

The southwest face—Coxcomb—of Jabel Misht. Routes marked here in the central section of the face are typically in the 5.7 - 5.9 category and around 500m maximum. (1) Tindetinix (Cicogna-Manica, 2003), (2) Watergate (Brachmayer-Precht, 2001), (3) Misht as a Newt (Barlow-Nonis, 1999), (4) Sorely Misht (Hornby-Sammut-Turnbull, 2003), (5) Gorillas in the Misht (Hornby-Ramsden, 1999), (6) Red Misht (Chaudry-Hornby, 2000), (7) Mishts of Time (Hornby-Knott, 2004). *Paul Knott*

scree slopes, which added to the challenge. During our visit heavy rain flooded the roads, and afterwards the temperature was surprisingly cold for several days. Traveling through the country was a pleasure, and we received great hospitality from the people living in the mountains.

PAUL KNOTT, *New Zealand*

Jordan

WADI RUM

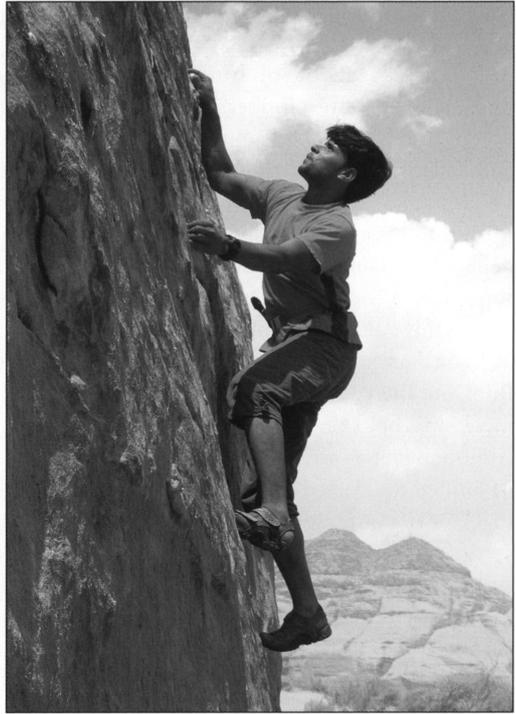
Autumn 2005-Spring 2006, summary. In 2005 climbing slowly began to pick up again in Wadi Rum, and just before Easter 2006 many climbers and trekkers were active. Visitors are advised to have travel and sports activity insurance, even if climbing with Bedouin guides, who are unable to obtain rescue insurance. Long-time activist Wilf Colonna, a French guide who runs a Jordanian travel agency, notes that local guides have formed the Wadi Rum Volunteer Rescue Society. They are looking for contributions, so they can purchase much-needed rescue equipment. Donations should be made to Sabbah Eid al Zalabieh, who is looking after the Rum Rescue Fund in the Arab Bank. Guides have identified accident “hot spots” and are training aspirants about hot spots on popular routes, before issuing a guiding permit that will be recognized by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA). The Guides also hope that the French Mountaineering Federation (FFME) will assist, by providing a technical guiding

course. Visitors are also advised to leave notification of their intended treks or climbs at the Tourist Police Office in the Rest House and not at the new Visitors Center, as originally proposed, a sensible precaution in this area of unusual complexity.

Now to the climbing. Autumn 2005's first developments were several new single-pitch routes, at F4 and 5, on Seifan Kebir in the eastern sector of Rum, put up during October by Harry and Lose Adshad. November saw more serious stuff appear, on the south face of Jebel Kharazi opposite the Rest House. Although still incomplete, the eight-pitch Ish Hazak (Strong Man) was climbed by Joel Etinger and Gili Tenne at 6a maximum. It takes a direct line up the obvious water-polished cracks that begin left of Vanishing Pillar. Descent is by five rappels.

Even nearer the Rest House, the rock Mecca of the east face of Jebel Rum's East Dome received yet another top-quality route. Named Rock Empire and put up by Ondra Benes, Michal Rosecky, and Tomas Sobotka, this 15-pitch route is bolt-protected and at least 6b to 7a for most of its length, with a crux of around 8a. [See report below—Ed.] Their verdict? "A great sport climb on perfect rock. Take 10 quick draws, slings, two 60m ropes, and Friends for the final pitches of Raid Mit the Camel."

Jebel um Ishrin was climbed by a route that is technically easy but long and complex. Bedouin guide Talal Awad, with Robert Mandi and Rum regular Gilles Rappeneau, made the ascent in November and named it Bedu Majnun (Crazy Bedouin). Wilf Colonna, who spends half of each year in Rum, made the second ascent in April 2006 with aspirant Bedouin guide Mohammad Hammad. Supposedly a long-lost Bedouin route up the east face, it was graded 4 by Awad, Mandi, and Rappeneau, who found it necessary to place protection on the exposed crux pitch. While finding evidence that ibex had almost certainly used this route (scuff marks are visible on the sandstone), Wilf and Mohammad believe it unlikely that Bedouin hunters would have climbed up and down this pitch. They were not convinced that this is an old Bedouin way, and Mohammad should know. Not only is he the youngest and best of today's Bedouin climbers, creating new routes up to 7b, but both his father, Hammad Hamdan, and his grandfather, Sheikh Hamdan Amad, were well-known guides, hunters, and two of the most illustrious pioneers in the region. Sheikh Hamdan led the first guided route in Rum, with clients Charmian Longstaff (wife of British Himalayan explorer Tom Longstaff) and her daughter Sylvia. The three climbed the Great Siq on the west face in 1952, "Hamdam climbing with bare



Top Bedouin guide, Mohammed Hammad, bouldering out the start of an unclimbed line in the Barrah Canyon, Wadi Rum. Hammad has climbed new routes up to 7b. *Di Taylor*

feet as surely as a mountain goat.” They reached the summit in around three hours, a time that is still rarely bettered.

There is talk of continuing the search for a Bedouin way on Jebel Um Ishrin and also on North Nassrani. Climbers have discovered ibex droppings (carried down and confirmed) on the latter, a difficult summit to reach. However, a new route on North Nassrani’s southeast face is definitely not a Bedouin way. Sandy Silence, climbed by M. Dorfleitner and F. Freider on January 3, 2006, lies on one of Rum’s most impressive walls, between Guerre Sainte and Muezzin. It is a nine-pitch route on good rock, described as “long, sparsely bolted, and more demanding than Guerre Sainte to the left.” All you require are 13 quick draws, slings, two 60m ropes and “a good head.”

Only Austrians Albert Precht and Sigi Brochmeyer seem able to climb Rum’s big faces in traditional style. They were out in Rum again this spring, climbing on the west side of Jebel Rum, but there is no news yet of their activity. Although the number of big-wall bolt routes is increasing, bolts on smaller cliffs are frowned upon, even by the Bedouin guides. Some guides, without being aware of British ethics, have suggested that sport climbs with fixed gear should be limited to selected cliffs. In fact, the leaflet provided for climbers at the Visitor Center states that “the use of power drills is not permitted in the Protected Area.”

So it is a great shame that a bolt-protected line has been added between Perverse Frog and The Beauty, both traditionally protected routes, climbed in 1985 by Alan Baker and Wilf Colonna. The new route, *Priez pour Nous* (Pray for Us: were they expecting condemnation?) is six pitches of mostly 6b and 6c, with a 7b crux. Twenty-five bolts were placed, shiny ones. They are even visible from the Rest House over a kilometer away, glinting in the sun. It may be an enjoyable climb, but in my opinion and also Wilf Colonna’s, the use of bolts here is out of order, unsightly, and detracts from the ambience of the nearby traditional classics. The cliffs of Rum were developed as an adventure playground with few signs of man. Let’s keep it that way.

In early 2006 the weather was most unusual. During late February a torrential rainstorm during the night flooded the whole Rum valley, from the new Visitor Center south to Khazali and on into Khor al Ajram south of Wadi um Ishrin. A river rushed down that valley, carving a new wadi in the heart of the old one. Bedouin had to be rescued from the floods. As the water evaporated, vast mud flats, then dust bowls, appeared, producing dust storms throughout the spring. The rains continued, albeit at rare intervals, until mid-April. This is unusually late for Jordan; north Jordan hills still had snow in March. And Mr. Bush says climate change is still in doubt!

Elsewhere in Jordan new three-day treks are being organized between Dana Reserve and Petra. Canyon exploration is also continuing, and some canyons now have fixed gear placed by guides. Wilf Colonna and Mohammed Hammad have been exploring the cliffs below Shaubak Castle, north of Petra. Between 20–30m in height, these cliffs are steep, with good quality limestone, similar to those around Ajlun Castle in north Jordan, where Tony Howard and Di Taylor have located a dozen cliffs. These cliffs have easy access, and the surrounding landscape is particularly beautiful in spring. The cliffs look over rolling green hills with flower-filled meadows and forests of oak, pistachio, and pine. There are also a few caves in this area, the best of which, Zubia, was recently trashed by well-meaning locals. Having discovered that it was being visited, they removed the obligatory roped descent and entry crawl, and people can now walk in. However, they thereby opened the venue to non-cavers, and most of the features have been destroyed. Such is life!

Despite the political problems, Jordan is still reasonably busy with tourists. Why not give it a try this autumn or next spring? The climbing is unique, the people are wonderful, and the Red Sea, with its superb snorkeling and diving, is just an hour away. For general information on, and links to, climbing in Rum visit www.nomadstravel.co.uk

TONY HOWARD, U.K.

Jebel Rum, east face, Rock Empire.

In November Michal Rosecky, Tomas Sobotka, and I visited Wadi Rum. We were interested in this area because we come from the Czech Republic, where most rock climbing is on sandstone. We've put up many new routes in our country and wanted to make a first ascent in Jordan using the ground-up ethic we employ at home. Although we were away from home for a month, we only spent two weeks in Wadi Rum, the rest of the time traveling and climbing elsewhere in Jordan and Israel. November may not be the best time to climb in Wadi Rum. Nighttime temperatures were 8-10°C, and climbing in the shade could be chilly. However, we put up a new route on the 500m east face of 1,560m Jebel Rum.

Rock Empire is a 15-pitch line with the hardest climbing on pitches three to five. We redpointed the crux fourth pitch at UIAA IX+/X- or an Elbe Valley sandstone grade of Xb. It was a vertical wall with small finger holes and a very technical finish. Pitches three and five were IX-. We completed the route from November 8-11 and believe it could be the longest hard climb in Wadi Rum. This is the Arabic world with its own rules and food, but we enjoyed the experience



Ondra Benes making thin moves on the new Rum super-route, Rock Empire (500m, 8a), east face of Jebel Rum. *Ondra Benes Collection*

ONDRA BENES, *Czech Republic*