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JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1975

SCENIC ARABIA
A Personal View

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WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY TOR EIGELAND

It had been four years since my last visit. I was standing in the domestic wing of Dhahran's handsome airport when the airline representative walked over and explained apologetically that there would be an hour's delay. I decided to cross to the international wing to wait in the coffee shop there. Without thinking, I placed my camera bag on the floor and strolled over to the international terminal. Half an hour later, I returned, expecting to find my things still in the middle of the floor where I had left them. And I did. Suddenly what I had done struck me. The camera bag contained about $3,000 worth of equipment. In any other airport in the world I wouldn't have let that bag out of my sight for a second.

I decided then and there that the article I had come back to write must reflect the special affection I have for Saudi Arabia. Although it can be a difficult and frustrating place to photograph—what with heat and dust storms, high humidity on the coasts and freezing temperatures in winter —there is much more to be said. It seemed important to me to point out that Saudi Arabia is a country of warm, generous human beings who, under the leadership of the House of Sa'ud, have managed to build in severe natural conditions a prosperous society. And without sacrificing traditional values and a devout religious sense which comes from Saudi Arabia's role as protector of the holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina.

Perhaps because I was not a newcomer to the country the vastness of my assignment—"Photograph Saudi Arabia and write about it"—staggered me. The kingdom, after all, is nearly a third the size of continental U.S.A. It has more than five million people, one of the world's most forbidding deserts, a towering mountain range, numerous oases, thousands of miles of coastline, several major cities and hundreds of towns and villages. A big bite.

Hisham Nazer, director of Saudi Arabia's Central Planning Organization, said once in an interview in Fortune: "*Saudis are not plutocrats. We are contributors to human society and sustainers of it. The idea is not money; the idea is to develop the human being in Saudi Arabia, to make it possible for him to work and produce. So basically we are not worried so much about the level of income only. We are concerned about the Saudi Arabian man.*"

And that, I reflected as I picked up my camera bag in the airport lobby, would be my concern too.

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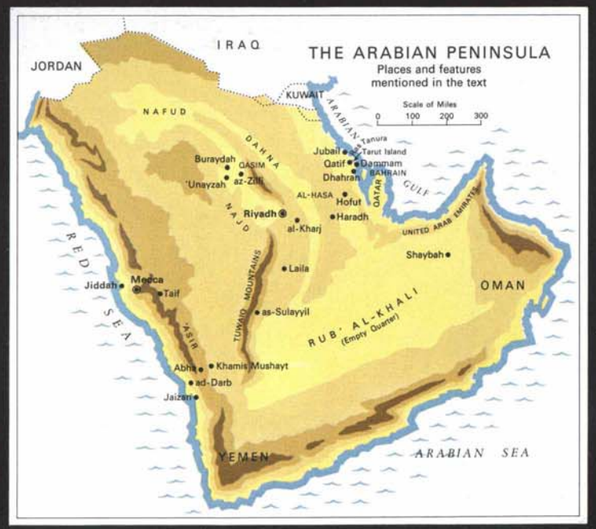


Cover: West of Riyadh, hikers explore trail up sheer face of dramatic Tuwaiq Escarpment. Inside front cover: In sun-spotted Jiddah harbor, fishing boats in foreground rest on keels at low tide. Rear cover: Jiddah's historic leaning minaret and recently completed 25-story apartment tower.

THE CHANGING COAST

A land of fishing villages and palm groves is on the edge of industrial and agricultural change.

A Tarut Island village, Arabian Gulf.

In Dhahran, headquarters of the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) and a green, beautifully landscaped town of bungalows and office buildings, it might be possible to forget about oil. But not for long. Working as they do for the world's most productive oil company, most residents do feel, at one time or another, the excitement of being part of something very big and very important.

By now, through attention given by the public press to growing demands for energy, it is generally well known that eastern Saudi Arabia is the source of a great deal of petroleum. Because of the amplitude of this source the kingdom has become the number-one oil-exporting nation in the world. Aramco produces nearly all of the oil that comes out of Saudi Arabia. Within the company's concession area are the world's largest oil fields, Ghawar onshore and Safaniya offshore, and Aramco's oil port on the Arabian Gulf is the biggest and busiest anywhere.

The Arabian Gulf's rich blue waters are going to be churned by even more traffic soon. Petromin, the General Petroleum and Mineral Organization, a state-owned, semi-autonomous public corporation, in partnership with Marcona Corporation of San Francisco and two Japanese companies, is planning a $500-million steel mill. To the uninformed this might seem farfetched. However, eastern Saudi Arabia produces large quantities of natural gas in conjunction with oil, and present plans call for some of this gas to be supplied for the steel mill. Supertankers will carry iron ore in the form of slurry from South America, unload at the coastal steel mill, then pick up oil at Ras Tanura and return to South America. With these economic advantages it is estimated that furnaces will be able to pour a million tons of steel and two million tons of iron a year, all at a competitively low cost. Another Petromin project, announced recently, calls for a $3-billion petrochemical complex to be built in cooperation with Japanese interests.

Jubail, a tiny fishing village on the Gulf north of Dhahran, is the proposed site of these huge developments. With jovial Ahmed Yousuf al-Dossary, a friend from Aramco, I drove there last February to record the timeless waterfront before time caught up with it.

Jubail turned out to be a charming village, but with clear signs that its idyllic period will soon be over. A new port is under construction, as well as a new market, schools and an ice plant. Most of the whitewashed mud-brick buildings were being torn down to make room for bigger, more spacious houses—from a photographer's point of view, not always as attractive.

We first stopped at the beach near the old jetty to watch the fishermen mend their nets. With tremendous dexterity, utilizing both hands to mend, and the toes to hold the net, the fishermen stitched holes up faster than my eyes could follow and register the exact way they were doing it.

Ahmed Yousuf and I strolled a little further and came across a good-looking young man busily making a big wire-mesh fish trap. Selim Muhammad Sekatry was immaculately dressed in a long white *thobe* and the traditional *ghutra*, or headdress. He was all smiles, greeted us courteously and kept working. Next to him were eight or 10 finished traps—each about two yards in diameter and of roughly the same height. Again I was impressed with the dexterity and speed with which the work was done. I tried to detect unevenness in the workmanship but could find none.

Selim did not slow down till some young boys came out of a house next door with a tray of tea for all of us. The tea was followed by coffee. To me this was especially touching, since we had not actually entered anyone's home—Selim was working in the street. I have found that hospitality in Saudi Arabia is not just a law or a duty, but is often extended quite "unnecessarily," and seems to give as much pleasure to the host as to his guest.

The sights and smells of the waterfront had given us an appetite for fish. Ahmed Yousuf took me to a little coffeehouse/restaurant/hotel in the traditional local style. Except for the kitchen it is all in one room. People sit cross-legged on tall benches that are quite comfortable, since the broad seat is made of woven rope. In front of the benches are equally long-legged tables. Stacked in a corner was a large assortment of *narghilas* (hubble-bubble pipes) awaiting customers.

After lunch we drove south along the coast with the headland of Ras Tanura and its gleaming refinery towers in the distance. Then we passed through the oasis town of Qatif and across a narrow stone causeway to the little village of Darin on Tarut Island. Darin, like Jubail, used to be a center for pearling and trade. Now there are fishermen and date farmers. There are few shops in the village, which consisted mainly of the little white houses of the fishermen and the crumbling remains of a Turkish fort.

Back on the mainland later, while strolling through narrow alleys and covered passageways of old Qatif, a much larger town just across from the island, Ahmed Yousuf and I came across some old houses with massive, beautiful wooden doors. Many were ornately carved with words from the Koran. The neighborhood residents took a puzzled but friendly interest in my photographer's excitement over the lovely old doors, and the subsequent picture taking.

Plant at al-Khobar changes salt water to fresh.

Darin and Qatif are both old towns. Dammam, in the same coastal area in the direction of Dhahran, is nearly all new.

Ahmed Yousuf and I reached Dammam just in time to see school buses unloading children on street corners in an area that looked like suburbia anywhere. With only slight differences. There were mosques, the women were veiled and in long dresses, most men wore *thobes* and *ghutras*. Other than that, apartment buildings and neat houses with gardens lined the broad boulevards. Big American and smaller European cars cruised along. Three little boys on tricycles darted around a corner, a screaming sister chasing behind them. Across the street three teen-age schoolgirls in long blue uniform dresses, lightly veiled, demurely discussed the day's events.

This was Ahmed Yousuf's neighborhood. The three girls across the street turned out to be his daughters and he called for them to come to supper. We stopped for a refreshing cup of tea in his spacious living room before hurrying on to see the Dammam port—the largest Saudi port on the Gulf coast for handling cargo other than oil products.

"There it is!" I had to look twice before I realized that way at the end of a causeway, stretching miles straight into the Arabian Gulf, were the hazy shapes of numerous ships. We drove seven miles into the Gulf, to be exact, passing many people fishing and picnicking by the water's edge along the way. Ahmed Yousuf told me that about halfway out to the piers a fresh-water spring bubbles up from beneath the sea and that in former times people from Dammam used to boat out to fetch their drinking water. "But now," he added, "Saudi Arabia has four completed sea-water desalination plants—and there are more to come—so drinking water isn't a problem."

In the sprawling al-Hasa Oasis, 65 miles southwest of Dhahran, the lack of water has never been a problem. Ahmed Yousuf and I drove to al-Hasa the next day. This 50,000-acre oasis, which embraces numbers of villages and several major towns, is home to more than 160,000 people. Al-Hasa has grown dates for as long as anyone knows, with plentiful fresh water flowing from some 100 natural springs and artesian wells. To make maximum use of the water and overcome the perennial drainage problem, the Saudi Arabian Government has built some 900 miles of elevated concrete irrigation canals, another 900 of drainage channels, and a 1000-mile road network. I photographed and wrote about the giant project nearly five years ago (*Aramco World*, November-December 1970).

Driving through the streets of Hofuf and through the palm groves, villages and garden plots, I realized that the change since my last visit was phenomenal. Seemingly half of the old mud villages had been abandoned for new homes in nearby locations. Donkeys, then still a common means of transport, had practically disappeared. Japanese pickup trucks and motorcycles had taken their place. Tractors rather than animals were pulling the plows. As for Hofuf, it looked to me as if bulldozers had leveled whole blocks to make room for new buildings. There was a boom-town feeling in the dusty air. So much change. I remembered a man who I thought made the finest long-spouted traditional Arab coffeepots in the Eastern Province. "Yes, Ali Salem is still here," Ahmed Yousuf told me.

We went to see Ali Salem, a dignified old gentleman with a well-trimmed beard. The craftsman had just finished a set of three handsome brass coffeepots, big, medium, and small. Through Ahmed Yousuf I asked how much they cost. "They're already sold," Ali Salem replied, looking up from his work. "A Bedouin bought them."

Ahmed: "But how much were they, anyway?"

Ali Salem: "1,200 riyals (nearly $350) for the three."

Ahmed: "They are beautiful, but that's a lot of money."

Ali Salem, a little condescendingly: "Bedouins buy nothing but the best. These were made to order." Ahmed Yousuf nodded to me and explained, "It's true. The Bedouins don't need much or buy much, but when they do they want the best quality."

We bade the craftsman farewell and since Ahmed Yousuf and I both frankly love to eat, we went on to a bakery to see whether the flat, round Hofuf bread was as good as I remembered it. It was. We bought some and carried it hot from the oven to a nearby hotel to have with the tender, fresh juicy lamb meat that I also think is unmatched outside Hofuf.

A few days later I flew over Hofuf and the gardens of al-Hasa in a small plane. I was on my way to an experimental farm project in Haradh, about 80 miles further south. As we took off from Dhahran we spotted the new al-Khobar desalination plant on the Arabian Gulf coast and soon after, Bahrain Island in the distance. We headed south along the cream-colored desert shore and the translucent, intensely blue waters of the Gulf and then turned inland. From the air, seen through a winter day's mist, al-Hasa no longer looked like an oasis but more like a huge gray-green carpet that had been slashed in a crisscross fashion by a giant machete—the concrete canals and channels—with the reflecting water being the only feature that stood out. We flew on south.

Until fairly recently Haradh was little more than a water hole for passing Bedouins, a few general-store trading shacks and a whistle stop on the Dammam-Riyadh railroad line. Now Haradh may hold one of the keys to the future of Saudi Arabia. There on the once-empty plain a new experimental farm sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture and Water mass produces both sheep and the grain to feed them.

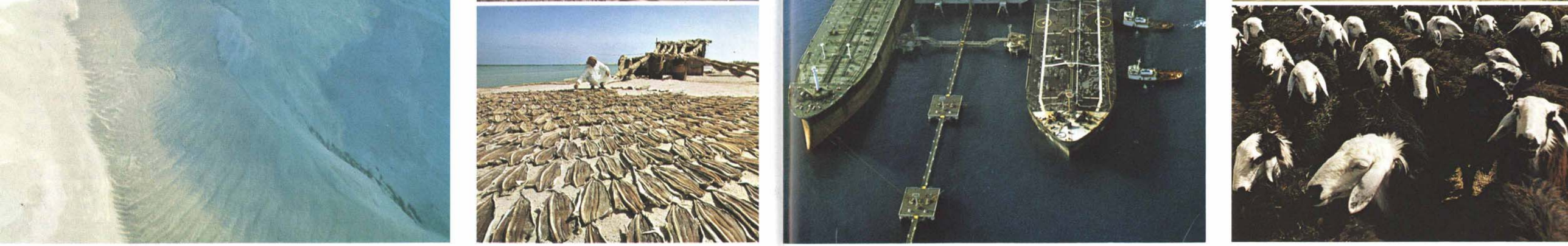
Abdul Mohsen al-Ajaji picked us up at the landing strip. The young Saudi sheep farmer had a very American look in his glasses, blue jeans, blue sweatshirt and red shirt. In fact, he was from a town on the Arabian Gulf coast, though he had studied agriculture in the U.S. He radiated healthy, youthful enthusiasm.

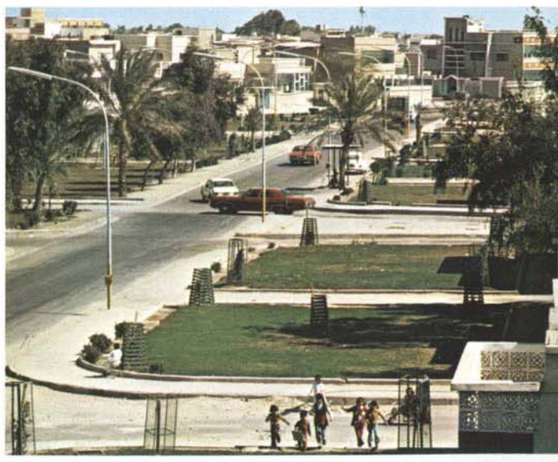
Driving with Abdul Mohsen from the strip into the farm, I asked how he liked living out here in the middle of nowhere. "Until recently," he answered, "foreign experts have managed most of this kind of experimental project in Saudi Arabia. I think it's time we got into them as well. As a matter of fact," he continued, "I've become very enthusiastic about life on this farm, though to be honest, mostly *after* I got here. You know, you really get to know people closely in a pioneering situation like this."

After a brief courtesy call on the project's busy director, Abdul Mohsen took us to see the sheep. The bleating and baaaaaahing of more than 20,000 animals filled the air—as did the rather sharp whiff of an equal number of live hides of wool. On closer inspection the flocks looked extremely healthy and well fed. These blackish brown sheep with white heads are of the native Saudi *Najdi* breed.

I asked Abdul Mohsen about the farm. "This is a pilot project," he replied, "and produces breeding stock as well as meat. Nobody has raised penned sheep in Saudi Arabia before. If we succeed we will set an example for others to start similar farms. We now have between 22,000 to 24,000 head, and within five years we'll produce 150,000 a year. That could satisfy about 20 percent of the country's projected demand. With only five or six projects on this scale, we could be self-sufficient in meat." He continued: "A second goal is to provide job opportunities for Bedouins. Some workers here now make the equivalent of more than $1,000 a month. They get such extras as air-conditioned quarters. When you provide this sort of job opportunity for a man used to the very hard life of a desert wanderer, he is probably going to stay. So in a way we are changing the mentality of the nomads."

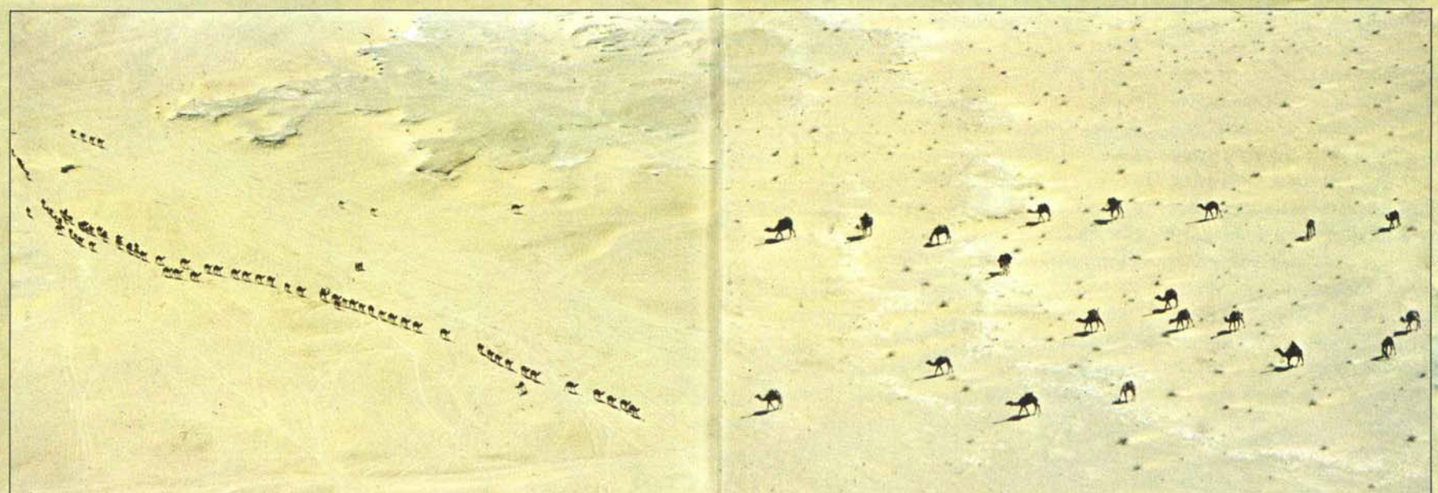
On the changing coast (clockwise, from top left) sand and sea merge in graceful, shifting patterns. At Jubail, a Saudi Arab fisherman weaves a wire trap; another dries fish on the beach. Supertankers load oil at the Sea Island, part of Ras Tanura's huge Marine Terminal. A Saudi Government experimental farm at Haradh now has more than 20,000 sheep, aims at 150,000. Some areas of Dammam, the kingdom's major non-oil Gulf port, resemble U.S. suburbia. A farmer in al-Hasa rinses vegetables in a natural spring; craftsman Ali Salem makes brass coffeepots in Hofuf.





THE NOT-SO-EMPTY QUARTER

Oil exploration teams and hardy Bedouins roam the land of the Great Sands.



Al-Murrah camels on the march.

The twin-engine Otter sputtered into life at Dhahran's busy airport. We taxied past three big Boeing 707's: Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia), Middle East Airlines and Pakistan International Airlines. I have to fly a lot on the big jets, but I was pleased that today I was *really* going to fly. We were heading down to Arabia's Texas-sized Empty Quarter, the Rub' al-Khali, or "the Sands," as Bedouins call it. It is the largest uninterrupted mass of sand in the world, and I was going to photograph its spectacular dunes from the air. I would be sitting in the co-pilot's seat and we would fly the area any way we wanted to.

The little Otter on its outsize wings lifted off like a bird in grayish-yellow buffeting cross-winds and we again headed south along the Arabian Gulf shore. This time the vivid coastal colors were faded by the dust storm we were going through.

An hour later the air cleared as we headed inland from the Gulf. The sands near the coast were whitish in the glare of the sun, but soon turned pink in tone. I have found that the desert is not at all monotonous. It changes from mile to mile and with the time of day. Now it looked like ocean waves when seen from a jet liner, a strangely pink ocean. We droned on, by now much further south than on our previous flight to Haradh. The waves became larger and larger, changing subtly from waves into mountains, sand mountains separated by broad white flats. "Pink whipped cream on ice cream!" a pilot's wife once exclaimed.

Banking sharply, diving, climbing, we took our photographs of this vast, weird, beautiful desert. At Shaybah, a mobile camp as tiny as one grain of sand in this expanse where Aramco is drilling for oil, we landed on a flat stretch of sand, a *sabkha*, and refueled for the trip back. A dry *sabkha* is as flat as a lake bed and great for driving a car or landing a plane. Hitting a wet *sabkha* (which does happen near low coastal areas or at certain seasons) a plane would tumble straight on its nose and a car could sink to its axles.

We decided to fly back on an inland course, over desert all the way. Shortly after takeoff we spotted six enormous trucks pushing south through the sands down below. It was a supply convoy for the Shaybah camp. I felt a strange twinge of guilt, soaring along in comfort and speed. Twice before I had been in this area, once aboard one of these truck convoys (*Aramco World*, May-June 1969). It took us five days to reach Shaybah from Dhahran, rather than two hours in the Twin Otter. On another occasion, on a *National Geographic* assignment I had spent six weeks with the storied al-Murrah Bedouins and their camels on the edges of the Sands, sleeping in the desert, existing on camel's milk, dates, rice and —occasionally—camel meat. And, of course, the traditional strong Arab coffee and sweet tea.

Now, cruising through the grayish-blue sky, half asleep, my eyes fixed on something that looked at first like a cluster of bushes. When it seemed that some of the bushes started to move away I asked Knut, the Norwegian pilot, if we could fly over and take a closer look.

We had spotted a well where hundreds of camels were being watered. From the south, long lines of camels glided toward the well, other long lines moved away to the north. As we flew closer we could see Bedouins hauling up water and others walking on with the herds. Two pickup trucks were parked near the well—a sign of the new prosperity of the country. Bedouins use the trucks nowadays to carry heavy gear such as tents, blankets and cooking utensils and perhaps very old or very young family members as well. I was sure these must be Bedouins of al-Murrah tribe, since this was their area and many of the camels seemed to be of the black milk-breed that al-Murrah Bedouins treasure.

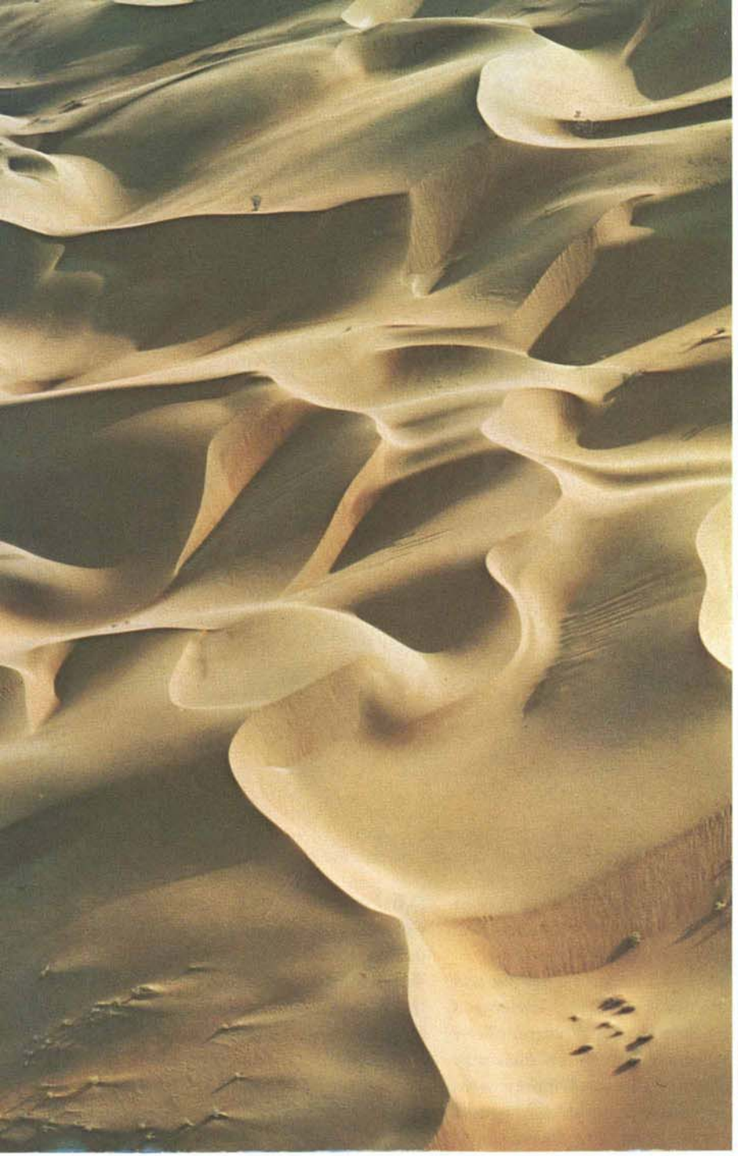
In all the time I had spent living and traveling with the Bedouins I had never seen so many camels on the move. On the ground a few days later I saw many more and also found out why they were moving.

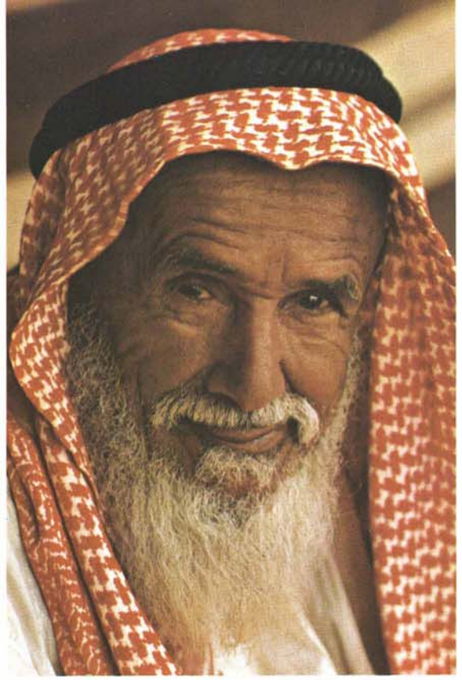
With some old friends from Dhahran I had driven to some hill country south of the oil camp of Abqaiq looking for a suitable picnic spot. We soon came across a small herd of moving camels and two young herders, a boy and a girl. I've noticed that when seen from the air or far away camels glide through the desert. From close up they shuffle.

Stopping our Land Rover, we got out and walked over to the camels and exchanged greetings with the young herders. They were friendly, but had to be on their way to keep up with their charges. Off they went, but every hundred yards or so they turned around and waved at us. They waved until we could see them no more.

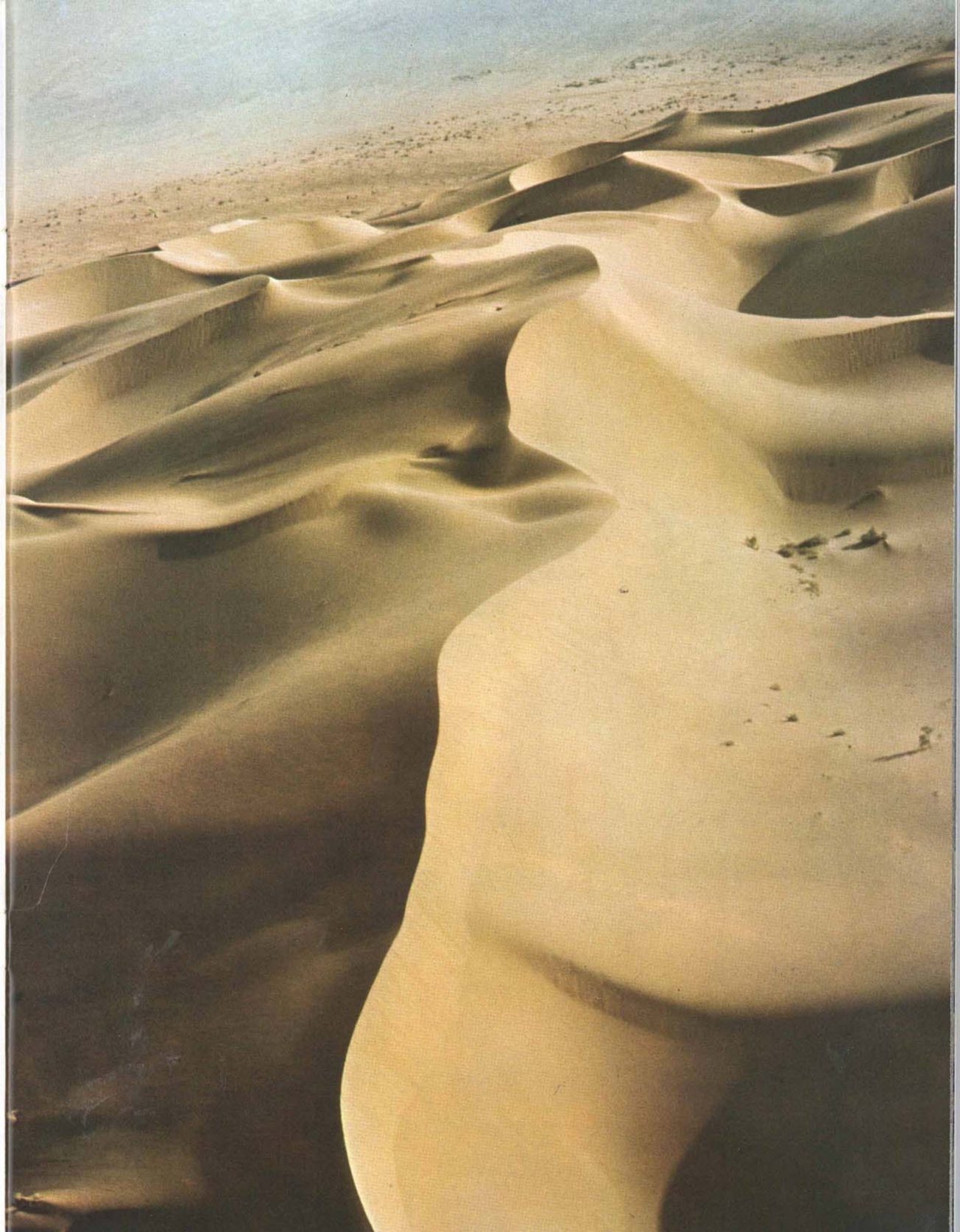
Then someone shouted, "Look over there!" As the rest of us turned to look we saw a long, endless line of perhaps more than 1,000 camels approaching. As they drew closer we saw men, women and children, some walking, some riding. The men were dressed in white *thobes*, the women mostly in black and with their faces covered. Some baby camels were trying very hard to keep up, chased by a very little boy in a brown *thobe*. He strode along with a proud and manly step. Several salukis, the speedy hunting dogs of the desert, ambled beside the herd with upturned curly tails. One was tied to a camel, but who was leading whom I don't know.

It was like watching a super-wide Cinemascope production. In spite of our intruding cameras shooting away, the Bedouins paid almost no attention to us as they moved past. Finally I walked up to one of the men, exchanged greetings, and asked how many camels were in the herd. "*Wajid, wajid* (Many, many)," he replied. Bedouins rarely answer such a question directly, I knew, but I was simply trying to make friendly conversation. Then I asked where they were heading. "Near Kuwait, up north," said the man. "Why is that?" I continued, which must have seemed like a foolish question, since the only reason they would be likely to make such a lengthy move would be in search of more water and better pasture. Still he replied politely. "It has rained a lot up there. Our camels will feed and get fat before summer." He confirmed they were of al-Murrah tribe, as I had guessed. "Your camels have the best milk of all," I said. Which was true. It is also one of the nicest compliments you can pay a Bedouin. He was highly pleased and rode on with a smile covering his whole face.





Even the hardy Bedouins don't linger in the Great Sands of the Rub' al-Khali, but an Aramco team, supplied by air and by truck convoy, probes for oil deep in the desert at Shaybah.



The world is beating a path to Riyadh, capital of the kingdom and center of the proud Najd region.

THE HISTORIC HEARTLAND

Modern Riyadh and old-city palaces.

I believe that, like the standard City Tour, an aerial reconnaissance is a very good way to get a quick first impression of a country and learn the lay of the land. At the crack of dawn an F-27 lifted off from Dhahran and headed west for the Qasim district of the Najd, in the north-central part of the kingdom. Well over an hour later we circled over the big twin oasis towns of 'Unayzah and Buraydah. Both towns are surrounded by reddish sand dunes, palm gardens and planted forests of tamarisk trees. Many of the dunes seemed to loom dangerously over the carefully maintained agricultural areas, but were held in check by thin lines of tamarisk trees, often planted along or just below the slip face of the dunes.

I was relentlessly shooting photos, oblivious of the time, when the pilot nudged me and suggested politely that we might be running low on fuel and had better head south for Riyadh, the booming capital of Saudi Arabia, to refuel. We banked sharply and winged southward, following the sharp line of the Tuwaiq Mountains. This rugged escarpment divides Saudi Arabia down the middle in a sweeping crescent from the Qasim almost as far south as the Empty Quarter. After a brief stop in Riyadh we were airborne again, heading toward the oasis outpost of as-Sulayyil at the foot of the escarpment where a large wadi cuts through the ridge. Most of the scenery below us from Riyadh south was desolate. In some places the land from the air looked like the wrinkled and cracked skin of an old elephant, a million times enlarged. In the Aflaj area, near the town of Leila, we saw some natural pools and a few palm gardens. Here and there we could see larger new buildings that stuck out among the traditional brown adobe-style houses in the villages. We guessed they were schools, new farms, and probably administrative headquarters.

Then we saw virtually no settlements of any size till we reached as-Sulayyil, a town of large brownish-gray adobe houses, walls slanting slightly inward towards the turreted roofs. Every house looked almost like a fortress—which in less peaceful times is what they were.

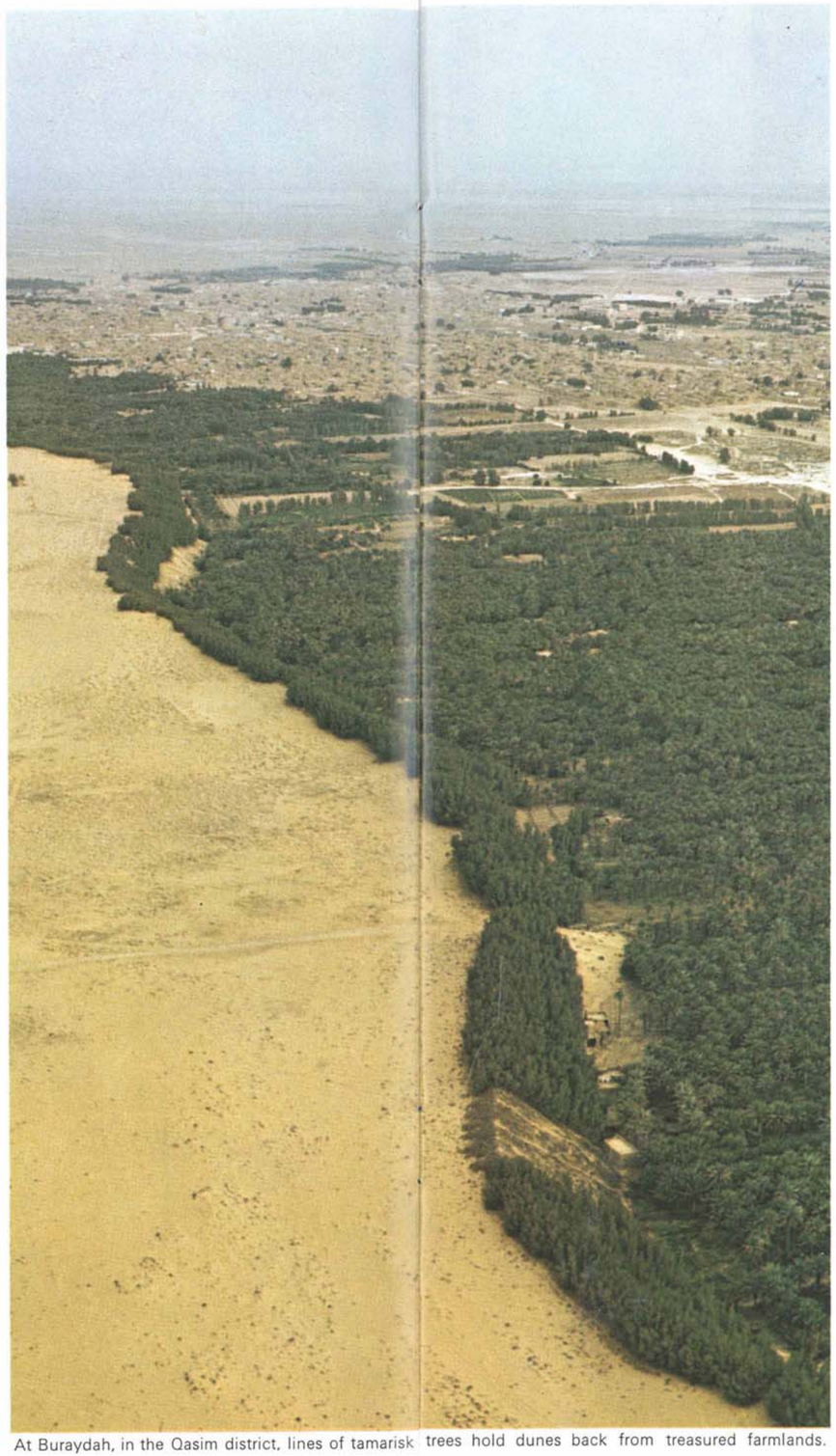
Again, the pilot nudged me and pointed to the west. "*Shamal*!" he shouted, meaning a sandstorm. I could see a brown haze on the horizon. There was no danger, but we would have no visibility. I nodded, closed the co-pilot's side window so we could pressurize, and we climbed. We had come south along the eastern side of the Tuwaiq Mountains and flew back north along the western side of the ridge. We could see no sign of life anywhere along here. The escarpment dropped into the sand desert where a few black boulders looked almost as if they had been scattered out of the sky and then seared with a blowtorch.

It was nearly dark when we again overflew Riyadh on our way back to Dhahran. The first lights had been turned on, and from high in the air the bustling city looked serene, peaceful.

The next day any thought of serenity vanished. I had flown to Riyadh from Dhahran on Saudia's scheduled commercial flight and, at rush hour, drove down Airport Road, the boulevard on which most ministries and government offices are clustered. It seemed as if every car in the city was simultaneously trying to make its way down this broad avenue, letting all the other cars know it was there by continuously blowing its horn.

From my hotel room on Airport Road the sounds of traffic had no sooner dulled to a gentle roar than I heard screaming sirens. I looked out the window. Hundreds of soldiers of the National Guard, at attention, lined the avenue. Soon a motorcycle escort and VIP cars shot by, headed for the airport. A short while later they passed again in the opposite direction, sirens still wailing. In the lobby now, I asked the receptionist who the important visitor was. He shouted across the lobby to the doorman: "Who's visiting today?" The doorman asked a cab driver outside, and the reply was relayed back in. "The President of Yemen."

During my week's stay in the capital it seemed to me as though the National Guard was lined up along Airport Road most of the time. President Sadat of Egypt, Colonel Qadhafi of Libya, Prince Juan Carlos and Doña Sophia of Spain, the U.S.'s Henry Kissinger and many others all came and went. No wonder the receptionist didn't know who was arriving that day. My hotel lobby reflected what was happening on the streets. Since my last visit to Riyadh Saudi Arabia's capital had blossomed into a true world crossroads, an international city. Chauffeur-driven cars zoomed up to the hotel entrance every few minutes disgorging or picking up Arabs in *thobes*, Arabs in business suits, Europeans, Americans, Japanese, Africans, all brisk and businesslike, all here to accomplish something, no one just to play tourist.



At Buraydah, in the Qasim district, lines of tamarisk trees hold dunes back from treasured farmlands.

Calling at several ministries, I found the same no-nonsense tone, although still tempered with the traditional atmosphere of desert informality. Offices are open, it is easy to get to see people, one is always courteously received, and it is possible to state one's business very quickly. Yet, everyone still finds time to offer the traditional cup of tea or Arab coffee—or both.

The ease with which one can see decision makers goes all the way to the top. I was told that at the modern Arab-style building which houses the offices of the Governor of Riyadh, the Kasr al-Hukim, His Majesty King Faisal still holds his *majlis*—the Arab open-house reception or audience—every Thursday morning. Anyone with something important to say or with a serious complaint, or someone in need, can go and speak to the King. Chances are that any legitimate grievance will be righted. Local administrators and amirs observe the same tradition. This is the ancient democracy of the desert. In my experience there is a tremendous natural dignity in the Saudi and he respects the dignity of others. Perhaps because there is a very direct relationship in Islam between God and man everyone feels equal under God. Many old Bedouin tribesmen still address the King simply as "Faisal."

I traveled around Riyadh a great deal in the course of photographing the city. My companion for most of the trips was Ibrahim Muhawwis, a charming, outgoing Saudi. We saw King Faisal driving to various appointments around the capital at least half a dozen times during the week. Ibrahim and I visited old buildings, new buildings, hospitals—everywhere the typical old brownish sand-colored houses were giving way to tall new apartment buildings, offices and government buildings. Probably all photographers prefer the old to the new. However, when on rare occasions some of the old architectural traditions are observed in modern buildings, I found that the result can also be stunning. In Riyadh I thought the Kasr al-Hukim, the Central Library of the University of Riyadh and the Ministry of Commerce were three fine examples of this.

Proud of his country's development, Ibrahim Muhawwis naturally preferred to show me the new things. Yet he would not let me miss the old al-Masmak fort in the center of Riyadh. Here, at an old wooden gate, the history of Saudi Arabia turned. Ibrahim told me the story of how the House of Sa'ud, expelled into exile from this region, their homeland, by the Rashids, had recaptured the city in 1902 under the leadership of young 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud (*Aramco World*, Jan.-Feb., 1965). 'Abd al-'Aziz, known in the west as Ibn Sa'ud, was King Faisal's father.

During an exciting dawn battle at the gate of the fort 'Abd Allah Ibn Jiluwi, one of 'Abd al-'Aziz's men, threw a spear at Ajlan, the Rashid's governor. "It missed, but the point of that spear is still embedded here in this wooden gate." Ibrahim pointed dramatically. Two old gatekeepers nodded knowingly, though he told me the story in English. They knew the details by heart. Ibrahim continued: "In the end Ajlan and half of the 80 defenders were killed and the fort was taken. This was 'Abd al-'Aziz's first big victory in his family's long struggle to unite Arabia. In 1927 he was proclaimed King of the Hijaz and the Najd and its Dependencies. In 1932, the country was officially named the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

The old wooden gate will not be forgotten in the history books of Saudi Arabia. But today a new kind of monument is being built in Riyadh. As al-Masmak fort tells us something of the kingdom's past, a new building in the suburbs tells us something of its future. There, finishing touches are now being put on what is expected to become one of the most modern medical facilities in the entire world—the King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Clinical Research Center. More than 1,000 people of varying specialities will serve in the 450-bed inpatient hospital designed to handle special problem cases.

The specialists will have at their fingertips such useful toys as 18 computers integrated into a single system supported by visual display units and teleprinters, electric trolley trains, an automated conveyor system, electric beds with full range of movement, a seven-theater operating suite equipped for everything, including laser surgery, and an intensive-care unit with full monitoring computer surveillance. Completely carpeted except for special functional areas,

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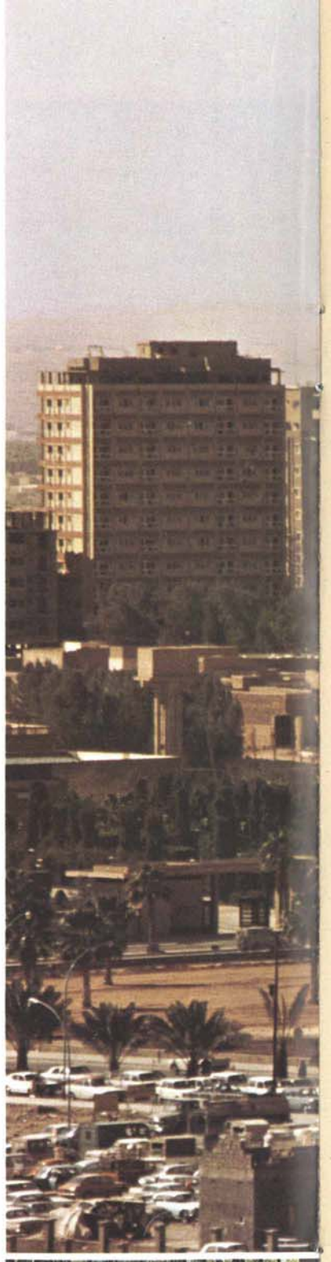

Clockwise, from bottom left: At Riyadh's modern football stadium, Saudi Arabia's national soccer team (in green) takes on the visiting Egyptian National Team (in red), while the band plays on. Riyadh's striking new water tower has space for a restaurant on top; the Ministry of Commerce and Industry utilizes traditional architecture. In old Riyadh: the historic gate of al-Masmak fort; coffee roasters for sale in the suq.

ARAMCO WORLD INDEX FOR 1974

COMPILED BY EILEEN OLMSTED

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the hospital will also have what may be the largest color closed-circuit TV system in the world. Television signals can be transmitted to more than 500 color receivers and the system includes two entertainment channels, one educational, and one "on-line" live program. The special-care zone will have a black-and-white TV surveillance system utilizing 56 cameras. It sounds almost as if the 21st century will enter early, when this hospital goes into full operation.

Helping to guide other areas of Saudi Arabia towards the 21st century is the government's Central Planning Organization. In Riyadh I spoke to Richard Kaynor, a senior industrial economist (from the Stanford Research Institute) who at the time was working with the CPO. I asked him what he considered to be the guiding principle behind present Saudi planning. I had pressed the right button. Kaynor has a mind like a computer.

Kaynor: "As you know, Saudi Arabia is financially dependent pretty much on its oil, with the minor exception of exporting some hides and dates. Naturally the kingdom is interested in diversifying its economy—utilizing oil and oil products as a base. One of the main goals will be to utilize the natural gas of the Eastern Province in a number of different ways. Already, as you probably know, there are projects of some magnitude under consideration in both the eastern and western regions of the country, projects for such things as a petrochemical complex and a steel mill, oil refineries, the possibility of magnesium export, and so on. The petrochemical complex is perhaps the single most important project, because by producing some of the basic industrial raw materials such as polyethylene and PVC needed in plastic fabrication operations, the country will be able to start a number of smaller plastics industries in different regions."

"How about export of these products?"

Kaynor: "That's part of the aim. Not primarily for the money, but because Saudi Arabia wants to be a trading partner in products and now has little to trade. The Saudis could penetrate foreign markets because of their inexpensive source of raw material and power coming from gas and oil. They have already proved that it can be done as there are a number of plastic fabrication plants already in operation. There is one right here in Riyadh, 100-percent Saudi owned and operated, except for one foreign technician. They've been in business for over 10 years."

From petrochemicals Kaynor moved on to other things. "There are mineral deposits in the western region—copper is now looking pretty good, marble looks good, there are possibilities for bauxite, and so on. Then there is this business of silica—there is already a glass-bottle plant in the eastern region, making soft-drink bottles. And there are reportedly a number of very fine silica deposits in the kingdom which will lend themselves to a fiber glass operation which again would tie in with hydrocarbons."

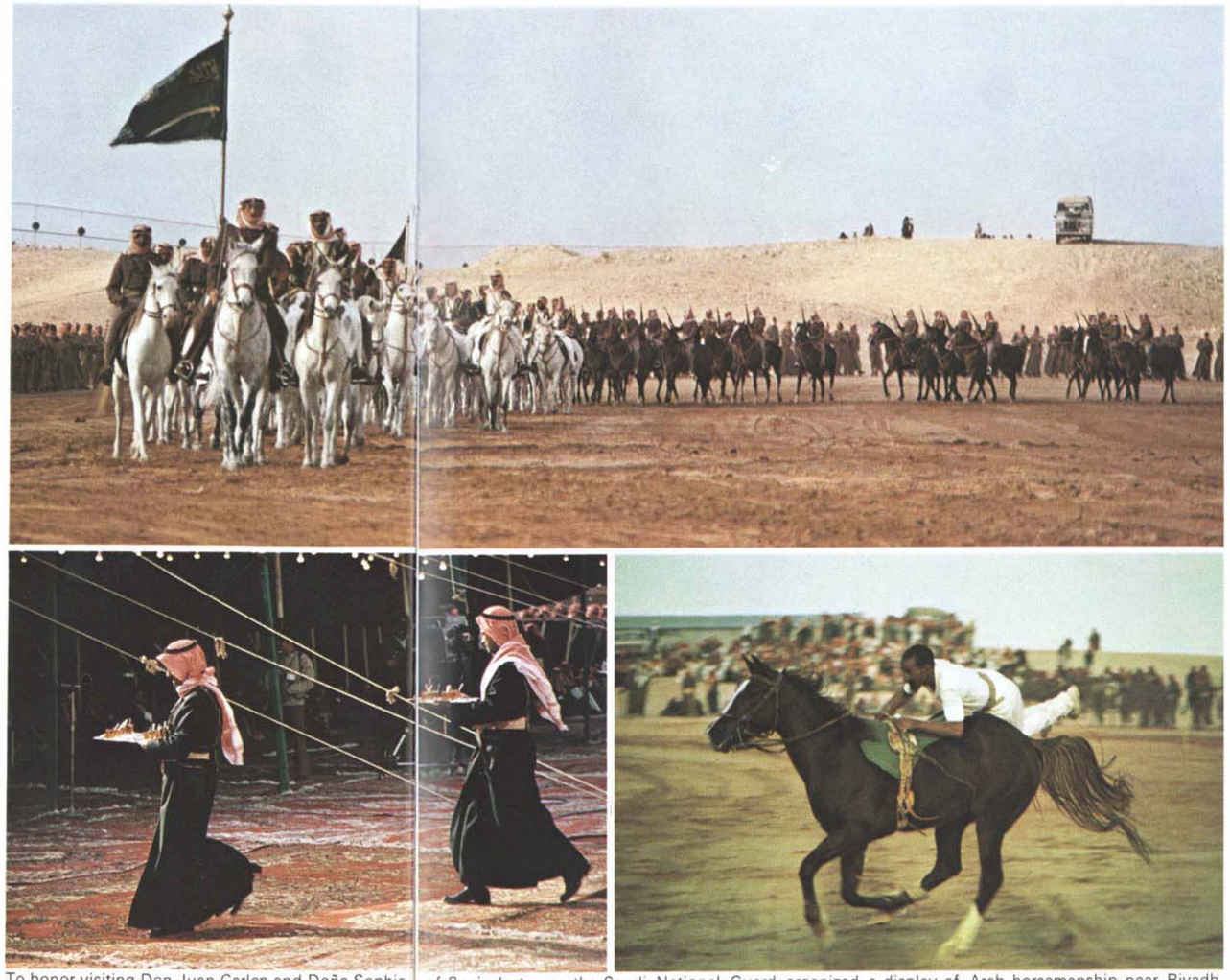
I asked if education figured prominently in the country's planning. Kaynor answered that there is a big push on at nearly every level of education. "The government is extremely aware of how important this is. On the university level they are already doing a lot of interesting things in research. I read an article just the other day about a number of Saudi scientists who are engaged in solar-energy research—the next logical step when the oil is used up. And they are certainly in the right spot for it," he added, smiling.

I'd seen the Qasim from the air. Now I was going to cover much of the same north-central region the hard way—by Land Rover. A friend from Dhahran met me in Riyadh with his vehicle loaded with camping equipment and food.

Jim Mandaville grew up in Arabia and as far as I can tell knows the name of every plant and animal in the kingdom (*Aramco World*, Jan.-Feb., 1968; and Sept.-Oct., 1968). Jim has crisscrossed the country and speaks fluent Arabic, so he would make a good guide for this leg of my trip.

The fine paved highway north from Riyadh travels through desert, mountainous areas and a number of villages. The architectural style in that area is a relic of an unsettled age. Surrounded by mud-and-brick walls, with watchtowers built all along the perimeter, the villages and their palm gardens form compact little worlds of their own. Within each little world every brownish mud-brick house with crenelated roof and tiny windows is another fortress-like private unit.

The further north we drove the greener the scenery became. Big rains had fallen



To honor visiting Don Juan Carlos and Doña Sophia of Spain last year, the Saudi National Guard organized a display of Arab horsemanship near Riyadh.

this winter. Even the desert, except the moving dunes, looked like a pale green carpet. On the highway hundreds of big diesel-powered trucks rumbled along in our same direction, rugs, tents, and waterskins tied dangling on the outside, seemingly two or three layers of goats and sheep stacked inside, with windblown Bedouin families riding happily on top. These are the ancient nomadic migrations modern style. They were heading north to the greenest pastures. Jim told me that nowadays many Bedouin families rent big trucks such as these to get their flocks to new grazing faster. Probably some of the men were following behind on foot with the camels.

We slept in the desert just outside 'Unayzah, one of the biggest towns in the Qasim. I awoke to the put-put-putting sound of what I thought at first was a small fishing boat. After some eye-rubbing it became clear that I was sleeping in the desert and that there were few fishing boats in the area. In fact, the putting came from nearby water pumps. Later we grew accustomed to waking to the rhythmic sound of water pumps, as this turned out to be the comforting early-morning theme song of most oasis towns.

After breakfasting on Mandaville's specialty, Tang and tea, we drove to the top of an escarpment overlooking 'Unayzah. Encircled by sand dunes, a protective tamarisk forest, date palms and small garden plots, the brownish mud houses and mosques of 'Unayzah looked serenely as if they had been there forever. Only some modern school buildings in the standard white-and-gray design one sees frequently throughout the country and the new telephone exchange reminded us that changes were sweeping in. From a photographer's point of view I was pleased that many 'Unayzah houses, though brand-new, still observed the harmonious style that had evolved over the ages to meet the needs of the climate.

Jim and I paid a courtesy call on the Amir of 'Unayzah, Hamid al-Khalid. The Amir, a young, good-looking man with quick, intelligent eyes, waved us in and ordered coffee for us. The coffee was served by his bodyguard, a black-eyed Bedouin with a revolver in his shoulder holster but a broad friendly smile across his face. We told the Amir that we had come to photograph the Qasim in the coolness and green of spring. He welcomed us warmly. "Of course, go and see and photograph anything you please." With Jim's help as translator, I asked the Amir how long ago the guardian forests had been planted here. "It's an ancient tradition," he replied. "They were planted a very long time ago. The trees protect our fields from the sand and on holidays family groups go out from the town to picnic in their shade."

The Qasim is a rich agricultural region. I asked what grew best around 'Unayzah and the Amir had an answer at his fingertips: "We have the vital date palms, of course, about 300,000 of them, also wheat, corn, alfalfa, barley and millet for livestock feed, tomatoes of different kinds, which we hope to be canning soon. Onions grow very successfully here, and we also raise seven different kinds of melon. Our livestock includes sheep, cows, chickens and about 12,000 camels, mostly for milk." He added with a chuckle: "And there is one escaped pet monkey running around. Now we are also introducing grapefruit, oranges, lemons, peaches, apricots and pomegranates and we're experimenting with different kinds of grapes. Some of them are doing very well."

Any Saudi official will tell you about schools, whether you ask or not. We didn't have to ask. Amir Hamid told us that in 'Unayzah there are now 14 elementary, three intermediate schools, and one secondary school for boys. There is a special school for the blind, with a vocational section. For adults and farm youth who work during the day there are five or six evening schools. There are now eight schools for girls, with some 2,300 students, 250 at intermediate level.

Amir Hamid offered to have his bodyguard guide us around the town. The Bedouin was well known and obviously liked by everyone we met. Up and down streets, alleys, covered passageways, through *suqs* and open-air markets, followed by a retinue of curious children, the three of us strolled until both Jim and I felt as though we had become qualified tourist guides for 'Unayzah ourselves.

On the outskirts of 'Unayzah we looked into a palm garden that conformed to my

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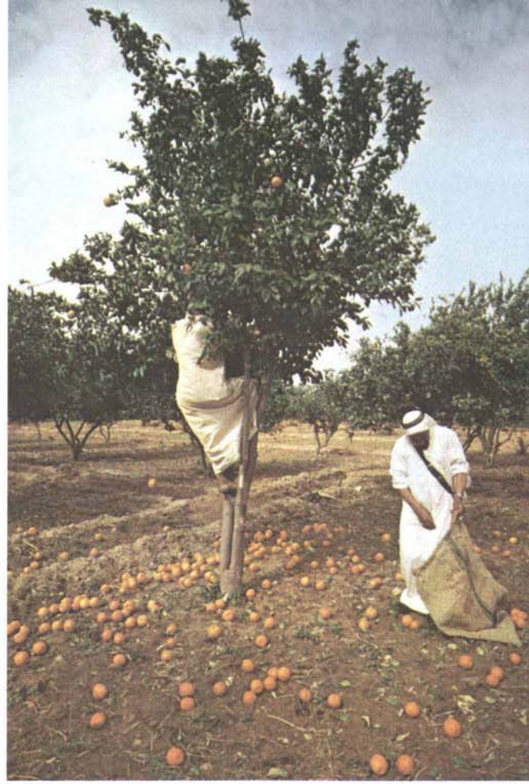

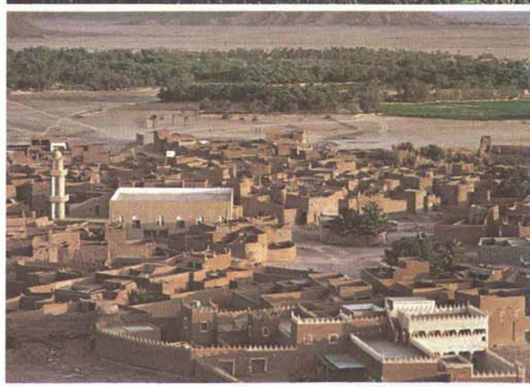

The Tuwaiq Escarpment (left) curves through the central Najd region. In 'Unayzah, farmers are planting oranges (top) alongside their traditional dates (center). Bottom: the Najd village of Marat.

A new road cuts through the sand near az-Zilfi in the Qasim. Opposite: the great pool at al-Kharj.

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idea of paradise. Three farmers were seated in the cool morning shade of a palm tree having coffee and tea. The ground was sprouting with young green wheat about 10 inches high. It seemed the most natural thing in the world for us to walk in and join them. The farmers instantly invited us to sit with them and served us coffee, then tea. They told us they were cutting the palm-leaf thorns so they could later climb up into the trees to harvest the dates.

After spending the night and dining in a hotel in 'Unayzah as the Amir's guests, Jim and I drove north through the nearby town of Buraydah, then headed west through open desert toward the town of az-Zilfi (*Aramco World*, Jan.-Feb., 1972). A good paved road is nearing completion through this difficult terrain, but we deliberately chose a desert route part of the way. Here too, the sand was like a green carpet and we passed hundreds of grazing camels. Black Bedouin tents were everywhere. Some had pickup trucks parked outside and we saw a motorcycle leaning against one tent wall. Towards evening a 75-foot, three-quarter-circle sand dune provided a fine shelter for our campsite.

A bird's sweet song woke me up. The wind, which came up fiercely during the night, had died, but it was still chilly. I had heard that particular bird before and asked Jim whether it was following us. "No," he explained. "That's *Umm Salem*, which means 'Salem's mother.' The Bedouins are very fond of that bird. They might hunt any other bird, but not *Umm Salem*. You find them everywhere in the desert."

In the town of az-Zilfi we bought more of the flat Arab bread for breakfast. Just south of the town, near a village called al-Ghat, Jim started feeling adventurous. He told me he thought there was an oasis and perhaps another town west of here, though there was not even a name on his map. We decided to explore, and bounced off in a westerly direction through an extremely desolate region. Here there was nothing green. After what seemed like hours we came to a flat full of bones. Camels' legs. Nothing else. Just bleached legs. Thousands of them. I felt a little spooked and would just as soon have turned around, but we continued.

Finally we climbed a rocky hill and spotted some watchtowers in the distance. We drove along a plateau and, suddenly, directly below us we saw: 1, a fine paved highway; 2, a brand-new school and an old oasis town beyond it; 3, a taxi stand. Laughing at ourselves, we drove into the town and found that it was called Tumayr. The road had just been completed and led right back to where we came from. And the mysterious Plain of the Bleached Camels' Legs, we were told, was the local slaughter house. After a camel is butchered for meat only the shanks are left.

From Tumayr back south to Riyadh the great explorers did not hit one single bump. It was a fine highway all the way. They entered Riyadh, stopped for a meal at the home of hospitable friends and moved on late in the afternoon, heading southeast. It was turning dark and we were looking for a suitable place to sleep in the desert. The capital is beginning to sprawl in that direction, but after passing Riyadh's brand-new multi-million-dollar refinery and a number of the automobile graveyards so familiar now in America we finally found some empty desert. It stormed again that night and was bitterly cold.

The morning brought no improvement. On the contrary, visibility was near zero. We were hoping we would be able to see a spectacular hole in the ground that we had come to photograph. We drove through al-Kharj, a flourishing agricultural area which was one of the kingdom's first experimental farms back at the close of the Second World War, then with a sand storm howling around us, drove on south into the desert. As far as I can tell Jim's sense of direction is something like a Bedouin's. In the middle of a brown dust cloud he hit it right on the nose.

We stepped out of the car and, buffeted by the wind, walked over to what seemed simply like a big hole in the middle of the desert. It was oval-shaped, about 200 yards long and at least a hundred wide. We moved closer to the edge and looked down. There it was, a black, deep natural pool. A ladder led down to the surface far below us. Some kids had climbed down and were happily splashing around. A roaring pumping station on top sucked the warm, sweet water up to be piped off to al-Kharj and spilled across thirsty fields there.

Returning to al-Kharj, we stopped to look at an ancient, now abandoned, system of irrigation, called *aflaj*. Mud protrusions shaped like ships' funnels stretched in a line through the flat dry landscape about 10-12 yards apart for as far as we could see. Looking into each funnel we could see down into what had once been an underground irrigation canal. In ancient times the ingenious people who built this complex system could extract water anywhere along the way, or climb down one of the funnels to clear obstructions.

The windstorm got progressively worse, and visibility was nearing zero. As we left al-Kharj for Riyadh we passed a Toyota pickup truck driven by a farmer. In the back, like a friendly dog, stood a large black goat with its front legs up on the driver's cab, bleating away, his ears straight out behind in the wind.

THE BUSY GATEWAY

Jiddah's bustling port stretches out to sea and its buildings are reaching for the sky.

With the Kingdom's continuing growth, Jiddah's port, completed in 1973, is already expanding. Auto imports, for example, rose 165 percent in one year.

Saudia's Boeing 707 circled over Jiddah, doing me a favor without knowing it. The crisp March morning was memorably beautiful. Intensely blue were the sky and the Red Sea—the whites and yellows of Jiddah's buildings reflecting darts of sharp light. During the four years since my last visit the skyline had changed almost beyond recognition.

Skyscrapers had transformed the character of the city even more than its horizontal expansion. Slender white minarets reminded me that this was Saudi Arabia, but I had to look hard to spot some of the lovely tall old Jiddah houses, with their wooden lattice balconies (*Aramco World*, September-October, 1971).

After landing, a walk downtown confirmed what I had seen from the air. Parts of the sprawling, colorful old *suq* were still there, but smack in the center of that busy market area an elegant 25-story apartment building, the Queen's Building, and an adjoining, equally elegant office building had just been completed.

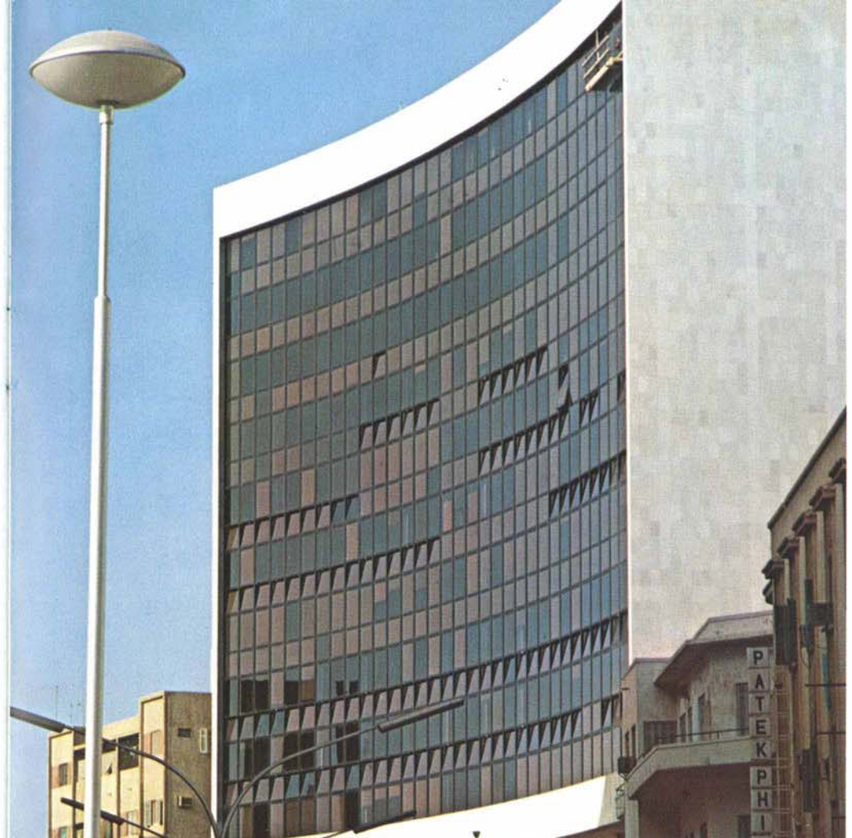
A big commotion was going on in the Queen's Building later that evening. I was strolling in with the three-year old daughter of a friend who had just moved into one of the apartments when she shouted, "Look, Tor, look!" Possessing an innate nervousness about large, excited crowds, I held back on the fringes until I realized that the mood was good-natured, bordering on hilarious. It turned out that the new buildings' escalators had just been opened to traffic. They were the first in the country, I was told, and joined the street-level lobby with the mezzanine. With something of the excitement that villagers of several generations ago must have felt when they saw their first automobile, hundreds of people had come out to try them—young and old, men, and a few daring women. Some were nervous about stepping on or off and, of course, like their counterparts anywhere, there were a few boys trying to run up the down escalator. At the insistence of my three-year-old friend, a lady of strong character, we pushed our way into the enthusiastic melee to partake in the trial runs.

Later, as I moved about the city, refamiliarizing myself with old haunts, it seemed to me as though all Jiddah was caught up in the excitement of things happening and the modernization of the country. Being the port of entry for most pilgrims, whether arriving by ship or by air, as well as the diplomatic capital of the kingdom and its biggest trading center, Jiddah is a cosmopolitan, friendly and tolerant city.

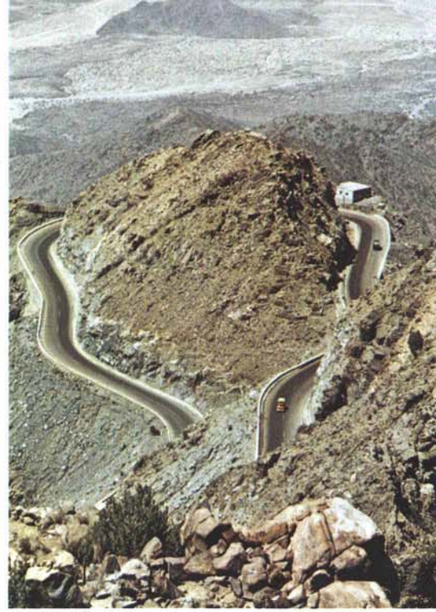
To accommodate the ever-increasing flow of travelers, a contract has been awarded for the construction of an enormous new international airport with two terminals, one for regular passenger traffic and the other for the peak demands of the Pilgrimage, when more than a million people move in and out of nearby Mecca in the period of a few weeks, a great number of them through Jiddah's airport (*Aramco World*, Nov.-Dec., 1974).

The seaport has not been neglected, either. The new King Faisal Port was opened by His Majesty in early 1973. With Abdul 'Aziz Uwaydah, a knowledgeable young Saudi public relations man with a marvelous sense of humor, I went to visit it. Mr. Ali Malaika, director general of the port, was an impeccably robed man whose perfectly accented, softly spoken English did not hide the dynamism of his character. Said Mr. Malaika: "We now have eight berths and construction is underway for four more. Of course, we already have plans for further expansion, since trade is increasing so rapidly. For example, the import of motor vehicles through Jiddah last year increased by 165 percent. In the same year there was a 502-percent increase in cement imports. Both are good indicators of the rise in prosperity throughout the kingdom."

Mr. Malaika assigned 'Isam Attar, a pipe-smoking engineer recently graduated from a university in the U.S., to take us on a tour of the port. The whole spacious area, neatly laid out with modern administration and storage buildings, a fine cafeteria and a mosque, was immaculately clean. Except for the ships it looked more like a college campus than a port. I told Mr. Attar that I had seen many ports throughout the world in the course of my work but this was without a doubt the cleanest. He chuckled and said with justified pride, "You've just



An elegant new office block (top) in downtown Jiddah and the desalination plant nearby on the Red Sea.



The Jiddah-Taif road snakes up more than 4,500 feet.

said the right thing! This is my responsibility. Every time a ship has finished loading or unloading a team moves in to clean up every bit of scrap." Other ports might well copy this admirable system.

It was evening rush hour when we left the port. The din of the traffic in Jiddah was every bit as loud as that of Riyadh. Abdul Aziz hit his horn with great frequency, a staccato "beep-beep." It reminded me of something. "Abdul Aziz, have you ever seen the Roadrunner cartoon?" I asked him. He spun around, laughing, nearly losing control of the car. "The Roadrunner? Of course I know him. We see him on television here all the time. He's the funniest thing that ever happened! That's why I beep my horn like that."

Abdul Aziz is a great roadrunner himself. One day we drove from Jiddah to Taif in the mountains west of the coastal plain about 90 miles from Jiddah. Taif lies at an altitude of 4,900 feet and the road up is a dizzying, spiraling climb. We took pictures of this cool, attractive resort town, went on an excursion with Abdul Aziz's brother, and descended to Jiddah—back in time for lunch.

Suddenly, about the middle of March, Jiddah turned hot and humid. Happily it didn't happen until the day before Abdul Aziz and I lifted off in a DC9, bound for Abha, the lofty capital of mountainous 'Asir Province in the southwestern corner of Saudi Arabia.

THE GREEN HIGHLANDS

Colorful villages and terraced gardens give flavor to the mountainous southwest.

A village near Khamis Mushayt, 'Asir.

At takeoff in our Saudia jet, once we were a thousand feet off the ground the heat haze over Jiddah became so thick we could hardly see the city. The plane turned east toward Taif and the haze lifted as we headed inland from the humid coast. Approaching the mountains, I spotted the black ribbon of asphalt twisting up the way we'd driven a few days before. Below us lay a moonscape. There was sand in between the black, barren hills and rocks—as if someone had tried to pour water on the scorched rocks to soothe them but, pushing the wrong button, showered them with sand instead of water.

Gradually the sand areas thinned out and there were just darkish-gray jagged mountains. Then, south of Taif, there was an abrupt change. The mountains, from this altitude, took on a faint green tint, almost resembling mould. From the plane windows we started to see a different world: green valleys, numerous villages, and, everywhere, laboriously terraced hills.

When we got off the plane in Abha we stepped into cool, crisp air. The sun was still shining but black clouds threatened on the horizon. After checking into our hotel, Abdul Aziz and I went to pay our respects to Shaikh Muhammad, Administrator of Abha Amirate, and Shaikh Ibrahim, Deputy Amir. Warm and courteous was our reception. And it didn't stop there. Our generous hosts put a four-wheel-drive vehicle with a driver at our disposal and told us that if we needed anything we were only to ask. Unfortunately, His Royal Highness Khalid bin Faisal, dynamic Amir of 'Asir Province and a son of King Faisal, was in Riyadh on business but as it turned out I had the good luck to have a meeting with Prince Khalid as I transited Riyadh later.

Just before dawn the following morning our driver, a lively Bedouin named Husain Ali, arrived at our hotel. Jabal as-Sudah (Black Mountain), at 9,000 feet the highest peak in the kingdom, was our goal. Before losing sight of Abha during the climb to the ridge on the west, we stopped and looked back at the city. To me Abha was a fitting symbol of what was happening in the whole of Saudi Arabia. The old and the new, sometimes the extremes of both, coexist there. Little farm plots in the middle of the city are dwarfed by neighboring apartment buildings. Old castles and modern villas fight for space. New cars on wide avenues zoom past donkeys turning up narrow alleys between the picturesque, fortress-like traditional homes.

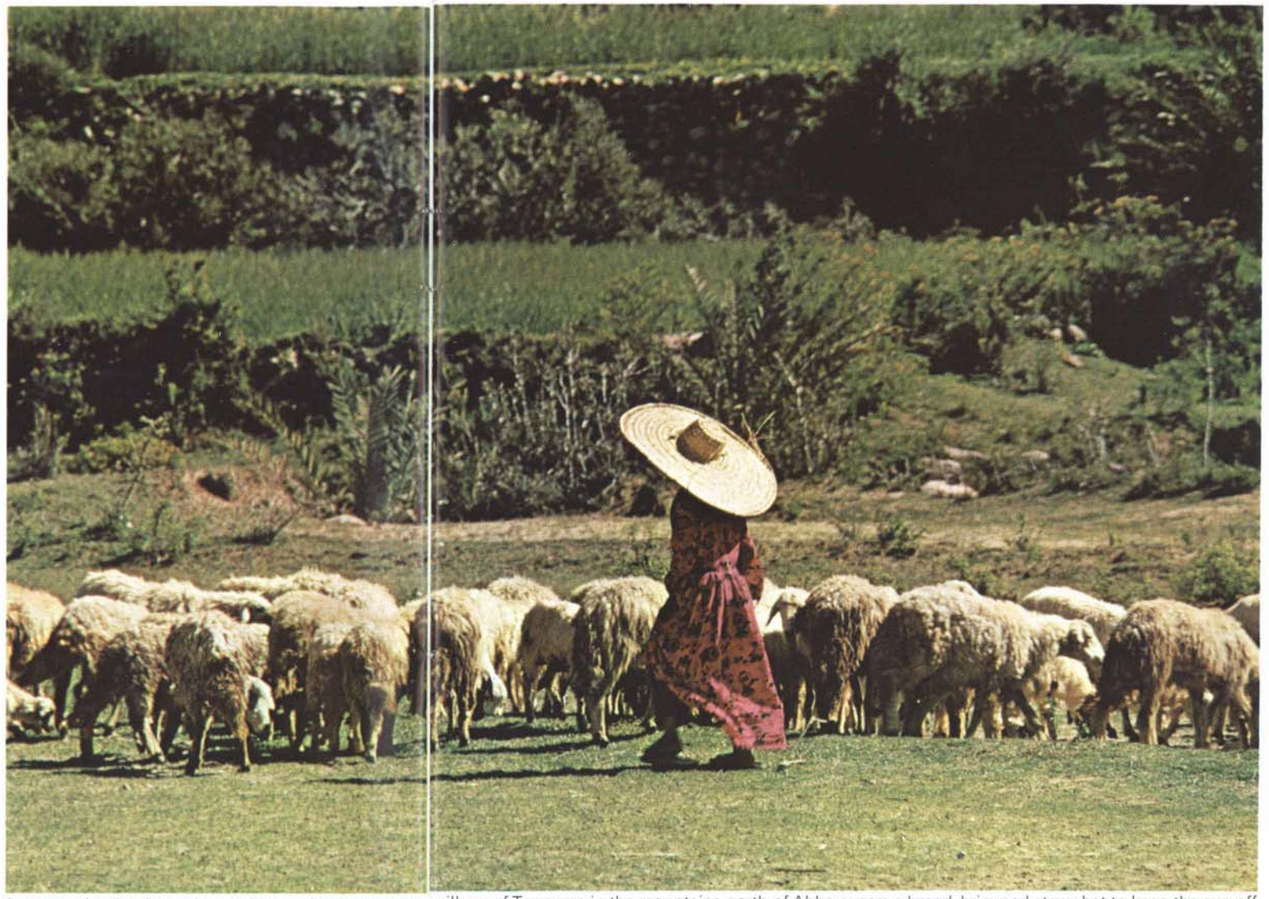
We got into the car and moved on, climbing steadily up green, terraced hills past numerous colorful villages. About half way up the mountain the peace of the idyllic countryside was broken by the roar of dozers, scrapers, dumpers and tractors. A new, wide paved road is blasting its way right up to the top. Saudi Arab operators in *ghutras* perched on top of the huge American machines, expertly raced up and down the unfinished roadbed scraping and dumping, scraping and dumping.

As we approached the top of as-Sudah, the air got colder and the villages tended to be less colorful. From the brightly painted mud and brick of the lower valleys the homes changed to gray stone construction. The remote village of as-Sudah itself sat on the flank of the mountain like a big gray stone fortress. As we climbed around the town we realized that there seemed to be only four entrances, all narrow and easily blocked. Inside the walls we occasionally had to double over to get through covered passages and tunnel-like alleys.

Our four-wheel-drive vehicle pushed on up the rocky trail to the top of the mountain. Green grass, a cool, clear brook, wildflowers and a juniper forest spiced with the fresh smell of spring rewarded us there. Husain Ali, the driver, excitedly pulled me over to the running brook and made me drink from it, then pulled me on to the grove of trees. To this man of the desert it must have seemed inconceivable that such a place could exist.

At the far edge of the ridge Jabal as-Sudah dropped abruptly several thousand feet into wild canyons leading down through the coastal desert to the Red Sea. A few tiny villages clung precariously to the mountainside here and there. I had not seen anything like this since visiting the wild Copper Canyon area in Mexico's Sierra Madre. For a moment, in fact, I felt I was back in western Mexico.

We returned to Abha and that afternoon took a gentler road east to Khamis Mushayt, a boom town of about 40,000 souls, about the same size as the provincial capital. Husain Ali guided us on foot through the open-air market there.



A young shepherdess, alone with her flock near the village of Tanouma in the mountains north of Abha, wears a broad-brimmed straw hat to keep the sun off.

A wild confusion of things was for sale: herbs, fruits, vegetables, meat, Bedouin jewelry, colorful local dresses, scented waters, antique guns, ceremonial daggers with silver handles, sheep, cattle and even camels. Adjoining the outdoor market were shops that carried the latest European, American, and Japanese products—transistor radios, Dior perfumes, American canned goods and cigarettes.

Then we drove on to see some of the prosperous villages in the neighboring green hills. It was for me a strange new part of Arabia which I had hardly realized existed, lovely and rural. A country lane wound its way up and down gentle slopes, past lush fields of wheat, barley, tomatoes, onions and alfalfa. Peach, apple, and plum trees were in the pinkest bloom. Saudi farmers were tilling their fields, plowing, pulling weeds. Women in huge straw hats and long dresses demurely herded sheep and goats in the hills. They turned modestly away as we passed, though very few were veiled.

Every single village had a different character, literally a different color, all beautiful and well cared for. Brown was the base color of the first village. Two or three-story houses, walls slanting slightly in towards the crenelated roofs, every window and the top of the walls painted white. Like a chocolate cake with vanilla frosting, I thought. From a distance the small square windows with the paint around them looked like friendly eyes.

In the next village the white frosting was the same but the mud walls of the houses had layered rows of stone slate jutting out to protect them against rain, and broad stripes of brown and white were painted right around the house as far down as the base which was painted a grayish black. Other villages were like a kaleidoscope, every house painted in different colors. Because of some inborn color sense it somehow worked very well—either the villagers were consistent or consistently inconsistent. Old conically shaped watchtowers and the ruins of abandoned forts dotted every prominent hill or mountaintop. Around one tiny village I counted 11 watchtowers.

No sooner did we stop somewhere than someone would come over and invite us in for coffee, tea and, if we wished, a meal. Driving further into this mountain dreamland, the three of us, American, city Saudi and Bedouin, were all completely enchanted.

Thirsty by now, we accepted the next invitation for tea. Our host, an elderly man of great dignity with a big, white beard, led us into his *majlis*, the formal sitting room for visitors, telling us all the while what an honor it was for him to receive such distinguished guests.

The homes of 'Asir, apparently, are even more colorful inside than out. The rug on the floor was basically red, as were the cushions placed around the walls. The walls and ceiling were painted in stripes of white, blue, green and red. The entire room was sparkling, shiny, and spotlessly clean. To me this was the work of some natural genius. Anywhere else such a confusion of colors and patterns would have been unnerving. This *majlis*, on the contrary, was not only cheerful, but restful as well.

I saw my host lean over and whisper to his son, who leaped to his feet. I quickly poked Husain Ali, for I knew what this meant. A sheep was about to be slaughtered to feast the honored guests—and we had an appointment back in Abha that evening. Apologizing profusely, we managed to leave this kind old man without hurting his feelings—much as we wanted to stay.

Facing us the following day was a scene as wild and rugged as everything we'd seen the previous afternoon had been gentle. The canyon in front of our car dropped three or four thousand feet. We crept along a narrow dirt road clinging perilously to the cliff side. The road led to Jaizan on the Red Sea, and that is where we were going. After a hair-raising descent a perfect asphalt road greeted the literally shaken travelers when we reached the coastal flats that lead to the harbor town of Jaizan. "The road will soon be extended all the way up to Abha," Hussain Ali told us comfortingly.

Again we entered another world. It could have been East Africa. From the cool air of the 'Asir mountains we had driven down onto scorching plains—part desert, partly irrigated and planted with hardy tomatoes, durra and other cereal grains. There were no more of the fortress-like buildings. In startling contrast, the villages on these plains consisted of straw huts shaped like upside-down onions. Many of the farmers around the town of ad-Darb looked more African than Arab, or perhaps like a mixture of the two. Of course, Africa was only about 200 miles away across the Red Sea. Because of the heat many of the men worked dressed only in loincloths, and the women wore light, colorful dresses rarely accompanied by veils.

Jaizan, the main town of the region, is an

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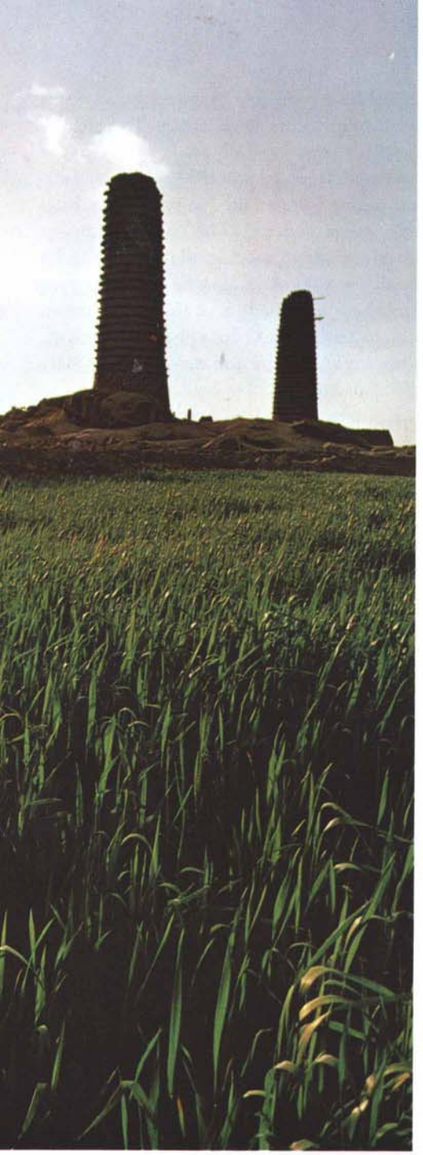

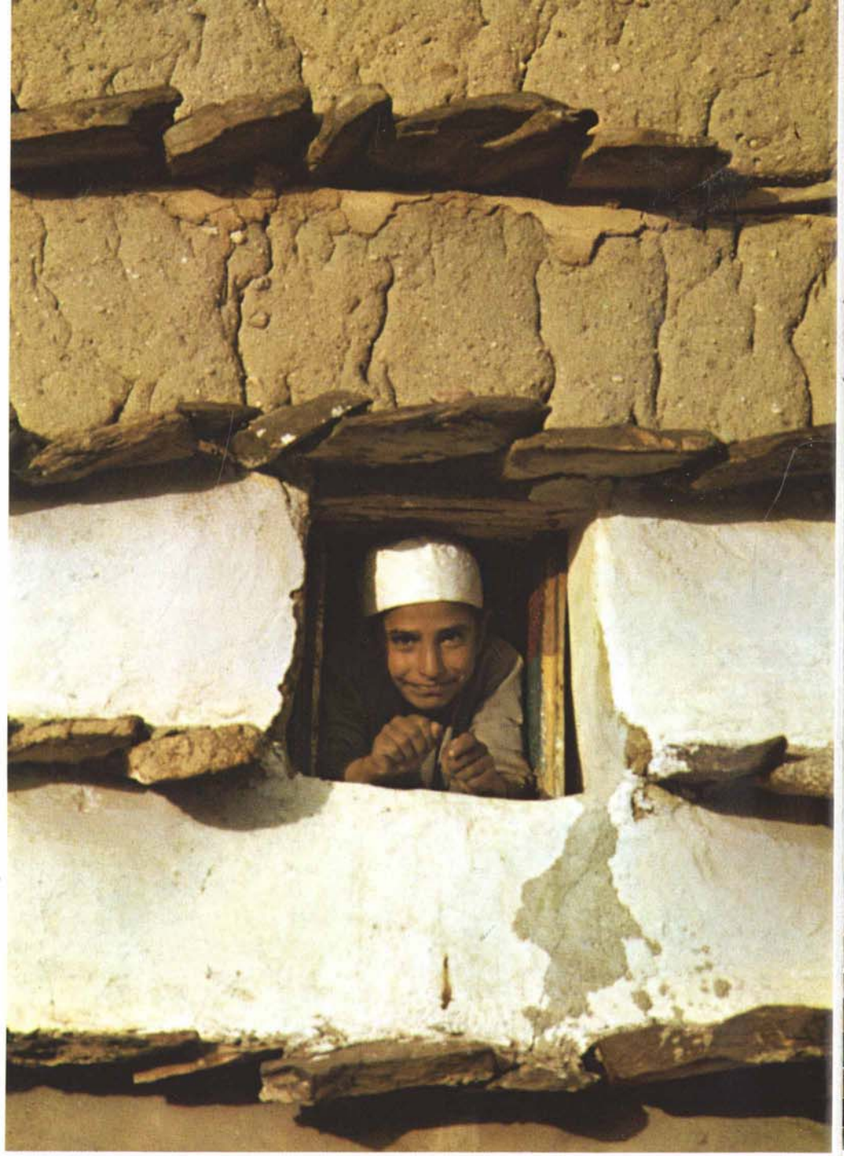

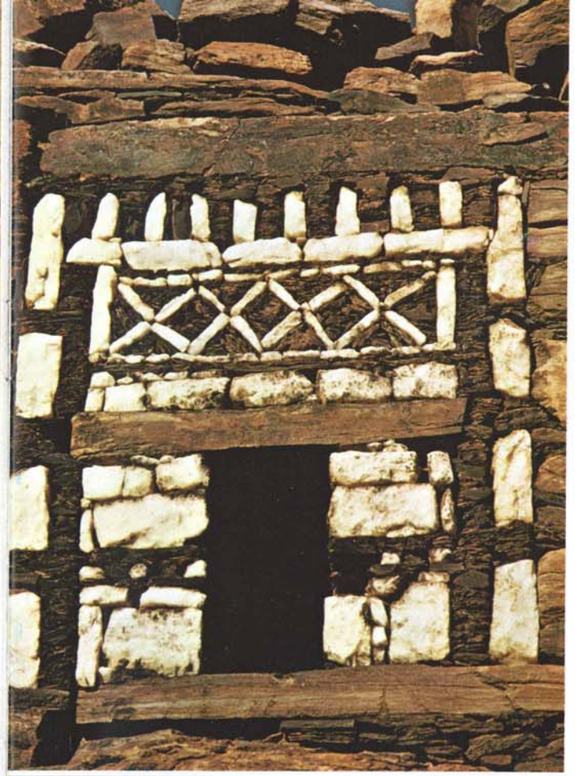

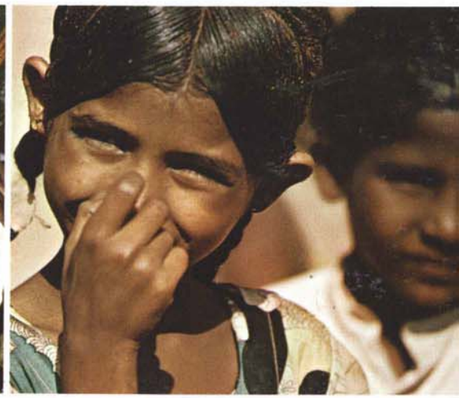

The green highlands of 'Asir Province, in the mountainous southwest of Saudi Arabia, have a rich and varied architectural heritage. There are slim watchtowers (above, left), relics of a less settled age, and fortress-like houses (center) built of multicolored stone or brightly painted adobe mud brick. Some have tiny windows and crenelated roofs, others layered rows of stone slate jutting out to protect the walls against the seasonal rains. Photographer Eigeland also found the people colorful and hospitable. On the torrid Red Sea coast live tribesmen who wear the unusual hats typical only of their region (right, center) and (right, bottom) fishermen like this one of Jaizan.

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incongruous mixture of concrete houses and straw huts, often within the same walled compound. Abdul Aziz explained that the huts are cooler but the new houses are more practical in other respects, so the local citizens cleverly resort to both. Numerous small fishing boats were anchored just off the beach. Wading ashore, the fishermen brought in their catches strung on poles carried across their shoulders.

My time in Saudi Arabia had flown by. The whole country had changed so much since I'd seen it four years before and it will certainly continue to change at an ever-faster pace. As a photographer I considered myself extremely fortunate to have seen and recorded so much of it before all the old is swept away. As I have indicated, the strange and beautiful region of 'Asir is symbolic in many ways. In Riyadh again, I talked about this and other things with His Royal Highness Khaled bin Faisal, Amir of 'Asir Province, who granted me an interview.

" 'Asir's development started fairly recently," Prince Khaled told me, "as in the rest of the kingdom. Since Saudi Arabia started producing oil in quantity some years ago our national income has been rising yearly. The first development took place as we planned, in the holy places—in Mecca, Medina, and the port of Jiddah, so that Muslims who came from all over the world on their Pilgrimage should be met with all the facilities they need. The capital, Riyadh, was the second priority, and of course, the Eastern Province, where most of the oil is actually produced. Then began the development of the rest of the kingdom. I went to 'Asir three years ago and I think that in those three years things have changed all over Saudi Arabia. Income has risen so fast that we have to constantly revise our programs. I think you'll find the same thing happening if you go to any other province in the kingdom."

"Prince Khaled, could you tell me a little about some of the main development plans for 'Asir the next few years?"

"Right now we're putting all our efforts into basic improvements such as our water and road programs. We have already completed a lot of roads and we have a program which includes more than 600 miles of new construction in the next five years. We are studying a dam-construction program for the whole region because, as you know, the mountains and valleys of 'Asir receive more rain than any other part of Saudi Arabia. It rains during almost the entire year, but especially in the spring and summer seasons, when you don't find rain anywhere else in the kingdom.

"Education and health are high priorities. And then we are also trying to rebuild our main cities like Abha and Khamis Mushayt, which are no longer the little towns they used to be. Their population is growing very rapidly—both cities now have about 30-40 thousand people. Unfortunately, the population figures for the southwestern region as a whole are not yet very reliable but we estimate about two million inhabitants."

"Prince Khaled, as a photographer I am very fond of the beautiful local architecture in 'Asir. I have a feeling that in building modern houses, hospitals, schools, and so

The highlands drop steep and barren to the coast.

on, you are trying to respect the traditional forms."

"Yes, actually this is one of the problems that we are facing. Many people are destroying the old houses which I, too, find very beautiful and rebuilding, as they say, 'modern houses,' which I personally find very ugly. We can't stop private individuals from building houses their own way but for official government projects we have already started to use designs which maintain the traditional architectural style of the region. Any government building under construction now should have an exterior facade in harmony with our past and we are also trying to think of ways to encourage people to do the same. We hope that when people see some of these handsome government-built buildings, some of which will soon be finished, they will like them and be tempted to copy this approach in their private dwellings."

"Prince Khaled, the idea of tourism is something quite new in Saudi Arabia, but I have heard of this in connection with 'Asir. What are the plans?"

"For now our plans are limited to attracting visitors from within the kingdom, and also our neighbors from the Arabian Gulf states to come and spend the summer here. No further than that for the time being, as such things take time, as you know. The roads will help a great deal. There is another road projected to begin construction next year which will run from 'Asir directly to Riyadh."

"Your Highness, are there plans for the development of agriculture?"

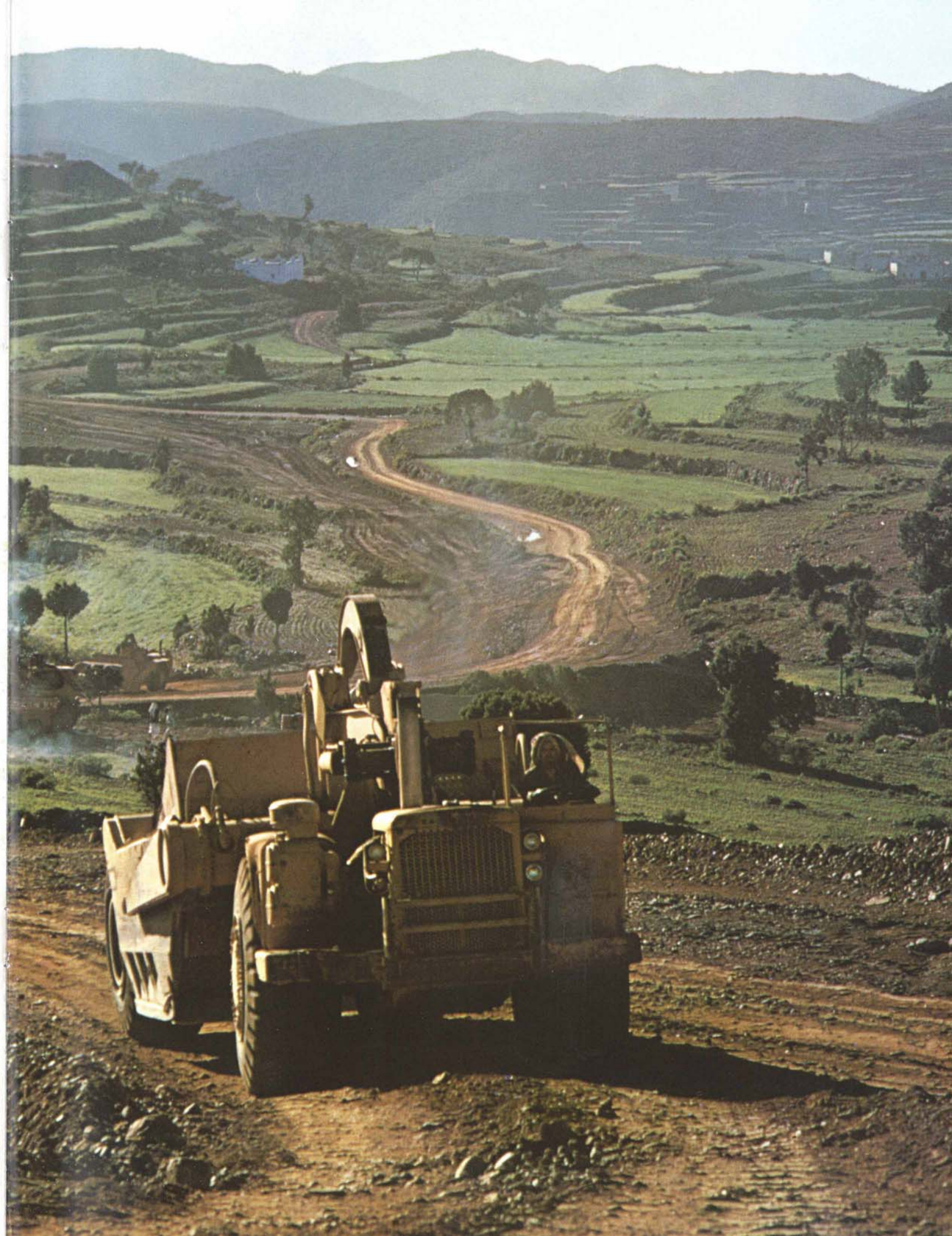
"A large program, some of it already underway. During the last three months we have had committees of experts visiting us in the 'Asir on a regular basis, and they have made many changes. We expect the major part of our plans to be completed in about five years. We'll grow principally cereals and fruits. We've found that fruits which grow in Lebanon will grow in 'Asir."

Then I asked Prince Khaled if he would like to find oil in 'Asir Province.

The Prince chuckled and answered. "Well, the way the world is right now what would we do with the money? I think we want water more than oil in 'Asir. I hate to think of too many smoking factories in this green agricultural region."

"Prince Khaled, one more question—and it does not refer to just 'Asir in particular. I have seen that Saudi Arabia is changing extremely rapidly . . ." Prince Khaled broke in: "Unfortunately!" he exclaimed. Then he continued.

"Unfortunately, in the sense that change must be slow enough to insure that it is for better, not for worse. But obviously every change is *not* always for the better. We want to keep our character, we don't want to spoil that. We don't want to lessen the importance of faith and religion among the people of the kingdom. Change which comes as fast as it has during the last two or three years can be overwhelming, even frightening. And we are hoping—but it is still just a hope—that we can win this struggle to continue to change, to grow and prosper, but always while keeping our national character and preserving the religion and faith of our citizens as strong as it is now. I don't know whether we will succeed, but above all, that is our goal for the people of Saudi Arabia."



Bulldozers build a new road to Jabal as-Sudah.