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V249



Bedouin
Experience

ROAD TRIP NORTH

We jumped into two 4x4's at 6am on a Friday and headed into the deep desert.

"SOUK" IS ARABIC FOR MARKET

In search of gifts from the deserts of Saudi. There is nothing in town like the markets in the villages!

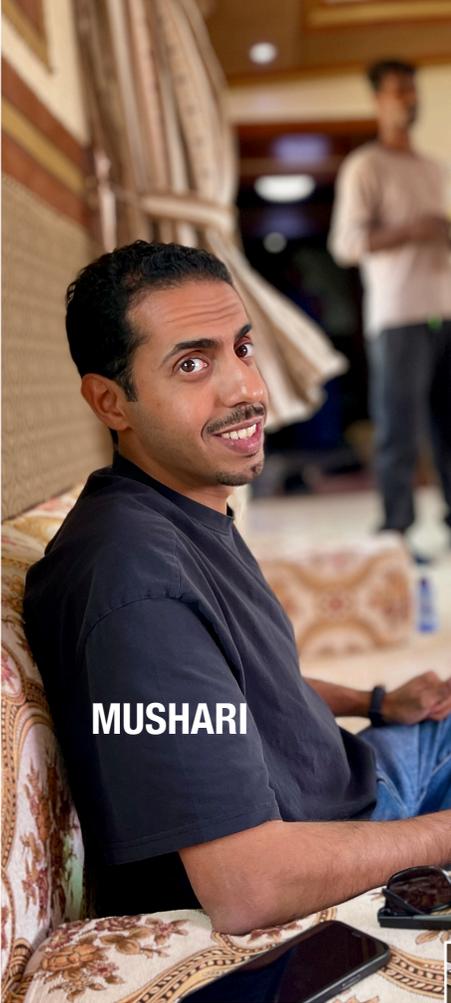
St. Some Times
Special Issue

The Tribe of Bedouin Dave goes to Hafir al Batin to find Bedouin Jackets known as Farwah.

THE TRIP

FOUR WESTERNERS AND AN ARAB DRIVE INTO THE DESERT...

Sounds like the beginning of a joke right? Well this was no joke. In northern Saudi Arabia, not far from the neighboring country of Kuwait, is a city of goods and markets, souks. We were headed there for Christmas shopping. Mushari was our local guide. His family usually goes up there for several weeks of camping each year.



MUSHARI



DAVID



ELENA



PIERRE



YOURS TRULY

This trip could be summed up in a few words: friends, laughter, bartering, fun, and wow.

Kuwait

Hafar Al Batin

حفر الباطن

Al Jubail

الجبيل

Dammam

الدمام

Bahrain

Arabian Gulf

az-Zūlfi

الزلفي



BLONDIE, WHITEY, WHATEVER

Just look at those eyelashes! Meet Whitey, the comptroller. We learned that every camel herd has a leader, whom all the other camels follow. The comptroller is the lead camel in the desert. Whitey, at a net worth of 200,000 SAR (\$50,000) is the mother of most of the herd we were introduced to.

Gosh, did she love Elena! This camel walked right over to Elena and gave her an

obvious camel hug. A camel hugs you by standing with you near their front legs and wrapping its head and neck right around your chest. So sweet!

The other female in the herd, the one on the cover, was ultimately jealous and headed over for Elena to hug her too. Her name really is Whitey, but Elena was very emotional about the whole ordeal and dubbed her “Blondie”.



THE BEDOUINS

The old tribal customs and ways of herding camels is alive and well in the Middle East.

From what I learned on this trip, the tribes still have their intact customs and old ways. We were lucky enough to have an interpreter, guide, (named Mushari) to ease things over with the bedouins' whose land we were already collecting cool rocks on. Mushari introduced us to the three brothers that owned the town and the herd. Once we were introduced, our small group was invited into their trailer for camels' milk, tea, and even to stay for a sheep dinner. (They kill one sheep for dinner each night.) We carefully accepted most of their graces, but declined the dinner. We had come a long way to get specific jackets and other gifts in the markets.

Be careful of the bull camel. He might just eat your head.

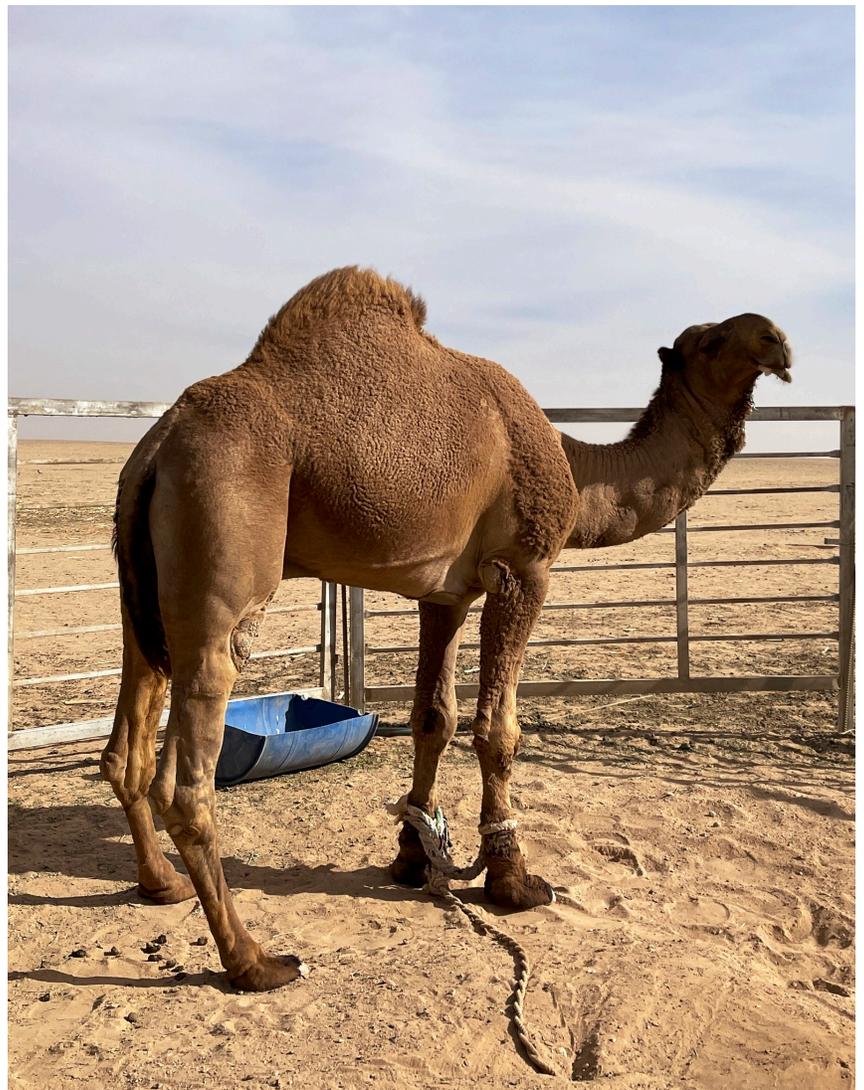
STEVE AUSTIN

This six million SAR stud camel is busy 365 days a year doing his career: mating.

The owner, one of the three bedouin brothers, warned us not to get very close to the fence. Why? Because he killed his last owner. Actually bit and crushed the guy's skull.

I didn't need to be warned more than once. What a way to go! Skull F*&ed by a bull camel! No thank you.

Interesting fact: bedouins do not out right charge a fee for a neighboring tribe to mate with their stud. Camel's are part of the tribal pride. Charging a fee would damage their pride by losing "face".



Another First...

According to Mushari, we were the first Westerners to set foot into this restaurant. The Turkey Restaurant is a favorite haunt of Mushari's Uncle. It's one of those places that is an absolute must, every time they travel north to go camping.

We all agree with Mushari's Uncle. The food is excellent. Flatbreads with all kinds of toppings, Turkish or Arabic coffees.

The owners were so nice to us. We were even allowed to take pictures, once Mushari asked permission for us. It isn't a family place to eat. Mostly men were here, on carpets with their shoes off.

We stopped here both on the way up to Hafir al Batin and on the way home. The food was great, the owners were nice, and Mushari had ordered ahead on the way home anyway.





This is not your average in and out shopping trip. NOT haggling the price down is considered an insult. Tea, juices, and coffee are all offered and accepted. It's a process.

THE GREAT FARWAH EXPEDITION

A farwah is a great sized jacket that the bedouin sheep and camel herders wear in the winter desert. The originals are heavy leather with lamb wool interior. Long enough to reach your feet and wear over other clothes, you can even sleep in one.

This was the true reason for the trip. The farwah. Since the end of contract is near for most of the team, it was time to buy the final gifts of which seasoned travelers buy in Saudi Arabia.

Naturally, you can get a farwah anywhere near camp. But the Souks of Hafir al Baten are known for their size and variety.

Hafir al Baten is the trading zone of the north. Anything you want - especially camping gear or herding equipment, can be found in a store here. And the stores are all lined up next to each other, competing with the same merchandize.

All four of us followed Mushari into store after store to find

rugs, farwachs, wall hangings, and other gifts unique to the culture. We were quite the show because there are no longer very many Westerners in the area. We were a sideshow. Each store we shopped in gathered mobs of customers peeking in to see what might be going on. Mushari and Dave made a great haggling team.

Farwachs in stores can range in price from 4,000 SAR (over \$1,000) and down. Depending on the style, material, and kind of farwah prices go down as you leave the bigger cities. Even street venders have them for sale along the highways. Since we bought in bulk, most of our Farwachs were bought for between 350 SAR and 120 SAR .



Walid, one of the brothers...

Few other Westerners might have a chance to be invited into the family herding trailer, which the Bedouins “live” in while in the desert. Sure, they owned the nearby village, but this is the inside of a huge trailer. Here is where they host their guests and spend time while the herd grazes.

Walid, one of the three brothers in charge of the family herd, is seen here

educating the five of us about the camel trade, customs, and history. Walid went to University in the West so his English is near perfect. He acted as our main host until their father arrived to meet us.

This family normally never hosts foreigners, but we were on their property and for whatever reason - curiosity, entertainment, pure kindness - they invited us into their lives.