

Unexplored Desert  
Bahra Safi

Urūq az Zaza

Awamir

Al Habir

Al Wabitha

Al Khatat

Mukalla

Umm Gharib

Shagay

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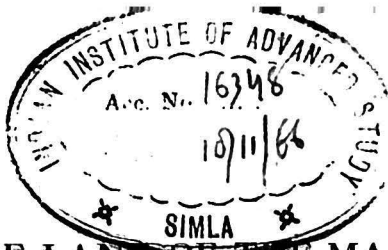
Bin Kasha

End of Track  
from Mukalla  
From RAIDAT it is possible  
to proceed along beach at  
low water as far as Black Peak

Low water beach  
possible to SHIRA

Route by motor  
Route by camel





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## THE LAND OF THE MAHRA

By MAJOR T. ALTOUNYAN

24

IN 1946 there still remained on the southern shores of Arabia a portion of that great coastline which lay wrapped in mystery. The western portion of the coast, from Aden to Mukalla and beyond, was known and had been frequently visited. The extreme eastern portion, which forms the Sultanate of Dhufar, had likewise been visited by Bertram Thomas and others since. There remained a gap between Wadi Masila and the Kara mountains to the east which the great travellers of modern times had, strangely, omitted to visit, and consequently little or nothing had come to light about it. It was to explore this portion of the coastline and the country inland of it that I set out from London in early November of 1946.

This was the old Ash-Shihr or modern Mahra, of which the Periplus and the early historians wrote, reporting on the unhealthy nature of its coast and the wildness of its population, whose food was the abundant fish with which they also fed their animals. This was the coast which had been described as having neither cultivation nor palm trees, but where the frankincense trees grew in the folds of the hills and exuded the white resin which for centuries was to become the most valuable article of commerce.

Modern Mahra lies between the Protectorate of Hadhramaut to the west and the Sultanate of Dhufar to the east and the borders on the Arabian Sea from Musaina'a (15° 05' N. 50° 45' E.) to Ras Darbat Ali (16° 40' N. 53° 05' E.). To the north there is as yet no definite delimitation of frontiers but it extends roughly to 19° N. as far as the Sands. The coastal area is intersected by a series of mountain ranges that jut prominently into the sea, notably the Fartaq range, and alternating with these headlands and between them are a series of plains consisting mainly of sand dunes or low-lying lime or gravel hills, intersected further by dry water courses. From the narrow coastal strip the ground rises from foothills of 1,000 feet to mountain ranges of 4,000 feet. Beyond the main central range of the Fartaq extends the great plain of Ghaidha, consisting of sand dunes or low-lying lime features near the coast with rough and broken country inland. The ground from Qamar Bay rises gradually westwards to approximately 4,000 feet towards Jebal Kunmain (16° 25' N. 50° 25' E.) on the Mahra-Menahil frontier. A network of great wadis intersects this sloping highland, notably the Wadis Jesaa, Mouba, K'Tut, Khufouf, Muraikh and Asm, along and through which the ancient track from Ghaidha to Tarim in the Hadhramaut lies. Thus the entire country, along the coast and in the interior, presents a variety of obstacles to travel.

Carrying only the barest necessities and sacrificing all comfort to achieve lightness, I made my approach to the Mahra from the west by way of Mukalla along the motor track until I reached its limit at Raidat Abdul Wadud. Beyond this point little was known of the country or of the state of the tracks so that there was no alternative to travel by camel.

There were no horses or mules, and later, in the Mahra, I found it strange that no one I spoke to had ever seen a horse.

With the help of Sheikh Abdullah Awadh, the local official, we spent several hours that evening in discussion and argument with the Thaayan tribe over my escort to Saihut. One would suppose it to be a simple matter in Arabia to hire a few of the camels that are to be seen squatting round any village. In fact it takes several hours of argument and discussion in which everyone takes part and has his say as the social custom requires. Agreement was finally reached with the Thaayan to escort me as far as the village of Eece, at the mouth of the Wadi Masilla, and at noon of the following day, November 29, 1946, I mounted my camel before a village gathering to commence the first stage of my journey into unknown Mahra.

The recent accounts I had heard of the country which I was about to enter had been discouraging, and many had been the expressions of doubt as to physical security there. I had neither personal arms nor any form of disguise, pinning my faith to the belief that I could build around myself an aura of immunity and inviolability by travelling openly and unconcernedly. In a country where every man carries a rifle from which he is never separated, the sight of a stranger travelling in this fashion drew astonished comment everywhere, and in places led to the belief that I carried a secret weapon, a rumour which I was careful neither to encourage nor discourage. The Hadhramis and the Mahra, if indeed they can be called Arabs, were nothing like the northern Arabs I had known, and my unfamiliarity with their ways and reactions made me not a little nervous of them.

That day and all the next we rode under a ferocious sun, through sand and lava, in the barren narrow coastal plain, which measures five to ten miles in width. During the morning of the second day we reached the ruined mound of old Musaina'a and, a little beyond it, the small cluster of low one-roomed houses of modern Musaina'a, built in loose lava stone, so that it could with difficulty be distinguished from its desolate black surroundings. Two young women here will for ever make me forget the filth and squalor, the smells and flies of Musaina'a. Instead, I will remember their smooth faces painted a bright lemon yellow and their eyelids painted an indigo blue, their white teeth flashing from behind deep indigo lips, silver bangles clanging at wrists and ankles, and each toe having its own white ring.

As we went along the track our party grew in size. We met other travellers, who became attached to us for company, and soon we had among us two sheikhs and a merchant, who were also making for Saihut. At the end of the second day, with sunset, we put down in Wadi Tamnun, near its two water wells, only to discover that an hour earlier a band of unknown tribesmen had deprived another party of all their camels at that very spot. There was a sudden panic and my companions urged me to leave for another place immediately. I argued that this was probably as safe a place as anywhere, as the robbers would by now be far away with their booty and not likely to return. Besides, two days of camel riding without a comfortable saddle to sit on had made me very weary, and just

then I didn't care about robbers or anything else. So I remained obstinate and we stayed where we were, without coming to harm, until an hour before daybreak, when we were on our way again.

Up to Wadi Masila, the country we had ridden through for two days had been very similar, with sand dunes and great patches of lava, and a complete absence of any vegetation. We had seen very few people, except along the sea shore, where scattered fishermen, in twos and threes, heaped their catches into large mounds, so that, in the scorching sun, the flesh rotted and stank, and the blood and oil seeped through a canal into a pit, from which the upper layer of oil was collected. The nauseating smell from these rotting fish heaps was quite overpowering and on occasions could be smelt from twenty miles away.

The first habitation we reached after Musaina'a was the mouth of Wadi Masila, where small clusters of palms and scattered mud houses snuggle against the walls of the great wadi. Here, in what is called Eece, we cooled for two hours, from the noon sun, and my Thaayan escort were prevailed upon not to dump me and return, but induced to carry me to Saihut. With only a few hours of daylight remaining, we crossed the open stony mouth of Wadi Masila, now no longer enclosed within its high walls, and covered the remaining sandy plain that brought us into Saihut as night fell.

The town, built in mud, stands a little inland from the open beach on a flat sandy plain, and has nothing in particular to recommend it. It is the largest and most important town in the Mahra, with its 2,500 to 3,000 inhabitants of seafarers, merchants, and tribesmen. It is also the headquarters of the troublesome Zoueidi tribe, who, even then, were being openly defiant of the Sultan, in their refusal to surrender a man who had killed a minor member of the Sultan's household. There was no peace in Saihut, as scores of people constantly sat around me, or followed me about, all the while treating me with the utmost suspicion, as their interrogations of me proved. Somehow, all attempts to meet the chief of the Zoueidi tribe, to arrange my onward escort to Qishn, came to nothing, as each messenger I sent came back with a different or contradictory reply, and there seemed no way of getting at the truth. So, on my second night in Saihut, I left, at midnight, from a lonely part of the beach in a hired canoe, to cover the 50 miles or so to Qishn by sea.

The land route, from Saihut to Qishn, by way of Atab, takes two days by camel. In our flimsy canoe, with nine men rowing against a cross current, we covered the distance in twelve hours, by keeping close to the land, and clearing the great cliffs that jut out to sea all along this coast by the barest margin. The seamanship of the Arabs here, as on other shores, proved to be of the usual high standard. Working as a perfect team, they kept up a steady rate of stroke of twenty to the minute, throwing every bit of energy into each stroke by standing on their footrests and hurling their bodies back on to their seats. For the first three hours no one rested, and to those who know what even three minutes of hard rowing means in physical exhaustion this performance will seem quite incredible.

The town of Qishn, with its clusters of palms, is centrally set in a beautiful bay, fifteen miles across, with its two land promontories on either

side jutting a mile out to sea. From what must be one of the finest beaches in the world, the ground rises gently towards the ring of hills in the distant background that encircle the bay. Tidy patches of cultivation, watered by salty water wells, spread like a carpet between the shore and the small group of mud houses that form the town. Sea-birds of all kinds, in their thousands, sit on the smooth beach, to peck at what the unfailing sea may next cast up. It would be difficult to imagine a more beautiful natural setting for a seaside town.

Qishn is the traditional seat of the Sultans of the Mahra, who are also Sultans of the island of Socotra. The hereditary succession to the title of Sultan of Qishn and Socotra is held by the Bin Afrir family, the present holder of the title being permanently resident in Socotra, and not having visited the mainland for a number of years. Sultan Ahmad Bin Afrir, a cousin of the Socotra Sultan, has become the resident Sultan of Qishn, and carries on the affairs of state, such as they are, assisted by his younger brother, Sultan Khalifah.

The country is entirely tribal and the social life of the tribe is regulated by tribal custom, so that although the Sultans are given their due respect they do not actually rule or exercise any great measure of control over the Mahra. Nevertheless, a treaty of friendship was concluded between H.M. Government and the Bin Afrir family in 1888, in similar terms to those with other Sultanates on the Southern Arabian coast, but, unlike the other Sultanates, the Mahra have been very much left to themselves without interference.

I remained in Qishn for two days with the Sultans Ahmad and Khalifah, and shared their simple life. There was no pomp or ceremony, or richly dressed attendants to serve us sumptuous dishes, such as one would expect to find in the house of an eastern potentate. Coarse cotton, or calico, instead of rich silks, adorns the lean figure of Sultan Ahmad, and, like everyone else in the Mahra, he walks about barefooted with a rifle across his shoulders carried at the horizontal. Sultan Ahmad, who is about sixty-five, with a white spade beard, spoke in a Bedouin dialect which I found it difficult to follow; but in spite of it we spent many hours in talking of the outside world. It was not surprising that in a country without telephone or telegraph, wireless or newspapers, that everyone was several years behind times with the general news. At Qishn and elsewhere people wanted to know if the war of the Christians was over and for how many years peace had been agreed on. Europeans were collectively referred to as Nasara, and strange were the stories circulating everywhere about the physical size and strength and the devilish machinations of the Nasara, whom they held in profound awe. A great number of the inland tribesmen had never heard of the English or any other nationality, but merely knew of the existence of an inferior and detested race whom they collectively called the Nasara, and of whom it was said that they never prayed and that they shielded their eyes so that they never saw the light from the sun.

Sultan Ahmad finally agreed to help me in my travels and presented me with a document which was to be my passport. With one Gidhi and one Hureisi as my escort, our party of three set out along the beach. At

the end of the bay, the waterskins were filled from the salty well and we penetrated into the sand dunes that form part of the Darja range. All next day we traversed the sandy plain between the Darja and the massive range of the Fartaq, that stood across our horizon like an impenetrable wall. Halfway across the coastal plain we entered the village of Sagr, in Bin Kelshat country, with its long and narrow strip of cultivation, and pursued the track beyond into Haswain.

My escort amused themselves by picking out in the dusty track the footprints of people they knew and discussing them with animation. At first I regarded this with scepticism, but it was later to be confirmed that they can, not only identify the footprints of friends, but claim to know the tribe to which any footprint belongs, be it human or camel.

Haswain is a small village, a little short of Ras Fartaq, and is the headquarters of one section of the Bin Kelshat tribe, who spread across the range. To cross the Fartaq range along the coastal road the traveller has to go by one of two passes, both of which the Kelshat control. The path nearer the point of the headland is the shorter, but is more difficult than the Houerir pass, which crosses ten miles inland and is less difficult for camels. These tracks are part of the great highway along the southern shores of Arabia, and to-day, as in past centuries, they form one of the connecting links between Eastern and Western Arabia, along which traders and pilgrims pass.

With the help of Sheikh Nasr, of the Bin Kelshat, who had at first been unfriendly, I procured some hill camels and an escort of three men, and we made our way towards the Houerir by way of the oasis of El Wadi. We climbed over foothills of lime and gravel and very soon the path became so steep that the camels stood and panted, refusing to go any further. As we reached the main range of mountains we encountered on our path huge sheets of smooth rock that sloped perilously towards the valley. There was only a faint trace on the rock surface, left by the rubbing of camels' footpads, to indicate the way of the path. At the sharp and narrow bends, with steeper gradients and more boulders ahead, the camels stood and complained loudly. They had to be given time to organize their feet, to enable them to turn in the narrow track, and prepare to take the next stride. I was the only one mounted, and I would a thousand times have preferred to have walked, had a leg injury not prevented my doing so. It is doubtful whether any other pack animal could have done as well as these hill camels, who combine the elegance of a gazelle with the agility of a goat.

That night we slept in a fold of the mountains, under the shelter of some dwarf trees, 3,000 feet above sea level. We were now three-quarters of the way up the range, and to keep warm we clustered around a fire that burned all night. Two hours more of climbing next morning brought us to the crest of the range, and to the beautiful vistas that lay before us. With our backs to the sea the huge sandy plain of Ghaidha lay to our right, with the villages of Nishton, Tabot, and Harut plainly visible, and, beyond them, the mountains of Dhufar towered pale in the morning mist. To our left, unending ranges of mountains extended as far as the eye could see. I felt disinclined to leave the cool fresh air of this



height for the suffocating plain below, with its flies and odours of rotting fish.

The descent of the eastern slope of the Fartaq is steeper and more perilous than the western slope. To remain mounted on the descent would be difficult and hazardous, as the track is rocky and very precipitous. It turns and twists and the camels slither and stumble as they put their feet on loose stones. It was late in the afternoon when we reached the plain and the inland salt lake, where we cooled the camels' feet by bathing them.

The next two villages, of Tabut and Harut, are in Bin Braafit country, and, not wishing to spend any more uncomfortable nights in villages, where I should also be expected to part with my Kelshat escort, we plotted to creep past both these villages under cover of darkness. At dusk we left the lakeside and crept to the seashore, to give the villages as wide a berth as possible. A huge full moon rose and hung over the sea and changed the night into day again. We were between the habitations and the moon and were sure to be observed, so we talked of passing the villages in the rear, but what seemed to us like a miracle suddenly happened; the moon was with us in our plot. A dent appeared in the lower part of her disc and rapidly spread so that as we passed Tabut she had lost most of her brilliance, and by Harut she had become completely eclipsed. My men became concerned, and asked if I had brought it about by some trick of the Nasara; but when they were reassured on that score exclaimed that God must be with me and had caused the eclipse to relieve my anxiety.

It was some time after midnight, with darkness hampering further travel, when we knelt our camels and slept where we stopped. We had travelled for more than eighteen hours that day and had had very little to eat. Before sunrise of the following morning we were away again with six hours of riding before us to reach Ghaidha.

The importance of Ghaidha lies in its being at the juncture of the inland route to the Hadhramaut valley and the coastal route to Dhufar. It is also close to the sea so that traffic and merchandise can pass through it to the four points of the compass. The town is in two parts, a quarter of a mile apart; the part nearer the sea being in Bin Kidda country and the more inland half in Bin Kelshat country. In the part nearer the sea, I became the guest of Sayyid Abdullah Bu Bakr, the chief notable, and a wealthy merchant. With his help we commenced negotiating for an escort to conduct me along the inland route to Tarim in the Hadhramaut. My plan had been a simple one. I had reckoned that in our journey we would cross the four tribal areas of Bin Kelshat, Bin Gumsait, Bin Sahol, and the Menahil, so that one man from each of those tribes, with myself, would make a small party of five. The Mahra, whom I found very talkative, found my plan too simple. The Bin Kidda laid claim on me for being in their part of the town. The Bin Kelshat claimed a bigger representation than any other tribe, as more than three days of the journey lay through their country. Endless conferences took place that lasted the entire day and were open to the general public to attend. Sheikh Soleiman, of the Kelshat, supported by his henchmen, came carrying an umbrella

stick shorn of all its spokes. The Chief of the Bin Kidda, a large and stooping figure with grey hair that hung to his shoulders, attended with a spear in one hand and a sword in the other. Scores of bare-backed men sat around us with their primitive rifles held upright in their hands. All day they argued and harangued and displayed their oratory and cunning. Late that night I was presented with an agreed plan for an escort of fifteen, at a cost of 300 Maria Theresa dollars each for the journey, which I promptly turned down.

In the succeeding days more heated discussions followed, with a steady deterioration in tribal relations. The Bin Kidda walked out in disgust, and the Bin Gumsait and Bin Sahol joined in. While these noisy and lengthy discussions were taking place I stole brief periods of solitude, until discovered by someone and asked to review all that I had seen so far.

The narrow foot-track from Raidat Abdul Wadoud had led from sandy beaches and stony plains over the formidable range of the Fartaq, and through the most populated section of the coastline. Along this highway and in villages we had stopped and exchanged the news with those we met. With friends the salutation had taken the form of rubbing noses, and with others a brusque handshake. Noticeable everywhere had been the state of constant fear in which the isolated section of the population lived. The sight of even a small party of mounted men had been sufficient to send everyone scurrying to the cover of bushes and rocks, from which they had pointed rifles until we had been recognized as friends. Instant suspicion and immediate resort to arms is a legacy of past and, to a lesser extent, present experiences, as the Mahra have been continually subjected to large and better-armed raiding parties from the North and the Yemen, and the law of arms remains the law of the country. My presence had everywhere aroused first suspicion and then extreme curiosity, which had not been satisfied until an explanation of the object of my presence had been made. Once suspicion had been overcome, they had brought their sick and wounded, the crippled and the mentally deficient, for me to cure. Most had had eye infection and some undoubtedly had been lepers with appalling body wounds, and it had not been easy to send away disappointed so much suffering humanity.

The main concentrations of population were in the townships of Saihut, with approximately 2,500 inhabitants; Qishn, with 1,000; and Ghaidha, with 1,500. In every village we met several households of Sayyids, who were of Hedjazi origin, and who, as claiming descent from the Prophet, received special veneration from the local population. They had established themselves in dominant positions in all branches of the community life, and, being of the moneyed class, they kept slaves as servants and as drawers of water. They were the traders, teachers, and arbitrators of their localities, and as such exerted no small measure of power.

Sheikh Mubarak, who was a co-guest in Sayyid Abdullah's house, often joined me in some hidden corner to have a chat. He had a handsome oval face, with deep-set humorous eyes, and wore a long grey beard. He was extraordinarily intelligent and thirsted for knowledge. He had been brought from a nearby district to prescribe for Sayyid Abdullah's daughter, who lay dying of a fever. With a reed pen dipped in solid ink of his own



making with soot and water he wrote passages from the Koran on pieces of paper and had them taken to the sick bed. "This is our medicine. What shall we do? We are not advanced like you, Nasara," he would say to me as if in apology for his form of medical practice. Two days later the beautiful lady died and was put in her grave within three hours, and the whole town shouted, "Heaven be praised!" and went in to prayers. Without expert medical opinion, and with such quick burials, "I wondered how many must have gone to their graves when perhaps life was not quite extinct.

That night we sat in a circle of Sayyid Abdullah's friends, who included a number of chieftains, and discussed the "wars of the Christians." They were given a description by me of a modern battlefield with all the co-ordinated arms that took part. We talked of aeroplanes, submarines, radio-telephony, and television; and my audience sat in awful silence, with gaping mouths and hanging jaws, listening to what their brains could not grasp. When the guests had gone, Sheikh Mubarak and I sat talking till the small hours of the morning. He told me that the origin of the Mahra language was lost in antiquity, but believed that at one time it had a writing. With the advent of Islam (Sunni), which the entire population had now devoutly embraced, the language became infused with a certain number of Arabic words, and, as a recent adaptation, the Arabic alphabet was used to write it. Arabic was partly spoken and partly understood by coastal dwellers, but the inland tribesmen spoke only Mahri. The tribes numbered about twenty-five and the general estimation of the population was given as near 40,000. The main wealth of the Mahra was derived from the sea. Plentiful fish, cooked or salted, formed their main diet, as well as that of their animals. Fish oil and salted fish of the shark types constituted their main export, which provided them with currency for the importation of dates and other necessities. Agriculture on a limited scale around water wells was mainly confined to the growing of millet, which was ground to flour for baking. Scattered date palms produced an inferior and inadequate quantity of dates. Camel breeding and goat raising would not in themselves be sufficient to support the population without the help of the fish industry, which was the foundation stone on which the country's economy was built. The former flourishing trade in frankincense had dwindled into insignificance through neglect of the gum-producing trees, and no local craftsmanship had developed to produce the simple things for which they now resorted to outside markets.

On the fourth day of my negotiations, when everything that could have been said had been said several times over, and a general state of exhaustion had been reached, a compromise plan, suggested by me, received general assent, and on the fifth day we set out along the inland route towards Hadhramaut. We started off at the trot to give the journey a lively beginning, and we were seven all told. After five days of confinement in the foul air of overcrowded rooms, to be mounted and travelling in space again was wonderfully exhilarating and resulted in prolonged trotting. I was mounted for the first time on a really fine she-camel, of good pedigree, which had never carried anything less than a Sayyid; but, as usual, there was only a blanket to serve as a saddle.

My escort consisted of three from Bin Kelshat, one from Bin Gumsait, one from Bin Sahol and one from Amr Jeed, who was to be my personal attendant. The caravans took fourteen or fifteen days to cross from Ghaidha to the Hadhramaut by Es-Sōm, and we reckoned that, travelling light as we were, we should reach Tarim in nine days. Our main diet was going to be dates with a small quantity of rice and some millet flour for baking. Other items that we carried consisted of a quantity of tea and sugar, three water skins, and a quantity of dry fish for the camels. That night we agreed we would rise an hour before sunrise and be away ahead of the sun and ride for five hours before resting the camels. Then we would rest for two hours and ride another five hours until sundown.

For the next two days we rode due west through and along the stony bed and the dwarf bushes of Wadi Jesaa. We passed through the oasis of Douhal, with its two Kelshat forts, and reached Kheis el Murait, with its water wells and palms. Here the Wadi Jesaa curls around Murait and alters its course to the northwest to join Wadi Erma, in Amr Jeed country, six days away. Here also the Bin Kelshat country ends and the Bin Gumsait country begins, although the oasis itself belongs to the small menial tribe of the Awabthe.

Here we entered a tributary of Wadi Jesaa, called Wadi Mouba, which runs due west, and leads into the oasis of Ghaidha, with its water wells, cultivation, and palms, fifteen miles west of Murait. We had been climbing steadily ever since leaving Ghaidha, by the sea, and had ridden through a series of wadis which alone showed any signs of life. We had reached a plateau several thousand feet high, consisting of rough and crumbling lime hills, parched and lifeless, except in the beds of dry watercourses, where we frequently saw gazelle feeding on the scrub. Provided everyone was mounted, we were able to pass quite close to these gazelles; but as soon as anyone dismounted to take a shot at them they kicked up their heels and vanished like the wind. The only other sizable animal we had seen was a small grey fox with an absurdly long and thick brush. I had expected to find snakes and scorpions and carried in my pocket a small piece of ambergris, which my host at Ghaidha had given me, instructing me to eat a small quantity immediately I was bitten or stung, but, luckily, the occasion never arose. It was generally said of it that a small quantity, the size of a match-head, eaten with milk, was a sure cure against poison. It was also believed to give physical strength and general good health. I have since tested the validity of this statement by consuming small quantities of ambergris, and the only effect I can record is that it produces nausea and might well be taken as an emetic.

From Kheis el Ghaidha we travelled for two days through Wadi Mouba, with nothing in particular to see, apart from the distant lime hills that shield the Mahra from the quarter of the Great Sands. We were in a complete wilderness with neither habitations nor people visible. In the cool of the mornings we trotted to the tune of a song the men sang in turn, and which the camels seemed to know and like. It had a fascinating and soothing air and its rhythm seemed to fit in with the jolts the trotting animals produced.

By eleven o'clock in the morning the heat from the sun became so

intense that we were struck speechless, and the camels hung their heads and slowed their pace. It began to cool off again an hour before sunset, and by the time it was quite dark we were clustering round the fire to keep warm again. Each nightly stop was immediately followed by a short period of great activity before there could be any rest. The camels were hobbled and let loose for the night to feed on what scrub they could find. Firewood was collected, sometimes from over a wide area, a fire was lit, and everyone selected his particular patch of ground on which to sleep. The meal took no time to prepare, as it mainly consisted of dates; but a pot of tea, made Arab fashion, with tea, sugar and water all put in at the same time, was kept brewing until bedtime.

My nightly problem was to pin-point our location on the inaccurate map I carried. Recognizable features, like wadis and mountains, were not indicated, so that a course could only be plotted by estimating distance and direction travelled each day. Distances could be calculated fairly accurately by keeping a check on time. My camel took ninety strides to the minute in ordinary walking, and her stride measured  $34\frac{1}{2}$  inches, which produced an average of 3 miles per hour. Time spent in trotting was reckoned double and so a distance of 260 miles was reckoned for the inland route from Ghaidha to Tarim, which we covered in nine days.

We usually sat around the fire for a couple of hours each night and talked. Friendly as my escort were, they were reluctant to answer my questions about names of wadis or tribal boundaries, and I had to use devious methods, usually by tackling them singly, before I got any information, which I had then to recheck by questioning another. They liked to talk on other subjects, and many were their questions about the Nasara. All six of my escort were married with one wife each. One had produced no offspring and the remaining five had produced twenty-six between them, of which ten were alive and sixteen had died before attaining the age of one. The butt of all jokes was one named Hamad, who had produced seven daughters in succession, all of whom had died. It was also Hamad who had heard of the existence of the motor car, but could not imagine what sort of "legs" it had!

Our sixth night we spent in Ras Mouba, close to Jebal Kunmain, on the Mahra-Menahil frontier. This was the quarter from which the raiders from the Yemen and the Great Sands came, and the men seemed suddenly to awake to a new alertness. That night, as we sat around the fire we were challenged out of the darkness by distant voices. Some we answered and the rest we ignored. One persistent voice, which had demanded the names of our tribes and our number, was promised safety to come and see for himself. Several hours later he appeared out of the darkness with his 1874 rifle levelled at us. He was a handsome Menhali, who, by way of conversation, told us a tale of two wolves which the previous night had eaten two babies as they slept in a cave, and he then rose to leave. I had sat silently watching him, but now I insisted he had become a friend and must stay as our guest until the morning. I said it was cold and we had a big fire, and we should sit and drink sweet tea until the morning. Reluctantly he was persuaded to stay and we watched into the



