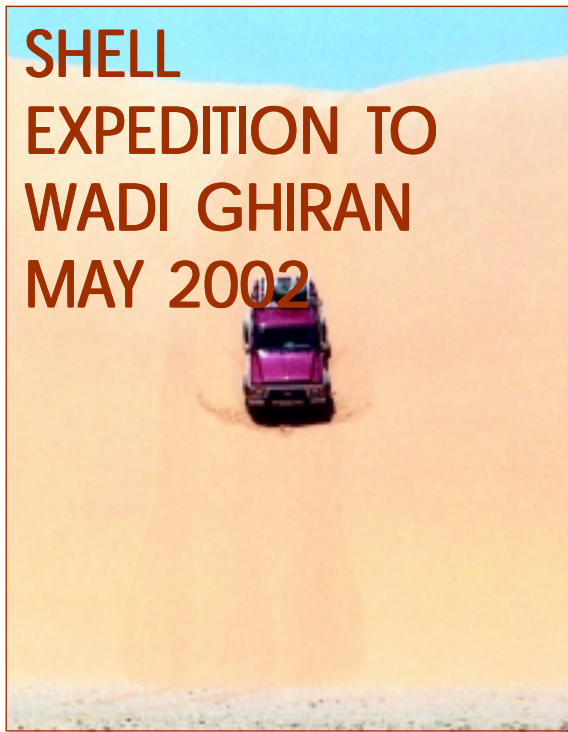


SHELL EXPEDITION TO WADI GHIRAN MAY 2002



Peter Lenthall said, "We visited the surface sites on the river bed and flood plain of Wadi Ghiran and examined them in sufficient detail to show the diversity of occupation periods and their close relationship to geological features and alluvial deposits.

We also visited nearby early palaeolithic sites, of which there are many and one middle palaeolithic site, of which comparatively few are known in the Rub.

The palaeolithic and neolithic cultures found throughout the Wadi and along its banks are representative of lithic cultures found in several large concentrations on the exposed rock desert surface and beneath the sand sea, throughout the northwest, southwest and central-southern regions of Ar Rub Al Khali in the Core Venture 1 and southern occurrences Core Venture 3 areas. They are primarily associated with two epochs of wet climate during the Quaternary period, the oldest the late Pleistocene 17,000 to 35,000 years ago, the most recent the Holocene 6,000 to 10,000 years ago, frequently overlaying the earlier late Pleistocene features (McClure).

Extensive lake and river systems developed in Ar Rub Al Khali, identifiable today by clearly discernible lake edges and riverbeds, marked by the shells of several species of fresh water molluscs".

The palaeolithic period is generally defined as the period of the emergence of primitive man and the manufacture of flaked and unpolished handheld stone tools, from 2.5 million to 3 million years ago, until 10,000 BC. In Wadi Ghiran, the vast majority of palaeolithic tools found are made of quartzite, locally abundant.

Neolithic is generally defined as the cultural period that lasted in Southwest Asia from 10,000 to 6,000 BC, characterised by primitive crop growing, stock rearing and the use of stone and particularly finely worked flint tools, some polished, plus projectiles in the form of spears, arrows and slingshot. Some flint was imported into Wadi Ghiran, often in the form of rough "blanks", of which many can be found, as are quartzite palaeolithic "blanks". A steatite bowl and a roller grain grinder confirmed very recent occupancy, archaeologically speaking, of two of the late neolithic sites. Pottery is abundant further to the north of Wadi Ghiran but none has yet been found in Wadi Ghiran.



by
Peter Lenthall

Left: Tim Wachter
descending a slip
face

Below: A Wadi
Ghiran inhabitant

IN APRIL 2002 Shell requested the organisation of an exploratory expedition to view representative palaeolithic and neolithic archaeological sites in the north-western quadrant of Ar Rub Al Khali, inside the proposed Southern Core Venture 3 northwest boundary.

The request came following the signing in June 2001 of the agreement for the participation of International Oil Companies (IOCs) in Saudi Arabia's Gas Initiative. Shell was awarded the leadership role in Core Venture 3, to develop the gas reserves in the Shaybah area, and a participating role in Core Venture 1, to develop the gas reserves in the South Ghawar area.

The aim of the expedition, executed in May 2002, was to demonstrate the richness of representative Palaeolithic and Neolithic archaeological sites in Wadi Ghiran, a north-eastern tributary of Wadi Dawasir, which extends east from Sulayyil, with a view to utilising these examples to outline a proposal for a conservation policy before the start of natural gas exploration and extraction.

The route was chosen by Peter Lenthall, a professional navigator, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) surveyor and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, who has travelled extensively throughout Ar Rub Al Khali over the last 22 years.

H.R.H. Prince Mohammed bin Turki bin Abdullah bin Abdurahman joined the expedition; Dr Tim Wachter represented the Saudi Arabian National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development NCWCD; and Axel Knospe, Business Development Director, Shell Overseas Services Saudi Arabia, sponsored the operation.

