

Wadi Rum, various routes. Over the winter John was based in Amman, and between trips to Baghdad, Anne visited Jordan and we spent as much time as possible in Wadi Rum. We decided the place was fantastic, having world class everything (trad, sport, scrambling, camel-riding, ...). Our top ticks were: FFA of Towering Inferno, freeing 5 aid pitches to give an 8-pitch E6 6a; Rum's first headpoint: Rum Grit (E7 6b) right of Catfish Corner; onsight ascents of existing routes Rock Empire (8a; to after the crux pitches) and La Guerre Sainte (F7b; the best multi-pitch sport route imaginable!); and several new short routes. Anne returned to the U.K. earlier so John had chance to nip down for a couple more routes, both climbed onsight solo (probably the first solos of any long routes in Rum other than Bedouin routes): I.B.M., 13 pitches, F6b (about E3 5c); Inshallah Factor, 15 pitches, F6c (about E4 6a); both times descending Eye of Allah after reaching the East Summit and the Main Summit (by Hammad's Route) respectively.

ANNE and JOHN ARRAN, U.K.

Jordan, climbing access threat. Di Taylor and I discovered the climbing potential of Wadi Rum in 1984 and soon extended our explorations across the country, finding more climbing areas, treks, canyons, and caves. I wrote in Summit 26, 2002 about the problems faced by the Bedouin with regard to tourism development in Rum. This year, with the creation of new Nature Reserves throughout the country and the likely tightening of regulations in Petra, we realized that Jordan may be about to lose many of its traditional mountain freedoms. As a consequence we devoted a week of our time in Jordan this spring to discuss the issue with those concerned, armed with feedback from climbers, trekkers and national parks in the U.K., USA, and France, and based on the following extracts from the UIAA environmental objectives and guidelines adopted at their general assembly, 4 October 1997, in Slovenia:

"The UIAA believes that mountaineers can best meet their environmental responsibilities, as well as helping to safeguard mountain land and local communities, through a process of integration ... [by] Persuading decision makers that mountains and mountain people are important and responsible mountaineering is an activity deserving of the highest levels of support ... [and] Supporting the establishment of protected areas, such as national parks and reserves, to safeguard the finest mountain wildlife and scenery, so long as these are effectively managed, well integrated with local community needs and sensitive to mountaineering requirements."

Since Di, Al Baker, Mick Shaw, and I first climbed in Jordan in 1984, we and other mountain activists have discovered that Jordan is full of unexpected adventure tourism potential, including climbing, canyoning, trekking, mountain biking, paragliding, and (to a much smaller extent) caving. Simultaneously, the RSCN (Royal Society for Conservation of Nature) have, without consultation with activists, been creating their reserves and strictly regulating access that was, before the existence of the reserves, open to all. Ninety percent of each reserve is closed to the public "to protect the environment," the rest is controlled by the need to make advance bookings, use designated trails exclusively, and to have and pay for a compulsory guide. Additionally, numbers are severely reduced due to limited accommodation in campsites and hotels in the reserves; no overnighting is allowed other than in RSCN camps; entrance can only be at the specified entrance points, where a fee is charged. Climbing and other such activities are banned, with no reasons given. Long distance trails are frowned upon and discouraged from passing through the reserves, which are some of the most beautiful parts of Jordan.



Sabbah Eid, a Bedouin mountain guide, showing off his homeland. *Tony Howard*

Whilst the Petra Authority has taken the same stance with regard to climbing and other “adventure” activities, which are seen to be hazardous (due to lack of understanding on management’s part), it has been less rigid in its approach to trekking and overnighing on the trails through the Archaeological Park. However, with the desire to further develop the commercial potential of the Park encouraged by consultants and funding from USAID, it now seems that bureaucrats with little or no understanding of mountain tourism are taking over. There was no consultation with mountain activists until the Petra National Trust contacted us for our views on designated trails and we subsequently presented our case for keeping the Petra Park open to trekkers and climbers. Sadly, we have been overruled on the climbing aspect, even where climbs already exist on the fringe of the Park; also, judging from the meetings we had with PNT since, it may not be long before Petra trekkers also lose their “right to roam.”

Luckily the situation in Wadi Rum is, as yet, almost unchanged. Despite recent well-intentioned efforts by RSCN to protect the area from excessive environmental impact by closing large portions of it, the indigenous Bedouin were resistant to change—they had already grasped the opportunity to improve their economy back in 1984, and swiftly met the demand for services in trekking and climbing. Their traditional hunting routes had gained a reputation as among the world’s best mountain adventures, and new and superb climbs and treks had been found, placing the area at the forefront of desert climbing and tourism. As a consequence, by the time others with commercial interests were attracted to Rum’s financial honey-pot, climbing development, trekking, and adventure tourism were booming, and the opportunity for outside control had lessened, though the threat still remains.

It seems inevitable that Rum must have suffered environmentally due to the massive growth of tourism. However, when we were there this spring, even though there were scores of trekking groups enjoying multi-day walks in remote desert valleys and numerous climbers from around Europe enjoying the hot rock, all helped by Bedouin guides with transport, the trekkers were so dispersed and well organized that we only met two groups, and there were few if any signs of their presence. The main environmental impact seems to come from 4WD trips provided to day-trippers from nearby Aqaba and Petra, and is therefore limited to the “tourist

circuit" in the RSCN's "intensive-use zone."

Consequently, the complaint that Rum is now "sinking" under 4WD tracks hardly seems justified. After one windy night this spring many of the tracks had already started to disappear under drifting sand. Even so, there are those who would like to control or curtail these activities by stipulating that access to all areas of Rum except the "intensive-use zone" can only be on foot or with horse or camel, and not by vehicle; this would not only make many climbs virtually unreachable, but would also make multi-day treks impossible as the necessary camps are serviced by 4WD; most importantly, it would also put numerous traditional Bedouin camps out of reach to their occupants. However, thanks to strong resistance from the Bedouin, Rum remains open and is prospering.

The north of Jordan is currently open as well, though there are plans to develop the Ajloun region for tourism. We have spoken to the Tourism Ministry, who informed us that they have no plans for designated trails, or closure of climbing and caving areas. Whilst few caves have been discovered there as yet, a number of quality single-pitch limestone cliffs are being developed for sport climbing, and trekking is becoming established in numerous Derbyshire-style limestone dales and forested hills. Just to the south, however, some of the awesome canyons above the Dead Sea, which offer spectacular canyoning, are already closed, or virtually closed, being in RSCN reserves. New reserves are opening and more are planned in the north; one already comes close to a climbing area—let us hope they do not encroach further.

With all this in mind, we gathered information on conservation and access from Roger Payne, the UIAA, and others in the world of climbing and conservation. This spring, with the support of Mark Khano of Guiding Star Tours, we presented it at meetings with the RSCN, PNT, Ministry of Tourism, USAID, and Jordan Tourism Development (SIYAHA). We did not get the opportunity to see the Aqaba Authority (ASEZA), but as Rum is currently suffering from minimal interference, it is probably best left to the local people to run their affairs unless they ask for support from the climbing and trekking community.

It rapidly became apparent that whilst some of the RSCN felt strongly that conservation was not just the prime, but sole priority of RSCN and were adamantly against all freedom of access within the reserves, there were others who were considerably more open in their approach to our stance that conservation and access can be compatible. So much so, in fact, that they made a goodwill gesture and invited us to trek with them in their proposed new reserve of Jebel Mas'uda, south of, and adjacent to, the Petra Park.

The two days we spent in the Mas'uda Reserve with Tarek abul Hawa, Laith al Moghrabi, and a local Bedouin, Mohammed Sa'idiyin, were worthwhile from everyone's point of view. Whilst in the reserve, we not only continued our discussions in more conducive surroundings than our boardroom meetings, but also repeated one of our own trekking discoveries through the Tibn Canyon, and descended an amazing series of Bedouin "ladders" and bridges down a vertical 100-meter cliff into a canyon with enough stunning rock scenery to make any climber's fingers itch. Thanks to Mohammed, we also saw numerous signs of wildlife, including a variety of birds, wolf spoor, hyena droppings, a venomous Painted Saw-scaled Viper, and a dead Blanford's Fox; ibex, he said, also inhabit this mountain wilderness.

Most of these species are endangered, and their long-term survival in Jordan would probably be in doubt were it not for RSCN and the creation of the new reserves, so we understand and respect the reasons for them. However, conservation and access have been proven to be compatible around the world, so let us hope it can be so in Jordan.

[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.]

TONY HOWARD, U.K.

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.

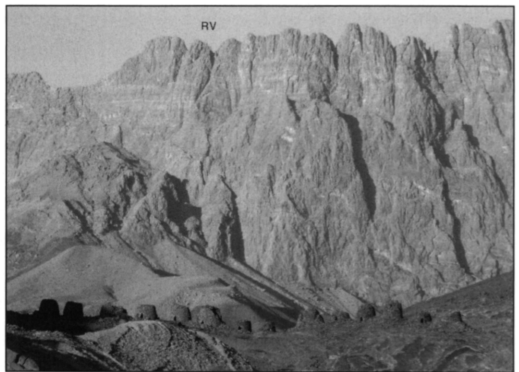
The extensive mountainous area of the Red Sea Coast is rather different from the Sinai, and access still appears to be a no no, partly due to the exact line of the Egypt-Sudan border being in dispute and the discovery of oil offshore. Tony Howard and friends have been trying to go to this area on a yearly 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.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *Mountain INFO*, www.climbmagazine.com

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*