



AAC Publications

Oman: New Routes and Exploration

Oman, Western Hajar

In December I returned to Oman's Western Hajar Mountains to climb long new routes, this time with Lee Burbery, also from New Zealand. We felt welcomed as always, and despite continued infrastructure development in Oman, the areas we visited remain quiet.

First, on Jebel Kawr's extensive southwest face, we climbed the Honey Hunter (520m, UIAA VI-) on the pillar right of the imposing Kawr Tower. The pillar ended at an exposed apex with no easy access to the plateau behind it. Fortunately, after two 50m abseils into the narrow gully on the right, we found a scramble descent for the remainder.

The Kawr Pillar had one existing route, the Full Qaboos (Chaudry-Eastwood-Hornby-Ramsden, 1999). Having scouted on previous visits (see AAJ 2010), I thought there could be an easier line to the left. From a bivy below the pillar, we saw gray, water-worn rock leading up the face and across to a straightforward arête. We found this feature very amenable to climbing, bypassing steeper walls to produce the Camel Hunter (700m, V+). We continued unroped up the arête for a further 500m to the top of the pillar. From the plateau, we descended farther left than previous parties via an abseil-free gully and were back at our bivy by sunset.

Moving to the iconic Jebel Misht, we climbed the previously untouched tower on the south face between Rock Vulture and Madam Butterfly. We found the lower tier surprisingly broken, yet above were almost stopped by a bulging and friable stratum. We bypassed this to reach the main upper wall, where a shallow arête with consistently superb climbing took us to the col just right of Rock Vulture. Our ascent of Call of the Bellbird (345m of climbing, V) was over after only four hours.

Across Wadi al Ayn on the northwest face of Jabal M'Saw, we found a route that breaches long lines of overhangs to access the untouched upper face. Archimedes' Passage (270m of climbing, VI-) gave us solid climbing on initial white slabs and a delicate pitch to a long, exposed walking ledge to the right to access the final pillar. To descend, we abseiled the delicate pitch and followed a lower ledge that eventually merged with the scree.

At the end of the trip, we explored more remote areas about 70km to the northwest. Recent heavy rain had left access to the wadis rough but mostly passable by a 4WD vehicle. In Wadi Bani Omer, we made a reconnaissance of towers above Sheseb hamlet and its striking fortification, finding sound metamorphic limestone on the Watchtower (125m, V) on an outlier of the main jebel. Finally, after the New Year, we did the first route on the smaller northeast-facing wall left of the Jebel Nakhus Gorge, finding superlative climbing on Hawasinah Window (100m, VI).

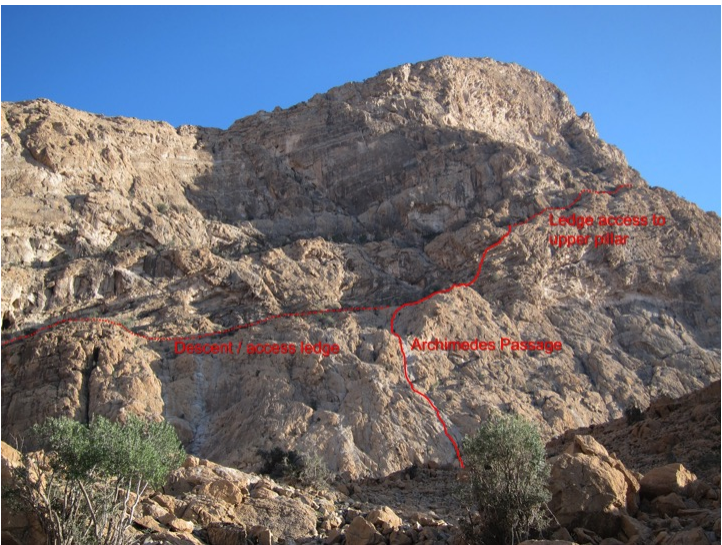
Sadly, shortly after our visit, Sultan Qaboos passed away, having led Oman's modernization for 50 years.

– Paul Knott, New Zealand

Images



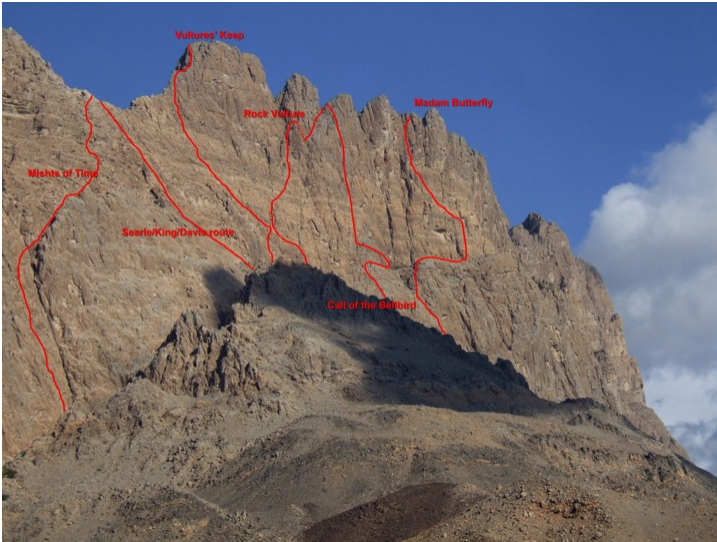
Lee Burbery on the upper wall of Call of the Bellbird (345m, UIAA V) on Jebel Misht.



The northwest face of Jebel M'Saw, a southern outlier of Jebel Misfah, showing the line of Archimedes Passage (270m of climbing, UIAA VI-).



A west-facing wall right of Kawr Tower, at the far southeast end of the southwest face of Jebel Kawr, showing the line of the Honey Hunter (520m, UIAA VI-).



The left end of Jebel Misht's south face, showing known routes, including Call of the Bellbird (345m of climbing, UIAA V), climbed by Lee Burbery and Paul Knott in December 2019.



A northeast-facing wall left of the Jebel Nakhus gorge, showing the line of Hwasinah Window (100m, UIAA VI).



The southwest face of the Kawr Pillar, showing known routes, including the Camel Hunter (700m, UIAA V+), climbed by Lee Burbery and Paul Knott in December 2019. Knott had previously made the first ascent of Anhydrous Living, to the right, in 2010.

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