

NOTES AND QUERIES

Iron Age Fort in Fujairah

More information on the ancient past of the East Coast of the UAE has been revealed with the disclosure of the results of an excavation of the remains of an Iron Age fortress at Husn Madhab, on the outskirts of Fujairah.

The discoveries at Husn Madhab were announced by Pierre Corboud, leader of a four-member team from the Swiss-Liechtenstein Foundation for Archaeological Research Abroad, which has been working in Fujairah for several years under the terms of agreements signed between the Fujairah Government and the Grand Duke of Liechtenstein, Prince Hans-Adam.

According to Corboud, "the fortified site of Husn Madhab is definitely one of the most important sites in Fujairah, because of its size, about 80 metres by 50 metres, and because of its good state of preservation."

The site is that of a major Iron Age fort, dated to around the first half of the First Millenium BC, (1000 BC to 500 BC).

The decision to excavate the site was taken because of the discovery on the surface of numerous pottery sherds from the Iron Age period, inside an enclosure wall and on the hill top.

During the excavations, Corboud and his colleagues uncovered the entrance to the fort, which comprised, he said, "four steps, followed by a corridor. The steps were made of large flat blocks and packed-down grey silt, located between two square-shaped walls that interrupt the enclosure wall. Other steps must be there, but they are currently still covered by rock and silt outside the entrance."

According to Corboud, two benches were placed in the entrance corridor, which extends for a length of 6.5 metres.

Inside the enclosure wall of the fort, excavations yielded the remains of a mortar-lined wall on top of a tank cut into the natural rock, which, according to the Swiss archaeologist, is probably a water cistern. It would have been used to hold water for the fort's inhabitants.

"The presence of a water tank in this hill fort," Corboud said, "can be seen as an indication of a continuous occupation of the fortification."

Another excavation along the west of the enclosure wall, half a metre from what appeared to be remains of a structure used for living, was designed to study the archaeological deposits in the area, and also the function of what appeared to be a small opening in the fortress wall. On this site, according to Corboud, a layer of sherds of Iron Age pottery was found as well as a grindstone.

"This means that we found the exact level of one of the various phases of occupation that occurred on the site," he said. "A study of the pottery sherds will, we hope, tell us to which period of the Iron Age they belong."

"The soundings we made on the Husn Madhab site yielded many interesting aspects of life of the site," he added, "while we also learned a lot about the architecture of the fortress. We know that it was used during the First Millenium BC, and there is certainly much more important information left to be uncovered."

The Swiss team also examined remains of an Iron Age settlement site at Bithna, not far from the important tomb they excavated a few years ago.

"Little archaeological material was found," says Corboud, "but the plans of the two structures we examined are interesting and are quite rare."

One was a large rectangular house, of about 12.5 metres by 6.5 metres, with two additional rooms, one an entrance lobby, added on to the east side of the building. The second was a rectangular house of 5 metres by 6.5 metres, with rounded corners, and with four large doorsteps.

Corboud and his team also conducted further surveying of some areas, including the Jebel Aqqab area just south of Fujairah International Airport, and adjacent to Kalba, part of the Emirate of Sharjah, as well as in the Mirbah and Qurayyah areas.

The Swiss team, based at the University of Geneva, plans a further series of excavations in the 1993-1994, which will include two or three more settlement sites, as well as further work on the Husn Madhab fortress.

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Brandt's Hedgehog in Al Ain

The ENHG Mammal Recorder's reports for January - June 1992 include the first record for the Group of **Brandt's Hedgehog** (*Paraechinus hypomelas niger*) from Wadi Naqab. At roughly the same time as the publication of this record, I wrote an article for the November issue of the Al Ain ENHG Newsletter describing the occurrence of a hedgehog of this species in a garden in Al Ain. At the time I failed to realise the significance of this record, thinking that the species was well known in the UAE, since it is described and illustrated in Christian Gross's book, *Mammals of the Arabian Gulf*. The details of my records (and of a less satisfactory one) are given below.

The hedgehog was found during the morning of 2nd

September 1992 in a flower bed of a garden in the Al Jimi district of Al Ain. It was about 20cm in length, but could not be accurately measured, as when handled or even approached it rolled itself up into a tight misshapen ball. For the same reason, the sex of the animal could not be determined. The animal agreed well with the description and illustration of *P. hypomelas* given by Gross, in particular the short legs, large ears and black coloration of head, limbs and spines. Surprisingly, the skin beneath the spines was clean and entirely shining creamy-white. The animal was apparently free of vermin, unlike all other hedgehogs that I have handled. It was released back into the garden where it was found, but has not been seen since. There have been other