

# Trip to the Farasan Islands in the Red Sea

by Irma Kackert

---

A group of westerners, working in the far east country of Saudi Arabia, became close friends, and planned this trip to; the remote Farasan Islands, where there was much coral formation in the sea, to explore, scuba dive and snorkel. We had to obtain permission from police authorities, to go from the city of Taif, where we were employed, to Jizan, not modernized very much and located on the Red Sea, in the far south of Saudi Arabia. From there, out to the islands, by boat. We camped together often, slept on mats under the stars, as we explored the country.

## SEPTEMBER 30, 1983

Members of the Adventure Club, going on the trip were Kurt and Jane Hindenberg, Jim Kelley, Andy Lowrie, Krist Gemmler, Sallie Vernon, John and Dave Lubbert, Harry Jones, Dr. Michael Gaether and wife Sara, Kurt and Jane's children, Ella, 6, and Janet, 5. Jim and Andy picked us up at the Al Hada hospital at 6:45 a.m., and we loaded everything into the suburban car, drove to Taif to the appointed meeting place, there we joined the two Jeeps, carrying our fellow travelers, driven by Kurt and by Harry. All equipment was re-loaded into the vehicles, and we left Taif about 8:00 a.m., drove south to the direction of Abha. There was a lunch stop at a point beyond Al Baha, a place where Michael and I had stopped and made lunch, on the trip we had made to Abha last April. Mats were laid out on the ground, stove brought out, to make tea and coffee, sandwiches were prepared, and eaten by all. Fruit and cookies completed the meal.. Following the lunch break, drivers of the cars were changed, so all could have a chance for rest. We reached the city of Abha about 5:30 p.m., big dark clouds were over the escarpment area, which is the usual pattern for late afternoon in the high altitude area of Abha. We continued the drive up to the Asir National Park, a new accomplishment for Saudi Arabia, and found the same campsite where Michael and I had camped before. It was chilly, and as the evening came on, it became quite cold, with a strong wind blowing. It was dark already as we set up camp, the big tent was erected, and stoves brought out to start cooking the evening meal. Kurt had stopped in Abha and purchased fresh vegetables from the suq, beef was taken from the cooler, and beef stew was prepared.

Everyone put on all the sweaters, or jackets they had with them. Now it was discovered that the sleeping bag Michael and Sara had brought (which they borrowed from Dr. Lewis) was missing, it must have blown out of the jeep that Harry was driving, it was open on the sides. So they had to make do with one sleeping bag the entire trip, and were not warm enough when we slept at Abha. Kurt, Jane and their girls slept in the tent, as did Harry, John and Dave. Sallie wanted to sleep outside, so did Jim, myself, Michael and Sara. We all slept in layers of sweaters, jackets, jeans and socks, also a warm cap if one had brought it along. The elevation is 9000 feet here, the air becomes very cold at night. Laying out in the open, in sleeping bags, we watched the stars, the half moon, saw two shooting stars. The wind never stopped all night, just kept on blowing. I was quite comfortable, as I had brought warm things, knowing how cold it gets here. Andy had only one blanket, and slept in the car, said he was cold there too.

## **SATURDAY OCTOBER 1 DAY 2**

Someone put on the tape music at 5:00 a.m., so everyone would awake early, and we could get a good start on the next leg of the trip, which was down the escarpment, to city of Jizan. Jim made coffee, and brought a cup to Sallie and to me, it surely tasted good: Sallie had her feet in a big plastic garbage bag, covered with a blanket, all night so she could keep them warm. She had draped her HAJ towel over a camp chair, and a nearby bush, for a windbreak. We teased her, saying maybe the garbage truck men would pick her up in the early morning, that didn't happen. Despite cold temperatures, we were all cheerful and happy, brushed teeth, washed faces, if you were brave enough to stand the chill. Breakfast consisted of cereal, banana bread, boiled eggs (we had prepared them before we left) and coffee or tea. We carried plastic containers of water, and ice chests, with food. Before leaving the park site, we all went to the top of the escarpment, for that beautiful view of the jagged mountainscape below. Jim, Andy, Kurt, Sara and the young men had never been here before, and thought it was spectacular. A recreation area, with tennis courts, restaurant and villas to stay in, is planned to be built in the future. This is a newly developed park. We left the park about 7:45 a.m., drove back to Abha,, then on down the steep escarpment road. In Abha, all was quiet, not many people were about – it is HAJ time in Saudi Arabia, many are on pilgrimage, to Mecca. This is a Muslim holy time. We are not working these days.

As we were descending to sea level, the air became warmer; about 2/3rds of the way down, we shed sweaters and jackets: as we neared the bottom, we needed the air conditioner in the car!!! The road down is of asphalt, but in a few places it is not wide enough for two cars, there are sharp turns and no guardrails, just dirt and rock piled up on the sheer drop off side. We came to the Tihama area, after the mountains. This is the desert type land that slopes to the Red Sea. There are many villages here, with the grass huts, rounded tops, like African huts. This area is directly across from Sudan, Africa, and people have emigrated across the Red Sea, bringing their mode of housing with them. We arrived at the old city of Jizan just before noon, it was extremely hot, surely over 105 F., the town is at sea level, located on the salt flats of the Red Sea. The town is poor looking, with no sidewalks or curbs, poorly paved streets, many buildings appear to be falling down: the salt flats were evident in all directions, just outside the city. Kurt said his company (he has worked in Saudi many years, for road construction) made an earth research a few years ago, and the area is sinking steadily, but slowly. The men on the streets were dressed in Yemen style, with the cotton skirts, a shirt of some kind, and a turban on the head. We saw very few white thaubes, and gutras, as are worn in the northern part of Saudi Arabia. The few women we saw on the street, wore the black abaya, a long cloak, and faces were covered with the black misfa (veil).

Kurt sought out the man who was to help him procure a boat, we waited in the cars. This took him a long time, so later he came and guided us all to the new Hyatt Jizan hotel, so we could get out of the intense heat, the hotel is a very modern building, with lovely air conditioning. We waited there, had lunch, and relaxed in the lobby until Kurt returned. He had no luck getting a boat, but said there was a car ferry that went to Farasan Islands every other day, and we could take it on Monday; he would return to the city and try to find out about our getting the cars on it. If it had not been for his knowledge of the area, his Arabic

speaking ability, and his perseverance, we would have never made it to the islands. The only boat owner he found, who would take us out, wanted 10,000 Saudi riyals, which was way too high. Kurt said he used to rent a dhow, with crew, for 150 SR a day. So, it was decided that we would stay on the beach at Jizan that night, and spend the next day in the nearby area, seeing whatever was of interest. Our entire group was interested in exploring the country, and the Bedouin way of living, seeing whatever was of interest.

We made camp just outside Jizan, on the sandy beach. There was no coral reef in the sea there, it was shallow a long way out, but was sandy, and we could swim there. We set up camp before dark, and made a meal. Afterward, Kurt and Jim returned to Jizan, to talk again to Kurt's local friend, took our passports and iquamas along, to get the papers signed permitting us to take the ferry. It clouded up, thundered and lightened, then rained a little bit. We moved our camp chairs under the tent top, till it passed over. Kurt returned with the news that we had to be in line at the gate of the seaport, at 5:00 a.m. Monday, in order to get into the line of cars of locals, boarding the ferry. John, Dave and Harry offered to take turns at watch, two of them would stay up at a time, and awake everyone at 3:30 a.m., we would break camp, and go to the port. These were wonderful, helpful young men, ages 17 to 21, sons of one couple who could not make the trip with us. It was very warm, but during the night the air cooled a little, a light sheet felt good over you – no sleeping bag needed on your mat. The ferry goes on Monday, we expect to be on it.

### **SUNDAY OCTOBER 2 DAY 3**

I awoke about 5:30 a.m., watched the sun start to light up the sky. After arising later on, I went into the sea, Jim and Michael came out too: it was beautiful to swim in the calm, warm water where the bottom was sandy, and shallow a long way out. After breakfast of cereal, boiled eggs, coffee and bread, Kurt said he would show us some of the interesting places near Jizan today. We drove first to the village of Sabya, about 10 miles south of Jizan. This was very primitive, the majority of men dressed like the men in Yemen, the country just below Saudi Arabia, a cotton skirt, a shirt, and a turban on their head. There were grass, dome shaped huts, right in the village, and the suq was just makeshift booths, with narrow footpaths between them. The ladies we saw shopping the area, had on bright colorful dresses, and either a black veil on their head (most had faces uncovered), or some had on the straw hat with the high, cylindrical crown, typical to the area. Some men wore these hats also. At one stall, there were camels providing the power to squeeze sesame seeds, to obtain the oil, in the old, primitive way. They were harnessed, separately, to walk round and round, in a circle, pulling a rope net filled with big rocks, which turned a large wooden pestle in a wooden mortar. This was filled with the sesame seeds and the pressing of the pestle squeezed out the oil. Each camel wore a blindfold and a muzzle. We were allowed to take pictures of this interesting scene, camel power instead of machine power!! We then went to another area where three young men were dyeing white gauze material into the three colors of veiling that the older women of the area wore. They used saffron for the yellow, indigo for the black, and a seed for the red. There was an African type hut in the center of this work area; I wanted to purchase a black and red veil, one man gave me the price of 5 SR, and as I produced the money, the other one said "la, la" (no) and gave it to me. I took their picture, they were willing.

We stopped at the area of ruins from the ancient IDRIS tribal headquarters. There are many complete walls left of these structures, roofs are gone. The architecture was very interesting, showed fine detail of design over arched doorways, etc. There was a well, in the ground, at least 35 feet deep, still perfectly preserved, made of stones. The sand was so hot there, I could hardly walk when some of it got into my thongs – a burning sun shone. Next, we went past a large volcano, which had blown it's top many, many years ago; the flow of lava rock was very evident, down the mountainside, very near us, and into the desert. We drove on, to find a flowing wadi, fresh water coming down the mountain, there were pools big enough to bathe in, so we stopped there, made a picnic and played around in the water in our bathing suits. It felt so good, warm, fresh water; we washed hair, floated lazily, cooled our bodies, enjoyed this gift of nature. As we did so, 5 camels came plowing down the mountainside, very near us, drank at the stream, and stayed nearby for a long time. Then a 6th one joined them, a native man was walking behind them, was probably the owner. Down the stream a little way, a man brought a donkey, with water bags on it's back, to the stream, to procure water for a home up on the ridge. He repeated this trip several times, this is the way water is procured for family use. We spent the afternoon at this delightful spot in the desert, then returned to Jizan, stopping at a large well to fill up all our water containers with fresh drinking water, to take to the islands tomorrow. We made camp again on the beach, at the same spot where we spent last night. The boys woke us at 3:30 a.m., as planned, and we sleepily broke camp, packed up, and drove in the darkness to the port.

#### **OCTOBER 3 MONDAY DAY 4**

We arrived at the port, in darkness, before 5:00 a.m. The gate was not open yet, so we parked and waited. Kurt's friend, the Arab man, was not there yet but in about 45 minutes he arrived, spoke to the man guarding the gate, who then allowed us to enter the port area. Without Kurt's friend, we would never have made this trip out on the sea. We drove the cars to the dock where the big car ferry ship was waiting, some Toyota trucks were already parked nearby, they must have entered the security dock area last night. Again, we got in line, and waited, watching the sky become light, and another day begin. At 6:45 a.m., the men who run the ferry, arrived, we produced passports and iquamas, were passed through. On the ship, men sit in the large salon area, and women sit in a separate, screened, enclosed area. If a woman is married, her husband may enter the screened area, so that he can bring drinks, or assist her with small children. So, Andy, who handled the passports for our group, told the officials that we were married couples in our party. At 7:00 a.m. the cars were allowed to be driven on board, everyone else walked on. We women were shown into the screened area, with two little windows looking out onto the sea. There were four Arab women, all veiled and wearing the black abayas, each with small children. We went there while the ship pulled away from dock, Michael later brought us all some coffee. It was dull, sitting in an enclosed area, when we would rather be up on deck, watching the sight of the beautiful water, and knowing we would have a 4 hour trip ahead of us, Jane decided to try and accompany her husband Kurt, up on deck. She did so, no one seemed to object, so gradually, the rest of ladies went up on deck also. The Arab men up there looked at us in rather a surprised manner, but did not seem to object, so we stayed on deck the rest of the trip. We saw dolphins playing in the water, also saw flying fish skim over the surface. I saw one that skipped 9 times over the surface, before he dropped back

into the sea. We would have missed these nice sights, had we stayed in that screened area, down below. We took a few pictures, while up on deck, later found we should not have done so.

We sighted tiny specks of land on the distant horizon, and almost four hours after leaving Jizan, docked at the Island of Farasan, the largest one. This group of islands were coral reefs in the sea, and 800,000 years ago, pushed up out of the water, now consist of petrified coral. There is virtually no vegetation, though in one spot, we saw a fence made of pieces of coral that surrounded some old, small buildings, and a few palm trees grew nearby. This, we later learned, was part of an old fortification. The roads were just tracks, and the entire surface of the island was bumpy, sharp coral. Brown dust blew behind each car, as we bounced along, and it covered our vehicles, bed-rolls and equipment on top of cars, and us. We had landed on the east side of the island, which is about sixty kilometers long, but drove for about 45 minutes to the west side, following the shoreline. Kurt found a sandy beach area, with access from the coral cliffs above, decided this was a good campsite.

It was perfect, just like one sees in travel magazines of islands in the tropics, or in the Caribbean, but there were only the few palm trees mentioned, no other kind of trees or bushes. Low rock fences, made by tribesmen many years ago, was usually what we saw while exploring in the Asir mountains of Saudi Arabia, but here the fence was made of chunks of coral, there are no rocks. The white sand beach, and beautiful clear, blue water, made a lovely spot. We all went into the sea for a swim, the breakers came up on the sandy beach and the sand was not blowing around, as it does in the North Creek and the Shoiba beaches in the Jeddah area. These are our usual weekend camp spots, where we scuba dive and photograph the corals and beautiful fishes. The Red Sea is one of the best diving places in the world, for viewing underwater marine life. The temperature was very hot, sun was burning, a swim felt very good. Soon the tent top was put up for shelter from the sun, and the cars were unloaded, campsite was established. We were just getting settled, when a police car drove up, it was a Jeep, a policeman got out and told Kurt that he had to go to the police station, in a village, to follow the Jeep. We all felt upset, Kurt had shown our iquamas and passports to an officer who stopped us, after we were driving away from the dock – we thought all was o.k. after this. -----So, Kurt took our iquamas and followed the police Jeep. There was nothing we could do, so all went snorkeling while he was gone. The coral reef was easy to get to, there were huge coral heads, then clusters of reef all along the shoreline, and not too far out. We saw all the beautiful colored fish, wimple, angel, butterfly, damsel, surgeon, boxfish, clownfish, many of them much larger than we see near Jeddah, but just about all the same varieties.

When Kurt returned, he told us that, mainly, the police chief wanted to know what we were doing on the island, and that no photographs were allowed – probably they had seen us taking photos (only a couple) from the ship, as we landed. He informed the officer that we wanted to come to these remote islands, to view the marine life, very few divers get to these parts, we had no evil purpose in mind. Satisfied, he had Kurt return to us, we were very happy that we did not have to leave here right away, as we had such a time getting out to these islands. A bit later Andy went spear fishing, to get fish for our meal, he came back with a beautiful, large parrot fish. The water was stirred up though; he said, due to wave

action and it was a bit hard to see through it. We had an evening meal of veal, which had been frozen, fish, vegetables cooked together and served atop rice. Yummy!! After cleanup of dishes, and relaxing in camp chairs for a while, we all put our mats down, for sleeping. No one slept in the tent, the air was very warm, and the sky full of stars. I watched them for a little while, then soon slept. We were all tired.

## **OCTOBER 4 TUESDAY DAY 5**

I awoke at daybreak, the sea gulls had gathered nearby, and were making their curious noises, calling to each other. I gazed on such a beautiful sight in front of me, our camp was on the coral cliffs, above the lovely white sand beach, and the blue, blue, Red Sea. We can see Damsuk Island, one of this group, straight across from us, quite far away. This is where Kurt wanted to take us, if he could have chartered an Arab dhow, he said the beaches and reef were even better than Farasan. There were no mosquitoes, or bugs. I saw one or two flies, and a couple of ants, that is all. Jim and I went in to snorkel, before we even had coffee, everyone else was still lying quietly on their mats, the children Ella and Janet were still asleep. The sea was more calm than when we arrived yesterday, and we knew visibility might be much better. We saw many fish, nothing really huge. After breakfast, I spent much of the morning playing on the beach with the children, they were so good. Also, I spent time again, teaching Ella to swim. She gained more confidence, and swam about 10 feet alone, at a time when the waves were not too big. Andy and Harry went scuba diving, when they came back Andy had two small puncture marks, close together, on his left leg – said he felt something strike, and a sharp pain up his entire leg, to the groin. Later, his left leg and whole left side, felt very stiff, evidently something had given him some kind of venom, he thought maybe he brushed a lion fish, and the barb poisoned him. The young men, John, Dave and Harry, fished with my pole and reel, and also with plain lines. They caught a few beautiful colored fish, not very big. Also, Jim and Harry speared some fish out on the reef. Later on, in the evening, I cast out a few times but did not get a fish. We did not have good bait, but I wanted to have the pole in my hands anyway, it has been over a year and a half, since I have been fishing, and I do miss it. There's no greater thrill, than having a lively fish tugging on your line, and you trying to land him, into the boat.

We all just keep our bathing suits on all day, it is so hot here, but there is always a nice breeze, and one can get into the water anytime, to cool off. I brought two, two-piece suits with me, and change once in a while, always sleep in one, and am ready to go right into a nice swim in the morning. Kurt and Jim have to be careful in the sun, they burn all the time, have to keep covered. There is a shady area, under a cliff, at one end of the beach, one can have feet in the water, sit and relax. They, like all the rest of us, just love the outdoors. Kurt and Jim went into the village in the morning, to get fresh water – no ice, for none is available on this island, they also picked up some fruit. In the evening, as we laid on our mats, they told us the village was small, had no real streets, just narrow paths or alleys; they had to walk between mud-brick houses and tin shacks, to get to a little “store”. The only source of gasoline was from this “store”, the little old Yemeni man who kept it, sat on the floor awaiting a customer. He had a 55 gallon drum, set up high, with a piece of rubber hose from it – he let this down and the gasoline then ran down into the container Kurt had, then Kurt siphoned it from the container into the gas tank, when back in camp. How

primitive!! But, here we are out on an island in the Red Sea, between Saudi Arabia and Africa. What can we expect? I think we are so lucky to experience this adventure.

We had a fish fry; a big meal, about 2:00 p.m. Sallie fried much fish, all they had caught plus a great big one Kurt bought in the village. I watched him clean it, on the beach; it was beautiful, about 2 ½ feet long, he cut it into filets, was delicious. I made all the French fried potatoes, which took a long time, to feed all the hungry people. We also had cucumber and tomato, combined with sliced onion. I washed the dishes, then Jim asked if I wanted to go to the south side of the island, to a spot where the surf was not strong, and look at that reef. We took Sallie along too, drove Kurts' Jeep, for the suburban auto is parked, backed up on a rise, just in case it won't start when we are ready to leave here. It has a problem!! This spot was very different from our campsite – there were cliffs but it was shallow and sandy in the water, could walk a long way out to the reef. There was a covering of soft, Gorgonian coral, which looks like plants, waving their short fronds too and fro, over all the coral head formations. It was a beautiful sight; tans, mauve, brown, grey, and a sort of lavender color, just like an underwater garden, truly a marine wonderland.

There were many, many fish, huge angel and butterfly wimple fish, the biggest I have ever seen, swimming along slowly, we were seeing something different all along the reef. The black sea urchins were about the size of basketballs, absolutely huge!! I had to be careful when swimming close to a formation, or diving down to the sandy bottom, that I did not scrape my leg or arm against their barbs. We had a lovely swim, before sunset, and said we must bring Jane and the girls here tomorrow, they could snorkel here, the water is very calm. We went back to camp in time to find everyone snacking on fried fish, fruit, and juices, they were also getting a campfire ready. It was now dark, we all sat around the fire, had coffee and tea, and all sang songs. We had a good “round” with “row, row, row your boat” and a rousing sing along with “Old McDonald Had A Farm” – Jim did the horse, I did the duck, Harry the cat, John the pig, Dave the cow, Michael the dog, Sallie the snake, Andy the donkey, Sara the chicken. What a bunch of farmyard sounds filled the night air! After awhile we washed with fresh water and soap, to get the salt off our bodies, privacy gained by taking turns behind the cars. I put on a dry suit, walked the beach looking for hermit crabs (they are BIG here, but few), used my flashlight to see them, then returned to the mat, overlooking the sea. The moon was half full, and very bright. I saw two shooting stars, we all talked a bit, everyone said good night to each other, and “don't snore too loud”, and went to sleep. I awoke during the night, saw the moon going down in a big bank of clouds, later awoke again, sky was clear and full of stars. Sleeping out of doors is so beautiful.

## **OCTOBER 5 WEDNESDAY DAY 6**

There were some clouds again in the sky, as I awoke, before it was fully light, but they blew away as the sun came up. Everyone was still asleep----then I saw Jane get up, go to the beach and get a bottle of sea water, come up and pour it all over John's head and shoulders. He never even jumped, or moved – then said, “Gee that felt good”. This is really a good group, all full of fun. We had a swim, after getting my cup of coffee on my mat, we called it “room service” and did it for each other. Later on, I went out on a cliff edge, to write, I could see fish swimming below me, in the area over the sandy bottom. The water

looks aquamarine color there, also I could see the surgeonfish on the coral reef, darting about, chasing the other fish away. They are very territorial. Jim brought me a plate with slices of cool melon in it, and a cold drink. We still have a little ice in one chest, procured it in Jizan. The men are going to town again, for supplies, and to arrange for our departure tomorrow, on the ferry. We will all hate to leave here. Later they all came back with the news that we cannot leave tomorrow, the ferry boat will not run, the operators are taking a holiday, for it is Eid Al Adha, the holiday following HAJ. It will run again on Friday, so we will have to stay here one more day. No one minded, except some felt bad that we will not have cold drinks. We have enough canned foods to take care of our needs, and water is available in the village. We will all be a day late for work, were supposed to be back on Saturday

In the afternoon, taking the two Jeeps, we went to the other side of the island, where the water is calm, everyone who wanted to go, climbed aboard. I took Jane out to the coral reef, and helped her to swim a bit, also see the beautiful Gorgonian coral. It looks like plants, waving their fronds to and fro, searching their food out of the water. This motion frightened her, as the soft corals waved back and forth, she said “they look like they will eat me”. She saw the many pretty fish, and since this is only her second time to try and snorkel, we felt happy she could view this area. Her husband was very proud of her snorkeling attempt, she is not a good swimmer.

The two Dutch boys, Dave and John, speak the Dutch language with Sallie (they also speak English very well), Kurt and Jane speak Arabic, German, and English – we have an international group. The young men are very good at helping with all chores. Tonight, they again found driftwood, and had a big bonfire, which we all enjoyed. Earlier, before dark, I cleaned a fish that had been speared, knelt at the edge of the water to do it. It has been a long time since I cleaned a fish! I fried all the fish that had been caught, they were delicious. It was a very warm night again, as we all rested on our mats, ready for sleep. The sea was rough, the waves very high, and they crashed against the coral cliff, sending up a huge spray over the top. This was a very pretty sight. We all talked a long time, watching the stars and listening to the boom of the waves – went to sleep about midnight.

## **OCTOBER 6 THURSDAY DAY 7**

I awoke early, watched the last star disappear from the sky – it was 6:10 a.m. then, and light. Also saw a satellite hurry across the sky, about 5:00 a.m., while still dark. About 7:00 a.m., I tossed little pebbles at people still asleep on their mats – got humorous replies from sleepy people. John got a bottle of water and was going to pour it over Jane, in retaliation, but didn't want to get Kurt wet too, so desisted, at her pleas. Lots of fun!

After a swim along the shoreline, I had a piece of fried fish and cup of tea – cereal was in short supply, and we had no bread at all, it was sort of “eat what you can find” for breakfast. We went into the sea to snorkel, but the visibility was poor, due to the strong wave action of last night, so we went again to the other side of the island, where it was nice and clear, the leeward side. We found many nice shells, all empty, that had been dashed out of the sea during storms, for many years I am sure. We also found some nice Cowrie shells, as we



swam along in shallow water, they were plentiful. Their mantles were spread out, covering about 2/3rds of their shell. We left them, to grow bigger.

Kurt went to town again, after a lunch of canned black-eyed beans, combined with canned Vienna sausages, tomatoes and good seasonings. Also, we still had tomatoes, cucumbers and canned fruit cocktail. No one really went hungry. No shops were open, no bread was available, but the man did get our papers ready, to enable us to leave here at 5:00 a.m., drive to the dock and get the 7:00 a.m. ferry. Jane complained of a sore throat, did not feel well during the day, and developed a high fever. Michael (a physician) had medication along for such an emergency, gave her some, and she rested in the shady tent area all day and evening. I was not wanting to get burned from the hot sun, had been in it so much, wore a T shirt part of the time, also the little plastic nose protector. This was left over from my days of being a life guard and swim instructor, at outdoor pools in the states, I was out in the sun 6 to 8 hours a day. It makes me look like I have a "bird beak", but does the work. I had no peeled nose this trip.

Later in the afternoon, a few of us went snorkeling and diving again, in the calm side. We drove there, it was quiet and the water was clear, spent about two hours there. There are many, many tiny mussels growing in the sandy bottom, this is an area where pearl diving was carried on, many years ago. We picked up a few full- grown shells, but found no pearls. I found a beautiful, large, unusual shell, picked it up after diving down for it, but it was still alive, so dropped it again, to let it grow. We came back to camp to a meal of fresh fried potatoes, corned beef hash, green pepper and tomato salad, canned corn, and rice pudding which Sallie had started, and I took turns with her, stirring it, earlier in the afternoon. Cooking this large amount of pudding, over the small burner we had, took a long time. Andy and Harry had gone for a scuba dive, were down for an hour and 15 minutes, had to fight a very strong current to get back to our campsite on the windward side of the island, had used up all but a few minutes of their air – that was too close. They were both extremely tired.

After dinner, everyone packed their personal belongings, and whatever items could be put in cars. Dave, John and Harry will again take turns at watch, so we can be awakened at 3:30 a.m., eat breakfast, have coffee, then clear everything up. The rest of the group retired very early. The sea was very rough, was sending huge sprays of water up over the top of the cliff, putting on a great show for our last night here. Sallie had to move her mat once, when she got a spray of water.,

## **OCTOBER 7 FRIDAY DAY 8**

I awoke at 3:30 a.m., when Dave came around with the flashlight, to awaken everyone. The moon was down, and sky was full of stars. Just as we were ready to get up, we saw a shooting star, Sallie said it was a last treat for us. Everyone assisted, after coffee and a bowl of rice pudding, in taking down the tent top, rolling up pads, packing bedrolls, camp chairs, food locker, etc. Small water bottles were filled, from the large containers, and put in ice chests, so when we reach Jizan, and procure ice, it can just be added to the coolers, and we will have cold drinks; this is a necessity in this hot climate.

Jane still felt very ill, her throat was very sore, but she rode in the Jeep with Kurt and their girls, propped on a pillow and blankets. Everything from our disposal bags was dumped into a small chasm, gasoline poured on it, and burned, so we did not leave a messy area. The sky was just getting light in the east, as we drove away from the campsite, at 5:40 a.m. On the way back to the ferry landing, Kurt got lost a couple of times, as there are tracks leading here and there, no way to find out which is the right one, out on this flat, bumpy, coral island. There is the village, but we ladies never did see it, as it was an hour drive there, and a very bumpy, hot ride. We saw a camel, and a few donkeys, as we searched our way, painfully slow, over bumps -----passed an area of palm trees, with a few old coral huts, all abandoned, memories of past habitation. Kurt had trouble with his car-top carrier, the mats and chairs kept sliding, we had to stop about four times to tighten, and re-adjust them. We now saw a man on a motorcycle, to the left, he had on a white undershirt and the cloth Yemen skirt, flapping in the wind. He drove to us, shook hands with Harry and Kurt, who was stopped again, told us the road to the left, ahead a bit, was the road we wanted, and drove ahead of us to that fork, pointed the way to go on from there. It was getting close to 7:00 a.m. ---- we arrived at the dock as the men were ready to take off the big ropes which hold the ship. Our car was the first of our group to arrive, we could not see Harry and Kurt behind us, nor any cloud of dust that the cars made. We told the ferrymen that there were 2 more cars on the way. Just a minute before 7:00 a.m. they arrived, we all just made it!!! Cars were driven on board, the whistle blew, and we pulled away from shore. If we had missed the boat, we would have had to stay on the island two more days. Now, I am sitting on the top deck, in the sunshine, going smoothly along over the Red Sea, back to Jizan. What an experience this has been. Jane reclined on a long bench, that was padded, rested there all the four hours of the return trip. She is some better, but very weak, and her throat is still sore. I just saw flying fish again, they skip over the water, are long and thin, sort of stand on their tail and skim along, drop down, and then up again. I saw one skim over the surface 17 times, almost unbelievable! There were not many Saudi's on board, but those sitting on top deck seemed to look at us as an oddity. There were only 10 cars aboard.

When we reached Jizan, Kurt and Harry drove the Jeeps off, and luckily, the suburban car started. It had to be pushed down the little hill, at camp, to get it started, early this morning. We drove first to the Hyatt Jizan hotel, to make phone calls to Al Hada hospital, and the Agusta company, for we will all be one day late for work, and needed to report to our department heads. It was very, very hot and humid in Jizan, it is a broken-down looking, dirty city, like Taif was when I came here 2 years ago. We purchased ice and bread (luckily these shops were open), most shops were closed for holiday time, got gasoline for all cars, then started on our homeward journey, back up the escarpment, to Abha. It was good-bye to our "desert island". The escarpment road was built about 15 years ago, has sharp turns, a very steep grade, is narrow in spots. Many very long trucks go up and down this road, carrying materials to and from the seaport at Jizan, I wondered how they made the turns, for it seemed they would almost have to bend in the middle! In about 2 hours we were up the steep mountain, at the city of Abha on the top. As we ascended, it got cooler by degrees, and as we reached the top, all needed sweaters or jackets. The view from the top is fantastic, over the mountain range with elevations of 9000 feet.

In Abha everything was quiet, the few people we saw on the street were dressed in their best clothing, the white thaubes were clean and neat, and many men had on their head, the white gutra and black igol, instead of the commonly worn red and white checked gutra. Little girls wore very pretty dresses, and some of the little boys had on Western type suits. It is still Eid Al Adha time. Kurt succeeded in finding a little shop open, but could only get canned cheeses and fruit. We then headed for the Asir National Park again, to find a campsite for the night. There were many Arab people there, making use of the park for the day, but as it was about 5:15 p.m., and air was very cool, people were leaving. We went to the same spot we had used, on the first night spent here, set up camp again. Everyone put on all the warm clothing they had, and pulled collars up around their ears, or put on the hoods of jackets. I had on warm slacks, T shirt, short sleeved sweater and knit jacket, also a warm hat. The wind still went through this clothing, so I put my large plastic raincoat over all, then I was very comfortable, while preparing the evening meal. We had celery and mushroom cream soups, bread and butter, cheese, fruit, warm coffee or tea. Slices of fruit cake, from a tin, completed the meal. After eating, Kurt and Jim went back to town, to try a phone call again, also Kurt wanted to buy a couple of blankets, they were cold the last time we stayed here. But, no luck, the phone line was out, to Taif, and no shops were open to buy blankets, so they were chilly all night, even though they slept in the tent. The small tent was put up too, and Harry, John and Dave slept in it. All the rest of us slept outside: Michael and Sara had trouble keeping warm, with only one sleeping bag for cover --Sallie was chilly, because she made her wind shelter the wrong way, said she had her face in the wind all night. I was quite comfortable, with several layers of clothes on. Jim put a coverall on over his clothing, had a hood on his jacket, that helped. My plastic raincoat was spread over my sleeping bag, it kept the wind off. and the wind did not stop blowing all night. The stars were very bright; as I was lying there, saw another shooting star, and later another satellite hurry across the sky, at about 5:00 a.m., just like yesterday. Andy slept in the car again, was cold, felt he had a sore throat in the morning. Jim, Sallie and I talked a bit, joked about our drastic change in temperature, from our beach camp last night, where we slept in bathing suits, and the air was warm and lovely. However, now we are at the high elevation, and right on the edge of the escarpment, in the Asir mountains.

## **OCTOBER 8 SATURDAY DAY 9**

I lay in my sleeping bag, watched the stars fade, early in the morning, as daylight came and a rosy glow appeared in the sky, it was a so pretty. Jim was the first one brave enough to crawl out of covers, put on water to heat, so everyone could have hot coffee, brought a cup to those few who were awake. We all sat under the covers and enjoyed that warm brew. The men had all let their beards grow throughout the trip, and looked unkempt, as we ladies did, with our hair kind of stiff from all the salt water. We all looked like we had been shipwrecked on a desert island, but we were happy. I jogged around the campground area before eating breakfast: cereal, bananas, bread and milk. The sun came up fast, and warmed everyone – we started clearing up, packed things, got ready to start on our journey to Taif. The suburban would not start, the men had to push it a little to get it going. We left the park about 8:15 a.m. The garbage men did come by about 6:30 a.m., but Sallie was already out of her bed, with the garbage bag, so they did not take her away. Ha, Ha!

As we left Abha, Kurt led us on a road into the mountains nearby, we went through rough terrain, roads that were really not roads, but ruts. But, as adventurers, we were glad to see whole villages with houses of the fortress-type construction, very old. The stone work, all done without mortar, was very interesting, the walls of houses were made this way, and had lasted for years and years. They were presently occupied. There were many, many round and square towers, left over from the time of the Turkish invasion of the Arab peninsula, in the late 1800's. What a lot of work was done, to terrace the mountainsides so crops could be grown there, build the stone retaining walls, the stone houses and towers. I wonder how many hundreds of people had aching backs in their toil. We eventually got out of the mountains, back to Abha, stopped for fruit and snacks, and started again toward Taif about 11:00 a.m. Our lunch break came about 1:30 p.m., we had broasted chickens that were purchased in a village we were driving through, then turned off the highway to a nice spot with trees, had lunch just as the Saudi's do. We spread the large mat out, all sat on the ground and enjoyed the chicken, fruit, bread, cheese, tomatoes, coffee or water. Drivers were changed again, and we continued on the long journey, with rest stops, and a few other stops to put air in a tire on Kurt's Jeep, one leaked a bit. There are "primitive" stations along the highway, for tire trouble, and other auto problems. They are just a poor small stand, equipped with a few tires, or equipment to repair a flat, and a compressor. The convoy arrived back in Taif about 9:00 p.m., at Al Hada hospital at 9:30 p.m. – all were grateful that we had returned safely from this wonderful adventure, and vowed that this group, the "Adventure Club" would ride again. Our departments had managed without us Saturday, other employees helped cover our duties. In Saudi Arabia, Thursday afternoon and Friday are equivalent to our Saturday and Sunday weekend, for Friday is their religious holiday and work resumes regularly on Saturday.

I hope anyone reading this journal, will feel the thrill of being in this very remote part of the world, experiencing time in a pristine marine place, unspoiled by modern ways.

Kristine Gemmler  
(Pen Name for Irma Kackert)  
Age 67

Typed on the computer in 2005, age 89.