



AAC Publications

Jebel Kawr, North Face, Vacanze (R)omane

Oman, Western Hajar

THIS TRIP to Oman was a bit like an unexpected gift: It arrived at the last moment, and I had no idea what to expect. In fact, this season I had been planning to realize a dream of climbing the famous Venezuelan tepui; we had a close-knit and motivated team, there were beautiful virgin walls, and we were engaging with a group of reliable locals in a project that would go beyond the mere mountaineering, to help the local population and support responsible tourism and resource protection. [See tepuiproject.org.] Plans were developing at full speed until we sat around a table and considered the rapidly changing political and economic situation in Venezuela. Realizing we had no way of managing the risks, we decided by mutual agreement to postpone our journey until more stable times.

From the ashes of this project, Simone Pedferri offered a “plan B”: Oman. And so, in November, we found ourselves as a team of four—myself, Simone, Stefano Caligiore, and my partner Arianna Colliard—driving about the dusty, rough roads of Oman, looking for walls, with 100 bolts, a drill, and a great desire to climb. Among the ocean of limestonewalls available, we were spoiled with many choices. We soon focused on the north wall of Jebel Kawr, just above the small village of Al Kumeira, and after some searching we found a steep, unclimbed wall about 1.5 hours walk west from the village. [The north face of Jebel Kawr is 7km to 8km long, with several distinct walls. The Said Wall, directly above the Al Kumeira village, has seen at least four routes established over the last decade. The wall described in this report is 3km to 4km west of the Said Wall and has no previously reported climbs.]

We spent three days equipping the route, emulating the style in the Alps in Rätikon or Wenden: climbing ground-up, without aid, and drilling only from natural stances or skyhooks. Thus the route is an “alpine sport route”: bolted, but with many runouts between. The result is Vacanze (R)omane (450m, 8a). After opening the route, Simone and I both free climbed it, each leading the crux pitches and swapping leads on the easier pitches.

Beyond the actual climb, there is a scene from this journey that I want to relate. Undoubtedly the moment that impressed me the most was our arrival at the village of Al Kumeira: A 12km dirt road climbs through arid mountains to an expanse of endless stones, two houses, four people, and 20 goats. We seemed to have landed in a place completely outside the modern world, light years away from the luxurious hotels and shopping centers of the Omani capital Muscat. An old shepherd of indefinite age welcomed us warmly with gestures and exclamations in his language. He briefly entered his house and then returned to present us with a giant bag of dates. A little embarrassed about the gift we’d received, we offered him Twix bars and he reciprocated by giving us biscuits and making us understand, by gestures, that we could camp on his land and stay as long as we wanted. A few days later, he hobbled up to us at dawn after taking care of his goats, bringing us a tray of tea, biscuits, and bread.

These are scenes that are not easy to render through words, but which struck me deeply. How is it possible that these people, who in our eyes have nothing, can share what little they have with complete strangers who do not even speak their language and have arrived from who knows where with a shiny new Jeep that looks like a spaceship? And how is it possible that for us (myself included) it is often so difficult to share our riches with those less fortunate than us? This scene speaks volumes about our society and the world in which we live. Perhaps it is really true that “the things you possess in the end possess you.”

– Matteo Della Bordella, Italy

Images



Topo of the 2018 route of Vacanze (R)omane on Jebel Kawr.



Simone Pedferri attempting to redpoint the crux pitch (8a) of Vacanze (R)omane on Jebel Kawr.



A generous man living in Al Kumeira who offered the team dates and other forms of hospitality.



Matteo Della Bordella opening the third pitch (7b) of Vacanze R(Omane).



The team, left to right: Arianna Colliard, Stefano Caligiore, Matteo Della Bordella, and Simone Pedferri.



Simone Pedferri attempting to redpoint the fourth and crux pitch (8a) of Vacanze (R)omane.



Matteo Della Bordella attempting to redpoint the crux pitch (8a) of Vacanze R(Omane).



Matteo Della Bordella attempting to redpoint the crux pitch (8a) of Vacanze R(Omane).



Omani landscape with a view of the south face of Jebel Misht.

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