clean up the aftermath.





Al-Sawadi Beach Resort, As Sawadi - August, 2005



Jabal Shams - August, 2005



Tanuf - August, 2005



2006

August 2006

It is summer, it is hot. And we're back for our August break. This time Adrian has decided to stay in London. With our daughter, we've brought our niece April, and nephew Samuel, along to experience the tingling heat of an Omani summer. On arrival, we head straight for Al-Sawadi Beach Resort. Our daughter, Elizabeth, likes it here. Although it's only three or four star, it's secluded, laid-back, far from the excitement of Muscat. My wife Elizabeth, and I, also enjoy the atmosphere here. We tend to head down to the beach each morning and I lay very still in the shade, as any movement at all, causes me to sweat profusely. We tend to stay by the beach until lunchtime, and then head off for a swim, followed by an air-conditioned environment, until late evening. Laying on the beach, watching the goings and comings of other tourists, is enough morning entertainment for me. A hotel staff member appeared one morning with the hotels (pet) camel, and took it for a dousing in the surf. The camel actually used its legs to splash water on itself, and then rolled around in the surf, much as a child might do. I've never seen a camel bath before.



We asked the hotel to organize a boat trip over to one of the atolls for us. When we get there we are pleased we had not tried to organize the trip ourselves. The hotel supplied us with a couple of large beach umbrellas, and an ice box filled with bottled water, as part of the fee for taking us over. We arranged a time to be picked up, and were then left alone to explore the island, picnic and swim off our own sheltered beach. The children, being teenagers, have until now, spent most of their time in the Internet room, or locked



in their rooms, watching music videos. Without coaxing, they would only spend a couple of hours each day, at the pool and Jacuzzi. This is very frustrating. When I consider all the beauty and fun they are missing. By taking them away from the hotel, to this island, and forcing them to relax, in that there is nothing else to do here, they end up actually holidaying. It seems that, not only do you have to take the camel to water, but you do have to convince it to drink.

After six days at Al-Sawadi Beach Resort, we head to Nizwa for a few days, a base from which to visit Bahla. Bahla Fort is still under repair and we are not able to enter it. So, we explore deserted mud-brick homes nearby, also under reconstruction.



Bahla's works are part of the tourism drive and are unique. I think it is a great idea, the restoration of what could, so easily, have become an eyesore. I expect this to become a prime future stopover for tourist. I wouldn't be surprised if a large hotel complex were to soon appear. Whilst in Bahla, we also take the opportunity to visit a pottery works, to buy a few souvenirs. Then, we head off to Jabrin Palace,



and get the full guided tour. A few days ago, we went to Nakhal, and visited the fort there, where we wandered around unguided. Having a guide, really does make the whole experience more educational, more fulfilling. Nevertheless, I think a mixture of both (if you have the time), is best. I had also wanted to take everyone on a visit to Rustaq, to experience the public hot spring baths, but as we are running out of time, and want to visit the Grand Mosque tomorrow, we head back to Muscat.



The Grand Mosque has become quite the tourist attraction. With the exception of Fridays (which is of



Elizabeth (Jrn) and April, Bahla - August, 2006



Wadi Bani Khalid - August, 2006

course a holy-day in Islamic countries), tourists may visit the mosque most mornings before midday prayers. The rules are very few and straightforward: be respectful; women and teenage girls should cover their heads, arms and legs completely; enjoy your visit and take as many pictures as you want. It's a great place to visit.

The immediate serenity you feel, when entering the grounds, is enhanced once you enter the male or female mosque buildings. The powerful air conditioning units are a welcome respite from the mid-morning sun.

After a night in Muscat, we head to Wahaybah Sands. I'd like the children to experience sleeping out in the open, in the desert. Thereafter, we will spend a second night in the desert, at the tourism camp, Al-Raha.

Before entering the desert, we stop at a motel in Al-Mintrib. We booked a room, avail ourselves of the facilities and left most of our luggage there. We wanted more space in the jeep. Then we drive into the desert and find a suitable place to camp for the night. By the time we actually got into the desert it was getting late, so the owner of Al-Raha camp, kindly prepared for us: lamb and chicken skewers (wrapped in foil), wood for fire, extra water and lights. Thanking him, we then head off, deeper into the desert, about fifteen minutes drive away. This gave us the illusion of a real adventure. The girls decide not to sleep in the tents that we had brought with us. Instead, they stay in the jeep, due to dung beetle activity.

After setting up camp, we get a good fire going and while away the hours stargazing, and singing until we all fall asleep. It gets quite cold in the desert before sunrise. It also gets wet with dawn's dew. I was only too glad to see the morning sun. Having had little sleep, we head off to Wadi Makhl, that is, after we carefully cleared everything





Mutrah Corniche - August, 2006

away, so as to leave the area as we found it. The route to Wadi Makhl is fully tarmac. No longer the thrill seeking adventure, it once was. It also takes about a quarter of the time to get there. Thereafter, we head back to the sands and Al-Raha camp for the night, just in time for the barbecue dinner, and late evening entertainment. Before dinner, one of the drivers at the tourism camp treated us to some sand bashing, driving at speed over the sand dunes. This was quite an experience, especially with the girls screaming. I did, however pick up a few pointers on crossing dune's. Although I don't think I will be putting them into practice, at least not on this trip. The next morning, after breakfast, we hire quad bikes and have ourselves some fun. The camp could do with a few crash helmets though, as my daughter Elizabeth, Samuel, and I, have similar driving techniques, and end up falling of our bikes, with slight damage to ourselves.



Now that the children have endured the interior, and we only have a few days before returning to London, we head back to Muscat to shop, and stay at the new Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa. This is what the girls had been waiting for. They're even more pleased when the front-desk informs us, they are going to upgrade the junior, to the Royal Suite. When Elizabeth, my wife, and I inform the check-in desk staff, the suite is not for us, but the children, I'm not sure whether it is a look of surprise or horror on their faces. But they can trust the children, they are very well-behaved adolescents.

We visit a number of shopping complexes, souqs, and fit in a little sightseeing, and before you know it, we're back on the plane.





Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa, Al-Waha Hotel - August, 2006



Mutrah Souq, Mutrah - August, 2006

December 2006

I'm back, this time I am meeting with a company here, trying yet again, to see if there is any interest in creating an on-line stock library, as an outlet for local photographers. Met with what I think might be the best candidate. The MD promised that we will start the project at the end of February, and I'm thanked for my past efforts. Think it best if I take it with a large pinch of salt. I've developed a sense in knowing when people are just making noise, and when they are actually making a commitment. This is noise.

As I don't have any other appointments, until I go to Dubai in a couple of days, I think I'll check into Oman Dive Centre.

I'm off to Dubai for a few days, to meet with a company that commissions photographers for advertising agencies. I am looking forward to getting some sleep. The rooms / chalets at Oman Dive Centre were very quaint, and I particularly liked the bathrooms, but as the walls are made of thatch, they don't stop sound. To my right



there are guests that appear to be a thoroughly respectful middle-aged British couple, but at night sound like newlyweds, who sleep all day. To my left, rear, and front, I have a French group, who are always awake, discussing something or other, late into the night. They're not loud, but it's so quiet, I can hear my heart beat. Anyway, I haven't been sleeping very well.

Just drove back over the border into Oman, and am so happy to be back. It has been raining in the UAE for the past two days. As I crossed the border, the sun came out. I stopped a few times, to shoot road-side beautification monuments, at Sohar, and its' seaside promenade. During the midday hours many places feel totally abandoned, as everyone is either at work or asleep. This means it is almost impossible to get a person casually positioned in your photographs.

Checked into Al-Sawadi Beach Resort and now it feels like I am on holiday. In the mornings, I go to the gym until lunchtime, then eat and sleep. I dine late in the evenings and early to bed. Now with only a couple of days before I return to London I'm heading back to Muscat, to visit a few people as I have no idea when I will be back in Oman.

I met the artist, Madny Al-Bakry, who works for the MoD (Ministry of Defence), whilst I was in a photographic outlet earlier today. We've agreed to meet at 6:00am tomorrow, and make a trip into the



interior as it has been raining, and appears to have stopped. This is the best time to go shooting. The air is clear and the wadis should have elevated water flow. Though not for long.

In the morning we're a bit late in leaving, but thankfully, we managed to get a number of scenic images. The light was wonderful, and we travelled, first to Rustaq, and then headed towards Al-Hail Salma'a, in Wadi Bani Awf.

We came across an amusing road sign that, suggested Oman was over eleven thousand kilometres in length. We're surprised no one had corrected it. This is where you need to have a little common sense, and realise they mean 11.5km.

We stopped and met a few locals. And as usual, all the children came out and insisted on posing. This is always a pleasant diversion, and something I am happy to see. It means that not everyone is leaving the interior for the cities. The Municipalities and telecommunications companies are also doing their bit, by ensuring rural people have access to services, which make life a little easier, and allows for growth of communities. I can now call my wife in London from the middle of a wadi or deep in the desert.

Just back from a classical recital, at the Al-Bustan Palace Hotel. An invite from Keith and Georgia; a couple of Brits whom I have known for nine years now, they've been in Oman forever, and still happy. This is the last concert the Al-Bustan Place Hotel will be putting on for a while, it's about to be closed for refurbishment over the next two years. I was almost late, would you believe it's been raining again. The amount of rainy days in Muscat must be increasing. The motorways were blocked, and I, of course, stopped to take a few photographs of people, who just can't resist trying to drive through deep water.

It is time to head home, I'm not sure, what, if anything, was achieved. But then, nothing ventured. Though I need to bear in mind; 'whom does this project truly serve?'





Wadi Bani Awf, Rustaq - December, 2006



Wadi Bani Awf, Rustaq - December, 2006



Wadi Bani Awf, Rustaq - December, 2006



Wadi Bani Awf, Rustaq - December, 2006

Modern Oman

Introduction

My association with the Sultanate of Oman spans over seventeen years at this point. And I have observed a multitude of changes; in life style, standards of living, attitudes and expressions. Whilst working on this project, to depict a visitor's view of Oman, many things within the country have improved. For example, many of the road routes mentioned within my diary of 1992, either no longer exist, or are completely bypassed by new tarmac road systems, with bilingual road signs.

The visitor can now travel by car to locations, once only accessible via graded roads, where using a jeep was a must. Of course, this has made traversing the country much safer. Yet, I feel some of the magic has been lost, but then I like it on the edge. There are five star hotels all over the country, large international style shopping complexes, and camps with western style toilets in the middle of the desert and on the top of mountains.

I have been fortunate to witness many of these changes, as I continue to record images of Oman, and have made several return visits. The growth of the country's infrastructure, business, social development, and tourism, has continued at a steady pace, as National, and International companies, plus individuals, invest their skills, time, and finances in diverse non-oil related projects, though oil is still Oman's major export.

Nevertheless, these observations have generally been made in passing. So, I return to the Sultanate in 2008, to subjectively look at 'Modern Oman', making comparisons with the Oman of 1992; the Oman that I originally fell in love with, to see if I feel the same.

Thus, I spend several weeks in Oman, during January, February, April, July and September 2008; throughout which time, I intend to travel the entire length of the country on a trip of rediscovery.

A wide-angle photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright yellow-orange sphere just above the horizon, casting a long, soft glow across the sky and water. The sky is filled with wispy, light-colored clouds. The water is dark blue with gentle ripples. A small, dark silhouette of a boat is visible on the horizon line, slightly to the right of the center.

January 2008

25th January 2008, Muscat City, Nakhal

Today is my birthday, and here I am, at dawn, shooting Muscat city. Woke at 5am, and after forty minutes to get ready, I had something to eat, and was in transit to the city of Muscat, set up and shooting by 6:40am. The time now is 7:10am, it's 21°C, and the sun is just about to peek out from behind the clouds. So much has changed in Oman, making it necessary for me to revisit, and update the stock.

I arrived late on the 23rd. It was not until the 24th of January, once I began to make contact with various associates and friends, that I was made aware of Gonu; a cyclone that hit Oman, on 6th June 2007. The cyclone has been well documented. However, cocooned as I was during that period, in Jamaica with my parents, I had heard nothing of it. Reportedly, many lives were lost. I'm not sure that anyone truly knows the exact number, and as expected, depending on whom you speak to, the figure varies. Last night, I was at a social gathering with a number of Omanis, and listened to their personal accounts. Although everyone had been warned of adverse weather conditions, they were expecting high sea levels, maybe even a tsunami sized wave. However, weather is unpredictable, and it was not high sea levels that caused the problem. Instead it was rain. Wadis filled and flooded the land. By all accounts, the water levels in the wadis were several meters high in places. And in the fast flowing water, people, livestock, vehicles, and other personal possessions, including homes, were washed away. Many homes were flooded, and when the flood waters receded, homeowners were left with mud - in some cases a metre deep - to clear away. I am told; livestock had to be removed from overhead electric cables.

The Muscat Festival is on, and will run until late February. The hotels are full, and the city is a bustle, with everyone either participating, or visiting the festival. Much of the festivities take place after dark. Mainly because people have finished work by this time, plus this is the cooler part of the day. Of course, this is not a concern at the moment. It's so cold, some people are wearing gloves, scarves, fleeces, and coats.

It's quite hazy at the moment. Hopefully, once the sun comes up, it will improve. Although I arrived here on the 23rd, I haven't taken any photographs until now, as I've been busy making contact with people and sorting myself out, in terms of accommodation and producing a photographic itinerary.



Muscat City - January 25, 2008

7:24am. The sun has finally popped up over the mountain, giving me a number of great shots, although I'm going to have to adjust the image, to equalize the sky and the landscape. Well, I think I'll pack up now, head down into the city, and see if I can find something to shoot. Though I think it's probably going to be a couple of hours until the sun has put its hat-on, and burnt away the haze. On this trip, I will be using a DSLR (digital single lens reflex) camera, which I tend to use tethered to a laptop, allowing me to see the image instantly enlarged. Well, there is no point shooting on film if I intend to publish the images. I would only be increasing my workload, by having to scan and retouch the pictures. You would think that my equipment load would be substantially lighter, but at this point it sure doesn't feel like it. In fact, it feels heavier than my film based 5"x 4" kit.



into the city, saw some steps, I'd never noticed before, and got out and walked, that I came across it. I have photographed this gate before; the museum must be an addition I've overlooked. That's the thing with Cities; you have to be a bit inquisitive, explore anything of interest, or you'll never know what's there. And it's best to do so by walking. Something most people in the capital don't do.



8:30am, 23°C. Just finished shooting Muscat Gate Museum. I never knew this was here. It's only because I took a less used route

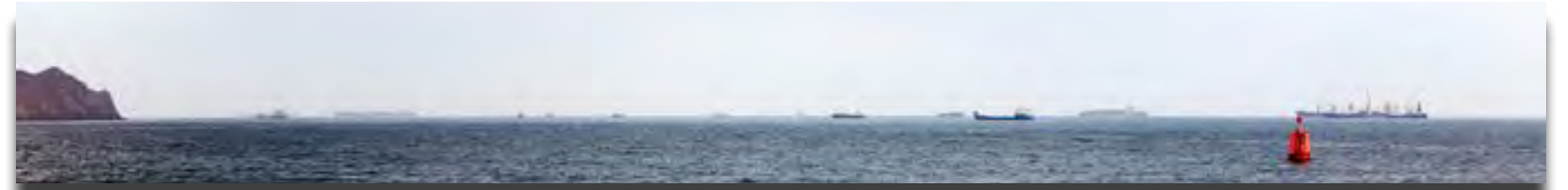
9:00am. Standing in front of Alam Palace, Muscat city. A number of buildings and road-ways next to the Palace, are now surrounded by a wall, and no longer form part of the tourist experience.



Muscat Gate Museum, Muscat - January 25, 2008



Muscat Gate Museum, Muscat - January 25, 2008



The Palace itself has a new main approach, the beginning of these works I saw in 2005, and they were completed by 2006. I'm not so keen on all the bollards on the approach. Who knows maybe they could be removed for me one day. Then I could get a clean shot. Though I do not think it will happen on this trip. In any event, as it's still a bit hazy, I'll return this evening for a sunset shot. I think I'll make a visit to Nakhal today, it being the 25th of January.

9:32am, 23°C. Now heading back to the hotel, where I'll pick up my raincoat. It looks as if it's going to rain. I stopped at Mutrah to take photographs of men fishing near Al-Inshirah restaurant, which looks as if it is still under repair after the cyclone of last year. It was amusing to see, the man fishing with the least equipment, was the most successful. Sure are a lot of ships on the horizon.

It's really clouded over now, also beginning to drizzle.





12 noon. I haven't made it to Nakhal yet. Stopped on route in order to photograph a large shopping complex, called City Centre, just past As'Seeb International Airport. I think it is the largest in the country to date, and represents a significant change. With its multi-storey

of a smouldering fire, even though there is not a soul around. It's completely tranquil.



Visible signs of progress are the appearance of new buildings, and slow decay of abandoned, old ones, many of them being small businesses.

Common ownership and use of motor vehicles, is probably causing many of these small businesses within villages to go under, as people now find

shopping, more of a thrill than a necessity, and don't mind driving to the latest hypermarket or shopping complex. This is a familiar cycle, have I lived too long already? I have noticed, there are a lot

car park, this has its own slip road from the motorway, and brand names of every description, covering two levels. It's a Mecca to shopping. Once upon a time in London, Sunday was a holy-day. Then it became a family day. Now, it's just another day to shop. Today is Friday, Oman's holy-day, and the shopping complex is already filling up. Offer people alternatives to traditional or religious pursuits, and they'll take them. Sometimes, capitalism kills cultures. I know, there are benefits as well. But these are of fleeting importance here.

1:25pm. Now at Nakhal, it's still overcast. The fort is a visitors' favourite that now receives guided tours by the coach-load. Hence the new toilets. As my camera and I wander off, arm in arm into the wadi, the sounds to be heard are: a cock crowing, birds singing all around, a donkey braying, distant sounds of children playing, and in the background, water running in the Falaj. There is the slight whiff



Nakhal Fort, Nakhal - January 25, 2008



more children around from when I was first here, more houses too. A growth in the Omani population, and reduced mortality rate. It's good to see.

So here's the question; how do you improve on natural beauty? Well, you cover it in concrete, so there's more space to park; you provide

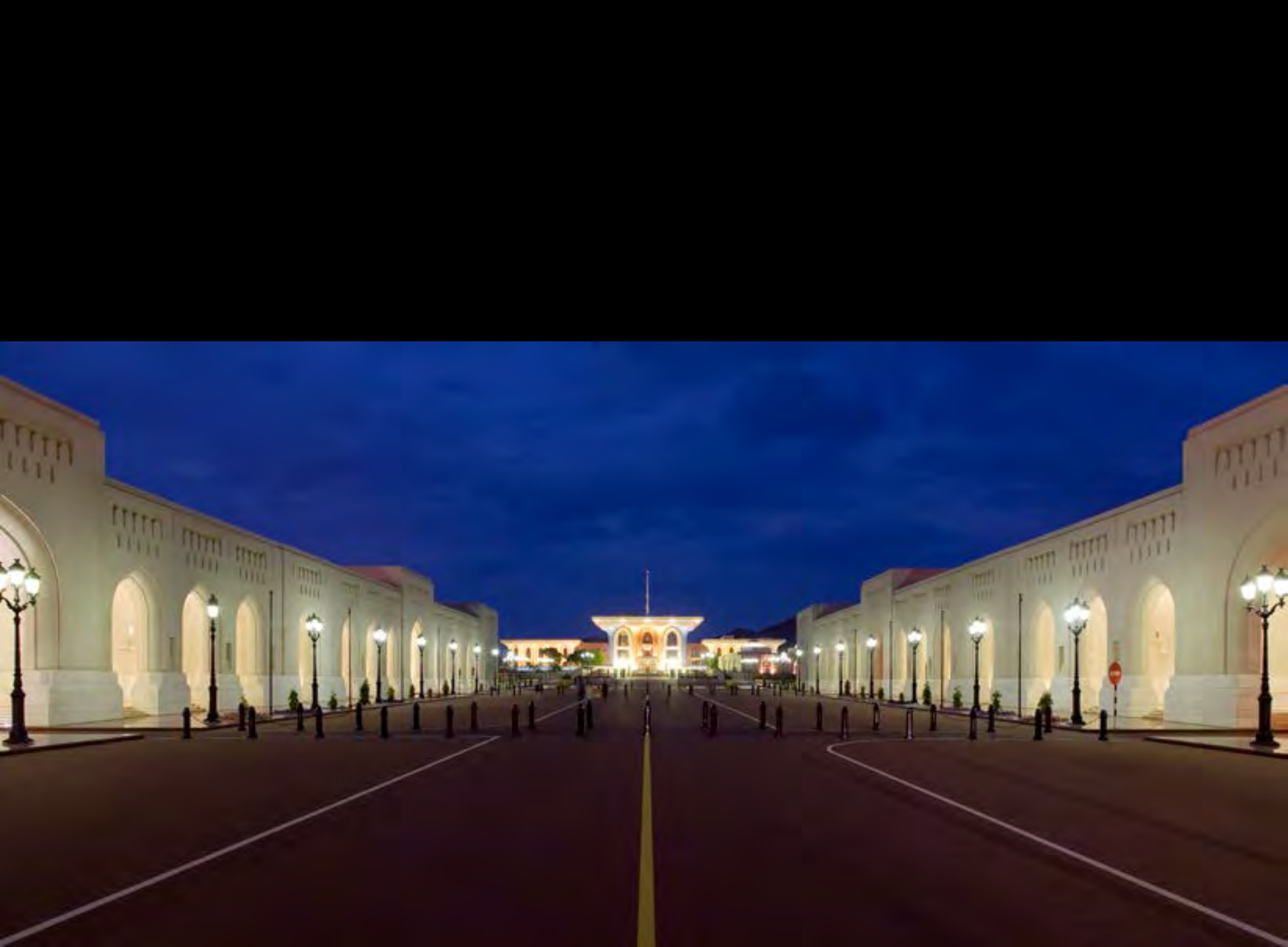


amenities, so that more people can come along and look at the natural beauty, which is ever decreasing, and you provide play and picnic areas for the family. That's how to do it.

When I first visited Nakhal, you used to get some exercise, walking along to the hot springs. Anything you wanted to bring; your picnic and refreshments, you had to take on your back. Now all you have to do is open your car door, and waddle along to the water. No adventure left here. Anyway, I better not protest too loudly, I'm sure I might have had a hand in this. Travelling around the country and taking photographs, to show people the accessibility of Oman's natural beauty, is bound to have encouraged others to want to come, share, and show. At least with the amenities, it is a safer experience. And if everyone puts their rubbish in the bins, the landscape will be preserved. I wish they wouldn't tamper with

the name though, even if we had it all wrong. Wadi Nakhal is now signed 'Ain A'Thawwarah'. I can't even pronounce it. During my numerous visits back to Oman, I have also been to Wadi Bani Khalid / Wadi Makhl, and Jabal Shams, these are also areas now accessible by car, and have their own amenities. You know what's coming next don't you? That's right, gift shops. Please, let them be Omani gifts, made in Oman, not Taiwan. 3pm, 20°C.

6:30pm. I'm back in Muscat city. Just finished producing a dusk photograph of Alam Palace, along the new approach. If you are going to attempt dusk or night photography, remember to use a tripod. Do not use flash, unless you need fill-in. And allow long exposures. Use the cameras self-time release, or a cable release / remote control, so as to avoid any camera shake. And remember, to obtain a good dusk shot, you need to shoot at twilight, after the sun has gone down. The



Alam Palace, Muscat City - January 25, 2008



Athaba Beach, Muscat - January 27, 2008

26th January 2008, Muscat

5am. The alarm clock has just gone off. Well I'd better have a shower, grab something to eat, back-up all the image files from yesterday, and then head out. Backing up image files – here's something you don't have to consider when using film, inconsequential as it is.

6:30am, 20°C. If it's going to take me this long, to get ready in the mornings, I'll have to get up before 5:00am. It took over an hour for me to prepare, and download the images from yesterday. I just couldn't stay awake to do it last night.

Last night there was a full moon, and I wanted to utilise it. So at 6:25am, I was set-up, outside a mosque, on what was to be a beautiful image, with the moon still visible in the sky. Took my time, and got everything just right. Then as I was about to press the shutter release, all the lights went off.

Although the sun rose about 6:35am, the sky began to get light not long after 6:00am, and this is the light that I need. The best sunrise photographs I've managed to shoot, have usually been

situations that I've researched beforehand. If by chance I see a good sunrise or sunset, it generally means I am too late to photograph it.

6:46am, 18°C. Full cloud-cover now. The temperature is plummeting; I now wish I'd brought winter wear. Think what I will do now is, find a vantage point from which to shoot the morning rush-hour traffic, then head back to the hotel, and prepare for a mid-morning appointment with an advertising agency.

I'm driving along yet another new road, with no idea where it leads. It feels as if every time I visit Oman, new roads seem to pop up all over the place. This road however, may prove to be just what I'm looking for, to demonstrate construction.

27th January 2008, Muscat

Went to the beach this morning and produced abstract images, then, I was busy with meetings for most of the day. In the evening, I started to produce shots of construction work.



28th January 2008, Muscat

3:47pm, 24°C. The cloud cover is complete, with no chance of change. I'm staying in an area called Athaba, with an Omani family. They have made me feel welcome in their home, in true Omani fashion. Now it really feels like home. They are no different from any other religious, respectful, well educated, and mannered family in the Western World. And that, in short, epitomises the future of Oman. Each modern nation, strives to keep the best aspects of its culture, language, and religion, but aspirations remain the same of all nations. The adolescent listen to similar music, across the spectrum, as do my own; their levels of attention, and basic interests, are the same as any others I have met. All this may be shaped by the fact that, the parents are travelled, and have, to some degree, been educated abroad. Whether or not they are archetypal, I just don't know without proper research. What I can say is that, they are representative of the Omanis that I have met. Last night

they had visitors; a UN Representative, a Professor and a Major. To clarify, my definition of a modern person is; someone whom advocates multiculturalism; in other words, a person whom respects, and can actually communicate with, people of different cultures. This also, includes the ability to embrace current lifestyles and technology; a person who, may have specific opinions, but remains largely non-judgemental. These are standards, which I, strive to maintain within my own life.

29th January 2008, Muscat

After lunch, I set out to get photographs of the motorway construction, near Qurum. This is a big construction project, to alleviate congestion, on Muscat's burdened road system. It still has a few years to go. The noise from the diggers, as they pound the stone, is incredible. There is a constant stream of trucks removing boulders; I wonder where they could be dumping them, maybe, out at the Wave project.



Muscat - January 29, 2008



Muscat - January 29, 2008



31st January 2008, Muscat

I like shooting mosques, but then, it's not hard to get good shots of them, as they are such magnificent structures. Even the small ones. One-day I must, really take the time to do a complete study of the Grand Mosque, in Muscat, it has so much to offer. In any event, I am here at the Grand Mosque, trying to find the best view for a dusk photograph. The viewpoint I really want is halfway up one of the minarets, but security have done their job well, and all the doors are locked. So I'll have to make do, with a ground level composition.

Managed to find a view of some merit, and got the shot. Then I got asked to leave, as the call to prayer went out; I was almost escorted off the premises, as I was not far from the women's' prayer hall.



Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Muscat - January 31, 2008

February 2008



1st February 2008, Muscat

So far the only thing I've shot, regarding the Muscat Festival, is a half marathon, and the Fun Run. This was held out by the Wave Real Estate Project this morning, along the oddly named '18th November Street'. It looks as if I'm not the only one struggling to cope, with the numerous new roads being built in Muscat. They must be running out of names. 'East As'Seeb Street' or 'Wave Way' might have been better. And that's another thing, whilst I'm on the subject of street names; I really wish the correct department, would provide a definitive list of street, and location spellings. For those of us with only one language, precision is paramount. It seems as if every time I buy a new map, a few locations, or street names, have altered spelling, and I never know which one to use.

3rd February 2008, Muscat

9:00pm. I've just managed to get the car washed before I was fined, it was filthy. I'm on my way home, with a very long night ahead of me. I'll be up all night, processing images from today's architectural photographic assignment, for Huckle and Partners. The assignment was, to shoot a newly built villa, which is being entered for a RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architecture) award.

The architectural style based on the client's requirements, is not your typical Omani design. The building stands out from its surroundings, as it is highly stylised, and individual. Internally the building has an elevator, to service the three levels, with large rooms that are uninterrupted by support walls. The owners were most hospitable, and I had to remind myself that, I was actually at work, as we enjoyed afternoon tea by the Zen pool, after a lavish lunch. Relaxed as I am, it's going to be a struggle to stay up all night.



Private Residence, Muscat - February 3, 2008



Private Residence, Muscat - February 3, 2008



Private Residence, Muscat - February 3, 2008



7th February 2008, Qurum National Park, Muscat

It's almost like old times; as soon as I'm in the capital, I get involved in quoting and shooting commercial work. In truth I don't mind. It's the endless meetings, and distractions, which keep me and the camera apart that I resent. So, I'm making a concerted effort, to get to the Muscat Festival tonight. It is being held at various locations around the capital, but I'm heading for the park in Qurum.

It was a fantastic event, and well attended. If you were visiting Oman, for the first time, and had limited time, but needed a quick introduction to the culture and people of Oman, then I'd advise you, to visit when the Muscat Festival is on. It's when the interior, comes to the capital.

After I'd been there for a short while, I met up with Keith and Georgia, and her mother, who's here visiting them from the UK. We wandered around until late in the night, looking at arts and crafts. Other Middle Eastern countries are also represented here as well, which is an added bonus. It was cold, the coldest I've ever felt in Muscat. Think I got some good shots. I have asked Georgia, to let me know if she hears, of any motor-sports going on in the capital, over the next couple of days, as part of the Muscat Festival. Yes, there is a program. I got one and tried to read it, but it made little sense. May be I'm tired.



Muscat Festival, Qurum National Park, Muscat - February 7, 2008



Muscat Festival, Qurum National Park, Muscat - February 7, 2008



Muscat Festival, Qurum National Park, Muscat - February 7, 2008



Muscat Festival, Qurum National Park, Muscat - February 7, 2008



Muscat Festival, Qurum National Park, Muscat - February 7, 2008

8th February 2008, Qurum

Got a call from Georgia at noon, she kindly let me know of a motocross meeting, in progress, opposite Sabco Shopping Centre in Qurum. So I've dropped what I was doing, and am heading there to shoot it.

This is also part of the Muscat Festival, marshalled and supported by a mixture of expatriates, and locals. For the most part, it's the western expatriates, who are competing. There are children racing motorbikes, and they are faster around the circuit, and higher through the jumps than the adults, who are good at falling off. They are also racing quad-bikes, this looks like even more fun. The track has to be constantly sprayed with water, to keep the dust down, or no one would be able to see where they're going, or have any grip. The races have been delayed a couple of times today, because there is only one ambulance in attendance, and for health and safety reasons, they cannot race without it being on-site. So when it is off, taking one of the adults to hospital, the races come to a standstill.



Muscat Festival, Qurum, Muscat - February 8, 2008



Muscat Festival, Qurum, Muscat - February 8, 2008



Muscat Festival, Qurum, Muscat - February 8, 2008

9th February 2008, Muscat, Nizwa, Bahla

10:11am, 22°C, 0km. About to leave Muscat for Nizwa, in search of Al-Hoota Cave. I went to the Wave project this morning, to meet with the PR Director and will return on the 12th of this month, to photograph the show-apartments.

12:50pm, 25°C, 116km. I am in Nizwa, and have visited the local tourism offices, which is sensibly located just off a roundabout as you enter Nizwa. There I picked up a couple of brochures, road map, and local area map with directions to Al-Hoota (Al-Hutah Cave).

Oh yes, I just stuffed myself with a large pizza at Pizza Hut, and went to Falaj Daris Hotel, to book a room for tonight. I fancy staying, as I'm already feeling tired, and don't wish to drive back to Muscat tonight. Or maybe it's the pizza. Anyway, I'm off again.

Al-Hoota is a recently commercialised cave system at the south base of Jabal Al-Akhdar. It is managed by a private company and has the first passenger train system in the country, no matter how short.



2:30pm. Found Al-Hoota cave, I even stopped along the way to take a few shots. When walking up to the visitor centre, a couple of men on their way out informed me, having noticed I was loaded with camera

equipment, that the cave management, had a 'No Photography' rule. I've seen pictures of the cave on the Internet; therefore, it had never occurred to me to check. Anyway, I had a word with the manager of the centre, and he informs me that I would need to seek permission from their head offices, back in Muscat. It's about five minutes from where I left this morning. I contact the head-office. They inform me that I would have to make the request in writing, on headed paper. The manager of the centre did invite me to take the short train ride, and view the caves, but as the camera and I are in this together, I won't leave it behind. So with that, I'm off to Bahla.

There is a photograph that I wish to take of the main mosque in Bahla, which I've been trying to take for a couple of years. Even though it's now too late in the day, with the sun being in the wrong position, I can at least ensure photography is permitted.

4:30pm. Finished at the mosque, I even got a photo looking towards the entrance, and it's okay for me to shoot tomorrow.

6:10pm. Back in Nizwa near the central mosque. Think I'll buy some bedclothes, underwear and T-shirts. When I left this morning, I didn't actually plan on staying overnight, so I only have the clothes I'm standing in. The place is bustling as usual. I'll have no trouble finding what I want. But I will have to wait, as the call to 'Maghrib' prayer has just gone out with the setting sun. Whilst waiting, I telephoned Elizabeth (my wife), in London, and assured her of, just how much I was missing her. I said if she were with me now, we could be as a married couple; she replied, "Yes, and then we'd go shopping, wouldn't we?"

Later at the hotel, I met a fellow Brit. (Richard), from Richmond. He is on his first visit to Oman, and travelling through the interior with a guided tour. Many of these guides are fearful, and don't like people in their charge intermingling with anyone not on the tour. So, the poor chap hasn't had much interaction with expatriates, or locals. A few days here, and he's asking me about investments.

Shortly after, I head off to the attached bar, where, I was told, there were dancing girls. Didn't think much of it though. Four of them just stood on stage, shrugging their shoulders to Egyptian, or Lebanese music. I tried to make the most of it, and sat there, rhythmically slapping my leg, trying hard to inject some excitement into the proceedings, whilst drinking beer.

Now I have a bruised leg, and a sore head. I don't think I'll be doing that again.

10th February 2008, Nizwa, Bahla, Gaul, BidBid

12:20pm. I'm sat by the camera at Bahla mosque. Having waited patiently, for the sun to align to the correct position, I've got the shot I wanted. Now I plan to wait until 'Dhuhr, Zhuhr', call to prayer goes out at 12:30pm, to see if I can get a few bodies in the shot. Don't think there'll be many, as everyone's at work, so would most likely pray where they are. If I was to shoot on a Friday there would be a lot of people, but someone would probably object. If I was to shoot at dusk, I would get an excellent sky, but everyone would be blurred, due to the long exposure. So this seems this is the best time to try.

I have just been told I can't be here at prayer times. So, I'm heading to Bahla Fort, to see how the restoration work is progressing. It's now 12:28pm, 26°C.

Bahla Fort is still not open to the public. The fort has been undergoing restoration for over three years, and still has at least another two to go. I haven't been very productive in the last two days. If it wasn't for the fact that, I've got the shot of the mosque I wanted, I'd be depressed about now. I've had enough of this, think I'll go in search of a few farming shots.



Following the main road, which snakes around the south of the Jabal Akhdar, I came to Gaul, and stopped to take a few photos.

Now I am heading back to Muscat via BibBib.



BidBid has grown into a large community. With improved water distribution, small farm holdings have cropped up all over the place. And best of all, many are being cultivated by young people, which is great for the future. This means I've finally got an image that I wanted. A young Omani man reaping his crops. If I have understood him, he sells this crop for livestock feed. I have lots of images with older men farming, but was concerned that, maybe all the young men were opting for office based city jobs.





Mosque, Bahla - February 9, 2008



Mosque, Bahla - February 10, 2008



Wadi Gaul - February 10, 2008



Wadi Gaul - February 10, 2008

12th February 2008, the Wave, Muscat

The 'Wave' is Oman's first property development, offering homes that may be purchased, by non AGCC citizens. As with the developments in the UAE (The Palms), this has been built on reclaimed land. I think AGCC states may be doing this, to avoid being criticised for selling Arabia, to non-AGCC citizens. Of course, anyone can buy property at the Wave, regardless of nationality, or religion. It is intended to offer, for the lucky few, the highest standard of accommodation available. With the latest mod-cons, and communication network. This project is cited ten minutes from the largest shopping centre, on the outskirts of Muscat, and not far from the airport. However, having spent time here, I have not noticed any noise pollution.



The Wave, have kindly given permission for me to photograph the show-apartments, and construction site. If these apartments had a running water, I would have locked myself in. They are stunning, and with the constant sound of the surf, this is serenity. It's hard to believe, they are actually going to raise this building, once it has served its purpose.

6:15pm. Well, I've been here all day, probably dragging it out, but then I feel so comfortable here. Just finished a late evening shot on one of the balconies, and that's the last for the day.

13th of February 2008, the Wave, Muscat

10:03am 25°C. I'm at the Wave again, to complete the on-site shots I did not have time for yesterday. I thought there might be another couple of shots left in the show-apartments, but as I walked through I realised, I didn't really need to shoot anything further. I think I've got it. So as the sales team, including the resident photographer, who is my contact for today, are in a meeting, I will take the opportunity to fill in my diary, as I sit here on a balcony overlooking the sea.

Not a bad office. It is so peaceful. Just the sound of the birds singing, and the surf rolling over the beach...

Sorry, I was just interrupted by housekeeping. Came along and swept the bottom of my shoes, as I walked in some sand, whilst taking a photo of the example golf course. Seems I've been leaving a trail right the way through the house.

6:10pm. Met with one of the sales team from the Wave, and went to see a photographic studio, in the Shaffer Shopping Centre. I wanted to see if there were any facilities in Muscat, for me to re-shoot the front cover of the book, in case I fail to get a model release in time. But, I hope this won't be needed.

8:30pm. Not long back from Al-Khuwair, where I went to scout a high viewpoint, for a shot overlooking the main square. The first time I ever visited Al-Khuwair, it was not much more than a scattering of villas, in the middle of nowhere. We were meant to move here, towards the end of 1992, and Elizabeth was not looking forward to it, as she felt she would be stranded. Now the area is densely populated.

I located a suitable building and spoke with the manager, who has agreed to allow me to shoot from the roof, between 6:15pm and 7:00pm tomorrow, after I have finished at Qantab Beach.





The Wave, Muscat - February 12, 2008



The Wave, Muscat - February 12, 2008



The Wave, Muscat - February 12, 2008



14th February 2008, Qantab Beach

Only a few days left on this trip. Today I'm at Qantab beach, to photograph the, 'Muscat Grand Prix 2008 Formula 2 Intercontinental Championship Motor-Boat Race'. And the weather couldn't be better. This is also part of the Muscat Festival, and the first time, teams have been invited, to use Oman as a venue. Although the meeting was billed as a three day event, today is the first day that the boats have been in the water. It's also the last day of the event. Qantab is an idyllic setting, allowing for numerous vantage points, from which to watch the race. Yet, the venue suffers from climatic

changes that affect the seas surface. The competitors inform me that, 'these boats are ideally suited for inland lakes'. Although they can race in the sea, conditions need to be dead-calm, as they are highly susceptible to even small rolling waves, as wind-sheer can lift them out of the water, causing severe injury. All agreed they were hoping to race in the nearby marina. If they were able to compete behind the sea breakers, they would have been able to race for all three days. Personally, I don't think the marina is large enough, thus raising other safety issues, given that these are speed boats.

I've met and taken photographs of various teams, including the British contingent.

Flying the flag for team GB is a family from England. In boat number 1: Colin Jeff, and in boat number 2: Owing Jeff. Their father is also here, as part of the support-team. They are completely self-financed and looking for a sponsor. By the way, they are the champions, and won at the last race meeting in Malaysia. Few of the boats look like works-in-progress, as everyone has been busy adhering to the new rules. This states that the hull, surrounding drivers, must be reshaped to protect drivers, in case of impact. I'm also told that, next year, additional safety standards are to be enforced, which will entail replacing all windscreens on all boats.





Muscat Festival, Qantab Beach, Muscat - February 14, 2008

When all the engines start-up, the noise, intensified by the cliffs, is notable.

After testing the water, they all set about the time trials. The Jeff Brothers qualify in 1st and 2nd place. Subsequently the boats are taken out of the water, refuelled, checked, then their back in the water, the race is about to start. And they're off!

To say it's an exciting sport to watch, is quite an understatement. It appears to be based on staying snug within the corners around the buoys, which act as markers, and having sufficient speed, and power on the straights. Like motor car racing, but with a wider track. Well, I'm sure it's more complicated than that, but you get the general idea. Still looks dangerous to me.



The British team seem tidier, and faster than the competition. Unlike F1, the boats change position often. Except for Colin Jeff, who leads the race from start to finish and takes the cup. I'm delighted. After the race I was speaking with Collin's son who was himself happy his Dad had won. "Looks like its ice cream all round tonight doesn't it", I said to him, "Dad's on a diet", he replied, "do you know why he won?" he asked me, "because he was the fastest?" I offer, "No," he replied, "Because he drank a Red Bull". If a Red Bull representative were here, they would want to recapture that on camera. What an advert. And with that, I wandered off to find Colin for a few victory photos.

Today was a good day. It is 5pm and the suns going down, I had better dash off to Al-Khuwair, for the dusk shot I arranged yesterday.





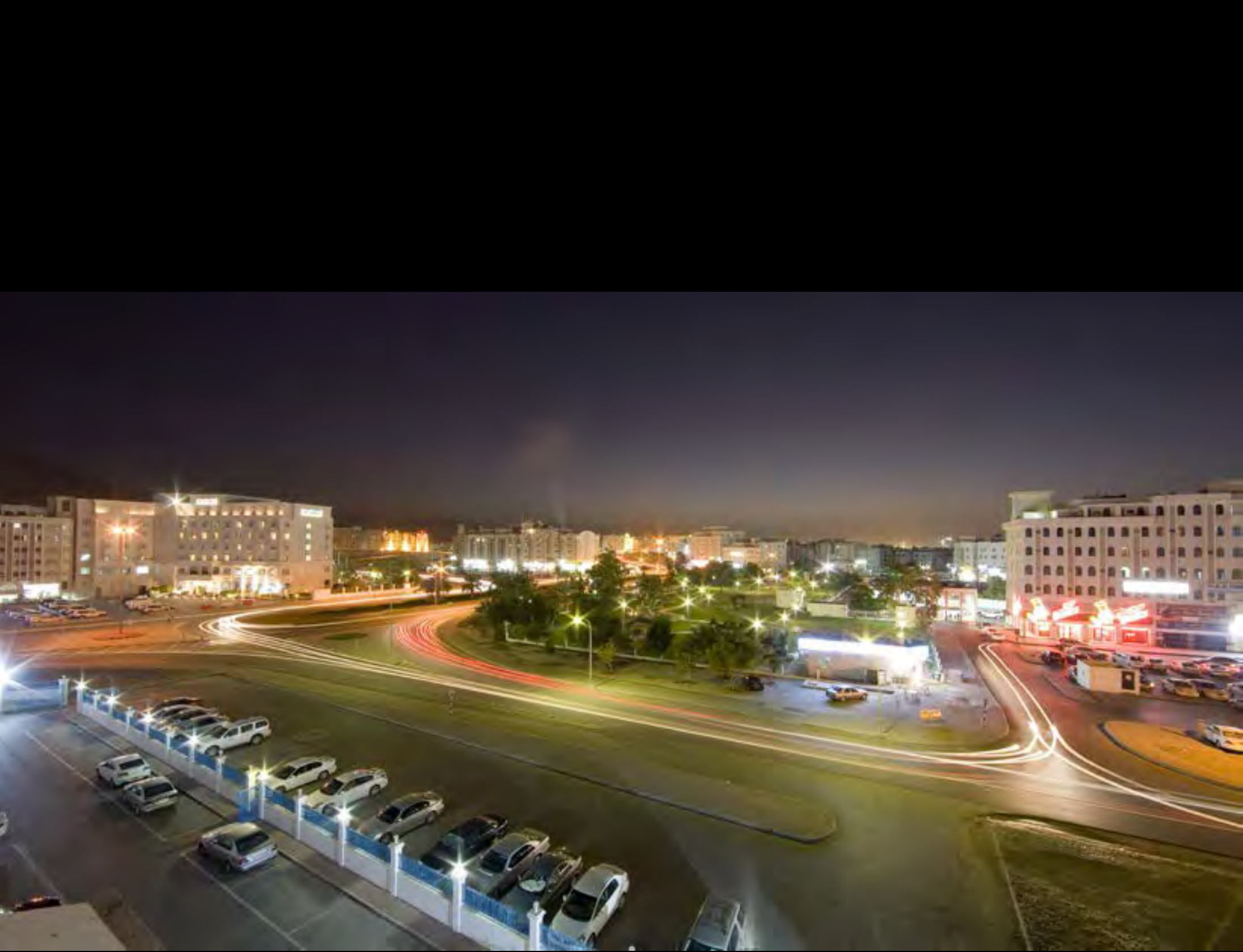
Muscat Festival, Qantab Beach, Muscat - February 14, 2008



Muscat Festival, Qantab Beach, Muscat - February 14, 2008



Muscat Festival, Qantab Beach, Muscat - February 14, 2008



Al-Khuwair, Muscat - February 14, 2008

16th February 2008, Muscat, Quriyat, As’Seeb

9:00am. The temperature is a pleasant 25°C. I’ve been cruising up and down Al Sultan Qaboos Street, the main highway, since 8:00am, in search of a female police patrol to photograph. I was told they sometimes, monitor the traffic along this stretch of road. Thought it might make a good shot. Looks as if I may have to set it up, but that wouldn’t be authentic. So I’ll not pursue that method. I know female police patrols exist. I’ve seen pictures of them, and even drove past one a couple of days ago, but was unable to stop. However, I can’t even find a male police patrol at the moment.

Now I’m outside Al-Harthy Shopping Complex. I need to buy a pair of sunglasses, can’t find mine, probably lost them during the power-boat race yesterday. Sunglasses never seem to last long with me. Going to have to make a detour to Ruwi High Street, as the shopping complex is not yet open. Then I’m going to head to Quriyat. I understand the area was hard hit, during the cyclone (Gonu) last year, and I want to see if life has returned to normal.

11:58am, 33°C. On route to Quriyat, and have just stopped atop the mountain range, to get a shot of Quriyat with the sea in the distance, and the road snaking down from the Jabal. I had forgotten how mountainous this route is. I had also stopped, to take some photographs of what was left of the highway, which had been washed away. It’s still hard to imagine, the power of the water that lifted the tarmac and substructure. Of course, drains were built along this route, but one can never adequately prepare for the unforeseen. Tangled bits of metal and some debris still remain. Nevertheless, most of the aftermath has been cleared.



Everyone I’ve spoken to was greatly impressed, by the response of the MoD, Muscat Municipality, and government in general, in getting help and supplies to the population after the event. One of the lasting memories that people have shared with me, apart from the devastation and loss of life; is the camaraderie, of the entire population, strangers and neighbours, family and foe, pulling together.

12:40pm, 28°C. Having stopped and taken photographs halfway up the mountain, then driven almost into Quriyat, it suddenly dawned on me. I’m squinting. Oops, the last time I saw my new sunglasses, I left them on the roof of the car. So it’s a U-turn and drive back to ‘atop the mountain range’. There they are, in the middle of the road, scratched. I’ve only had them for two hours. This is a record, even for me.

I’m finally here walking along the beach, and so far I haven’t seen obvious signs of damage from the cyclone. Things that are new are, a tree-lined corniche, and sea breakers, creating a safe harbour, for the fishing fleet of small-boats, and encompasses the old fortification, that has remained for so many years.

The fishing fleet has increased substantially, or is it just that they congregate here now? Anyway, I’m going to walk along the corniche. Hang on, a woman has just thrown out, what appears to be fish guts on the beach, and the seagulls have gone crazy.

There’s no doubting it; the improving affluence of Quriyat is evident and tangible. The fleet has definitely increased, and the town has grown into a city. It now has fish souqs and trading area. Quriyat looks as if it is set to grow.





Quriyat Fort, Quriyat - February 16, 2008



In truth, I'm too late to get the best shots of the day, which would be early morning. When the fishing fleet returned with its morning catch. It is quite deserted now. Additionally, I am having a bit of trouble getting a good composition, as the tide is out. This is altering my point of interest. Could wait until 3:00 or 4:00pm, or work with what I've got. Think I'll go climb inside that fortification, which is now more accessible, although I am probably not allowed.



2:11pm. According to the on-board thermometer it's 31°C, which probably means it's around 28°C, as the car was parked in the sun. I would possibly have to wait until near sunset, to get photographs with people milling around. However, as I don't want such a long mountainous drive after dark, I'm heading back to Muscat, via As'Seeb, to see if they still fish off the beach there.

5:45pm, 24°C. It is now 146.8km, since I left Quriyat. I'm now in As'Seeb, at the same location I was, on April 30, 1992. I have lost my best shots of fishermen in silhouette, casting their nets from the beach at sunset. So I'm hoping to get new stock. It looks as if fishing has been replaced by football. Omanis are crazy for football, and will create a pitch on any semi-suitable ground.



Everyone who now wants to fish, seem to have a motorboat. I have managed to get some photos of people setting off for the night.



6:15pm. I am heading back to Muscat to download the images taken today, but I didn't get any net casting. Now I must prepare for a birthday party I am requested to attend.

Today is probably my last chance, to create any images on this trip, as I now have meetings right up until I leave Oman. I must admit, although I like Muscat, I still get more excited when heading into the interior.





Mosque, As'Seeb Corniche, As'Seeb - February 16, 2008



April 2008



14th April 2008, Muscat

Arrived in Oman, and as usual with long-haul flights, you are delivered to your destination so late, you can't actually do anything with what's left of the day. So we just checked into the hotel, got something to eat and went to sleep.

We? Although I'm normally alone on these excursions, my wife Elizabeth has joined me for this mammoth trip. There are only a few people on this planet that I could stand to be in the company of, in such close quarters, for so long. Elizabeth is at the top of the list; it's still going to be hard for us both.

Mammoth trip? I'm now ready to complete my journey, visiting the most northern, eastern, and southern, populated areas within the Sultanate of Oman, on my trip of rediscovery. Some of the places I wish to visit, I have not been to since 1992. As such, this trip has particular significance to me.

My intention is, to leave Muscat as soon as possible, and head north, along the coast to Daba. Then, through the mountains of Musandam to Khasab, where we will go dolphin watching, and if possible, visit Kumzar, the most northern populated settlement in the country, and only accessible by helicopter or sea. On leaving Musandam, we'll head back along the east coast to Muscat, and then to Quriyat, on route to Sur, via the coast road. After a brief stop at Sur, to check on the Dhow building industry, we'll head for a campsite

at Ras Al-Hadd, to see the turtles at Ras Al-Jinz. Then, I wish to visit Khalifa Abdula, in Al-Ashkara. From there we will head to Salalah, staying as close to the coast as possible. Whilst in Salalah, within Dhofar, we'll make the trip to the town of Sarfayt, which is close to the border between the Sultanate of Oman, and the Republic of Yemen. And then, on to Dalkut, which has the largest population that far south. Next we intend to head back up to Nizwa, in order to visit Al-Hoota cave, before making our way back to Muscat, then home, to London. I have allotted a total of ten days to complete this journey. I know, it's not enough time, but it'll have to do.

There are a number of hotels / guesthouses along the route, but we will only use them if, they are convenient to the timetable. This trip is not about luxury, or a holiday, so I keep telling Elizabeth. She seems to be quietly planning something else.

15th April 2008, Muscat

4:00pm, 34°C, 0km. We're in the jeep, about to leave Muscat.

16th April 2008, Sohar, Musandam

11:05am, 33°C and 250 kilometres recorded since leaving Muscat. I'm in the gardens of Sohar Beach Hotel about to check-out, having arrived here around 8:30pm last night. Muzaffer, the General Manager, put us in a chalet, almost right on the beach. It's wonderfully exclusive. We left Muscat with the intention to check in at Al-Sawadi Beach Resort, but there was 'no room at the inn'. I had phoned ahead, they said there was a possibility of a room, but it looks as if the guests have not checked out. Al-Sawadi Beach Resort and Oman Dive Centre, are two places you can almost guarantee to be consistently full. I would have booked from the UK, but was uncertain when we would be able to get away from Muscat. As it was, we had three meetings yesterday (15th).

It was dark when we arrived in Sohar, and I got us a little lost, having turned off at the wrong roundabout along the highway. This did however, afford us the opportunity to see some of the residential areas in Sohar, and very nice too. This is one of the areas in Oman that I wouldn't mind residing.

I always enjoy stopping at Sohar Beach Hotel, as the walls are furnished with photographs I produced during 1992, when the hotel was first opened. However, I understand from Muzaffer that, many of the images may be changed, as they are currently refurbishing the hotel. This includes building some forty-odd new rooms. We spent a good part of last night sat chatting until the wee hours, in the central

courtyard, where they have a fountain.

I had wanted to photograph a number of residential areas this morning, and get a general feel of the area. But instead, I spent most of the morning writing documents, to be sent by email. Once I've completed these, I have no intention of doing any further paperwork, until we go back to London. I am determined to make this a photographic tour, and keep business to a minimum.

Driving around Sohar, the streets are tree lined, the people, and the general atmosphere here, are unperturbed, nothing like the hustle and bustle of Muscat. Sohar is a provincial city, possibly how Muscat used to be. We haven't noticed a lot of tourists. Other road users are showing us a great amount of tolerance, as we meander through the city. The locals seem a little surprised to see us. It may be that Sohar is not getting its share of tourists. This makes it a great place for me to be, as I'm not surrounded by myself.

34°C, 4:15pm. We drove into Musandam - Oman, via Daba, about 4:00pm, and have 112km to reach Khasab. I wonder if there's still a guard post along this route. There are a number of militarily sensitive areas in Musandam, and this is not the normal tourist route. I thought it might now be tarmac roads all the way, but after 5km of tarmac we turned off, following the sign to Khasab. Now it's all graded roads. Cowboy territory, with large plumes of dust being created by the jeep, as we head into the mountains. At last the four wheel drive vehicle will come in useful.





Musandam - April 16, 2008

Just stopped to take a photo of an old stone hut. I remember this hut from my last visit in June 1992. I'm a bit surprised to see it still here. We're definitely on the right track. I'm not going to be able to stop to take many photos as we go, it's going to get dark around 6:30pm, and as these are graded roads, with no street lights, we need to be off the mountains before then.

4:46pm, 33°C. We've definitely left this journey a bit too late in the day. Took a few shots of a section of road that leads through a gorge. It reminds me of images of the approach, to the city of Petra in Jordan.

As this area has remained unchanged, this route is very much what it was like, driving around the interior of Oman sixteen years ago. You definitely need a four wheel drive vehicle, and an experienced driver, to safely traverse this terrain. There are some spectacular views here. This is what I wanted to find when I came to Musandam, and feared it would be only tarmac roads. Travelling along these graded roads awakens so many memories. I'm as happy as can be. It is like driving on a bed of powder. The dust being created by the jeep, rides the wind, engulfing everything we pass, and catches up with us whenever we stop. It's sitting heavy on the tailgate.

As we past other vehicles on the track, I remember to slow down when passing people, homes, and other vehicles on the road, so as not to cause offence, or an accident. And, you don't want to go at speed around corners, as you never know what's going to appear. Pay particular attention to goats. They clamber over the side of mountains. Try not blowing your horn at them. They tend to panic, and run out in front of you.



It's incredible to think that people still live here, amongst the mountains. I don't think you could call it poverty, but they do live a minimal, basic life, a life that might have been the-norm, nine decades ago. And to think, less than an hour away, others are living, with the latest technology, and all the modern conveniences provided by the twenty-first century, from all over the world.



5:25pm, 29°C. We have at least another two and a half, to three, hours to go. We're on top of a mountain and beginning to make our descent. We'll be able to pick up some speed once we get down in the wadi, before having to climb the next set of mountains. You definitely can't do this trip by car; you just wouldn't have the grip, on this dust-like, gravel surface mountain track. I wouldn't trust anyone, who was reckless, or had little experience driving on gravel roads, to drive here.

31°C. We've reached level ground. A vehicle just went past and completely engulfed us in dust. We stop and put the jeeps high beam lights on. Just in case it's being followed, and something else comes out of the dust cloud, straight towards us.

Just been to the checkpoint in Musandam. Well that answers one question. When I was last here, I was supplied written permission, to use this route through the mountains. I don't know why, but I thought the route would now be open. As we don't have the correct paperwork, we have been redirected by the guards, towards the border with UAE, which will allow us to travel the coast road to Khasab. I am also reliably informed; this will be the quicker route for us to take.



Well, if I wanted adventure, it looks as if I might have found some. 5:57pm, 35°C. The sun's going down. I followed the instructions of the Omani guard, and ended up at a border crossing to the UAE. This particular border is closed and has been for a number of months. And will remain so for at least the next year, according to the UAE border guard. So we can't go forward, so must go back.

6:16pm. We are ascending a mountain, on-route back to Daba, in order to cut across the base of Musandam, through the UAE, towards Ras Al-Khaymah, and then along the coast road to Khasab.

The only problem is, by the time we get to the top, we'll just see the last rays of sunlight. This means descending the mountain, and making the journey in the dark. Furthermore, if we continue the journey throughout the night, I'll miss the opportunity to produce any photos as we go, and that is the entire point of the trip.

8:05pm, 31°C. Not wanting to drive in the dark, here we are atop a mountain, as a result of the earlier fiasco. Why is everyone pointing at me? I did tell Elizabeth that, there were likely to be a number of nights, spent in the jeep. And she assured me, she'd be okay with this, as we sat in the comfort of our home in London.

We have set up camp a little way off the main track, and found a nook to park the jeep, where we will not be disturbed by any passing traffic, although I don't expect there to be any. We've set up a little tent, and stuck all the suitcases in it. Made ourselves a lovely bed, in the back of the jeep, using a number of fleeces, we bought in the Sultan Centre back in Muscat, for this very purpose. In the morning, when its light and we are refreshed, we'll drive down the mountain and on to Khasab. It's about one night away from being a full moon, so it's bright enough to see whilst walking around, near the edge.

31°C. I've just had an excellent wash with three bottles of water (6ltrs), and Elizabeth has done likewise. We're just about to bed down. I demolished a roast chicken, some Houmous, and a couple of oranges, all of which we bought earlier.

It's quiet, just the sound of a few

insects. There's a slight breeze. I thought it might have been cold up here tonight, but it's not. It's warm and peaceful. I'm not even going to set the alarm clock, when we wake, we wake. We're not going anywhere until it's light anyway.

17th April 2008, Musandam, Khasab

6:10am, 22°C, 523.5km. I've been awake since 4:10am. Sleeping in the back of the jeep brought back memories, of nights spent dreaming of dawn. Elizabeth gave up at 3:00am, she found that the back seat was wide, and long enough, for her to sleep on. Poor dear, I bet she'll be covered in bruises. If ever I do this again, I think I'll invest in an inflatable mattress, and an electrical pump, which I can run off the vehicle's battery. Hopefully, when next we need to camp we'll be in the desert, then we can sleep in the tent without a mattress, as the sand shapes itself to suit ones contours. Although the sun hasn't come up yet, there is sufficient light for us to drive down the mountain, after we finish our breakfast of Arabic bread, mango juice and water. The sound of birds have replaced those of the insects from last night, and flies, there are always flies. The morning is a bit misty, with any luck the sun will burn that away, as it comes up. There's a cool breeze in this penthouse with a view, and completely serene. My mistake, has allowed us the experience of sleeping on top of this mountain, and a bit of off-road driving in Musandam.



7:56am, 28°C, 574km. Just drove back into the UAE and now heading over to Ras Al-Khaymah, on the west coast, then north into Musandam. I don't expect to be driving on any graded roads between here and Khasab.

9:45am, 33°C, 681km. We've just crossed the border back into Musandam, Oman. The visitor to Khasab has to be prepared for a number of inconveniences, if travelling by road from Oman through the UAE. In order to get here, you have to drive through four passport control check-points, have the registration papers for the vehicle you're driving, and be prepared to have the vehicle searched. You'll also need a multi-entry visa, which you can obtain from the embassy, in your given home country. The single entry holiday visa, which is obtained at the Airport, or point of entry into Oman, will not suffice. Additionally, a number of UAE states, which you must drive through, are in the process of being developed, hence, confusion, dirt, and traffic. However, once you drive through the border, into Musandam, it's very much like being on holiday. It's beautiful. Elizabeth has a smile on her face. Okay, I'm smiling too. The near perfect road snakes around the mountains along the coast, offering a wonderful driving experience. And the views are particularly beautiful, even though the sun has not yet burnt the haze away, and it remains slightly overcast.



The alternatives to driving here from Muscat are, to take a flight from A'Seeb International Airport, or the ferry, soon to be in service, then hire a car, or avail yourself of the hotel shuttles, and guided tours. This is of course more expensive, but it all depends on how much time you have, and how much luggage you need to bring. Whichever route one may choose, this is a dream location.

10:45am. We stop along the way, and take the opportunity to stretch our legs, walking along one of the pristine beaches - there are so many here. We also stopped near a fortification that's on a hill, beside the road. I climbed the hill, and found it had a sand dune on top. I've managed to get a couple of shots from this vantage point, overlooking the road, and town of Al-Jadi. We're now heading on to Khasab.

6:45pm, 35°C. Once we arrived, we immediately checked into Khasab Hotel, which was the only hotel here during my first visit, sixteen years ago, and is owned, and managed by, an Omani company. Khasab Hotel has now been joined by a number of others. This includes the Tulip group, which is the first hotel you come to, when driving into Khasab, by the coastal road.





Al-Jadi, Musandam - April 17, 2008



Musandam - April 17, 2008





Although Khasab Hotel offers excursions, we went to see Jaber Ahmed, who is the General Manager of Khasab Travel and Tours. I wanted to gain information regarding tourism in Khasab. He informs us, there is a cruise liner expected to dock in Khasab, tomorrow morning at 8:00am. Khasab receives many tourists from other AGCC states via road, but it is the cruise liners that, bring the majority of Europeans to Khasab.

Although the liner expected tomorrow, is only a small one, compared to 'The World' ship, which has docked here. Jaber has been requested to provide; three coaches for city tours, twenty jeeps with drivers for mountain tours, and one Dhow for a sea tour - around the fjords of Khasab - offering swimming, a visit to Telegraph Island, plus Dolphin watching. Jaber assures us that, I will be able to gain access to the port to take photographs, he has also offered to place his speedboat, a guide and captain to pilot the craft, at our disposal. He believes I'll get better shots of the dolphins, from a lower view point, as opposed to being on the Dhow. This also means that, I will be

able to pack a lot more in, given our timetable. We, of course, accept his exceptionally kind offer. It would seem, the generosity of Oman, is very much alive, and extends to Khasab. On returning to Khasab Hotel, we took a few minutes out of our schedule, and jumped into the swimming pool. It is amazing how one night of discomfort, can make you appreciate the simplest of pleasures.



I'm outside Khasab Fort, setting up a dusk shot. Elizabeth is back at the hotel, going through the beautification ritual, that all women require, after a night on a mountain, in the back of a jeep.

When we first entered Khasab, earlier today - around lunchtime - the streets were deserted, but now, as the sun sets, the city is coming to life. Though tempered by the sea breeze, it feels slightly warmer here than Muscat, and that includes the sea temperature. When I first visited Khasab, in 1992, the main two industries were, fishing and date farming. Khasab has grown into a little city, and tourism is a visible addition. The deep sea port, built as part of the land reclamation project, has made a huge difference to the prosperity, and modernization of this region. I predict growth.

10:47pm. We're now back at the hotel preparing for bed. After completing the shot of Khasab Fort, I returned to the hotel and picked up Elizabeth, then drove around Khasab, exploring the nightlife. We went to one of the beaches just outside Khasab, and has facilities for campers. There were a group of men, from the UAE, preparing a lamb carcass for barbecuing. A few expats have also erected their tents, and were stargazing, relaxing by campfires, whilst the sound of the surf competed with music from portable radios. Anyway, I expect tomorrow to be quite a busy day, so it's time for bed.



Khasab Fort, Musandam - April 17, 2008



18th April 2008, Khasab

6:27am, 26°C, 762.3km. We are in the jeep, just leaving Khasab Hotel heading for the port, to ensure the ship is still due in.

7:45am. I'm on a high cliff overlooking the port, awaiting the arrival of the cruise liner. From here, I have a clear view of the land that has been reclaimed, thus creating a safe harbour for the fishing fleet, along with the deep sea port. A canal has been created, allowing access to a small section of the original shoreline. I have no idea what the temperature is, but I hope the ship doesn't take too long to come in. I wish to stay up here and create a shot as it enters the seaport. I've got a small bottle of water in my pocket, which I'm saving for the climb down. It took me about thirty minutes to climb up here, and will probably take as long to climb down, plus twenty minutes to drive to the harbour. So I'm going to be a bit tight on time. Having made myself presentable this morning, I'm going to

look a mess by the time I get to the harbour. It's lovely up here, but the sweat is pouring out of me. It's so hot!

8:30am. I got down the cliff in seven minutes, and am now at the dock, along with all the jeeps that are lined-up, waiting for the passengers to disembark. At least I'm back on schedule.

This is a small cruiser, in comparison to others I have seen. This one is only four storeys above deck, yet the activity it is generating, would suggest that when 'The World' ship, which I believe is, eight or more storeys high, docks here, the activity must be something to behold.

It took quite a while for the passengers to disembark, and set off in various vehicles for their land based excursions. Those heading out on the Dhow, for the waterborne excursion, didn't start boarding until 10:00am. Elizabeth and I finally boarded the speedboat at 10:35am,



and set off in search of dolphins. It only took ten minutes before we had our first sighting. What a joy! I had thought we wouldn't see any, given the time of day. And although they are not leaping out of the water, as pictured in so many excursion brochures, they are all around us, and very active. Seeing them in the wild like this is an exhilarating experience, as opposed to performing in captivity. Still, I don't think we'll be jumping in to swim with them.

Next we set off to watch Cormorants' fishing in large flocks. One minute they're all on the surface bobbing away, the next they're tails up, and disappear beneath the surface, only to reappear minutes later, some distance away. We've also seen stingrays, but didn't find any sharks. Then, off to Telegraph Island, where a number of Dhows are anchored. Motoring through the fjords, we pass numerous tour groups feeding fish, that dart to the surface for a free meal.





Telegraph Island, Musandam - April 18, 2008



Khasab, Musandam - April 18, 2008



Musandam - April 18, 2008



Kumzar, Musandam - April 18, 2008



Some of the passengers have taken to the water themselves. The fjords are like lakes. The water, glass-like, so clean and still. I think Elizabeth's going to get sunburnt if she's not careful, neither of us have brought any hats, chances are they would be blown away.

I had not mentioned to Jaber Ahmed, who has lent us this speedboat that, I would have liked to visit Kumzar, but as our guide is originally from this fishing village, and has offered to take us there, this is an opportunity not to be missed. Of course we could have gone there with just about any one, but having someone along who is actually from a local tribe, is a bonus. So, first of all, we find a spot where we are able to get a telephone signal, and phone Jaber, to confirm it's okay and let him know our plans, just in case. Then set off at high speed. Now this is where the speedboat really comes in handy.

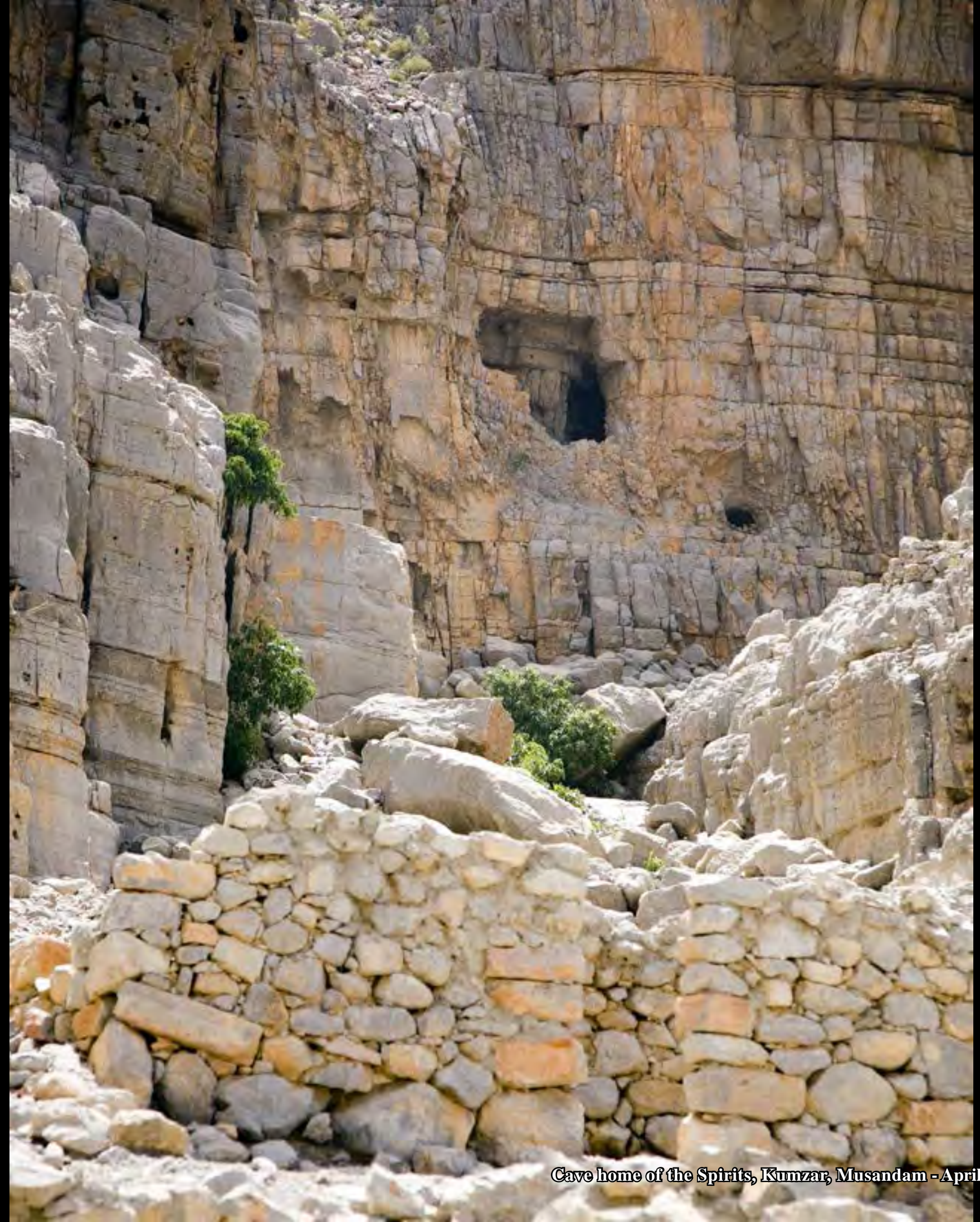
Kumzar is a fishing village, only accessible by helicopter or sea. It is mainly inhabited during the cooler winter months, by up to five thousand people. Who then go to Khasab, for the summer months, as the heat becomes unbearable. Numerous family groups, with close blood ties, share limited living space when here, but disperse into three, or four, houses when they return to Khasab. The lack of land for building, has meant that, some ancestral graves, which are of course unmovable, have been



incorporated within the homes, as they were expanded. I'm told they have here a school, helicopter pad, desalination plant - providing electricity and drinking water, and other necessities. By the way it's really, really hot! When we first went ashore, the place appeared deserted, but then as we meander through the very narrow walkways, people came out to observe us, observing their lives. The cyclone of 2007 also affected Khasab, and the main cemetery wall has had to be reinforced. Our guide took us on a tour of the village, whilst keeping us entertained with local tales.

Two stories, which we found amusing were; the custom of a groom having to break an egg using his toes, as part of his wedding ceremony. Failure to break the egg, would result in having to repeat all the steps, leading to that point, and that includes, having to purchase thousands of riyals worth of gold for the bride. We amuse ourselves with supposing the bride would replace the raw egg, with a hard boiled one, doubling her dowry.

The other anecdote we found amusing was, that a cave at the base of the mountain was inhabited by spirits that, will take your life, if you are outside near the hours of midnight, but, they will not touch you if they detected alcohol. But don't use this as an excuse to bring a bottle of whisky with you. I can almost feel my leg being pulled.



Cave home of the Spirits, Kumzar, Musandam - April 18, 2008



Kumzar, Musandam - April 18, 2008



Kumzar, Musandam - April 18, 2008

On our return to Khasab Hotel, Elizabeth and I both realise, that we have been sunburnt on the top of our heads, painful to the touch. I look a state! My hair has gone ginger, bleached by the sun, and the colour of my skin is now that of coal. ‘La sauwur, min-fadlak’. (No photo, please). Anyway, we have a gruelling schedule to keep up. So, with just enough time to take a shower, and change of clothes, we check-out of Khasab Hotel, and head for Muscat. Where we will stay in tonight, before heading to Quriyat, first thing in the morning, and hope to be in Ras Al-Hadd, by sunset.

19th April 2008, Muscat, Quriyat, Sur, Ras Al-Hadd
12:44pm, 33°C. Since starting our journey, (15th April), we’ve covered 1457.5km. Before leaving Muscat this morning, we went to the Sultan Shopping Centre in Qurum, to stock up on water, and a few other supplies. Whilst there, we took the opportunity to have a hearty breakfast, at the buffet restaurant. Once adequately stuffed, and after we guide a couple of lost Scots, to a car showroom in Wutayyah, we head off to Quriyat. Here we make the briefest of visits, as I was here just two months ago (16th February).

Now leaving Quriyat, to drive along the coastal graded road to Sur, the road I had an unpleasant experience travelling on 11th March 1992. Still, I was a little disappointed, to find the route is in the progress of being turned, into a motorway, with bridges built over the wadis’. My fear is that, speed and safety, will replace the experience to be had, from off road driving. Simultaneously, much of Oman’s beauty, which lay within its wadis’, and villages, will go unnoticed, as the motorway will guide travellers, at high speed, straight over them. This is not necessarily what the visitor wants. Of course, the motorway is an important improvement for locals and businesses alike. However, to my great glee, we often have to return to the graded road that meanders along the coast, in order to bypass unfinished sections of the motorway. I have so many opinions on this subject that I’m now beginning to get on my own nerves.



Elizabeth lost interest about an hour ago. She’s only too grateful for the new road systems. Along the way, we stop to take a few photographs, and I had the opportunity to speak to a tour guide, on an outing with four businessmen. The tour guide assures me



that, there will be a number of slip-roads, in order to facilitate those wishing to visit local villages, and wadis’. As such the entire graded road will not be consumed by the motorway. Okay, this makes sense. Hopefully, I’ll still be able to find new places, and people, which are the highlights of my trips. I suppose I’ll have to buy one of those guidebooks. The thing is, travelling by guidebooks, removes much of the excitement I feel stumbling over a new find. And makes it, for me, a lacklustre experience. Don’t get me wrong, I think guide books can be great, and if I used them, I would probably find what I’m looking for quicker. But truth be told, it’s not just about the photographs, it’s also about the experiences. Some of my most profound experiences have no photos to go with them, and that’s okay with me.

1:45pm. The temperature is ‘ruddy hot’, walking along Wadi Shab, with Siyed, who we just met. He is guiding us to where you would actually have to get wet in the first of three pools, in order to get to the caves here. But we’re not going to the caves, we’re only going as far as we can, without having to get wet. We do not have our swimming costumes on, plus we don’t have the time. The next wadi along that we would come to, if we carried on along the coast, would be Wadi Tiwi, which if you followed it towards its source would lead you to Wadi Bani Khalid, so I’m told.

Siyed and I amuse ourselves by swapping stories, as we walk along the wadi. He informs us that there is a, thirty million riyal hotel complex, going to be built near here. So tourism may actually be coming to this area, in quite a big way. However, having pointed out



a mango tree to us, laden with fruit, I ask him if the tree to its right, which has been flattened by flowing water, is also a mango tree, as the leaves, and bark, look exactly the same to me. He informs us, it’s just a ‘wadi tree’, and I wonder how accurate the information I’m getting is.

Walking along the sun bleached stones of the wadi, which reflects the heat at every angle in a blinding light, is hard going. I fear we’ve started this walk without sufficient drinking water. As soon as we get to the first section where there is a little shade, and water, some twenty minutes later, we pause, then head back to the jeep. Happy to be in the comfort of the air-conditioned cabin of the jeep, we are on our way again, after giving Siyed a lift to a nearby café / restaurant.

4:45pm. Stopping only to take a few shots, of the World Heritage site at Qalhat, and a refinery or oil storage tanks that, has popped up since last I was here, we’ve made it to Sur.

We visit the ‘Boat Factory’, run by Juma Hasoon Juma Al-Araimi and three of his sons. This is the last remaining Dhow building yard - possibly in Oman, definitely in Sur. We met with Ali bin Juma Al-Araimi, who kindly showed us around, and informed us that, ‘all other dhow building yards have been closed, because the owners are too old to continue the business, or have died’.



‘The younger generation do not seem to have an interest in Dhow building’. This would explain why, apart from their proximity, the Dhow’s in Khasab are bought from the UAE, as opposed to being sourced from within the Sultanate. The last Dhow, built in this yard, which was nearing completion, some five months ago, succumbed to a fire within the boatyard, along with a number of storage sheds and their contents. The Dhow itself was thirty feet in length, and represented a year’s work and investment. No one has any idea as to how the fire started, but the financial impact on the family was unwelcomed. The last significant project they had, was a commission for His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Sa’id Al-Sa’id. Juma himself had much involvement in the project - including that of a craftsman - which took over a year and a half to complete.





Wadi Shab - April 19, 2008



Wadi Shab - April 19, 2008

Ali is pragmatic, and the family is in the process of rebuilding the storage sheds, but this time they'll be using bricks, and concrete instead of wood. Thankfully, the business had diversified some time ago, and produces hand crafted models of Dhows and other boats, for the tourist trade, which they now have the monopoly on. Furthermore, they manufacture rowboats, used for racing. Ali himself is in a team.



It would be truly regrettable, to lose this heritage industry, which also serves as a tourist attraction. With no Dhow building in Sur, I fear the area would lose a fair degree of its historical importance, as a place of interest. Many of the Dhows, built in neighbouring countries, are formed from fibreglass. This is a technological challenge that, I feel Juma and his family could rise to, and produce such crafts, alongside the traditionally wooden built dhows. I can only hope that they can surpass present difficulties, to continue this tradition, for Sur, and the country.

It's 4:56pm, 30°C, 1536.5km since beginning the trip, and we're off to do an overall shot of Sur. Other than that, we'll be heading to Ras Al-Hadd.

6:50pm, 28°C, 1619.4km. We're in Ras Al-Hadd, and have been along to 'Turtle Beach Resort', but don't be fooled by the name, there are no turtles there. What they do is, run a tour – you use your own vehicle - to the beach, at Ras Al-Jinz, where the turtles are.

This is also what they do at 'Al-Nassem Camp', which is even more basic than Turtle Beach Resort, but much closer to Ras Al-Jinz. In fact, the main reason we'll stay at Al-Nassem Camp is, we just want to get out of the jeep, and this is the last place we stopped. We've already been to Ras Al-Jinz, and handled the baby greenback turtles, which hatched last night at the centre. There is also a campsite at Ras Al-Jinz, though it's too windy to camp out tonight. I think, in the past you had to get permission from Muscat to visit Ras Al-Jinz, but now you can just turn up, fill out the form, put your car registration details down, pay a small token fee, and receive a ticket to enter the nightly guided tour.



This is my second visit to the area, but first, to see the turtles. I can see why I was not attracted to linger here. It's barren and photographically uninteresting. At least to my eyes, under these overcast and bland weather conditions. I can only express the landscapes here as desolate, much like the landscape between Thumrayt and Adam, along route 31. I think I would have been petrified to explore this area on my own, during 1992. Then I had an unstable jeep, no experience in driving it, no differential wheel lock, and no mobile phone, no one with me, no tent, poor quality maps, and limited road signs. It's a wonder I survived. There would have been little point, or desire for me to have stayed here. Now, at least the roads are tarmac, clearly signposted, and there's somewhere safe to stay. Regardless of my earlier rantings about tarmac roads, at least they give you the illusion of actually heading somewhere that, others have been, or want to go. In fact, I might have been apprehensive to have come here even now, without these improvements.



10:50pm. We're on the beach at Ras Al-Jinz, the climate is moderate, and there is a reasonable breeze. We've been warned that moonlit nights, such as tonight, are not the best time for turtle viewings, yet we've been looking at turtles laying their eggs. We've also been fortunate enough, to see baby turtles making their way down to the sea. I think our host wish us to believe that these are hatchlings, but as Elizabeth has pointed out, 'why are there no shells?' I think we may have seen these hatchlings before. At least this time, we're all making sure they get to the sea. With over nine jeeps here, we are a large tour party for this time of month and year. In fact, there's so many of us, we've split into two groups, and there are still too many legs in the way of my lens.

Back at Al-Nassem Camp, I don't think I got any worthwhile shots from that experience. There was too much movement. If it had been just me, and the turtle, and one torch, I could have done wonders.

Such is life. Ali, the Omani in charge of the campsite here, showed me a fantastic photograph he claims to have taken with his mobile phone, just four days ago at dawn. Given the incident with the baby turtles, and the clarity of the shot... In any event, we'll get up before dawn and return to the beach, in the hope of seeing a turtle without the human legs blocking my view.

Elizabeth insists she sleep in the jeep, which she claims will be more comfortable, as she'll not have to worry about insects. Girls. I mean, that's what the mosquito nets for. I'll sleep in the hut, with the door open.



Eastern-Half of Sur - April 19, 2008



Turtle Laying Eggs at Ras Al-Jinz - April 19, 2008

20th April 2008, Ras Al-Hadd, Al-Ashkara, Abu Al-Akarish, Madrasah (Ras Khashayim) 8:00am, 25°C, 1644.8km. We were up at 5:00am and went back to the beach, at Ras Al-Jinz for 5:30am, to see if there were any turtles. There weren't, and we returned to the camp, for breakfast; a couple of boiled eggs, two slices of toast, and cornflakes. Then we showered, sorted the electrics out (chargers etc.), backed up all the image files, and now we're off to Al-Ashkara.

10:36am, 30°C, 1732.8km. We're in Al-Ashkara. Standing outside 'Al-Ashkara Hotel'. Yes, they have a hotel (of sorts) here too. I approached a ROP officer, to see if he knew the whereabouts of Khalfa Abdula, the door-maker, whom I photographed, 9th March 1992. He opened his mouth, and I have never heard such a well spoken policemen. Pronunciation that would make an English professor proud. I had to keep a close watch to ensure lip-sync was in, or I would have sworn he had a tape recording behind his back. Anyway, he said he's not from this area, so he did introduce me to Khalifa Al-Gaffri, who works with the Ministry of Agriculture, and just happened to pull-up in his jeep at that precise moment. Mr Al-Gaffri went to much trouble to help us. We scoured the town, tracking down Khalfa Abdula, with the help of Khalfa Abdula's nephew, whom we picked up along the way. Weaving in and out of these narrow roadways, no longer used for main traffic, memories of the past seep into my mind. This was worth the trip. Finally, we arrived at Khalfa Abdula's home, and were shown into the Majalis, to await Khalfa's appearance. Khalfa Abdula is now eighty years old, and extremely apologetic for his failing hearing. I think this bothers him more than anything else. Khalfa remembers our meeting, and is fascinated by the photograph from sixteen years earlier. As we sit there in the dimly lit room, with Mr Al-Gaffri shouting my translated words, whilst reassuring Khalfa that he had no need to be embarrassed. Khalfa informs us that 'there are no door makers left in Al-Ashkara'. 'The Ministries, and Petroleum industries, pay far better'. And another part of Oman's cultural heritage disappears, only to be shown at special exhibitions. At this rate, all these arts and crafts would be forgotten, if it wasn't for such exhibitions as the Muscat Festival, Salalah Festival, and the like. I feel this meeting has some hidden significance. As Khalfa Abdula, sits in a dignified silence. It feels as if a lifetime passes. Sometimes language is not a barrier. I snap myself out of this mood, and we bid him farewell, with the promise that, I will, one day, seek him out again.



12:00pm, 31°C, 1829km. Just took a picture of a Bedouin village, along the base of Al-Wahaybah. We're driving on a graded road at the moment. A tarmac road is under construction, but it's not open yet. There are patches of barren sand dunes, and I would love to get a shot of one of them, as I'm short on stock. The only problem is, it's so windy. I fear for the equipment, should I take it out of the case. Where there are sections of the highway that we can drive on, you can clearly see how the wind, moves the fine hot sand across the surface of the road, like water over rocks. I am thankful for the improvement in maps available here in Oman these days. During 1992 I had to travel with several maps, as some roads and locations, were shown on one, and not another. I was hoping to have telephone coverage throughout the journey to Salalah, but there is no coverage here. If I was to use this route often, I would definitely invest in a satellite telephone. There have been numerous petrol stations along the route, and regardless of how full the tank may be, I've topped up at every one of them. And will continue to do so until we're in Salalah. It will probably take two days for us to reach our destination. All we have to do now, is keep the sea to our left.

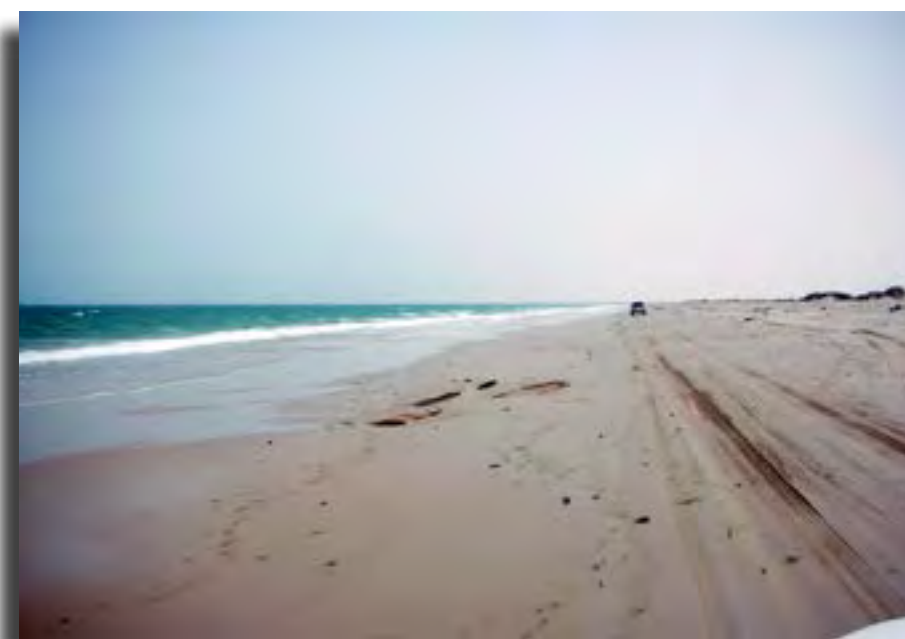
2:33pm, 33°C, 1909km. We're back on the blacktop, the tarmac. There came a point where we were on graded road for a while, which we expected. What we didn't expect, was it to end so abruptly. And then we were on sand, but unable to go forward as it was heaped in front of us. We got out, took a couple of photos, and then when attempting to complete a three-point turn; the jeep got stuck, right up to the axle in no time at all. So, trying to keep an expression of, 'I know exactly what I'm doing', thus avoiding any panic from Elizabeth, we let air out of each tyre, for a count of seventy. I clear some of the sand away from the front of each wheel, put the jeep into 'four wheel low' and drive out of the hole we were in. Elizabeth is delighted, and her confidence in me, has probably gone up a notch or two. My confidence in me, has gone up a notch or two.



Now however, I'm faced with the decision. The tyres are so deflated that, I don't wish to drive along a graded road, as I believe I won't get far before getting a puncture. Two punctures and I'll be stuck again. Additionally, I don't want to go back. I want to go forward, towards Dhofar. This will mean driving on sand, and the tyres are already prepared. Just then, I spot a Bedouin, driving his pickup truck in the opposite direction, a few yards from where we are. I call to him, and using the universal communication device – pictures in the sand – he explains to me, 'all I need do is follow the tracks in the sand, and it will lead us to a tarmac road with a roundabout, then turn right, and I'll see signs for Salalah, three or four days away'. I can do that! I'll ignore that last part though. He takes me by the hand, and points out the track, which I missed. Elizabeth doesn't like this, but this is what we do, when we go into Al-Wahaybah sands to camp, we just follow the tracks. So filled with confidence, having seen someone driving along these tracks, we head off.

We were doing okay, and I was almost having fun, until we came to a village with several tracks, and each one we follow seem to lead nowhere. Now we had a problem. And there doesn't appear to be a soul about. Where is everyone?

We were in Abu Al-Akarish, with all tracks leading nowhere, and I have to admit, I'm not sure what to do. I didn't know whether to stay near the beach, or go inland. We had passed a large building, which we had believed to be a Ministry Building. So, we're headed back, to seek advice. On arriving at the building, it turned out to be a school, where we met two men, one with a basic understanding of English. He then asks another man, who I think was the headmaster, to help us. The headmaster escorted us to his house, and got us a bowl of water melon, and another man called Mohammed, who is an Egyptian, teaching English at the school. Mohammed then got another man, called Abdullah, who was an expert in driving in this region. And between them, although I had woken them from their midday sleep, they decided to escort us, until we picked up the track again. You see, it's so windy, they're not sure the tracks are there. So we set off, and within a couple of minutes, for the first time in my life, I was driving along a beach, at high speed, as if it were a motorway.



We had Mohammed, the English teacher, in the jeep with us, and I'm trying to keep up with Abdullah, who has balloon tyres fitted to his wheels. These are best for driving on sand, and he happily does 100kph along the damp sand, just above the surf, where the sand is firm. I mean he's flying, along with flocks of birds that, take off as we approach, and head for the windscreen. Just as I was gaining confidence, Abdullah makes a right turn, and we're now flying over sand dunes. I mean taking off! Well I have to, in order to keep up. On some dunes, I can't see any tracks in the sand, apart from his. So I don't want to lose him. In between trying to compose him-self;



even Mohammed's screams are drowning out those of Elizabeth. I'm too scared to make any noise, I'm just holding on. I have been 'sand bashing' once before, in Al-Wahaybah. But the vehicle was being piloted by an expert, and I was a passenger. I remember saying at the time, 'I don't think this is something I'll be doing', but I had no warning of this, and here I am doing it. It is great fun! Just as well I'm throwing my underwear away as we go, and not washing them. I just about managed to keep Abdullah in sight. Shortly afterwards, we're driving along the beach again. Then back in the desert, until we reached an area of greenery.



Photo: Elizabeth Mclean

We stopped and they had a discussion amongst themselves. Then, they decide to take us all the way to the blacktop. And so, we set off again. At speed, through the desert, along the beach and then back inland slightly, until we were at the blacktop. That has got to be, the most thrilling thirty-five minutes of driving I have ever done. And now, that it's over, I wouldn't mind doing it again. Maybe a little bit slower this time. I may just have lost my fear of driving in the desert, but not my respect for it. I try to offer them something for refreshments, for petrol, or to buy something for the children. They won't hear of it, and appear insulted by my gesture. All they wish for us to do is, "have a safe journey". I can't thank them enough for something so simple to them, but meant so much to me. May God Bless and Keep Them Safe. Once again, my journey has been made considerably easier, by the generosity of people I meet. Next time, if there ever is a next time, at least I now know how to do it. I am mindful that overconfidence can lead to disaster. Elizabeth is even more impressed than I, and believes they may have saved our lives. I don't belittle the thought, but, I've often been in worse situations.

Elizabeth's a lot happier, maybe even more so by the fact that, we're now heading off at slow speed - as the tyres are near flat - to the first petrol station we come to. Where I'm sure I'll find a tyre shop. There's always a tyre shop, stationed near the main road, out of the desert. At least, there always is, in the north. It might be quicker to travel with a tyre pressure gauge, and a battery operated pump, to refill the tyres in future.

8:10pm. Having found a petrol station, and somewhere to inflate the tyres, we decided to push on to Madrasah. If there's nowhere to stay, we'll spend the night on the beach, at Ras Khashayim. We end up at Ras Khashayim but it's quite windy, overcast, and humid. Elizabeth

believes it will rain and we'll get washed out to sea. So we're parked on the outskirts of Madrasah, in a car park leading to the beach, Ras Khashayim. As close to the beach as she wishes to get.

About a hundred yards away, there is a public wash cubicle. Local men have been coming to it since sundown, to take their nightly shower. I spoke with a couple of them to ask if rain was expected tonight, and told them that, we would be staying in the car park area, until dawn. They assure me it won't rain. Nevertheless, Elizabeth wants to sleep in a position that, she can drive away in a hurry. I think all the stories she has heard regarding flash floods, has left her possibly over cautious. Now that the traffic to the cubicles has subsided, we are about to take our nightly shower, in the off-suite bathroom, next to our boxes of water, before dressing in the changing area, towards the back of the jeep, and then bed down in the jeep.

It's been a really long day, and I have a feeling, it's going to be an equally long night. Who says I don't know how to show a girl a good time?



21st April 2008, Madrasah (Ras Khashayim), Ras Sawqrah, Salalah

6:21am, 26°C, 2226km. We've had another restless night. The humidity was so high, we had to run the engine, to power the jeeps' air-conditioning unit, several times during the night. Thankfully, it did not rain. Despite the events of yesterday, we covered over 580km. This means we are about halfway to Salalah. Unfortunately, we will not be able to stick to the coast all the way to Salalah, unless we drive along the beach, and we do not have sufficient knowledge of the terrain, to chance that. Additionally, given last night's accommodation, we really need to check into a hotel.

Our intended route from Madrasah to Salalah means we'll have to double back a bit, as we're on a dead-end road. Then head south towards Sawqrah, via Haitam, in order to go west, along route 41 to Marmul, via Shalim. Then connect with route 39 to Thumrayt, where we'll pick up route 31, heading south into Salalah. The maps we have, show route 41 as being under construction. We hope it is sufficiently complete.

12:52pm, 39°C, 2842km. Sticking to the plan, we actually ended up in Ras Sawqrah, having completely missed the turning for Shalim. I had a discussion with a few locals who confirmed our location, so we backtracked in search of the correct route. When we finally found what we believe to be the correct turning, the route looks as if it has been washed away, with no clear tracks remaining. We reckon, if the tracks are not clearly visible, it probably means the route is not in frequent use. Therefore, if we get into trouble, the chances of help, from passing traffic are slim. We decided to head back some 70km north, towards Haitam, then west, inland to Rima, pick up route 39, heading south, to Thumrayt.

Around midday it reached 40°C, and there was not much to see, apart from oil installation 'nodding-donkeys' pumps. As we push on towards our goal, the number of camels we sighted increased as we approach the Dhofar Mountain Chain. Elizabeth is holding up quite well at the steering wheel, though she looks a bit wild, her hair hasn't seen shampoo and conditioner for three days.

There is a lot of development around the Thumrayt area, including a dual carriage motorway. Thumrayt was little more than a couple of shops sixteen years

ago. It now looks as if it will evolve into a town, within the next five years.

11:00pm, 3035.3km. As we came over the 'Dhofar Mountain Chain', approximately 3:15pm, we note, the land is clearly awaiting the arrival of the Khareef. This is the period normally between July and September, when Salalah is enshrouded in rain clouds and mist, as the monsoon makes its way east. The Khareef is also the tourism high season here. During this period the landscape changes, into lush green pastures, animals give birth, Wadis overflow, and tens of thousands AGCC citizens, including Omani's flock to Salalah, leaving behind the heat of the north. Personally, I find it too cold and wet, and prefer to visit just after the Khareef, when the clouds recede, and the land still retains an abundance of colourful beauty. At the moment the landscape is ash brown, somewhat like my sun-bleached hair.

The roads into Salalah are strewn with herds of livestock, in search of whatever they can find to eat. You need to be very careful driving; you never know what's around the corner. The animals are allowed to wander freely, and prefer walking on the road. Entering Salalah, the immediate visible improvements are the road systems, and although it is low season, there's still a fair amount of traffic.

After driving around Salalah for a while, we checked into the Crowne Plaza Resort, our personal preference, after visiting other hotels. The Crowne Plaza Resort used to be the Holiday Inn Salalah. It is sited



on the coast, with its own private beach of white sands, and well maintained gardens, with several swimming pools, gym, mini-golf course, tennis courts, and all other expected amenities. We feel as if, we've come in from the wilderness, to civilisation, and must have looked a sight, walking into the hotel.

We spent the entire evening, trying to roll back the years, the last three days, have added to our appearance. When we discover the humidity of last night, got into the suitcases, and steam pressed all our clothes, we despaired. Once we regrouped, we headed to town, and had the car completely cleaned, as part of our beautification process.

As with Muscat the emergence of shopping centres, and supermarkets, are beginning to have an impact on lifestyles.



22nd April 2008, Salalah, Mirbat, Wadi Darbat, Taqah

8:00am. I'm grateful for the eight hours sleep, but still feel exhausted. Even though our time here is short, we've decided to spend the morning enjoying our surroundings. This means, we'll have to be selective with our objectives.

It's completely overcast, and I don't expect it to change whilst we're here. It's still very hot, and Elizabeth has managed to get slightly sunburnt within five minutes, of sunbathing under overcast skies. Being low season, the hotel is quite empty. As such, we've got the pools, and the incredibly hot Jacuzzi, to ourselves. But this is not a holiday, much to Elizabeth's dismay.

1:31pm, 34°C. We're now leaving the hotel. The plan today, is to head east to Mirbat, visiting Wadi Darbat, and Taqah on our way back.

2:31pm, 30°C, 3102.9km. In Mirbat; the local guide information we have, lists it as being famed for horse breeding. Yet, Thalib - a local man I met here in a coffeehouse, is unaware of this. As there are no stables or the like, listed on our local maps, or sign-posted, we deduce, this information is irrelevant. So, in an attempt to find something of interest, we are outside Mirbat Castle, which is under renovation. It looks like it's taken quite a battering from the coastal elements. This is not an unusual sight in Mirbat.

Mirbat, now a sprawling town, was traditionally a fishing village. And as traditional family dwellings fall into a state of disrepair, new, low-rise apartments have been built, to house emerging families. There is talk of, and notice boards heralding, future



Wadi Darbat, Dhofar - April 22, 2008

development of a hotel resort to be built. At the moment, it feels as if Mirbat is in a transitional phase, and a little unsure of where it should be heading. I get the feeling that past, traditional pursuits, are no longer relevant, or valued, in this corner of Oman. Even the children we've seen no longer dress traditionally. What happens next, in terms of development, has never been more critical, regarding implementation, ensuring emphasis on cultural integration.

This epitomises the feeling I have, in only a few other places, we have stopped. But here it's poignant. Yet, people we've met have been warm, open, friendly, and welcoming. That at least is something, which has not changed, throughout our journey so far.

4:28pm, 29°C, 3163km. We're in Wadi Darbat. There were spectacular viewpoints on the way down into the Wadi. The land is copper toned with dead grass, and trees without leaves. Yet, enough vegetation remains to provide grazing, for large herds of camels and cows. The further you go into the Wadi, the greener it gets, as it



still retains water. I would like to be here in early September once again, to see it at its most lush state. Nevertheless, the Wadi is still picturesque. When I first visited here in 1992, the track was so sodden we couldn't enter the wadi, through fear of being stranded. Now it is well sign-posted, and has a tarmac road as far as the tracks once led, with a spacious car park, and bathroom facilities.

Just off the car park, there still remains a footpath, taking you ever deeper into the Wadi; to sounds of birds cooing; the gentle rustling of trees; field mice scattering as I approach, only pausing to pose for me; and a camel's head pops up from behind a large bush. It's teeming with life.

5:57pm. We are in Taqah, and just completed, the one hundred and thirty seven step climb, to one of the fortifications. There is a vehicle track that leads up here, but we need the exercise. The reward is, it's scenic and cool. So I'll produce a panoramic image. Just wish the weather would clear up. I so dislike day, after day, of grey skies.



By the time we got back to Salalah, twilight was approaching. So before heading back to the hotel, I took the opportunity to photograph a number of fruit stalls, which are plentiful here. Salalah is very much an area of agriculture, given its temperate climate, and plentiful rain fall. Here they grow Bananas, Papaya, Mangos, and Coconuts, but not Dates. The whole area is filled with farms, hidden behind high walls, given more time, I would like to visit a few.



23rd April 2008, Salalah, Mughsayl, Ayn Jarziz, An Nabi Ayub (Job's Tomb)

10:30am, 31°C, 3272.4km. On route to the most southern point in Oman. This morning we went to the bird sanctuary, which was closed. And there's no point me researching it, as our timetable doesn't allow for a return visit. In fact, I'm not sure that it has the same facilities it once had, as it looks unkempt. Maybe it's only used

throughout the Khareef. Then we visited the 'Tourism Village'. This I thought, due to its name, would be an area dedicated to Omani culture, exhibitions, rides, hotel accommodation, and facilities. Well almost. It is about fifty percent complete, has a number of apartments and villas for rent, and a small swimming pool. However, we are reliably informed by a member of staff, who gave us the grand tour, the place comes to life during the Khareef. A temporary supermarket is created on site, an area is set-aside and populated with attractions for visitors, and the restaurant opens. It's a pity no one here has the idea to develop the 'Out-of-Season Tourist Industry'. After all, I don't think all people really enjoy damp, soggy holidaying. And I do believe Salalah has more to offer.

11:24am, 32°C, 3323km. Along the road to the border of Yemen, there is now an army checkpoint, and you need your passport, and the vehicle registration documents to continue. Ours are back in the safe at the hotel. So we've been turned back. We'll have to amuse ourselves in some other way for the rest of the day, and return tomorrow. Oman's borders have become more security conscious than they once were. Presently, we're just gearing down the mountain, on our way back to Mughsayl and level ground.



Mughsayl, Dhofar - April 23, 2008



Mughsayl, Dhofar - April 23, 2008





1:28pm, 31°C, 3336km. Left Mughsayl about eight minutes ago. We are on our way to the mausoleum of ‘An Nabi Ayub’ (Job’s Tomb), via Ayn Jarziz.

Mughsayl has been developed since 1992, and is an attraction that has merit all year round. With beautiful coastal views, blow-holes, and is accessible to wheelchair users, which is something that might surprise the first-time visitor to Oman. There is a concerted effort to accommodate wheelchair users. It also has a reception building with a restaurant, and toilet facilities. But, as with many public toilets, you’ll have to hold your breath. This is something that needs improving. Elizabeth is doing her Princess Diana impersonation, looking thoughtfully out to sea, as I set off in search of a composition.

On leaving Mughsayl, we note the reception building was being prepared for lunch, and there’s a procession of eight tourist coaches, heading past us. The coaches cannot climb the hairpin mountain road, so they must be heading for Mughsayl. Wait until they get a whiff of the bathrooms.

2:31pm, 31°C, 3409km. We are now on route to Job’s tomb, having just left Ayn Jarziz. Ayn Jarziz is a particularly beautiful place to visit during the Khareef. The water from the mountains creates a wonderful waterfall, much photographed. But out-of-season, as it is presently, and under a major refurbishment programme; there’s not much to see. If Salalah ever decides to take advantage of an out-of-season tourism industry, it would be a good idea to dam some of

the water, and install a pump, to create the effects of the Khareef, making this a great all year round attraction.

3:21pm, 28°C, 3425km. We are leaving Job’s tomb, which, and as with many sites in Oman, the surroundings have been developed (though the mosque itself remains untouched). The tourist coaches, that I mentioned earlier, as we were leaving Mughsayl, have arrived. I spoke with one of the tour guides, [Mohammed] who translated, to the guard looking after the mosque, my request to go into the minaret to repeat a shot I had taken years ago.



I understand that World Heritage, and religious sites are for all people. Nevertheless, I still feel that, bussing in so many people, and turn-styling them through such religious sites, is irreverent. Maybe, if more time was given to such visits, and more significance applied, everyone would get more – spiritually - out of such stopovers. Additionally, a better system for coaches needs to be implemented, as they are unable to pass each other safely. These roads were never designed for such traffic. The tourists, on these coaches have all disembarked from the cruise ship, docked in Salalah.

Salalah, and Khasab, are both benefiting from tourism, and trade, from the creation of ports. The ports are a successful and welcomed gain of modernization. The Dhofar region, like Khasab, is slightly different from the rest of Oman. In fact, the people here are still adapting to the numerous changes, brought about by modernization, and tourism. In speaking with Mohamed, the coach tour guide, I suggested, tourism in Salalah seemed to be lagging behind the sophistication of Muscat. He agrees that it has taken the people of this region, time to realise the rewards of such trade, but he thinks, as the benefits are now tangible, attitudes are quickly changing.

24th April 2008, Salalah, Sarfayt, Dalkut

8:49am, 31°C, 3479km. We’re setting off with, we hope, all the necessary papers, to allow us access to the border with Yemen. It’s still overcast, and I think clouds and dull skies are my equivalent to Superman’s Kryptonite; as I feel the energy being drained from me. I crave blue skies.



View towards Oman - Yemen border, Sarfayt, Dhofar - April 24, 2008



Dalkut, Dhofar - April 24, 2008

Today’s objective is to reach the most southern populated area of Oman, and the border with Yemen.

10:50am 31°C, 3630km. We’ve gone through a second checkpoint, and still heading towards the border town of Sarfayt. There is yet another mountain range to navigate. The endless majesty of these mountains is not lost on me. The roads are quite a feat of engineering. Driving through these mountains, I’m no longer complaining about tarmac. It makes the journey so much easier, and keeps the wife quiet. This is definitely a morning trip; not something to be rushed. As you ascend, and descend, each mountain you can feel the change in temperature.

12:04pm, 31°C, 3660km. At present we are in the town of Safayt, taking a well earned break, and a few photos before heading on to Dalkut.

The road sign states ‘Sarfit’ and the map says ‘Sarfayt’. We made it to the border, and I feel a premature sense of achievement, which has somewhat re-energised me. The border-post was opened in 2000. It permits crossings, and a small amount of trade. Oman has good relations with all its neighbours. Sergeant Ahmed Al-Ryhami, informed me that, we indeed had the necessary paperwork required, to cross over the border into the Democratic People’s Republic of Yemen. But that is not the objective. No matter how tempting it is. That’s another adventure.

1:30pm, 31°C, 3684km. Dalkut, the largest populated area within southern Oman, is a coastal town that is being modernised. Here you will find infrastructure necessary for the town’s transformation and expansion. Once again new buildings are being constructed, aside more traditional residences.

2:19pm, 31°C, 3700km. On leaving Dalkut, we stopped at a gathering of men, celebrating the wedding of Adula Ahamed Al-Barami, who unfortunately wasn’t there. Nevertheless, I was made welcome, and invited to join the celebration. The women’s celebrations are about a kilometre further in town, but Elizabeth feels she is too exhausted to enter into such a gathering, and so she awaits me in the jeep. I met and photographed Sheik Suhail Amer Mohammed Zabnoot. Then spent the next thirty minutes trying to explain, why I have to leave. In truth, I know I’m missing an opportunity here. Thanking them for their offer of hospitality on my return, which I hope to do one day.

I had thought this trip would take two to three hours, and am



glad that we had set out early. For now, we have just enough time to return to Salalah before dark, with a couple of stops along the way for photography.

5:12pm, 31°C, 3860km. Now back in the car park of Crowne Plaza, Salalah. On the way back, I managed to get shots of small shops along the road here. These were the mainstay of Salalah’s shopping and commerce industry not so long ago. It will be interesting to see if they survive the continued modernization of Salalah.

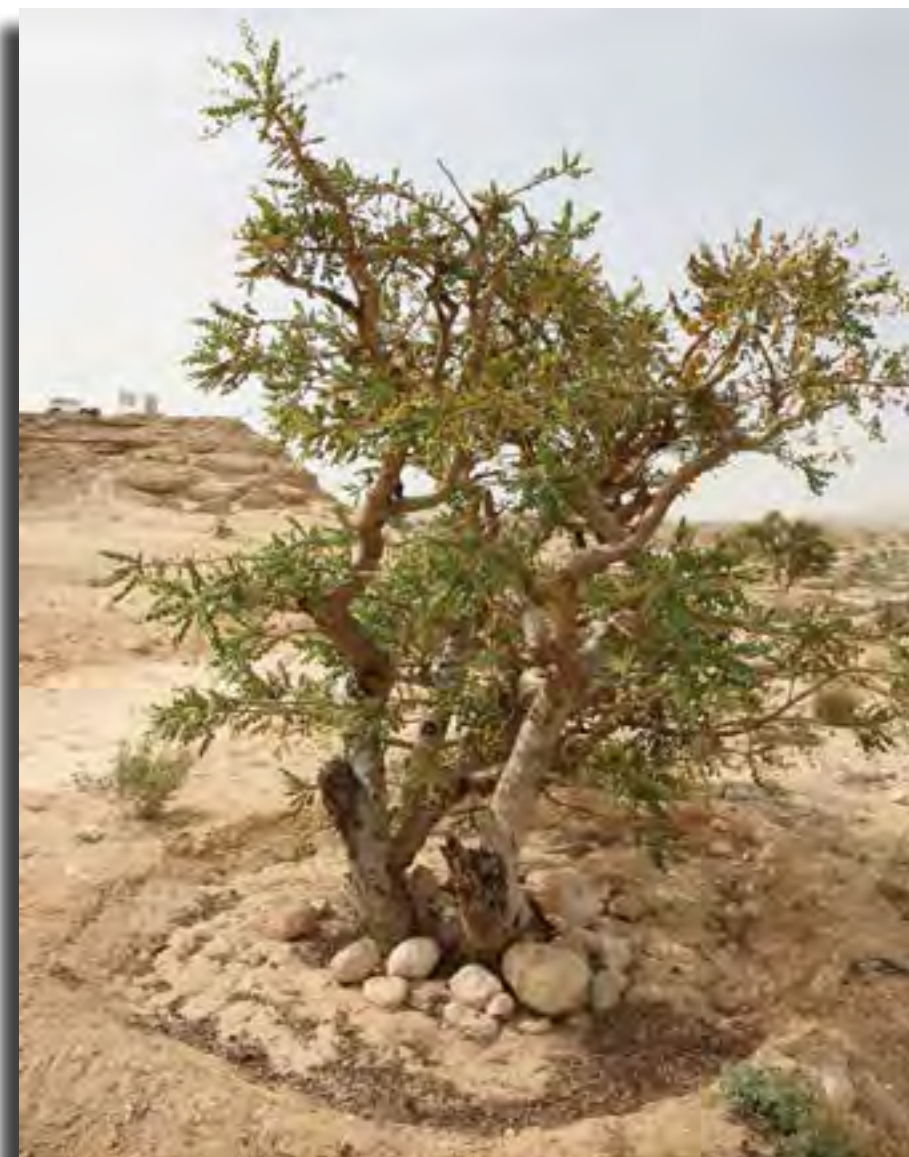
25th April 2008, Salalah, Wadi Dawkah, Nizwa

8:21am, 31°C, 3900km. We’ve just navigated the last roundabout out of Salalah, heading for Nizwa via Thumrayt. I’m aware I haven’t had enough time in Dhofar, but we must leave, hopeful to return.





Sheik Suhail Amer Mohammed Zabnoot, Dalkut, Dhofar - April 24, 2008



9:28am. Stopped at Wadi Dawkah, and photograph Frankincense trees. Their appearance belies their importance and fragrance. Leaves of the frankincense tree do not carry the scent; only the green buds, and mainly the sap, or resin, which hardens on contact with air, and when smouldered releases the fragrance.

4:39pm. Apart from a few oases, where petrol stations and Motels are situated; the area between Thumrayt, and Adam, is devoid of vegetation. There was one sticky incident when we were engulfed by a mini sandstorm, and had to pull off the road, through fear of a head-on collision, as we couldn't see past the bonnet of our jeep. Arrived in Nizwa and checked into Nizwa Hotel. It's great to be back under blue skies. And we have no intention of driving another kilometre today. Instead we'll enjoy the hotel's amenities, and recharge, before continuing tomorrow.

26th April 2008, Nizwa, Muscat

9:24am, 34°C, 4799km. We're just driving away from the Ministry of Tourism in Nizwa, having picked up a new map. The last one got torn to shreds by the wind. Today's schedule is to visit Nizwa Fort, which I haven't done since 1998, and then visit Al-Hoota cave, before checking-out of the hotel, and heading back to Muscat.



10:34am. Just leaving Nizwa Fort, which I had expected to be a ten minute visit, but was blown away by the changes. An excellent exhibition, of Omani traditions and culture, has been installed, and done to a high standard. There is also a coffee shop, with ice creams and snacks, and a souvenir shop, with prices that demand haggling over. All of which are air conditioned. This is a definite 'must see' for visitors to Nizwa. Given our timetable, we've gone around the fort as quickly as possible, but it still took an hour.





Nizwa Fort - April 26, 2008



Nizwa Fort - April 26, 2008



1:20pm, 39°C, 4868km. Finally got permission to take photographs within Al-Hoota caves, but as agreed, I'll go to the offices of 'PromoOman' in Muscat, to get a 'Property Release' in order to publish the images. It's beautifully cool within the caves, though a little humid due to the underground river at their base. The investment injected into this project is evident, by the standards to which it has been developed, and staff trained. They also have the first public train here, to transport visitors the short distance, between the reception building and the caves. I'm extremely glad I made the effort to return here, as the visit was worth it, and I've managed to get a great selection of photographs.



5:39pm, 30°C, 5110km. Safely back in Muscat. Just checked into the hotel. After a shower and change of clothes, we'll go to Ruwi for a spot of shopping, as we've got the evening off.



27th April 2008, Muscat

5:05am we're up for an early morning dip in the infinity pool, at Barr Al-Jissah Resort & Spa. And I can't resist. Again I've got the camera out, and am now instructing Elizabeth, as my model. I know, I don't give her a break, do I? This is our last day in Oman, and we intend to make the most of it, before flying home tonight.

Having interrupted Elizabeth's morning swim, we're off to dress for breakfast, attend a couple of meetings, and say goodbye, to a few friends we didn't have time to say hello to. Then to the Amouage factory, on the outskirts of Muscat. I've promised Elizabeth a gift, for putting up with me, over the last couple of weeks. Although I'm sad to be leaving, I find I'm looking forward to seeing my children.



Elizabeth at Barr Al-Jissah, Muscat - April 27, 2008



Epilogue

The Sultanate of Oman has under gone an extensive period of change, and shows no sign of slowing. Having travelled the full length of Oman; during this latest world-wind tour, driving over 5,600 kilometres in two weeks, and speaking with locals wherever I’ve gone; I have discovered that, the essence of the Sultanate, still remains. The people of Oman have made the transition from the past, without losing their identity, dignity, or humanity. If there are any changes in the Omani people, it is that they are a little more worldly, tolerant, and understanding. The warm welcome I’ve received, is reminiscent of my experiences of 1992. I feel very much at one in the presence of Omanis, as there are numerous parallels, with my own life experiences, and basic values.

My only dilemma is that; though I wish everyone could experience that which is Oman, I also wish to keep it safe, from much of the unhappiness of the rest of the world. Nevertheless, what this most recent voyage of rediscovery, has revealed to me is; the managed development, and tourism programmes, are at a pace adequate for modernization, yet, suitably measured, to allow people - especially those of the interior - time to adjust, to the influx of visitors, and ideals, whilst retaining that, which makes Oman so special. As such, the Sultanate of Oman remains a premium, unspoilt, must visit location.

Even though, I have been visiting the Sultanate of Oman since 1991, I still feel as if I’ve only scratched the surface. This is such a diverse country, and there is so much more to see. And so it is my sincere desire to return often to this land that, has given me, so many memorable experiences; Insha’llah.



Intend to visit? Well before you set off, here are a few Do's and Don't's whilst exploring;

- Do – *smile and take the time to meet and greet people. They don't want anything from you and often are the very same people you're going to need to help you when you get into trouble.*
- Don't – *speak loudly or become frustrated if one of the languages people speak isn't the one you do.*
- Do – *feel free to drive anywhere you wish and feel safe.*
- Don't – *drive at speed past people, other vehicles, and houses or through villages when using graded roads. The dust created can cause offence or accidents.*
- Do – *keep your windscreen clean and slow down or pullover until sunrise or sunset passes and beware of people or animals on the road. If you hit a camel it can kill you when it lands on the roof.*
- Don't – *move your vehicle after an accident (unless you have no choice), until the police have recorded details.*
- Do – *take all opportunities to fill up on bottled drinking water and petrol.*
- Don't – *run out of petrol, or drive a dirty vehicle in the capital, there's a fine.*
- Do – *accept offers of refreshments.*
- Don't – *take more than three cups of coffee or take a cup*

- when offered unless you're the eldest, even though your host may insist. There's etiquette of refusing, at least three times, insisting that your host drink first.*
- Do – *remove your footwear before entering a home or stepping on a carpet to take refreshments.*
- Don't – *sit until you host sits.*
- Do – *look after you feet, kept them clean and well oiled.*
- Don't - *show the sole of your feet, and keep your legs closed; it's an insult and will cause offence.*
- Do – *feel free to try the food, why not use you're hands, food tastes better that way, but wash them before and after.*
- Don't – *eat with you're left hand. That's for washing your privates. Of course you can use both hands to tear your own bread, but use your right hand when picking it up and then don't replace it for others to eat.*
- Do – *use sun-block, the sun is stronger than you think.*
- Don't – *show bare skin, cover arms and legs, especially if you're a woman. This will stop men glaring and women frowning.*
- Do – *drink water even if you don't feel thirsty, particularly during the summer months.*
- Don't – *get straight of the plane and exert yourself in the sun.*

Photographer Gerald Mclean

Gerald is a highly experienced and well published creative photographer who works internationally. Having began his career using traditional photographic methods, he has retained and honed his skills, whilst completing his Masters in Digital Imaging. Embracing new technology, he is completely conversant with current digital photographic methodologies. And now produces 100% of his work using digital equipment, and processes his own photography. Thus, extending his control over the final depiction, whilst ensuring the veracity of the image.

Gerald's choice of photography, as a profession, was influenced by his realization of control of photographic images, when participating in the entire process - from conception to print. His love, and practice of photography, now spans over thirty years.

As with all professionals, Gerald had to select a photographic discipline, and Architectural Photography was his preference. His choice of architecture, as his specialised subject, was determined partly by his apprenticeship, to architectural photographer, John Maltby. And partly by the desire to portray, what he perceives to be constructive in our lives - in both the literal and the abstract sense. Architecture, and the elements from which it is composed, provide Gerald with the ideal subject, with which to transform those elements into salient pictorial form.

Early in his career, Gerald decided to go to New York, and attempt to photograph, what is acknowledged to be, one of the most architecturally exciting cities in the world. In New York, taking pictures for his portfolio, he experimented with the new shapes that presented themselves, and achieved a greater confidence controlling the fundamentals of form; line, mass, space and proportion. International assignments have helped him to photograph from unusual standpoints; to stress those aspects, which communicate the driving aesthetic behind each composition to the viewer, without losing the integrity of the original subject.

Kodak -1991

However, Gerald acknowledges that, 'it is Oman that has presented him with some of his greatest challenges and joy'.



taSauwur

Sultanate of Oman

is a chronological photographic diary, documenting the trips and tribulations of photographer Gerald Mclean, as he explores the Sultanate; visiting off-beat locations covering the entire length of the country, whilst photographically depicting Oman's diverse and beautiful landscape, people, culture and progress.

The book is aimed at those readers whom have an interest in Photography, Travel, the Middle East and Arabic culture, and the Sultanate of Oman. The reader is taken on an eventful trip through the Sultanate, introduced to the warmth and welcome of the Omani people, including aspects of rural life, and entertained by the thoughts and experiences of the author. Finally, it offers a glimpse of modern life, and amenities available for visitors, to the Sultanate of Oman.

The book has been published in celebration of the Sultanate of Oman 40th National Day.
18th November 2010.



taSauwur - Sultanate of Oman

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