

Greece-Turkey-Iran-UAE-Oman Tour Trip report

27 January > 28 February 2003

In the evening of the 27th January, we were already sleeping, the police visited us. They knocked on the car and asked to come out, I first checked through the roof window what was going on and asked what they wanted. They just wanted to know what we were doing, and where we came from. After they checked our passports they apologized for their visit and went off again. We think they were just curious and of course not many foreigners come to this part of the world in their own car!

Next day we made a trip through the Musandam peninsula, trying to get to the town of Khasab. Starting from sea level the road winds through the narrow gorge at Wadi Khabb Shamsi, then over a pass through sheer rugged mountains and back down into Wadi al Bih. The graded road was well maintained and the views were spectacular. At the turn-off to the right for Khasab there was an Omani checkpoint, but although we explained that we would like to go to Khasab by this road the soldier at the gate refused to let us through! He said we had to go to the official border post at Tibat on the west coast. To get there we had to drive through Wadi al Bih to the city of Ras al Khaymah, and from here further along the west coast. After passing the Emirates checkpoint we arrived at the west coast again, but because we could not find a suitable place to stay for the night we decided to go back to the Daba beach where we had stayed the previous night. And around 8 o'clock in the evening, it was dark already, we were back in the same place we started that morning!

Next day we decided to stay at this beach just to relax a bit. And also in the late afternoon of this day local people came to visit this beach. There were also group of young men with 2 cars trying to drive up against the steep dunes, a spectacular sight! We also had a chat with 3 Canadians, one of them living in the Emirates the other 2 visiting him from Thailand where they lived. They too were planning to come and live and work in the Emirates. Also Lex got a lot of attention again, and many pictures were taken! That evening we went to Daba to do some internetting. After we did some shopping, we went back to the beach near Kor Fakkan the next day. Because Thursday and Friday are the weekend in Oman and the Emirates many people go out to the beach or to other nice places to have a picnic, and also on this 30st January it was busy on the road and the beaches. When we arrived at our spot on the beach, it started raining and we had to stay inside the car that evening.

Next day the sky was clear again, and after breakfast we walked through the palm plantations to the oldest mosque of the Emirates just nearby. This mosque was build some 500 years ago, and has a distinctive structure especially its roof consisting of 4 pointed domes and supported by an internal pillar is unusual. There was also still some restoration going on. Because Lex was with us, José decided to stay outside the premises with him. The guard showed me around, but I was not allowed to take a look inside! After this we walked back through the palm plantations and a small fishing settlement were mainly people from India were living. There are a lot of people from India and Pakistan living in the Emirates and Oman, almost all the shops and companies are run by them. They also do the less attractive work which the people from the Emirates and Oman don't like to do themselves! In the late afternoon we walked to a cliff which stretches into the sea, from here we had a great view over the beach and the palm plantations.

The morning of the 1st February was cool, with only 16°C. Its amazing how you get used to these high temperatures. In the evenings when temp. drop to 24°C. we feel even cold! This day we tried to get a permit to enter Musandam at the checkpoint we had been before. We went to the police station in Daba, after explaining our plans the officers got a bit confused. They did not know if this was possible, and after talking to a senior officer they advised us to go to the official border post in Tibat! So, our only chance to enter Musandam now was at this border. We decided to take a chance, and went off to the west coast again through Ras al Kaimah up to Tibat. In the afternoon we arrived at the Tibat border post, leaving the Emirates was no problem after paying 40 Dirhams. But when we came at the Omani side, a lot of trouble began! In the first instance they said it was not possible to enter Oman with our car with Dutch number plates! After some phone calls this problem was solved, we were allowed to enter Oman with our car with Dutch number plates.

Next problem was Lex of course, they needed a permit from the Omani ministry of Agriculture. We knew we needed this permit, and we already had applied for it when we were still in Holland. A vet in Muscat had arranged this permit and had send it to us, the only problem was that this permit was only valid for 1 entrance. If we showed them this permit here, we maybe could not enter the other part of Oman! Because we never had any trouble bringing our dog into other countries, we just wanted to give it a try. It turned out that the Omani custom officers were very strict on this matter, as we also would experience later on during our journey. After some discussion they decided not to let us enter Musandam! We returned to Daba that same evening.

Next day we stayed at the beach, we did clean the car inside and washed some clothes, there was enough water in this place because there was a watertank just near the beach.

In the morning of the 3rd February we moved on again, this time to the main part of Oman. We took a road through the desert to the oasis of Al-Ain close to the border of Oman. When we arrived in Al-Ain there were now signs for the border, but with the GPS we finally found the road into Oman. After paying 40 Dirhams again it was easy to leave the Emirates. After some 10km. we arrived at the Omani border post. After checking our passports they wanted to look inside the car, and of course they noticed Lex. First thing they asked for was the permit, but this time we could show them this important paper! After all the present officers had taken a look at this permit we were allowed to enter Oman! We think they had never seen such a permit before!

Now we could start our first 3 week stay in Oman, because we had multiple entry visa we were allowed to stay for 3 weeks every time we entered Oman. From the border we headed to the coast again, and near the town of Liwa we found a place to stay for the night.

Next day we went in southerly direction along the coast, towards the town of Sohar. This town used to be an important harbour, but nowadays its just a quiet town. We went to the fish market were all kinds of fish are traded. Because this market is close to the sea, the fish is brought in straight from the small fishing boats. From Sohar we went back inland again to the town of Yanqul, in the middle of the Hajar mountains. The graded road was very rough at some places, and also very steep as well. The more we came in the mountains the scenery became very nice. There were even some pools in the wadi al Bih. In the late afternoon we found a nice place to stay for the night, between some big old trees surrounded by mountains. In the evening we made a fire to keep warm, temp had dropped to 22°C.! In the morning of the next day it was 14°C. only! This day we continued our trip through wadi Hibi, and after a while we saw a camel caravan following the same road.

We also filled our water tanks at one of the water filling stations, these filling stations you can find all over Oman. Just when we had finished a car stopped, and the driver invited us to have coffee at his home nearby. He was accompanied by his daughter of about 20 years, she spoke some English. We had a warm welcome by his wife, and we also met his mother and father and a younger daughter. Coffee and dates and other fruit were served outside in a shady place, where we were sitting on carpets on the floor. Of course they wanted to know where we came from, and we showed them our photos of our family and friends in Holland. By the time the 2 daughters had to go to school, the oldest as a teacher, we also left this kind family.

We continued to follow some wadis in the direction of the town of Rustaq, but once on our way again there was a hard bang! It turned out to be the inverter, some parts had exploded. Why this happened we never understood, but the problem was that we could not charge the batteries of our laptop anymore!

Next day we arrived in Rustaq, I already had opened the inverter to see what had happened. Some fuses were blown, and one glass fuse was exploded causing this bang! In Rustaq we went to a TV and radio repair shop, this shop was run by Indian people and was full of old model TV sets and radios. We hoped by replacing the blown fuses and soldering a new support for the glass fuse the inverter would function again. After the friendly owner of the shop had replaced the fuses and soldered a new support, I connected the inverter again. But unfortunately the inverter did not function anymore, probably more parts were damaged. We decided to send an e-mail to the company in Holland where we had bought this inverter, after all it was just a few months old.

That evening we went to the wadi Bani Awf to stay for the night, we knew a place where we had been 4 years ago during our first visit. We also decided to go to Muscat to buy a new inverter, it would take some time before we could expect a solution for our inverter problem.

But on the 7th February we first went to another wadi, the wadi Abyadh, some 25km from wadi Bani Awf. This is a very nice wadi, because water flows all year round. From the blacktop road you have to drive about 10km through the wadi until it is impossible to drive further. On this spot we found a good place to stay, near some palm trees and flowering oleander bushes. Because this place is visited frequently in the weekend there was a lot of rubbish lying around, and we first cleaned up this place. We collected 8 big plastic bags full of rubbish! In the evening we walked down the wadi, along the 'blue pools' where this wadi is noted for.

The colour of the water is caused by the light reflecting from calcite, a white mineral which lines the bottom of the pools. In some pools the calcite is in suspension giving the water a milky colour. When we returned to our car we saw a few vultures sitting near the bags with the garbage, they probably were not happy with our clean up!

Next day we went to Muscat to get a new inverter, but after we had visited several shops none of them had an inverter... Other problem was that most shops close between noon and 4 o'clock in the afternoon. After we waited somewhere in the shade for a few hours we started our search again, and finally we became an address and phonenumber of a shop who might sell inverters. But now we had the problem to find this shop, after an extensive search I phoned the shop to get directions. But the very kind Indian owner decided to come to the place where we were at that moment to guide us to his shop!

And indeed he had just one inverter for sale, but after telling our story he maybe could help us to repair our inverter! He knew a friend, a TV repair technician, who maybe was able to repair our inverter. Together we went to the shop of this friend, he soldered some new parts on the print. After returning I tried the inverter again, but there was still no output! So, after all we bought the new inverter of the friendly Indian guy. We think it was the only inverter for sale in Oman!

In the meantime it had become late again, and it had become very busy on the streets and in the shops. It turned out to be the evening before the Eid al Adha festivities, a major Islamic festivity which lasts 5 days. We decided to go to a beach some 20km from Muscat to stay for the night, but because we ended up in an enormous traffic jam we had to take another and a longer route to get to this place. At 10 o'clock in the evening we arrived at the beach near Yiti, I first connected the new inverter and now we could read the e-mails again who were sent to us. We also received some photos of our cat Zoë, who now lives with friends. The same friends we became her from at the time. Finally we could get some sleep after this weary day.

Next day we returned back to wadi Abyadh, we had to drive back through Muscat again but this time there were no traffic jams. For some 50km you drive through well maintained gardens alongside the road with all kinds of flowering plants and shrubs and everywhere flowering Bougainvilleas in several colours. 11.30h that morning we were back on our nice spot under the palm trees in wadi Abyadh. The rest of the day we spend relaxing.

The 10th of February we stayed at the nice spot in wadi Abyadh, in the morning we had a walk further through the wadi. But because temp were rising very quickly we decided to return to a place in the wadi where we could swim. Later in the afternoon we did wash some clothes again, there was plenty of water around to do this.

Next day we went to the town of Rustaq to see if we could find an internet café, but because of the Eid al Adha festivities all shops were closed. We decided to drive on to wadi Sahtan which is the gateway to numerous villages set back into the mountains or along the wadi bottom. After some 16km the actual wadi begins, and is lined with plantations and small settlements. After another 8km the gorge opens into the Sahtan Bowl. On the right rises Jabal Shams, the highest peak in Oman at 3009 metres. It is almost a 2500metre drop from the summit to the bottom of the wadi. While passing through the villages we saw people slaughtering goats and sheep for the Eid festivities. After some km the road starts climbing up a ridge and here also is the turn-off to the village of Wajmah . From here it was another 5 km on a very steep track requiring low 4 WD. Wajmah is really an incredible site with terraces carved into the mountain slope. Just before the village there is a small parking place, where you can turn your car. When we returned from Wajmah we met two guys, one from France the other from Switzerland who turned out to be geology students from a university in Switzerland . They were trying to find proof for the fact that there had been glaciers in the past in the rocks of the surrounding mountains. After backtracking to the main road again we took the turn-off which connects the Sahtan Bowl with wadi Bani Awf, this making a roundtrip through the mountains possible. After some km we took a turn-off to the right to the village of Salma , and after another 6km the road starts its ascent to the mountain. Here again we had to switch to low gear, and the last km offering fantastic views of the mountains and small settlements.

Here we also found a place to stay for the night, it was in an abandoned village with a great view. Because there was no wind it was a very silent place, we only heard natural sounds like singing birds. After a shower, we felt reborn again!

In the morning of the 12th February we drove back to wadi Bani Awf, and took a turn-off to the villages of Zammah and Bilad Sayt. When we entered Zammah the people here were roasting the meat of the goats and sheep they had slaughtered the previous day, and when we approached they waved and shouted that we had to stop and join them! In no time our car was surrounded by all the children of the village, and the men gave us some of the meat they had roasted. After a while we continued on again in the direction of Bilad Sayt, and immediately outside Zammah the steep climb began. On some parts we had to shift to low gear. The panorama along this road, literally cut into the side of the mountains, is spectacular. After we took the turn-off to the left to Hat, we came at a spot we had been before when we first visited Oman some 4 years ago. At this spot is the entrance to a narrow canyon which leads to Bilad Sayt, with some deep shaded pools and a waterfall. But this time there was not enough water to supply the waterfall. We had lunch here in the shade of palm trees, and when we left to go to a place in wadi Bani Awf to stay for the night we met 2 Dutch couples with their children. They were very surprised to see a car with Dutch number plates in Oman ! Because of the Eid festivities they had a short holiday, they worked and lived in Muscat . That night we stayed at the place in wadi Bani Awf, we also had been here 4 years ago.

After having breakfast we first went to the town of Nakhl to see if there was an internet-café. But although this town is overlooked by a massive fort, there was no internet-café around here. We decided to go to the hot springs , a few km outside the town. But because the Eid festivities were still going on, it was very busy with Omani families having a good time at the springs. After drinking coffee in the cool palm plantations we decided to go to Barka, a somewhat bigger town on the coast in the direction of Muscat . But also here we could not find an internet-café, and after some searching we went to the seaside to stay on a beach for the rest of that afternoon. In the late afternoon we drove on to Muscat, and after a while we found an internet-café. We tried to send some photos to Ufuk, our Turkish 'webmaster,' but after a while things did go very slow and we stopped. It had turned dark outside, and we decided to go to a place some km south of Muscat to stay for the night. While driving through Muscat it was very busy on the road with families returning after a day out. When we finally arrived on the beach near Yiti, there were still some families there sitting near a fire.

In the morning of the 14th February we continued to Quriyat, a town further along the Gulf Coast , in easterly direction. After driving through wadi Mayh we reached the blacktop road again for Quriyat. After descending the pass over the mountains we entered the fishing village of Quriyat . In the centre there is a large golden-domed mosque and the souq with its shops and vegetable market. Near the old fort we turned right and crossed a wide wadi bed with an inlet lined by a dense mangrove forest to a part of the town which is built on a dune along the sea. Here also is the port with many fishing boats and some old wooden dhows. We decided to stay on the nearby beach for the rest of the afternoon, here we saw fish eagles trying to find something to eat. Later in the afternoon we went to wadi Dayqah, one of the most spectacular wadis in Oman .

What had been a rough track on our first visit to Oman was now a brand new blacktop road, because it was a Friday again this new road was very busy with cars full of Omani families headed for wadi Dayqah! So, we decided to return to a turn-off some km back where there is also an entrance into

the wadi. In this part of the wadi we also had been before on our first visit to Oman , and we knew there were some nice pools in this part of the wadi. But when we drove to that spot there was no water anymore! We already had noticed before that there had been almost no rain this winter. We decided to drive further upstream through the wadi, and hoped to find some remaining pools. Luckily we found a pool where we could swim, and a little further we found a nice spot to stay for the night. On one of the rocks nearby there was a picture painted of, what looked to us, was the face of Osama bin Laden! We joked he maybe was hiding in one of the caves in this wadi! That evening we spend near a fire under a full moon sky in a very silent wadi.

In the early morning of the next day, it was still dark, we woke up by some noise. It turned out to be a light truck who had stopped nearby to load sand, probably for making cement. Because of the cool morning hours the 2 men had come so early, we think.

This day we drove further through the wadi, some parts being very rough. But after a while we saw more and more pools, and after a few km even a stream! At some points we had to drive through, what now had become, a real river. At one of these crossings we stopped to have our car washed, no problem with all this water! Just before the village of Mazara , where you can get out of the wadi again, we stopped near a large pool and stayed there until the evening. With this abundance of water we washed some clothes, and cleaned the inside of the car. In the evening we went to the other entrance of wadi Dayqah to stay for the night. From this place we started our walk through the most beautiful part of wadi Dayqah the next day. Most of the time the track follows the wadi floor, frequently crossing the stream. Along the way are some deep pools for swimming. Further on the wadi becomes very narrow with steep cliffs on both sides, and we had to walk through the stream in order to keep going. After we returned to the car we went back to Quriyat again to do some shopping, and in the evening we returned to the same place in the wadi again to stay for the night. But when we returned the sky had become very dark, and it looked like there was a heavy thunderstorm coming. A local guy advised us not to stay at this spot, because we surely would be washed away when it would start raining. So, we went to a place a few hundred meters back where we would be safe in case the wadi would be flooded. Soon it started to rain indeed, but not so severe as it had looked like. After a while it had stopped, and we could see the stars again.

Next morning we went to the nearby wadi Suwayh, also a very scenic wadi. The narrow graded road cuts deep into the mountains, at times requiring low gear. Just before the village of Suwayh there is a big and deep pool with a waterfall, surrounded by high cliffs, really a beautiful place.

Because there was no possibility to go in the shade here, we turned back to another pool we saw some km back. Here we could park the car and sit in the shade of a huge Acacia tree, and have a swim in the beautiful pool just nearby. In the late afternoon we went on again towards the coast, and went to a sinkhole a few hundred meters off the coast. These sinkholes are created because groundwater has dissolved the limestone below the surface, first an underground cave is created until the surface finally collapses under its own weight. On one edge it is possible to climb down, it's a delightful secluded spot to swim and picnic. In the brackish water are plants and animals that are unique to this environment. We decided to stay here for the night, right on the edge of the sinkhole with a view in the deep and to the nearby ocean.

In the morning of the 18 th February we followed the rough graded road along the coast towards the town of Sur. This day there was a strong wind blowing, and parts of the road we had to drive though a real sandstorm with sometimes minimal sight. About halfway down this road to Sur we entered the

village of Shab . This village is built on the sides of wadi Shab, overlooking a small beach. Here we took a small boat to the other side of the river where there is the beginning of a path that leads up the wadi. This boat is attached by a rope to both sides, and you have to pull yourself over to the other side. The walk up the narrow and deep gorge of Shab alongside plantations, pools and waterfalls is very beautiful. After this nice wadi we went to the next wadi, it was wadi Tiwi only 2km. from Shab. This wadi is wider than Shab and can be driven through for a few km., on some points becoming very narrow. In this wadi also water flows all year round and it has an abundant vegetation. After having lunch in this wadi we continued towards Sur. This town was once a major trading port with East Africa, also the shipyards were famous in Arabia throughout the 19 th and first half of the 20 th century. Large ocean-going dhows, used on trading routes to the Gulf, India and East-Africa, were built here. Because we arrived in the afternoon most of the shops were closed, so we first visited the shipyard where still wooden dhows are being built. Nowadays mostly by Indian people. Later that day we went to an internet-café, we had to send a lot of photos and text to update our website. Later in the evening we found a spot near the sea just outside Sur to stay for the night.

The next day we went back to the same internet-café, and I received several mails from family and friends for my birthday! This being the first birthday in my life in another country! After this we took the blacktop road back inland to Al Kamil, and from here to Al Mintirib along the northern margins of the Wahiba Sands. This desert stretches out for some 180 km from north to south and 80km from east to west. The northern part of the Sands is characterised by north-south orientated sand dunes, up to 100m in height, separated by wide depressions. From the road we could see the dunes in the distance, but after some km. we took a turn-off to the right to wadi Bani Khalid and back into the mountains again. This wadi is one of the most visited wadi's in Oman , and there are numerous villages lining the wadi which usually has running water all year round. After we had lunch near a large shallow pool we went on to the end of the track, from here it is possible to walk further through the wadi and to a cave. At the end of the track we saw some other foreign visitors, the first time since we were in Oman . And here we also met Iris and David and their 7 year-old son Travis. They had come here with a rented car from Muscat , and it turned out to be that they were travelling much the same way like we do! They had come to Oman by boat owned by people they had met in Thailand , these people had invited them to sail from Thailand , through the Maldives to Oman on a 30 day trip. After they arrived in Oman they had to wait for 3 days for their return flight to Thailand , to go back to their car which they had left behind in Thailand . They were travelling for several years now in their 4WD Mercedes truck, and they also had sold everything they had just to travel! David was born in the USA and had lived, together with Iris, for a long time in Germany before they decided to go travelling. They already had travelled through big parts of the Far East , and were now planning to go on through Indonesia to Australia. After we had talked for a while, we decided to go on together and search a place where we could stay for the night. Because we were near the Wahiba desert we decided to go there to find a suitable spot, they could use our tent and other camping gear. After having a nice meal together, we spend the rest of that evening talking about our travel experiences of course!

Next day we decided to drive further into the desert together, because their car was a Nissan Patrol this would be no problem. For us this was a good chance to get some more experience in driving in sandy conditions, especially with our new car. We still had some doubts about this car, we thought this car had a lack of power particularly in sandy conditions. After we had let much of the air out of the tyres, to increase the contact area with the ground, we tried to manage some steep slopes. After

some attempts we reached the top, where we could stop and turn on a flat piece of sand. David and Iris told us that it was not so difficult to drive up sand dunes with their 10-Ton truck. After a while 2 local Bedouin men joined us with their car, they were just curious about what we were doing. They invited us to their tent, just nearby. The mother of one of them made tea for us, while we sat in the shade of their tent. After this ceremony we went back to the blacktop road again because David, Iris and Travis had to go back to Muscat to catch their flight back to Thailand . Because they still had some time we decided to go back through wadi Tayin towards Muscat . But this being a rather rough track, they decided after some km. to leave us and go back to Muscat in a faster way.

After we said good-bye to them we found a nice place to stay for the night between some palm trees, there was also an irrigation channel with fresh water where we could take a 'shower'. With temp. as high as 36°C. this was a real pleasure! Later that evening a rather large scorpion 'visited' us, our light probably attracted him. After he made his way around the table, we lifted our legs of course, he disappeared into the night again.

After a hot night, temp. stayed as high as 31°C., we followed wadi Tayin again until the village of Al Ghayyan . From here we followed wadi Dima through the heart of several villages and date plantations. When we stopped somewhere for a break we got the attention of a lot of children, they just kept some distance and gazed at us. We did not experience this before in Oman , probably they are not used to strangers in an unknown car. Some km further we found a quiet place near some pools and a small stream, here we stayed for the rest of the afternoon. In the beginning of the evening, just before dark, we found a place to stay for the night between some trees. This time temp. were far more pleasant.

On the 22 nd of February we went on to Muscat , we wanted to extend our visa at the airport. We had multiple entry visa to stay for 3 weeks every time we entered Oman , but we hoped it would be possible to extend this visa at the airport. This way we did not have to go back to the Emirates and then enter Oman again. But unfortunately this was not possible, so we had to go back to the Emirates again. We also had to arrange a new permit for our dog again, the one we had arranged in Holland through a vet in Muscat . We had to visit him anyway in order to pay for this first permit. He told us he would contact the ministry of Agriculture to ask if we needed a new permit for our dog, this would take a few hours. In the mean time we went to the Iranian embassy to ask for visa for our return-journey to Iran . We got some application forms and they needed 2 photos of each of us. José just had one photo, so we had to go to a photoshop too. But first we went back to the vet, he had been to the ministry and had become a new permit for our dog! We now could return to the Emirates and re-enter Oman . From Muscat its about 330km. to the border, so we decided to stay for the night close to the sea near the town of Liwa .

Next day we crossed the border at Khatmat Milahah and first went to an internet-café in the city of Fujayrah . From here we went to a place we had been before, on the beach near KhorFakkan. In the early morning of the 24 th of February we headed back to the border at Khatmat Milahah again to start our next 3 weeks in Oman . After paying a 'departure tax', we came at the Omani side of the border. We already saw that the Omani officials checked every car thoroughly, some of the them even had to remove a special shadow coating from their windows! When it was our turn they said we could not enter Oman with foreign number plates! We explained them we had entered Oman already before with exact the same car, and after they made some phone calls this problem was solved. But then they saw our dog, and the discussion started all over again!! At the end we

were not allowed to enter Oman at this border, they said we had to go to the border at Wajajah! To get there we had to return to the Emirates again, also the officials at the Emirates side started to make trouble about our dog this time! We tried to explain the situation, and after some time they let us enter the Emirates again. By the time we reached the border at Wajajah it had turned late again, and very tired and disappointed we found a place to stay for the night just before the border....

Next day we went to the border with new hopes, this time everything just went smooth and relaxed!! After we got an insurance for our car we could enter Oman without any problem, even our dog was welcome! Very relieved we started our next 3 weeks in Oman ! This time we wanted to go all the way south to the region of Dhofar, some 1000km. from Muscat . But we first went to our favourite spot in wadi Abyadh to stay for the night .

In the early morning of the 26 th of February we carried on in the direction of the city of Nizwa , and made a stop in wadi Muaydin. Here we found a place under a big tree close to a rock face. On this rock a so called falaj was constructed, from this channel water was pouring down like a real water fall! These falaj are cleverly constructed irrigation channels which have been used for centuries. The water is collected from pools or springs and then carried in channels along the banks of the wadi to the village which is sometimes many km. away from the source. On coastal and desert gravel plains tunnels are dug to tap the underground water. The afternoon we spend cleaning the car and washing some clothes, around 4 o'clock we started our long journey to the south. It still was very hot, some 40°C., a strong wind was blowing across the monotonous gravel plains. After being 630km from Muscat we decided to stop at the Al Ghaftain Resthouse to stay for the night. Luckily temp had dropped to a more comfortable 25°C, so we had a good sleep after this long drive.

In the early morning of the next day we continued our journey to Dhofar, now we were driving along the edge of the Empty Quarter one of the largest deserts in the world and close to the Saudi-Arabian border. After the early morning fogs had cleared, temp were rising quickly again up to 37°C. For us a good reason to get to the Dhofar region as quickly as possible! At last we saw the contours of Jebal Qara, and from here we knew temp. would be more pleasant again. Also the landscape changes dramatically, coming from the hot desert we saw mountains with trees and even grazing cows!

This part of Oman is known for centuries for the production of frankincense. The narrow coastal belt and mountain range benefit each year from the south-west monsoon winds, which are an unusual feature for the Arabian peninsula . Moisture laden winds supply rain from the end of June to August. Heavy mists blanket the coast and mountains during this time, creating lush green hillsides, cool temp. and the perfect environment for frankincense trees to grow. We stopped for a break, and had a magnificent view over the coastal plain and the capital city of Dhofar : Salalah.

First we went to the spring at Ain Hamrah, this spring is located in thick woodlands at the foot of Jebal Qara and is a popular spot with Omanis for family picnics. This day being a Friday, it was very busy but fortunately we found a nice spot under a big tree where we spend the rest of that afternoon. We also had a chat with some young guys from Salalah, we think they were here to see the girls walk by! In the late afternoon we went back to Salalah to do some shopping, and in the evening went to wadi Tabrook where there is another spring. Unfortunately this spring is infected with Bilharzia, a tropical disease. We decided to go back to Ain Hamrah, just close by, to stay for the night. It was still very warm and there were also a lot of mosquitoes at this place, so we decided to

drive to the coast just nearby. Here we had a cool breeze, but later that night when the winds had gone there were again annoying mosquitoes keeping us awake!

Next day, 28 th of February, we spend on a beautiful white beach some km. further. At this spot wadi Tabrook ends up in the ocean, creating a lake just behind the shore. Here we found a nice place to stay for the rest of that day, later in the afternoon a camel herd had a bath in the lake. Something you don't often see!