



## Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize goes to Al Ain ENHG Member, Phil Iddison

by Brien Holmes

It was easy to overlook Phil Iddison's devotion and passion for natural history. His quiet, unassuming manner often belied the thorough way he approached each project, be it dairy products, fish or plants.

His many years of work, the results of which were always shared without reservation to friends, colleagues and the world, were officially recognized earlier this year when the Abu Dhabi chapter of the Emirates Natural History Group announced that Phil would be the 2002 recipient of the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for Natural History.

Originally named the Jashamal trophy, donated by the popular department store, the Award has become the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for Natural History, named in honor of the work done by the father of the ENHG's patron, Sh. Nahyan bin Mubarak.

In addition to the spectacular silver dhow each recipient receives, Award winners receive Dh5000.

For the past two years, the Award has been granted to individuals nominated by the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG. This year's recipient, Phil Iddison, won in recognition of his original research work on a variety of subjects while last year, Peter Cunningham received the Award for his research on dhubs and other wildlife in the UAE.

While the Award recipient for this season was announced several weeks ago, the

presentation was made to Phil recently in Abu Dhabi when he and his wife Patsy returned briefly to the UAE. The Award was presented by Sh. Nahyan at his majlis in Abu Dhabi. Present to congratulate Phil were Abu Dhabi ENHG chairman Simon Aspinall and Al Ain ENHG chairman Brien Holmes.



From Left to Right: Mrs. Iddison, Phil Iddison, Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak al Nahayan, Simon Aspinall, Brien Holmes

"President His Highness Sh. Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan has frequently stated that 'people who do not know about their past cannot deal with the challenges of the present and future,'" Sh. Nahyan said at the ceremony. "For us to be able to tackle these challenges properly, it is important that proper studies are carried out of our past heritage, and of the environment in which we and our ancestors lived."

As reported in the Gulf News (Thursday May 22), "He added that Sh. Zayed, Their Highnesses Members of the Supreme Council and Rulers of the Emirates, and His Highness Sh. Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces,

have shown their dedication to the conservation of the country's heritage and environment."

Sh. Nahyan added that "... these aspects of our country can only be preserved if they are properly studied. In this process, academic institutions, agencies

and individuals, both UAE citizens and expatriates, all have an important role to play."

Phil recalled the extent of changes that have taken place during the past few decades in the UAE and discussed how several of his studies have documented some traditions that are fading from memory.

"The rapid changes of the last few decades have affected almost all aspects of UAE life," Phil was reported saying in the Gulf News. "In my research on traditional foods used by the

people of Al Ain area, I have tried to record as much information as possible, before knowledge about it is lost. It has been a fascinating study and one which I have much enjoyed doing.

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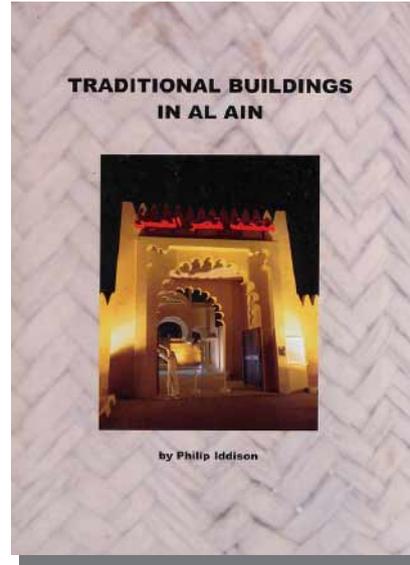
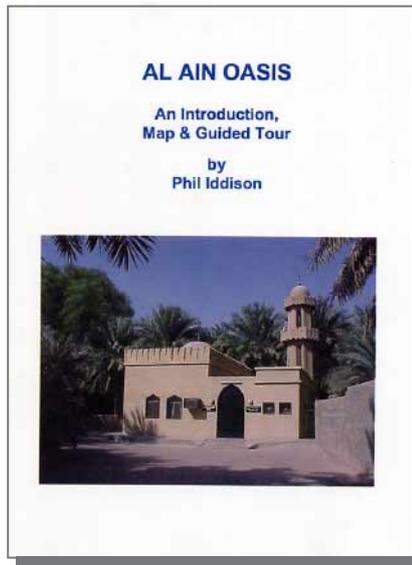
## Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize goes to Al Ain ENHG Member, Phil Iddison

(cont'd) by Brien Holmes

"I hope that the results of my research will help to provide a more detailed picture of past life in the UAE so that the generations of today and tomorrow will have a better understanding of how their forefathers lived."

For several years, Phil prepared papers on a diverse range of subjects, presenting his findings at the annual convention on Arab studies held each summer at Oxford University.

Phil has generously shared these papers with the Al Ain chapter members, making them available in booklets and via the website.



The list of articles on the website (<http://enhg.4t.com/iddison/contrib.htm>) includes:

- Date Palm Pollen
- Dairy Food in the UAE
- A Fish Souq in the UAE Desert
- Arabian Traveller's Observations on Bedouin Food
- Desert Truffles in Middle Eastern Cookery
- Food and Folklore
- Weights and Measures

In addition, Phil has donated countless photographs to the Group, many of them available on the website. He was instrumental in organizing and documenting this season's weekend field trip to Ras al Khaimah. Privately, Phil has contributed to the research of numerous naturalists. One of the most interesting projects involved the collection of date stones. His findings were donated to the Abu Dhabi Island Archaeological Survey (ADIAS). A copy of his research was also donated to York University in the UK.

Prior to his departure from Al Ain, Phil generously donated his original research papers to the Al Ain chapter. The plan is to have the papers reproduced into a collector's set of booklets, available to

members in the upcoming season. When nominating Phil for the Award, the Al Ain Committee noted that Phil has been a Committee member for at least six years and, during the past three years when Al Ain organized Special Interest Groups, he coordinated the activities of the Food -- later Cultural History -- Special Interest Group. His wealth of knowledge, from years of living in the Gulf, is simply unique and he shared it with everyone without hesitation. His colleagues include visiting archaeologists, geologists and specialists.

In concluding the nomination, the Committee noted, "In brief, an outstanding contribution of original research that, in our opinion, has not been matched."

Phil was a prominent member of the Al Ain Chapter for eight years and has been an ambassador for ENHG, presenting papers at the Oxford University Symposium on several

occasions. He has also written booklets on Arabic Architecture and on the Al Ain Oasis. Phil has given generously of his time and resources, frequently taking parties of visitors around local Oasis or acting as Trip leader when the visit has had a cultural history flavor. He is always willing to take members on an impromptu tour of the fish suq to explain the curious specimens that abound there, and tell stories of strangely shaped vegetables. Phil's prolific contribution of notes and photographs are published on the website the photo galleries including Bastakia Wind Tower Renovations, Bengal

Figs, Al Ain Palace & Fort, and Al Ain Oasis. Phil has often shared his knowledge and experience as a lecturer at ENHG meetings.

"We consider his contributions to committee deliberations as 'outstanding'. Phil has been a mainstay of our Group," the Committee's nomination concluded. 🏠

## Editors Note

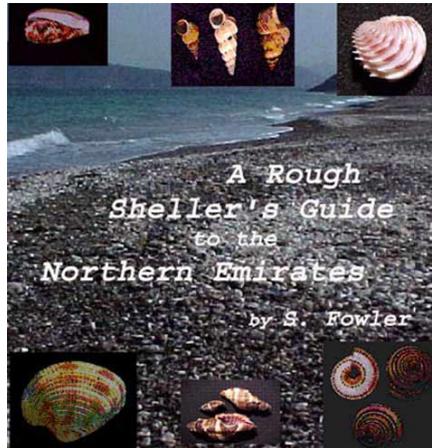
Rumour has it (a little bird told us) that many of you ENHGers are going to disappear any day soon until the heat dissipates somewhat. We hope you enjoy yourselves in your respected countries and holiday spots and look forward to the many tall tales you have to tell on your return. Meanwhile the rest of us, some for the first time, will endeavor to make it through the summer here.

Now we know that traditionally the Editor's note goes at the front, but we remind you that this is Al Ain!!! Things don't always happen as you expect them to!

By now in this issue you should have found some bit's n' bobs to remind you of your year, and there's even a recipe for a yummy dinner. Before you leave you should pop into the new ENHG workspace where, if you are quick you can borrow the Shellers guide or the report on water from ERWDA. If you are interested speak to a committee member. Geoff tells us some more about his favorite topic and there is a lovely description of a trip to Jebel Qatar. Travel safe.

**Will & Andrea** 

## Life's a Beach! A review by Will Moore



With the following excerpt from Dr. Sandy Fowler's "A Rough Sheller's Guide to the Northern Emirates," in hand, I am off to places yet unseen to begin my own collection. The good Dr. has made his work available to ENHG members in CD form. It prints out to a 50 page 11 x 8 booklet. It is an excellent collectors guide, especially in that it is not a coffee table (Don't put your drink near that book!) publication. It is full of pictures. Directions are kept simple. It covers beaches up and down both coasts of the Emirates. And the rewards are obvious. I quote:

*My work is not a shell reference guide to replace "Seashells of Eastern Arabia". Nothing can. Its function is to help shell collectors, principally those of my fellow members of the Dubai Natural History Group, find the beaches they want to access, and to help select beaches on which to collect particular varieties of shells. To help pick the best times of the year, or the tide, on which to visit, and how to take care of specimens once collected. I wish I'd had such help when I first started getting really interested 10 years ago. How much time I could have saved instead of hunting down one beach track after another, to hopefully find something at the end (usually not!). Because many of the beaches have no names on any map, I've been forced to*

*give them nicknames. Some are shell-descriptive, some geographically informative, and some just plain whimsical. Perhaps so, but it's entered in my records, and that's what's important – accurate records. So bear with me. I've included GPS locations where useful. Many people have one; they will be a godsend in precise locating. Don't think for one moment, however, that this is another kind of Motivate publication. This is a personal, opinionated, unedited one man's view of shelling in the U.A.E., warts and all. You may disagree with some of my descriptions – fine! Argue with me. You may claim there's a better beach I haven't described – great! Tell me how to find it. You may have found shells I haven't in places they haven't been described before – super! Let's have a shelling workshop and share our findings. And if you still think this is a pretty amateur piece of work – no problem. Produce your own version, and I'll be the first to read and enjoy it!!*

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The CD is in safe keeping in the ENHG library, soon to be located in the Al Ain English Speaking School workshop – so generously offered to the group by Mr. J. Crawford, Principal. 



## Antiques Corner: The Martini Henry Rifle

You will find a lot of Martini Henry rifles in the souks locally. People often ask me what these Arabian Firearms are, and can they own them or export them? These are actually ex British army rifles first introduced in 1871. They are a single shot, closed breach, falling block rifle which fires a mighty 577 /.450 inch shell that would cut through 18 half inch thick hardwood plates at 20 yards or knock a man dead at 1000 yards right off his horse! Exporting to Europe? ...don't bother since the customs man will either take it off you or you could end up in trouble. Almost any weapon that fires brass cased ammunition is illegal under new stringent rules caused by misuse of firearms in and around Europe. The only way for normal people to legally import these weapons is if they are de-activated which involves splitting the barrel at the breach.

The weapon came about through a competition designed to find the best weapon with which to equip the British Army, however there was a draw and the two winners ..Count Martini of Switzerland and Mr Henry, of Scotland, were tasked to combine their rifles as one, thus the Martini Henry was born.

In 1871 when this rifle was introduced it transformed warfare as they knew it...trained soldiers were capable of an astonishing rate of fire of up to 23 rounds a minute and because of the closed breach and rifled barrel, it was very accurate. The bullet was a big stopper, and at close range of 100 metres or less and fired in the traditional volleys it must have been devas-

tating against tribal infantry. The bullet penetration would cause more than one person to fall as it passed through one target dropping the person behind! One of the disadvantages was the huge dusty cloud which developed after a few volleys, from the black powder cartridge. This often obscured the targets. There must have been perhaps 10 variants of the Martini Henry including cavalry and artillerymens carbines and other patents spanning its 30 odd years of faithful service.

So, after it was superceded many became available to the market and appeared in Arabia as an "Askeri" or palace guard weapon made available through the emptying, by sale of guns, mainly from Indian armories. Others would also have arrived from Zanzibar, Africa, Afghanistan, Persia etc. Many came into Arabia via Ajman and Muscat for sale to local owners and to the Bedouin who favored the weapon as it was accurate and could be modified and made much lighter, yet retain its accuracy simply by sawing about 12 inches off the barrel! In the process the heavy steel work required to fit the bayonet plus a lot of the heavy wood-work of the stock was discarded.

I recommend the web site at reference below as a quite outstanding rendition of the markings and variants of this piece though anyone who has a question about any weapon is welcome to drop by and ask.

Invariably these Arabised weapons have been nicely adorned with silver whilst gun belts have been fashioned

Peter Hudson

by leather craftsmen. When I see them lying in souks around here the words of Michael Cane ring out in my mind from the famous film Zulu.... "Front rank LOAD!" 



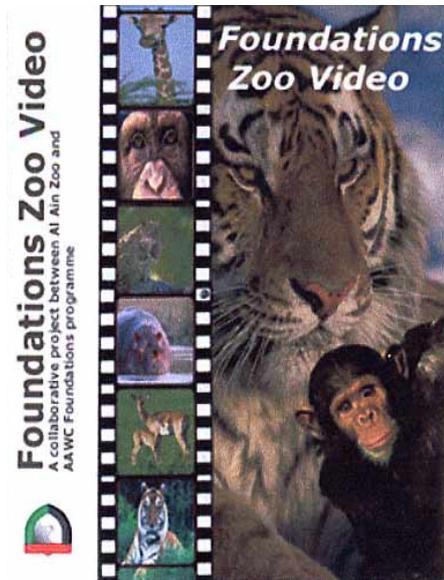
### More information:

[www.martinihenry.com](http://www.martinihenry.com)

Peter is a weapons specialist and spent 10 years in the Royal Marines and 9 years in the Oman Army. He is also an Islamic sword and bladed weapons buff and has contributed to some top class collections including the Tariq Rajeb Museum in Kuwait and other private collections.

## Al Ain Women's College Zoo Project

by Will Moore



**Meet the animals at Al Ain Zoo**

**Contents:**  
 The Giraffe  
 The Tiger  
 The Chimpanzee  
 The Leopard  
 The Cheetah  
 The Hippo  
 The Gazelle

**Researchers and scriptwriters:**  
 Amal, Asma, Bakheeta, Bushra, Eiman, Fatima Ahmed, Fatima Hasan, Fatima Mohamed, Hessa, Huda, Maitha, Maryam Mohamed, Mariam Saied, Mouna Yarouf, Muna Ghanem, Nassra, Rabha, Saleha, Sanaa, Shaikha from Foundations F4

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**With special thanks to:** Maria McGuire, Amna Obaid, Dr. Najl, Dr. Abbas, Sultan Darmaky, Heinz Elia, Kalukhan and all the staff and keepers at Al Ain Zoo

On Tuesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, the Emirates Natural History Group held the first of its two regular monthly meetings at the Al Ain Women's College of the HCT for a special presentation a group of Foundation Project students had prepared.

Since September, this group has been undertaking a joint educational project with the Al Ain Zoo. The aim is to support the work of the zoo in the field of conservation of wild life for future generations, and also to enhance the zoo's role in educating the general public. The Foundation Project is a three-year course leading to a Higher Diploma.

ENHG Chairman Mr. Brien Holmes, who had recently been awarded the prestigious Bish Brown Award for his personal outstanding contributions to the development of the study of natural history in the UAE, MC'd the event. The Foundations students who spoke that night were: Shaikha Ali Al Neyadi, Rabah Mohamed Saleh & Fatima Saif Al Meqbali.

As a result of the group's efforts, posters with explanations of several animals on display have been prepared and will be installed in the zoo grounds. An interactive quiz has been produced for visitors, and an impressive video tape featuring 7 animal residents has been made. Two audio tapes describing flamingoes and houbara bustards have been produced and will be available for zoo visitors. A logo has been produced showing the partnership between the AAWC and the Zoo itself as well as a new brochure. All the posters and quizzes are in both English and Arabic.

zoo so the youngsters could see the animals in the flesh. This was financed from the funds raised by a charity Fun Run.

Director of HCT in Al Ain, Dr. Neal Mangham, offered his congratulations to the students who had initiated the project themselves and those Foundation Course staff who had given it their support. This team led by Mrs. Maria McGuire includes Sarah McQueen, Vince Dunwoodie, Mary Cunniffe, Allan Smith, Susana Palomo, Muhammed Al Abed, Reem Arafat, Geraldine Jones and Dean Tweedle.

At the meeting, a panel of the participating students also distinguished themselves by confidently fielding insightful questions from the knowledgeable ENHG audience. As a result they expanded on their concern about the behaviour of visitors to the zoo, the provision of appropriate enclosures for the 'inmates', and the hope that their project will continue with future cohorts of students with possible emphasis on endangered local species.

The evening was a complete success. The students are to be congratulated, especially as this is their first year's product. We look forward to their future efforts and, I am sure, stand ready to offer any help we can. A 1<sup>st</sup> class effort indeed. 🏠

## Arabic Proverb

*Let trouble (evil) alone, and trouble will let you alone.* 🏠

إترك الشر بيتركك.

The students have already taken their work into the local community including making presentation visits to Al Ain English Speaking School, Liwa School, Al Shaima School, and the Al Ain Model School. In addition, they have made a special presentation for diabetic children, which was followed up by a visit to the

## *On water, water and more water*

Text by Andrea Hamann, Photos by Bill Jones and Geoff Sanderson



Luke -with the best seat in the house!!  
Photo by Bill Jones

We newcomers to Al Ain have been told that this years' rains were the heaviest in 5 or 6 or even 10 years which, of course, all depends on who the tall tale telling master of the day is. How much rain did actually fall? According to the UAE University it was close to 29mm for the big storm.

Facts aside it certainly did get a little wet didn't it! It was the sort of rain that you associate with the tropics. Glorious! I had an urge to run around jumping in the puddles, irrespective of how wet I got. To the tune of a song called, wait for it, 'Rain', by an Australian band called 'Not drowning Waving', I actually did spend some time in a puddle.

It was a rather large puddle that was slowly filling up the balcony. Perhaps swimming pool is a more apt term. And of course the balcony only had a drainage hole about the size of an old 1 dirham piece. It seems the builders of my lovely little place thought it would be much more logical to drain the balcony inward, and under the window and the lounge room carpet. So I spent a good half hour keeping company with the rain and a broom, coaxing the water towards the hole, which, quite naturally, was at the high point of the veranda.

It seemed everybody had a rain story or two, roads closed, floating furniture, there were even tales about water pouring out of the plugholes. But tales about rain can't beat the pictures, can they!! 🏠



Hanging Gardens of Jebel Qatar, Photo by Bill Jones



Al Ain Flood, by Geoff Sanderson



Al Ain, Photo by Geoff Sanderson



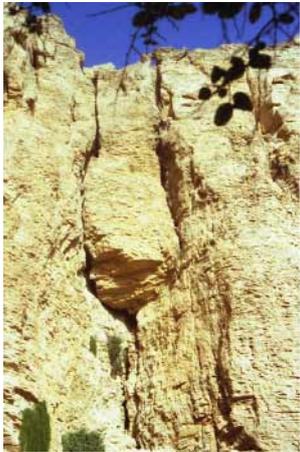
Hanging Gardens and Hanging Gardens wadi, Photo by Bill Jones



Al Ain Street in flood Photo by Geoff Sanderson

## The Jebel Qatar Song

Written by Christian Le Cozic, Pictures by Will Moore



Many of us have already visited the Hanging Gardens on the way to Mahadah out of Al Ain city on the Sohar road.

It is very well described in "Off road" books so that you can find the way easily. But the climbing of the plateau that overhangs the surrounding lands definitely needs a guide.

With Ibrahim as our guide, the visit to jebel Qatar and its uppermost peak revealed not only his entire knowledge of the land but also his years of experience. Cars parked at 8.00 am on a level ground near the wadi and soon after 16 men, women and 2 children about 10 years old started to trample the stony wadi. We were equipped with a backpack, which contained water, biscuits and fruit.

The plateau was always close at hand, rising with an impressive effect with its sudden steps. Everybody knew they would have to make a detour because of the irregular relief of the escarpement. The paths are only known by Ibrahim. At the beginning of the wadi we had to jump over many cascades polished by the water effect after thousands of years. The journey was accomplished with an

assured walking through a desert land and a stony landscape to the plateau, sometimes out of the wadi, sometimes in a narrow bed cut in the rock. The wadi sides are limestone, 40 million years old only, submerged with shallow sea water. In the growing silence, you can hear brushings, clashes, landslides and movements that constantly break the silence to create a great melody which our normal daily routine prevents us from hearing. A breath of air runs over the hot stones. This wadi ends at a cliff of 300 m. and give us an awesome view all over the lower region. In the distance, you can also see the contours of the Fossil Valley and jebel Huwayyah disappearing in a heat haze. A few meters more and there we finally were, upon the plateau. The prevailing silence was broken by a light wind. From this plateau we could see the top of the mountain, which would be the last test of our trip. Everywhere the ground is dry. Only the experienced eyes of a specialist can discover the remains

of millenary life. Ibrahim showed us the entry of an ancient cave. To enter you just slip in and you find the exit lower down. We had our lunch on the plateau of jebel Qatar. Ibrahim with a small group, sat a little way away, sheltering in a recess overhanging the valley. Another group sat in the shade of the only tree. The more experienced men showed us an old stony fox trap and also showed us some low walls used by hunters to protect them against the wind. Finally, all eyes turned to the mountain of 750 m, the highest point. Performance coupled with curiosity, offered us the necessary energy to run up till we reached the top. Ibrahim picked up the fossils of sponges and of corals. In a fading light, we were, some standing up and others sitting down, in the contemplation of the harmonious hill side coming down a plain of ocher sand submerged by several rocky brown skiffs. As a protective veil, the sky spread an imperial blue all over the scene. The return trip was easier inside the valleys with many cave entrance in the inner cliffs. The uttering of an echo, a faraway cry of an unknown bird will continue to be, until drowning in the flood of silence, the deep mystery of the jebel Qatar song.



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## Still more on Water: ERWDA's Water Management Plans

Report from Will Moore

Back in February or thereabouts, when the new co-editors of this newsletter were just beginning to pick up the threads of the job, Mike Brooks of ERWDA gave us a powerful presentation on the Water resources here in the UAE. His Powerpoint presentation was vivid, informative and well researched. He has kindly made this presentation available to ENHG on CD and it is waiting to be placed in the new library at the Al Ain English Speaking School. (for more on our new workshop, see our September newsletter). His most salient point, it seemed to me was that water consumption here is 7 times the capacity for production. Thus the need for a very comprehensive WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN

Thank you Mike – please call on our members for any assistance you think we might be able to provide. Apologies for the late report – things got pretty hectic through March and April. 

## THE BACK PAGE

### Hungry Anyone?

#### Khoresht Baadenjaan

**Ingredients:** (4 servings)

lamb or beef, 400 grams  
 small eggplants, 8  
 medium onions, 3  
 tomato paste, 2 spoons  
 fresh lime juice, 2 spoons  
 cooking oil  
 salt and black pepper

**Directions:**

Peel onions and slice thinly. Fry in oil until slightly golden. Cut meat into small pieces and fry with onions until colour changes. Bring 2-3 glasses of water to a boil, and add to meat. Add salt and pepper, and cook over medium heat for about one hour. When meat is cooked, there should be about one glass of water left. Add tomato paste and lime juice, and mix well.

Peel eggplants and slice lengthwise to a thickness of 1 cm. Add salt on both sides and fry in abundant oil on both sides over medium/low heat until golden. Place eggplants over meat (but do not mix with meat). Place the lid on and cook over low heat for another 10 minutes.

**Courtesy of :**

<http://www.iranmania.com/travel/eating/khoreshtbaadenjaan.asp>

**Alternatives:** Another recipe I know includes: Turmeric, beef bouillon, 4 persian limes, cinnamon, nutmeg, butter instead of oil. The other recipe also suggest a cooking time of about 1 3/4 hrs rather than 1hr. People with reactions to eggplant should consider salting the slices for a couple of hours (and resalting) on paper towels which soak up the offending acidic liquid.

### *Date Palm Trivia* Geoff Sanderson

Date Palms and their fruit have been the subject of stories, religious message, social doctrine and mythology since the beginning of recorded history.

Here are some tales tall and true, collected by Professor Charles Stirton to add to the ever widening fascination I have with dates.



#### Dream Dates

Palms are known in dream analysis. For example, Gustavus Miller in his Dictionary of Dreams (p.184) says that 'to dream of seeing dates on their parent trees signifies prosperity and happy union, but to eat them as prepared for commerce are omens of want and distress'. Palm trees seen in one's dreams are messages of hopeful situations and happiness of the highest order. For a young woman to pass down an avenue of palms omens a cheerful home and a faithful husband. If the palms are withered some unexpected sorrowful event will disturb her serenity.

#### Symbolism

Jack Tressider (Symbols and their meanings, p.81) says that 'the majestic palm with its huge, feathery leaves was a solar and triumphal symbol'. In the ancient Middle East; it was equated with the Tree of Life in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. Emblematic use of palm fronds in victory processions (and as awards to winning gladiators) was adapted by Christ's followers to publicize his final entry into Jerusalem, which is now celebrated as Palm Sunday.

Pilgrims who had visited the Holy Land were called palmers.

Palm forms on lamps or other funerary objects symbolize resurrection.

The palm became the attribute in art of many Christian saints and martyrs.

St. Stephen's symbol (1st century saint) is a gold palm branch, surrounded

by three silver stones all on a red background. The Christian symbolism of the Palm is spiritual victory - the Martyr's triumph over death. For example, St. Christopher, a 3rd Century Saint and Martyr of the Decian persecution was called Christopher of Christ bearer. His staff has a palm branch. Palms were also funerary emblems of the afterlife. ☩

#### COMING SOON

*Marmelade Competition Winners*

*Photography Competition Winners*

*Book Review:*

*The Map at the end of the World*

*An obsession with Dates continues*

*Turtle Beach- Ras al Jinz, Oman*

*Antiques Corner:*

*Maps that Change the world*