

[Editor's note: Tony Howard and Di Taylor are the authors of *Treks and Climbs in Wadi Rum and Jordan: Walks, Treks, Caves, Climbs & Canyons*, and operates the tourism consultancy n.o.m.a.d.s., [www.nomadstravel.co.uk](http://www.nomadstravel.co.uk).]

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## Egypt

*Access issues.* In the middle of 2007 the Egyptian Tourism Ministry announced that they were banning climbing in Sinai, which would have effectively stopped all climbing in Egypt. However, by late autumn this had been rescinded and Dave Lucas made a Sinai traverse without problem. In fact Lucas is being salaried for two years to lead treks and climbing trips, and to train the Jabaliya Bedouin in the St Katherines region in trek leadership and first aid, a project managed in Cairo and financed by the EU. Other British trips are planned for 2008.

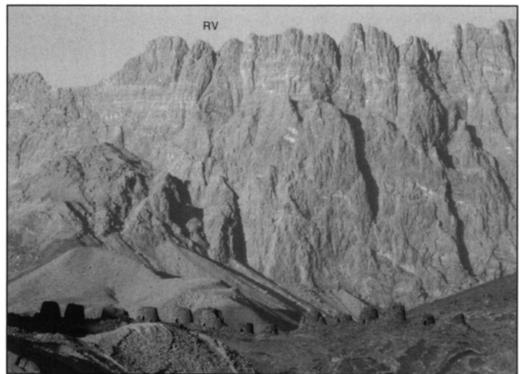
The extensive mountainous area of the Red Sea Coast is rather different from the Sinai, and access still appears to be a no no, partly due to the exact line of the Egypt-Sudan border being in dispute and the discovery of oil offshore. Tony Howard and friends have been trying to go to this area on a yearly basis, their latest attempt in early 2008, but have been steadfastly refused by the Egyptian Army despite personal requests from local contacts. But there are others who suggest Egypt is incapable of banning climbing, as the regulators don't understand the concept, and in any case the Sinai is run outside Cairo's influence, with the mountain valleys full of opium farms that are operated, protected, or financed by the army and police chiefs, who certainly wouldn't listen to authorities in Cairo.

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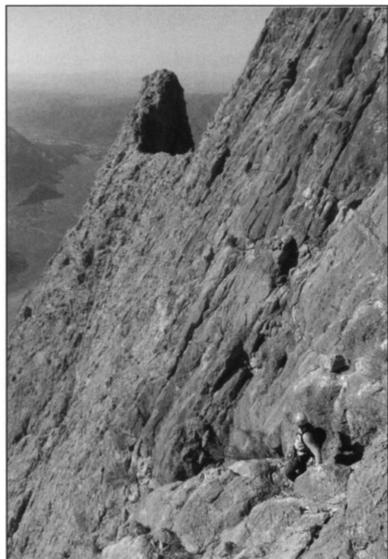
## Oman

*Jabal Misht, Jabal M'Saw, Jabal M'Seeb, Jabal Kawr, Nadan Pillar; new routes.* In December, I returned once again to the exotic limestone massifs of Jabal Misht and Jabal Kawr in Oman. My climbing partner on this trip was Richard Simpson, also from Christchurch, New Zealand. We found the people as welcoming as ever, and in the stable weather we were able to climb seven new routes. In all cases, we sought natural lines of weakness and climbed in traditional style using cams and nuts, as has been the norm in this area.

On the superlative Jabal Misht (2,090m), we found the cunning line Rock Vulture (505m, TD-, VI, 5.8R) near



The western end of Jabal Misht's south face, as seen from the "Beehive Tombs" at Al Ain. Rock Vulture takes a slanting ramp to the second tower right of the broad col. To its right is Madam Butterfly (700m, TD, 5.9, Chaudrey-Hornby, 2000) and to its left (taking the easier ground to the broad col), is the 1982 Davis-King-Searle Route. *Paul Knott*



Pitch 12 of Rock Vulture, above the crux at the start of the circling ledge. *Paul Knott*



Richard Simpson completing pitch 1 (IV) on Rock Vulture. *Paul Knott*

the western end of the south face. We accessed this neglected part of the face by scrambling up to an atmospheric hanging valley. The key to Rock Vulture is a broad ramp circling up and round the steep second tower. To reach this, we escaped from a deep cleft via two exciting crux pitches at British HVS and a short traverse and abseil.

We also climbed on the south side of Wadi Al Ain, opposite Jabal Misht. On Jabal M'Saw, a south-western outlier of Jabal Misfah, we climbed White Knight (545m, D+, V+) on the buttress left of the existing White Magic. On Jabal Assala's furthest east tower (referred to by the friendly villagers below as "Lorbib"), we climbed the delightful Orange Roughy (383m, D, V+) on the main north pillar.

South of Jabal Kawr (ca 2,700m), we climbed two routes on the shaded and accessible north face of Jabal M'Seeb, adding to the three existing lines. Bloody Sunday (395m, TD-, VI-) was a varied and satisfying route sneaking through the overhanging head at the left side of the face. We named it for the havoc a dislodged flake caused to the back of my hand. Moonshadow (276m, D+, VI-) was a shorter, but still excellent line at the right hand end, featuring steep climbing up huge hollow blocks.

We climbed two easier routes on the adjacent sunny face of Jabal Kawr. Sunset Serpent (503m, D-, IV) takes a shallow buttress facing M'Seeb hamlet, and probably represents the easiest route to this end of the plateau. The hiss of a snake startled us on the entry pitches; at the top, we were surprised to discover a carefully wedged, faded cap sporting the coat of arms of the UAE. It may be that this marks the celebrated National Day Climb (500m, D-) climbed in 1984 by Bill Wheeler and friends, in which case their route must have taken the old watercourse right of Sunset Serpent, some distance from the line suggested by existing information. We made our final ascent on

Christmas Day, weaving our way up AD+ (IV) slabs and stepped ramps to the summit of the Nadan Pillar, a striking feature rising 800m from the gorge that leads to the hidden cirque of Nadan. The pillar sports an alluring but somewhat inaccessible black and orange south face, from which our route would make an expedient descent. Below in the gorge, work continues on the improbable and somewhat destructive project to build a road through the ancient boulder choke to Nadan village. Despite the developing infrastructure in this part of Oman, we still met no other climbers during our stay.