

# RECORDERS' REPORTS

## Archaeology

The summer months are, not surprisingly, a quiet time for outdoor archaeology in the Emirates, and the bulk of the work undertaken both by local teams and by those from abroad, taking place from the autumn to spring, has been most recently covered in *Tribulus* Vol 5.1, April 1995.

This summer, however, has been somewhat of an exception, at least as far as Abu Dhabi and the Group has been concerned, with the carrying out of a rescue excavation at Abu Dhabi International Airport by two archaeologists from the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey Project, co-ordinated by the Group Recorder.

The site was first identified on a range of hills (a former coastline) adjacent to the Airport in February, when an extensive scatter of Late Islamic pottery was noted. Subsequent study revealed fragments of flint tools, provisionally dated to the Late Stone Age.

With ground levelling threatening the site during the summer, an emergency excavation was carried out in June and July, sponsored by Abu Dhabi Duty Free, on the instructions of Civil Aviation Department Chairman Sheikh Hamdan bin Mubarak al Nahyan, and also receiving support from a number of the ENHG's Corporate sponsors, including ADNOC, ADCO and ADPPOC.

The excavation, which involved a detailed surface pick-up, sieving of selected areas and clearing of two stone structures visible on the surface revealed important evidence of occupation during the Late Stone Age (c. 5,000 BC to 3,500 BC), including a number of finely made flint tools and scrapers, some made of locally available material, and others evidently imported in a finished state from inland, possibly from the well-known flint factories at Jebel Huwayyah (Fossil Valley), near Al Ain.

Pottery from the Umm an Nar period (2,700-2,200 BC) was also recovered, the first evidence yet known from this period on what was then the coast of the mainland, suggesting that the site may have been a terminus on the overland route exporting copper from Al Ain to Umm an Nar and thence of Mesopotamia.

Two stone structures proved to be wells dug deep into the sandstone, the first such wells known to have been excavated on the Abu Dhabi coastline, although others have been found in the Ad Door site in Umm al Qaiwain, dated to the first centuries of the Christian era. Dating of the airport wells proved impossible, since it was too dangerous to clear them to the bottom without special equipment, it is hoped to complete this work next spring.

The Late Islamic pottery confirms use of the site in recent centuries, probably as a stopping off point

before travellers crossed the *sabkha* salt flats to Abu Dhabi.

A detailed report will be published later.

The excavation was the first to have taken place near Abu Dhabi to which the public has had access for over fifteen years, and the ADIAS was delighted at the number of volunteers, including many Group members, who came out to help on the site despite the summer heat and humidity.

A guided visit for Group members was organised in early October.

One point worthy of note: the Recorder was informed by one volunteer, a member of the Mainland Hash House Harriers, that he and colleagues had frequently run over the site and had seen pottery, but had not known to whom to report it. Fortunately, the site was at least partly preserved in the nick of time before it was destroyed, but how many others have vanished because they were never drawn to the attention of anyone interested?

If Group members see, or hear of anyone seeing, pottery or other archaeological evidence while wandering about along the coast or in the desert, PLEASE report it!

Palaeontological work by the joint team of the Natural History Museum (UK) and Yale University (USA) was due to resume in mid-November with the support of our corporate member, the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operation, ADCO. Initial work was to involve a resumption of studies of the late Cretaceous outcrops to be found at Jebel Huwayyah and in Abu Dhabi's Eastern Region.

As usual UAE archaeology received considerable attention at the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies in Britain, with papers being presented on work undertaken in Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. This winter will see the usual combination of work by both foreign and local teams, including a return of our former speaker, Professor Ernie Haerinck, of the University of Ghent, to Umm al Qaiwain, and of another former speaker, Professor Dan Potts of the University of Sydney, to Fujairah. The Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey will resume work on the western islands in the New Year, while local and French teams will also be at work in Sharjah.

There will be some scope for volunteers to provide assistance this winter in some of the archaeological work, and anyone interested should contact the Recorder.

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