

The Emirates Natural History Group in Al Ain Newsletter

Oasis Walk (By Ahmed Awadh)



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The Lost Al Ain Airfields (By Laurence Garey)

Laurence Garey is an ENHG Lifetime Member and a former Vice-chair

Those in Al Ain are fortunate to have a first class international airport just a few minutes west of the town.

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جمعية الامارات للتاريخ الطبيعي - العين



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Past/Upcoming Events:

Walk: Al Ain Oasis to Danat/Shikhla

24 May Al Ain Oasis 4:00 pm

Walk: Musah-Haywan

6 June Buraimi Hotel 4:00 pm

Social: Palms Golf Club

10 June Al Ain Golf Club 8:00 pm

Walk: Jazira

13 June Danat Parking 7:45 am

General Meeting: Star Dust and Virtuoso

24 June Islamic Institute 7:30 pm

General Meeting: A Video of Choice

15 July Islamic Institute 7:30 pm

General Meeting: A Video of Choice

12 August Islamic Institute 7:30 pm

General Meeting: To be announced

26 August Islamic Institute 7:30 pm

From Page 1: Oasis Walk by Ahmed Awadh

We set off from the Al Ain Palace gate and walked through the plantation to the Wadi, we strolled along it to the Danat.

This was my first tour in an oasis. If I had been alone I would have said that it was just a vast plantation full of dates; but instead it was a wonderful experience with a cheerful group of people (or should I say I was with the right group at the right time)? Here is a group picture and a shot of an insect trap we discovered.



We found the Wadi (a valley situated beyond the date forested area) and we walked along its dry water course. Song birds provided a peaceful symphony as we trekked, several birds were seen to fly through the tree branches. A lively debate ensued as to the bird species. A green boulevard added vitality to the desert scene as we walked further down the Wadi.

Appreciating the little things in life makes the experiences gained from trips such as this priceless. I went with the expectation of a satisfying walk. In actuality I met with several people having similar interests that provided me with moral support during the walk.

I hope that the opportunity for another hike arises soon. That way my ENHG family will grow bigger and we can explore the beauty of Al Ain's nature together. ✕

The Library

The library is housed in our ENHG room in the Islamic Institute. Members and non-members can access the catalog on-line under www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg.

Here are a few examples of the many books in the library that are available for members to borrow.

Seashells of Eastern Arabia ; DT Bosch.

Flora of the UAE; FM Karim.

Wild Flowers of the UAE; MVD Jongbloed.

Desert Ecology of the UAE; PE Osborne. ✕

Carbon Conundrum Continued (by Digby Scorgie)

Necessary but not sufficient?

In this series of articles on climate change the focus so far has been on the carbon dioxide emitted by burning fossil fuel. It is now time to consider the effects of the other greenhouse gases and the other sources of these gases.

Firstly, carbon dioxide is not the only greenhouse gas emitted when one burns fossil fuel. There is also some methane and a small amount of nitrous oxide.

For purposes of comparison it is standard to represent the effects of the other greenhouse gases in terms of the equivalent amounts of carbon dioxide. When this is done, the proportions of emissions from burning fossil fuel are as follows:

Carbon dioxide (91,9%), methane (7,3%) and nitrous oxide (0,8%). It is because carbon dioxide constitutes such a large proportion of the emissions that, as a first approximation, it was reasonable to earlier focus only on this gas.

When all the greenhouse gases are considered, the contribution from fossil fuel compares to the contribution from other sources as follows:

Fossil fuel (71,7%) and other sources (28,3%). Fossil fuel is clearly the dominant source. This is why it is necessary to reduce fossil-fuel use to zero, or near zero, as quickly as possible. However, while necessary, this is not sufficient, given the size of the contribution from other sources. The latter emissions need to be trimmed too.

The emissions from other sources (ignoring fossil fuel for now) consist of carbon dioxide (10,0%), methane (9,0%), nitrous oxide (5,9%), and fluorinated gases (1,9%). The remaining 1,5% is due to secondary aviation effects. The sources of the three main gases that contribute to the conundrum are as follows:

Farming (9,4%), deforestation (6,6%), cement production (3,4%), waste disposal (2,5%), industry (1,2%) and burning (1,8%). This breakdown gives some idea of where efforts should be made to cut emissions. Halting deforestation, for example, should obviously be high on the list.

But how much time is there to reduce emissions sufficiently so as to avoid more than two degrees of global warming? Studies of the Earth's palaeoclimate indicate that the current concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide might already be sufficient to cause this amount of warming.

Nevertheless, the scientific community has set 450 ppm as the limit -- not so much because it is more accurate, but rather because it is politically more achievable.

However, at the present rate of annual emissions this limit of 450 ppm will be reached in about 2030. On the other hand, 2020 is the earliest that one can hope for an international agreement on the implementation of real cuts in emissions. There are therefore a scant 10 years in which to act. Readers may judge for themselves the probability of success. The consequences of failure are outlined in the next issue.

To be continued in the next Newsletter....

The Lost Al Ain Airfields (by Laurence Garey)

From Page 1

The Al Ain Airport opened in 1994 and its 4 000 meter long runway allows its use by modern jet airliners, as well as UAE Air Force College training aircraft. It has hosted an annual air show and aerobatic competition since 2004, drawing international participants from far and wide.

However Al Ain, or more accurately Buraimi, could boast two airports long before the “new” one was built. Modern Al Ain is really only part of the nine villages of “Buraimi Oasis” and the two airfields were known as Buraimi Hamasa and Buraimi Dau’di. Hamasa is still in use by the Oman Air Force and Police, and Dau’di disappeared under housing estate bulldozers just a few years ago.

Aerial photographs from 1968 (Photo 1) show the runways at Dau’di and Hamasa, made of hardened sand and gravel, and marked with simple white stones along the edges.



Photo 1: A 1968 aerial photograph of Dau’di airfield. The runway can be seen running from top left to bottom right and the arrows that marked the threshold at each end are just visible (indicated by yellow arrows). It is difficult to imagine that this is now just south of the Al Ain Danat Resort Hotel!

Two large white arrows are clearly visible at Dau’di at each end of the runway, which ran east to west. Google Earth still has archived images of Dau’di taken before its final destruction in which the runway, its whitewashed marker stones and one of the arrows can be seen. Both airfields are indicated on the 1975 Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 1).



Figure 1: A 1975 Ordnance survey map showing Buraimi’s two airfields, Hamasa and Dau’di (indicated by blue circles)

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The Lost Al Ain Airfields (by Laurence Garey)

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Dau'di is still visible in the Sarooj district just south of the former Intercontinental Hotel, now the Danat Resort on the Al Ain planning map some twenty years later (Figure 2). The new airport is also shown to the west.



Figure 2: Al Ain city planning map showing the site of Dau'di airport at Sarooj

The short distance from the former Intercontinental Hotel is easily judged from Photo 2.



Photo 2: Demolition work at Dau'di in 2009, with the Intercontinental Hotel in the background

The runway was some 1 800 meters long, but soon houses were being built on its western end and in 2009 work continued over the rest of the site. The last few airport buildings (Photo 3 on the next page) were demolished, but a helicopter landing pad was still there, although covered by building material.

One of the huge whitewashed stone arrows indicating the runway threshold was still present in 2006 (Photo 4 on the next page). Few people could have guessed that this was the site of an important part of Al Ain's history.

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Photo 3: The remains of the last airport buildings at Dau'di in 2006



Photo 4: The eastern arrow, made of whitewashed stones, which marked the end of the runway at Dau'di, 2006

Dau'di was used for military and civil flights. The famous nurse of the Oasis Hospital, Gertrude Dyck (affectionately known as Doctora Latifa), shows a photograph in her book "The Oasis" (Motive Publishing, 1995) of a Twin Pioneer. The small twin-engine transport aircraft of the Royal Air Force (RAF) was on a medical evacuation flight about to leave Dau'di for Dubai in 1964 (Photo 5).



Photo 5: A medevac flight from Dau'di by Twin Pioneer. From Gertrude Dyck, The Oasis (Motive Publishing, 1995)

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These aircraft were well suited to the harsh conditions in the Trucial States. They were based with RAF 152 Squadron at Sharjah. They flew missions to support oil exploration and to supply remote parts of central Oman, including the Saiq plateau on Oman's Jebel Akhdar where they landed on the difficult and dangerous airstrip (2 000 meters altitude). One of the pilots, John James, remembers his visits to Dau'di around 1960 (Photo 6), although he did not realise there were two airfields at Buraimi!



Photo 6: A Twin Pioneer flown into Dau'di by John James around 1960

One of John's jobs was to deliver supplies to Al Ain. After a hot hour's flight from Sharjah he remembers the Trucial Omani Scouts (TOS) Land Rover driven across the sand from Jahili Fort, some six kilometers away but right in line with the runway. The Land Rover's task was to whisk thirsty crew off to the fort for some cold "refreshment" before being lodged in the officers' quarters in the famous round "wedding cake" tower. They always tried to land as close to the Land Rover as possible to shorten the delay.

Another pilot who remembers the hospitality of the TOS at Jahili is Jock Manson. He was with 105 Squadron RAF based in Bahrain. In 1967 he was the first to land the large four-engine Argosy transport at Dau'di (Photo 7).



Photo 7: Jock Manson landing the first RAF Argosy transport to visit Dau'di, in 1967

In spite of pessimistic speculation he landed safely, and continued to fly into Al Ain. He remembers flying to Dau'di in his Argosy with a heavy construction vehicle, accompanied by specialists to advise on moving such heavy loads, with a very junior officer in charge. Before Jock got in the Land Rover to go to the fort, he reminded the specialists that they would need to put ballast in the front of the aircraft before getting the vehicle off the back, for the Argosy had an undercarriage consisting of main wheels and a nose wheel.

The young specialist responded that he was the expert and did not need a pilot to tell him what to do.

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A little later Jock watched as the nose of the aeroplane gradually rose out of the heat haze as it was unloaded until it sat on its back wheels and tail!

Jock also remembers the shock to crews flying into Dau'di when the Hilton Hotel was built in 1972. The relatively high-rise Hilton is just two kilometers from the runway threshold, so it spelled the beginning of the end for Dau'di.

Apart from military flights, Gulf Aviation operated services to Dau'di from 1965 to 1968, using DC3, Heron and Friendship aircraft: examples of the first two are still preserved at the Al Mahatta Museum in Sharjah (although they are not the original aeroplanes).

1968 aerial photographs and the 1975 map (Figure 1) of Buraimi-Hamasa airfield show its two rather short runways, one approximately east-west, the other north-south.

Google Earth still shows the two runways, with housing encroaching on the northern runway.

Hamasa is inside the military compound east of the Buraimi souk and fort. It is best recognized by the presence of a large modern fort. It was used in parallel with Dau'di, but by the Oman Air Force and Police Air Wing, using small transport aircraft, such as the Skyvan (Photo 8).



Photo 8: From the cockpit of an Oman Air Force Skyvan light transport landing at Buraimi-Hamasa in 1973. The two runways are visible, as is the town in the distance with its forts

These two almost forgotten, but once very active, airfields in the oasis villages of Buraimi played an important role in the expansion of this area as from the 1950s.

Al Ain continues its proud tradition of international air travel and military aviation at the new airport, and few people realise how different things were just a few decades ago. ✕

Meeting Location

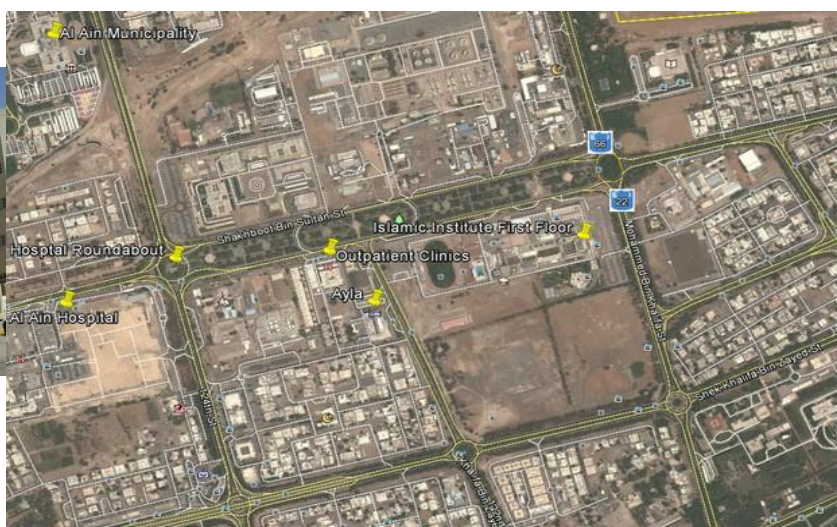
The Al Ain Chapter of the ENHG meets at the Emirates University Islamic Institute.

General meetings as well as committee meetings take place on announced Tuesdays, all members and invited friends are welcome to attend either meeting.

Location Details (Courtesy of Google Earth)



Islamic Institute



Islamic Institute GPS location : 24 13 44.80 N 055 44 59.50 E

www.enhg.org

Committee Members:

Chairperson

Brigitte Howarth Brigitte.howarth@gmail.com 050 619 7316

Vice Chairperson

Leslie Butler Lesiebutler@yahoo.com 050 112 1637

Treasurer

Joseph Mansour Josephmansour@yahoo.com 050 130 4660

Library

Verena Davies Verena.davies@gmail.com 050 583 4049

Newsletter Editor

Alex Schmarr newsletter@enhg.org 055 834 5079

Under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan