Jordan and Oman 1988: More Rum Goings On

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(*Plate* 104)

In last year's Area Notes I left Miguel and Xavier Gallego suspended on the third day of their new route on the E face of Jebel Rum. I should therefore begin by belatedly announcing the completion of their route on the fifth day: The Red Sea, 400m ED, with pitches of VI+ and A2.

Since then (spring 1987), the area has continued to grow in popularity, with up to 100 climbers visiting the valley in both spring and autumn seasons as well as a few in midwinter. A large quota of new climbs has been added, in particular by Italian and Austrian climbers. Perhaps the best selection of first ascents in 1988 were a dozen climbs added by Wolfgang Hampolter and Albert Precht of Austria, in the spring, with grades varying from IV to VI on the massifs of Rum and Um Ishrin, lengths from 300 to 500m.

The English team of R M Austin and A D Erskine added a unique little climb out of the remote 'Pit' in the Great Siq which gashes the summit of Jebel Rum. They named it The Empty Quarter, 5B, and they also rediscovered a previously unknown Bedouin climb on Annafishiyyah.

Di Taylor and myself also called in *en route* to Sinai and Egypt's Eastern Desert and added a couple of pleasant climbs to Jebel Rum's rapidly growing 'tick list', as well as spending some days out in the desert sharing Ramadan and swopping yarns with our Bedu friends. Sinai proved less attractive than Rum but has many climbs to offer (going back to ascents by Comici), on granite walls and cracks unfortunately exfoliating because of the extremes of temperature. The area is nevertheless well worth visiting, and no doubt also has much to offer in the way of new routes as well as classics, many put up by Steve Read in the 1970s.

Wadi Rum, on the other hand, is now rapidly coming of age. Most of the classic lines in the main valley and within easy reach of the Rest House have been picked. Further afield, however, the place is still wide open for rock exploration. An updated 'New Routes Book' will be taken out to the Rest House in spring 1989. It describes about 50 new climbs, and for those seeking the best of the existing routes the following climbs are a few of the most popular (or should be!):

Jebel Rum

All the Bedouin Routes, in particular the Traverse of Rum, Althallamiyyah and Rijm Assaf. Mostly Grade 3 or 4. People who have done these routes are ecstatic about them.

Pillar of Wisdom. TD inf 350m. A real classic with a 5B (English grade) crux at the end. Beware of 'flashing' the route and getting lost on the summit domes!
Aquarius. TD sup 300m. The only route on the E Dome wall known to have had a number of repeats. Lots of variety!
Inshallah Factor and Towering Inferno. 450m. TD sup and ED inf respectively. Waiting for repeats. Both superb.
The Ziggurat-Aquarius-Atalla Connection. 450m ED (crux 6B English) has probably not yet been strung together as a single route and should be excellent.

Um Ishrin Massif

The Beauty and The Perverse Frog. TD and TD sup 200m. Justifiably popular crack and wall climbs respectively.
Autre Dimension. TD 500m. The only route to date to the top of N Nassrani. Unrepeated (crux 5C English).
Warriors of the Wastelands. ED inf 400m. The soaring corner of the E face of S Nassrani. Unrepeated (crux 6B English).

Further afield, the Barrah Canyon climbs are a must. Stay the night out there: it's magic. (Mostly routes of 100–200m at English 5A or above). Burdah E face slabs and Rock Bridge are on everyone's tick list and quite rightly so (Wadi Rum's Idwal Slabs), and down at the south end of the area Khazali is also a must with its rock carvings and climbs like Doug Scott's Crack of Cracks (English 5C, unrepeated).

For good deals on travel to Jordan from the UK, Jasmin Tours of Chalfont St Peter, Gerrards Cross, still seem to be the best contact.

The Mountains of Oman

During a four-week visit to Oman in December 1988/January 1989, Di Taylor and I travelled through most of the northern mountains, namely the massifs of the eastern and western Hajar, facilitated by expatriate rock-climber and adviser to the Sultan, Alec MacDonald.

The rock is limestone and rises to a height of 3009m at Arabia's highest summit, Jebel Shams, part of the Jebel Akhdar range in the western Hajar. Unfortunately, because of the nature of the rock and the extremes of temperature (freezing at high altitude in midwinter, and over 50°C out of the shade at midday, even in midwinter), the vast majority of the rock is either exfoliating or broken and not climbable with any feeling of great security!

Nevertheless, there is good rock to be found, and Alec MacDonald has collated details of about 60 routes on rock of varying degrees of solidity, some in the wadis of Aday and Mayh, near Muscat and others further afield. The biggest routes in the country are on Jebel Misht (2090m), on its six-kilometre long S/SE face which rises to a height of 1100m at the central 'Nose'. A route was climbed near the Nose by three French guides headed by Raymond Renaud, with extreme free climbing and 'some aid in the lower section'. In the western sector British climber Mike Searle and team added a difficult 1000m route and,

at the western extremity, a 150m climb of a more amenable standard. Together with Alec MacDonald we added a 400m route, maximum difficulty 5B, up the SE pillar. We also climbed – and added some extra routes to – Alec's smaller cliffs, and did a lot of trekking into the many superb upper mountain valleys and canyons.

In the western Hajar, Jebel Akhdar (and Shams) have some superb treks in magnificent scenery in wild valleys where remote and beautifully terraced villages are situated. Here also are big walls of up to 1200m, but with loose rock despite their very attractive and challenging appearance. Some of the canyons, however, seem to have excellent walls of around 200–300m. The view from Jebel Shams down into the 1000m deep Saydran Canyon is reminiscent of the view into the Grand Canyon.

To the east there seem to be fewer opportunities for climbing, but the through-canyon of Wadi Dayqah is a particularly splendid 15-kilometre trek, with a 1000m cliff at its NE end and the journey through Wadi Bani Khaled, over the pass and down to Tiwi on the coast should be excellent. There is also considerable caving in both massifs, some very spectacular, and for bird-watchers both the mountains and coast offer an amazing variety, from vultures, eagles and ospreys to kingfishers and sun birds.

The best time of the year to visit the country is December–February, and for the climber or trekker looking for something new the possibilities are almost infinite. There are three main problems: first, a 'no objection certificate' is required, and is only obtainable from a resident in the country or an approved travel agent such as Jasmin Tours of Chalfont St Peter; second, a good robust vehicle (preferably four-wheeled drive) is essential for access to the mountains; finally, many of the best treks are through-treks (crossing the massifs from north to south, or vice-versa) and, to undertake these, arrangements have to be made to be met at the other end: it is best if there are two parties to take opposite routes and exchange vehicles.

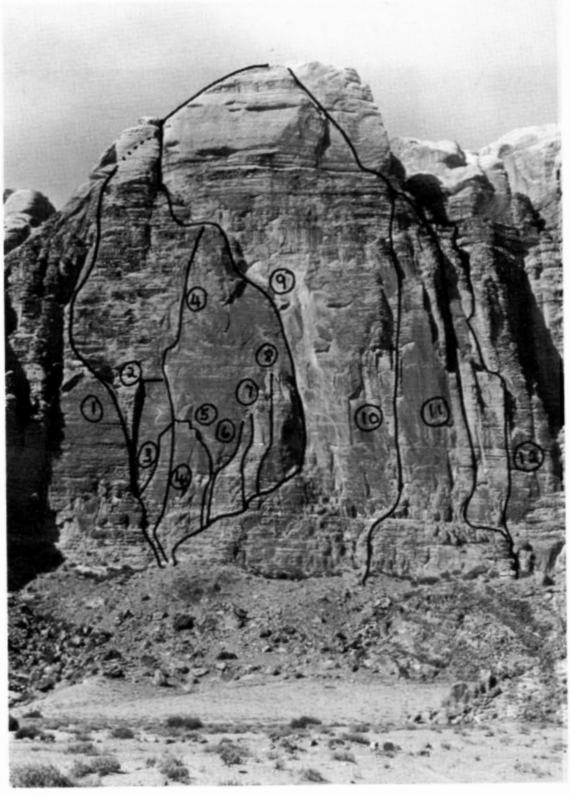
Addendum: Note on Africa

EAST AFRICA: Andrew Wielochowski would be grateful for comments and information about recent developments and changes in East Africa to update guidebook information: A Wielochowski, 32 Seamill Park Crescent, Worthing BN11 2PN, or c/o the Alpine Club.

RUWENZORI: Henry Osmaston is updating his guide to this region and would appreciate new-route information: Dr H A Osmaston, Regil Farm, Winford, Bristol BS18 8BB, or c/o the Alpine Club.



103. (Above) Sierra de Gredos: Riso Moreno and Ameal de Pablo. (p 231)



104. Jordan: Jebel Rum – East Dome – East Face. (p 250)

1 *'I.B.M.' 400m TD*
2 *'Flight of Fancy' 5c*
3 *'Mad Frogs and Englishmen' 5c*
4 *'Towering Inferno' 300m ED inf*
5 *'Walk like an Egyptian' 4c*
6 *'Troubadour' 5c*
7 *'Wall of Lace' 5a*
8 *'Goldfinger' 5a*
9 *'Inshallah Factor' 450m TD sup*
10 *'Red Sea' 450m ED*
11 *'Atalla' 450m TD sup*
12 *'Aquarius' 300m TD sup*
... *through cave 'Eye of Allah'*