

September 1982

This is the story of one of my adventures, while working in Al Hada hospital, in Taif, Saudi Arabia. I had many friends working there also, from various countries. No woman could drive a car, so we rode with male friends, explored the mountains and desert, where we lived. We camped, took own food and water, and slept on mats on the ground. There were three of us leaving today on a trip to an area south of Taif, where we had been once before. A "wadi" is a watercourse, having water after winter rains, but often drying up in summer. Wadi Turabah has water in it all year.

We arrived at the wadi Turabah two hours after leaving Taif, the air was clear, no clouds at all in the bright blue sky. The traffic was not too heavy, on Road to South, the name of the two lane highway that runs all the way to the city of Al Baha. Sometimes, especially in summer, this road is very heavy with traffic.

We turned right, before crossing the highway bridge over the wadi, onto the dirt road that runs along this watercourse. The last time we came here, we drove thirty-two miles in, along this wadi, crossing it sixty-seven times on the way. The water has receded a lot, during the summer and fall months, and the lovely green on the mountains has disappeared, now dried grasses remain. The deciduous trees still have green leaves however, and there are bushes along the wadi that remain green.

In about one-half hour driving time over the bumpy, rocky road, we arrived at the site of the pretty falls, but now no water was flowing. We stopped here, for across the wadi I saw a Bedu man with three camels, each having a pack harness on their backs. I asked my friends to wait, while I went to talk with him, waded across the wadi, Pat and Corrie waited in the car. The man was loading gunnysacks of grain on the camels, and I wanted this picture. He waved me away from the camels, as I approached, they were all lying down, legs folded under their bodies ----- I went back toward the wadi a bit, but kept walking toward him, said "marhaba" (hello) and "kefalik" (how are you). He answered "kwayis" (good). I used my Arabic to tell him that I just wanted to look at his camels, and asked if I could take a picture (asoura), first he shook his head "no", but as I continued to talk to him, he came closer and extended his hand. I shook it, asked him if his home was in the mountain, pointed up toward the ravine I presumed he would take the camels to reach the crest above, he answered "aywa" (yes). He seemed surprised that I could speak some Arabic, I answered "atkallam Araby schwaya" and "ana darast Araby" (I speak a little Arabic – I studied Arabic). He said "kwayis", (good, good). He was a handsome man, probably in his thirties, with the typical strong Bedu features, wore the white thaube (a bit dusty looking) which was pulled up and draped into his belt, so he could work better, and the red and white checked gutra was wound around his head

Again I asked, could I take pictures, and then he agreed --- even motioned if I wanted to "edgelas" (sit) on the camel. I refused this offer, but took pictures as he continued to tie the

bags of grain onto the wood sticks lashed to the camel's sides. He also said he had no "jemel haleb" (camel milk). I thanked him sincerely, he said "afwan" (you're welcome) in response to my "shukran" (thank you). I walked back to the car across the wadi, and related my conversation to Pat and Corrie. This is what I like, on these outings into the mountains, getting to talk to the people, and see their old customs still being carried on.

We proceeded on to the spot where the "baboon cliff" occurs, at a bend in the road, it rises in sheer rock above the wadi. There are a few bushes and small trees growing out of the crevices here and there, and dried grasses on step-like areas on the face of this 500 foot high escarpment. The baboons have chosen this as a safe night time resting place, as any predator would be unable to climb, or descend, the steep, sheer rock. We had discovered this spot by accident, the last time we were in wadi Turabah, as we chose the grassy, clear spot across from the cliff as our camp site, then discovered the baboons coming in droves, as evening came on, and spending the night on the face of this escarpment.

It was dusk as we arrived today, and we set up camp. We could hear the noises of the baboons, and in the fading daylight, could make them out, scrambling here and there across the entire face of the area. Sometimes a bush or small tree would be waving furiously, we knew they were playing there, jumping from branch to branch. The noise they make is interesting, the old, grey haired, large males, with bright red buttocks, make a loud barking sound, then there is a low rumbling sound made by the rest of the community. This is interspersed with shrill, sharp sounds of the babies, and young. These sounds, from the whole community, could be heard intermittently with periods of silence; then the bark, and rumbling would be heard again --- I wished I had a tape recorder, to permanently store this great natural happening, in Saudi Arabia. The females carry the babies on their back, jump and run as lightly as if they were not carrying anything.

I awoke several times during the clear, cold, star-filled night, and listened to the chorus of baboon sounds in the air. Our sleeping bags were covered with two blankets, and we slept in sweat-suits, sweater, and warm cap: I was very comfortable. Just before dawn, while stars were still in the sky, the sounds began to come from lower on the cliff, then farther to the left, and I knew the descent had started. As it got light, I could see groups of them scrambling down, one following the other. They stopped at the water's edge for their necessary intake of water, then went on to the trees beyond, and they would spend their day in the low mountains and bushes, foraging for food. They eat roots, berries, etc. They were all visible with the naked eye, but through the binoculars, every detail could be seen. During the night, donkeys wandered close to our sleeping area, grazing on the very short, sparse grass in some of our camp spot. They didn't bother us, nor we them. It was like being on a safari! After daybreak, two Brahma cattle wandered past us walking up the wadi --- They belong to Bedu camped in the wadi area. Later, a group of camels wandered by, making their loud, blowing sound.

We had coffee on the mats, as usual, sipped it, and enjoyed nature. The sun was behind the escarpment area, and gradually it's light moved closer to us, as it rose higher in the sky. By the time it peeked over the high cliff and shone on our faces, the air was warmer and one could get up and move about in just a light sweater, no warm coat needed. Later, in a very short time, shorts and T-shirt felt comfortable. We spent the day walking through a

portion of the wadi area, followed the stream first, then took a walk up a valley, taking pictures of interesting rock formations, and some very, very old, twisted trees. Later, on return, we had lunch, rested in sun or shade, whichever one desired, watched the kites and hawks and bustards sail through the blue sky. They catch a thermal current of air, and gracefully float a long way on it, hardly using wings at all.

It was a beautiful day. We stayed until the baboons started returning to their resting place, just before dusk. First we could hear them coming from a distance, on the left, then sighted them scrambling back. They appear to travel in groups. Later on, a large congregation came down directly over the jagged rocks of the very top, were noisy, as they leapt and ran to their preferred spots. Through binoculars, we could see young ones playing with each other, jumping and climbing.

We left after breaking camp, and darkness was coming on. Driving the twenty one miles, on dirt track, and through the wadi, in the darkness, was really a bit scary. We saw a desert fox dart across the road, in the headlights of the car, then Pat stopped the car: the fox stopped also, was blinded by the headlights, so we got a very good view of him. Another animal darted across once, it looked, and ran, like a cat, was brown, was possibly some kind of bob-cat. We didn't get as good a view of it, as the fox.

Arriving at the highway, and finished with the bumpy track, we proceeded back to Taif, helped unload the camp gear at a friend's house. Then Corrie and I were driven to our housing at the hospital, and felt that we had experienced another wonderful time with nature, in the mountains of Saudi Arabia.

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