

# Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey Project

PATRON : H. H. SHEIKH MOHAMMED BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN

1994-1995 Winter Season

## Occasional Newsletter

No. 3

Date : February 11th 1995

### *First ever survey for oil industry Sites identified on Jubayl, Fahid*

Since the beginning of its activity back in 1992, the Project has benefited to a very considerable extent from help provided by the ADNOC Group of companies, in particular from ADNOC itself, our major financial supporter, and from the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO, who have been a consistent and reliable source of logistical backing.

Apart from the provision of some material for their in-house magazines and annual reports, along with a bit of press publicity, the Project hasn't been in a position to give much in return.

In early January, an opportunity arose to say thank you in a practical way.

Later this year, ADCO are planning to drill a second well on their Ramhan structure, east of Abu Dhabi. In accordance with ADNOC Group environmental policy, the Company is obliged to carry out a detailed environmental baseline study and impact assessment to evaluate the possible impact of their operations on the environment.

In its broadest sense, of course, the environment covers archaeological sites, and the Project was delighted to be invited to send its Staff Archaeologist, Jakub 'Chas' Czastka, to the drilling site, on the island of Jubayl, to carry out a preliminary survey for sites.

Spending three days on the island, (and camping in the back of an ADCO-provided Land Cruiser), Chas identified a total of eighteen separate sites on Jubayl and the adjacent Jazirat Fahid, none of which had been previously recorded.

Some were simple, and relatively unimportant, like late Islamic shell and pottery scatters. Two sites of potential significance were located, however, one a mysterious alignment of stones that cannot be a water catchment area, as they run uphill rather than downhill, and the other an Islamic graveyard.

Jubayl, like other islands, must once have held at least seasonal fishing settlements, and ethnographical research will now be required to find out as much as possible about its use in recent times.

A detailed report on the sites has been prepared and submitted to ADCO, who will now be able to take archaeology as well as natural history into account as they prepare the next stage of their drilling programme. One piece of information of immediate value was the identification of the Islamic graveyard, which will now be fenced to ensure its future preservation.

As far as we know, this is the first occasion on which archaeological considerations have been taken into account before an oil industry project gets under way. We hope it will not be the last !

### *More work on Merawah*

Mapping of the main area of the Pre-Islamic settlement discovered on Merawah last December, (*see Occasional Newsletter No. 1*), was completed during a short visit to the island in late January by Jakub 'Chas' Czastka, with the assistance of the Project Co-ordinator and a local volunteer, Arleen Edwards, whose husband has just taken up an appointment with Project sponsor ADCO.

The mapping covered an area with over 60 individual features, including rectangular and circular hearths, more ephemeral hearths and raised circular mounds, possibly graves.

A further couple of dozen similar features were found to the east of the main site, near a water collection feature that dates to more recent Islamic times.

A computerised map of the area is now planned for completion in April, to be added onto the main

### *Aerial survey yields evidence of new island sites*

With the kind support and assistance of the UAE Air Force, a quick aerial survey of islands in the Western Region was undertaken in mid-January.

A thirty minute stop on the island of South Muhayimat, north of Sila'a, produced three small Islamic graveyards, as well as a number of hearths, raised circular mounds and rectangular features similar to those previously located on Balghelam, Jubayl, Merawah and Fiyya. Once again, these were located on a raised shoreline, and may date to the same period as the finds on the other islands, probably between around 300 AD and 650 AD.

A low helicopter pass over the island of Khardal, north of Ghaghah, revealed further evidence of a raised shoreline that may well have other archaeological sites, although investigation on the ground during the forthcoming spring season will be necessary to see if anything can be located.

Evidence continues to mount that there was extensive settlement on Abu Dhabi's offshore islands during the pre-Islamic period, all of which is unrecorded in the available historical references.

Excavation will be necessary on one of these newly discovered island sites to help confirm (or demolish) speculation about dating, but the trip showed, yet again, that there is much archaeology on Abu Dhabi's islands that has yet to be recorded.

### *Visits to Arzanah and Zirku draw a blank*

With the approval and support of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, ADNOC, and the Zakum Development Company, ZADCO, short visits were paid by Jakub Czastka in late January to the oil terminal islands of Arzanah and Zirku to search for archaeological sites.

Both islands first appear in historical records at least as early as 1580, suggesting that they must have been known to sailors and were used by local fishermen, as was the case until recent times.

Regrettably, visual evidence that might have existed now cannot be traced, as a result of recent development, with the only finds being on Arzanah, one Late Islamic shell midden near the airport, and a possible indication of a Late Islamic graveyard.

A search will now be made in historical records to see if any further information can be obtained, to ensure that Arzanah and Zirku will at least be mentioned in future research studies.

Fortunately support from ADNOC and members of the ADNOC Group for archaeological surveying, (see story on Jubayl, *above*), should ensure that no

construction on our remaining offshore islands will be permitted in future until proper archaeological studies have first been carried out.

### *Preparations for Spring Season*

The main part of the 1994-1995 Winter Season of the Project gets under way in early March, with the arrival of Project Academic Director Dr. Geoffrey King and a dozen more archaeologists from London.

The season will last six weeks, until late April, and will be divided into three main parts. On the island of Sir Bani Yas, work will continue on the pre-Islamic Christian site in the Al Khor area, with the objective being to identify the extent and to determine the precise function of the site. There will also be continued excavation of a site nearby where a water channel and tank were identified last season.

On the north end of the island, at Ras Danan, a Late Stone Age settlement site will be excavated.

The Island Survey team will set off by dhow from Abu Dhabi to visit islands in the extreme west, like Al F'zaiyyah, Ghaghah and Khardal, to complete mapping on the first two and to survey the latter. It will then move to Merawah, to undertake further studies of the pre-Islamic site located in December, and of the Late Stone Age site on the south west of the island.

During this spring season, Project members hope to welcome sponsors to Sir Bani Yas to look at the excavations. If any of our sponsors would like to visit, ideally after March 20th, please let us know.

### *Help from NBAD*

Archaeology, like everything else, is increasingly dependent on technological innovation, and one area where the miniaturisation of technology has been invaluable is in the invention of light-hand held equipment that permits locations to be plotted accurately (Global Positioning Systems).

Battery operated, a GPS permits field archaeologists to get details from a satellite of precisely where they are, with that data then being used to facilitate mapping.

Until now, the Project has been dependent on the generosity of the National Avian Research Centre for the loan of a GPS for Staff Archaeologist Jakub Czastka to use when out in the field.

Now, thanks to a donation from the National Bank of Abu Dhabi, the Project has its own state-of-the-art GPS equipment which will be used by Czastka during his field surveys along the coast and on offshore islands.

Our thanks to NBAD for their help.