

## **Yemen – Arabia Felix – A fantastic experience – Maree Papworth –Part 2**

When traveling, I do not keep a written diary; rather, the record of my trips to over 70 countries is in thousands of photographs. This Yemen trip (in 1995) was prior to a digital camera so leafing through approximately 700 photos (chosen from twice as many) in 3 albums has been a marvelous trip down memory lane.

### **On the road to Ibb, Taiz and Hudaydah**

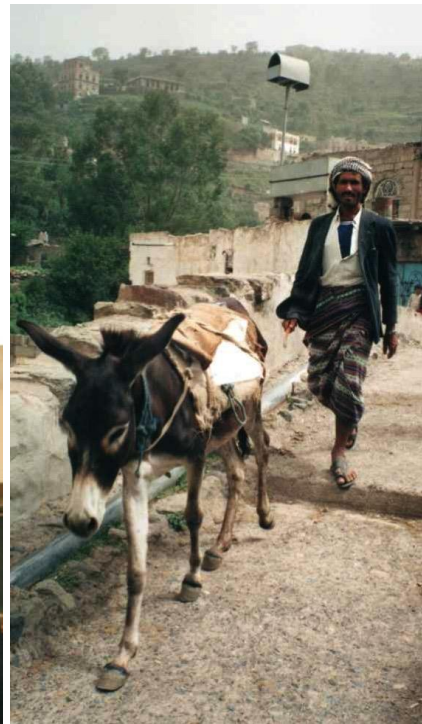
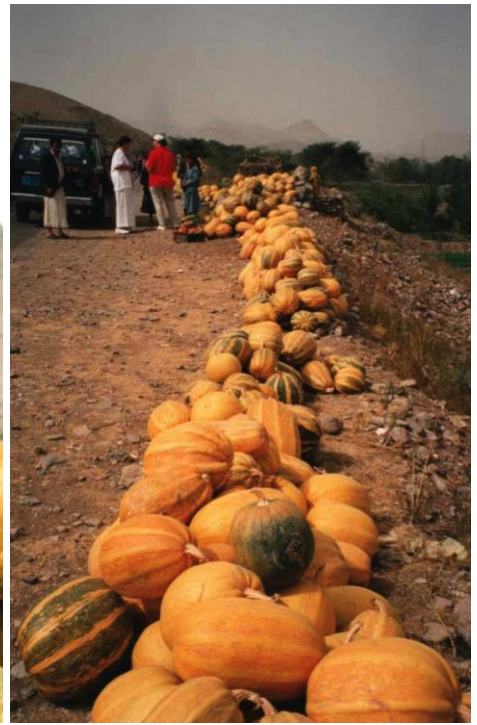
Travelling south from Sana'a via the central highlands, we passed through the fertile Dhamar area, a major agricultural region.

Archeological studies show that farming in this area started some 7,000 years ago. As well as diverse crops of vegetables and fruit, herding of sheep & goats and Arabian horse breeding, the area is well known for its coffee.

The hotel vehicle was comfortable enough with just 3 passengers, although the suspension needed attention. We appreciated the frequent stops for coffee or sweet tea, made with sweetened condensed milk and cardamom, offered along the roadside. This gave us a chance to meet, with smiles and hand gestures, the local people. We also had our meals at these roadside stops – more about that later.

### **Scenes and people along the way to Ibb**



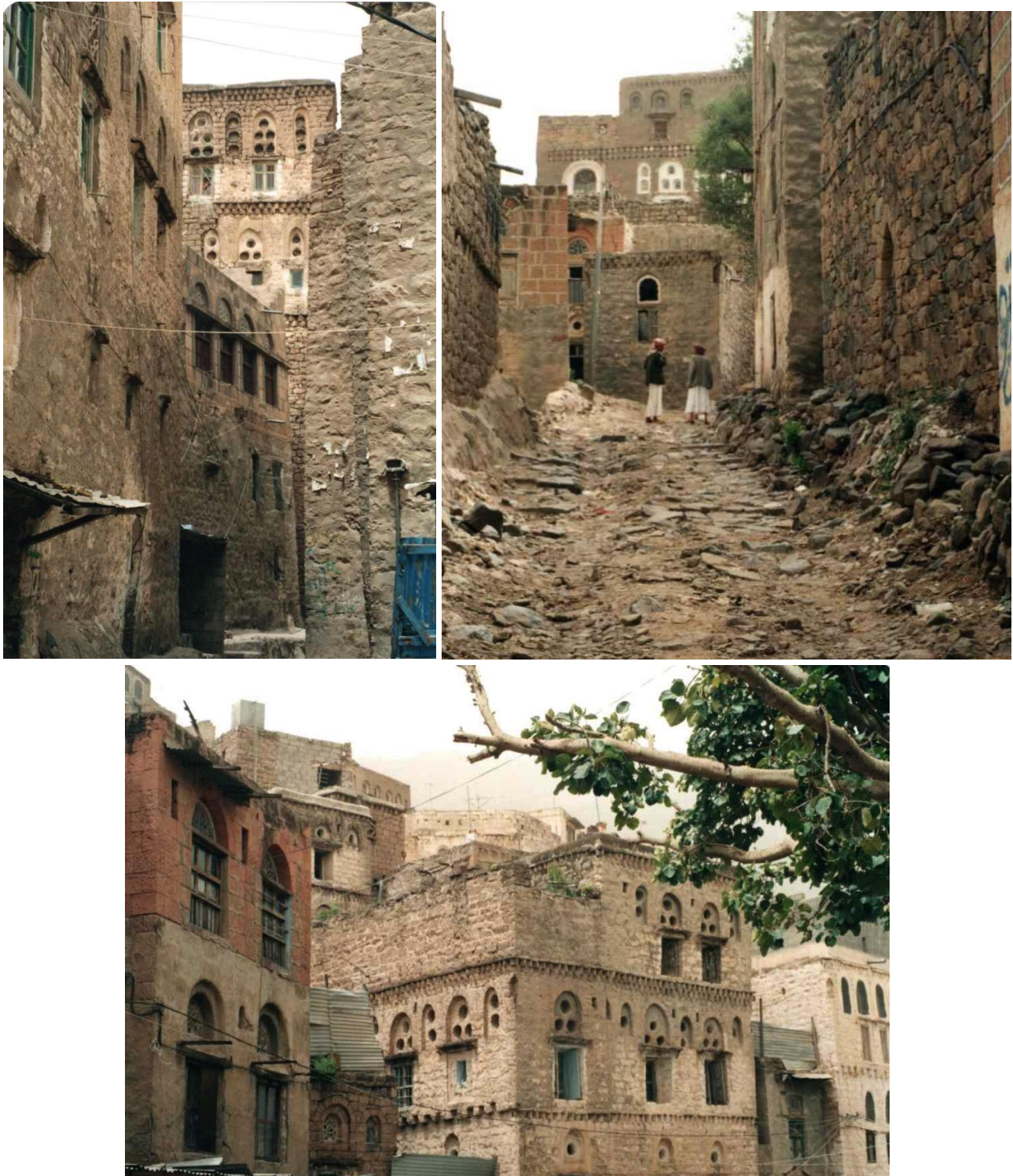




We travelled 194 km from Sana'a to the city of Ibb, a market town and once the administrative centre for the Ottomans.

Among other crops in this area is khat (Arabic qat, a mild narcotic). It was introduced to Yemen before the Islamic era and nowadays takes up areas where food crops once grew and consumes a large amount of the country's water supply. In Yemen, there are about 40 kinds of khat grown at different altitudes. Khat consumption induces mild euphoria and excitement. Khat chewing is seen as a social pastime. (At driver Ali's insistence, we tasted some rather bitter leaves but did not try chewing it - we had heard many stories about the effect Khat can have on the unwary.)

### **Ibb – Old area inside the city walls**







Susan snapping some willing subjects



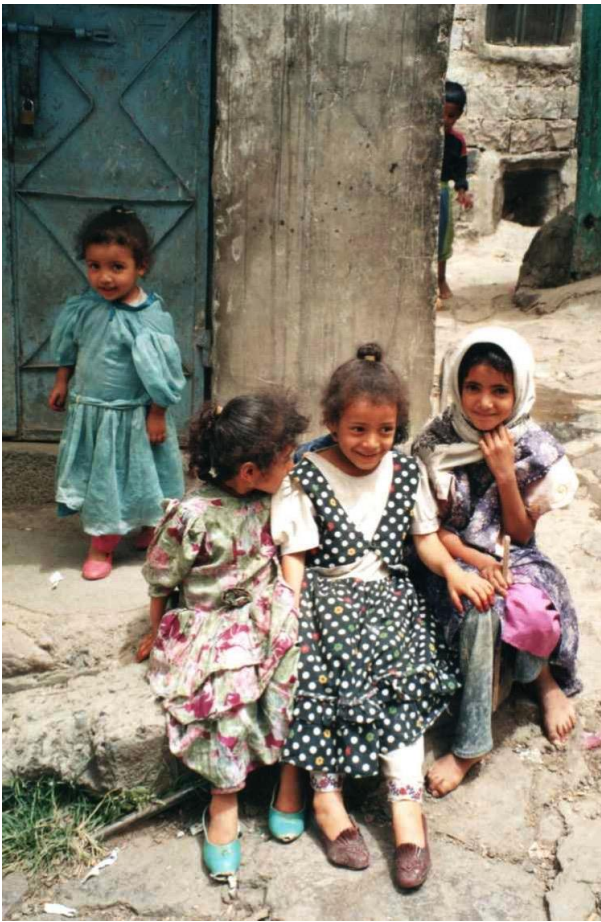
Maree in the open main square of Ibb. This area would be crowded on Saturdays for the market.

The children that we met throughout our trip were delightful. The younger, say under five years, were generally shy but interested in sharing space with us and happy to be photographed.

At one mosque we were met by three boys about ten years of age who greeted us in three languages (French, German, English), trying to determine our nationality. When asked how they had learnt these languages, they said “from you” meaning from tourists. Impressive young Yemenis they then interpreted for the mosque guide who spoke no English.

We had not crossed paths with many tourists, certainly no busloads as such, only occasional groups of four to six people travelling in one or two vehicles with a guide and a driver.





Another happy group.



Distance covered in 3 days.

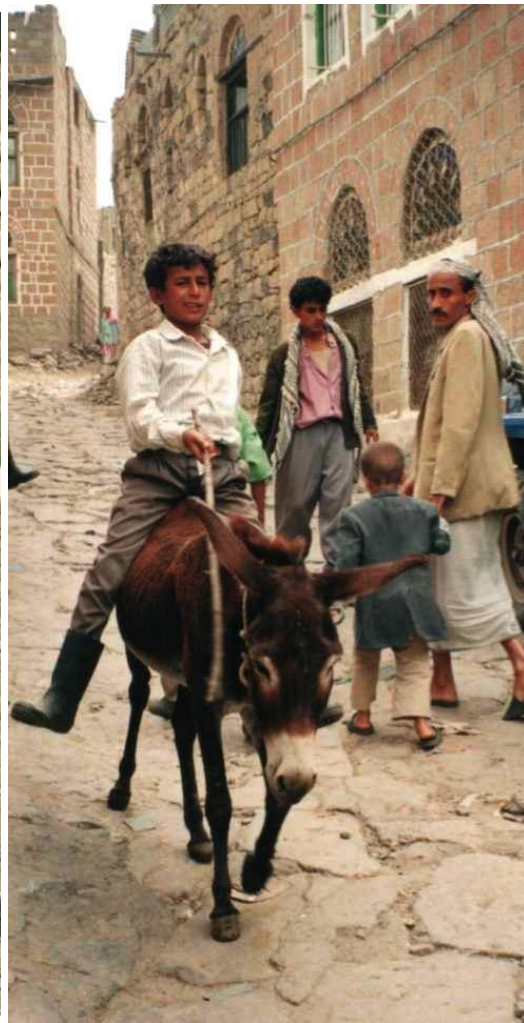
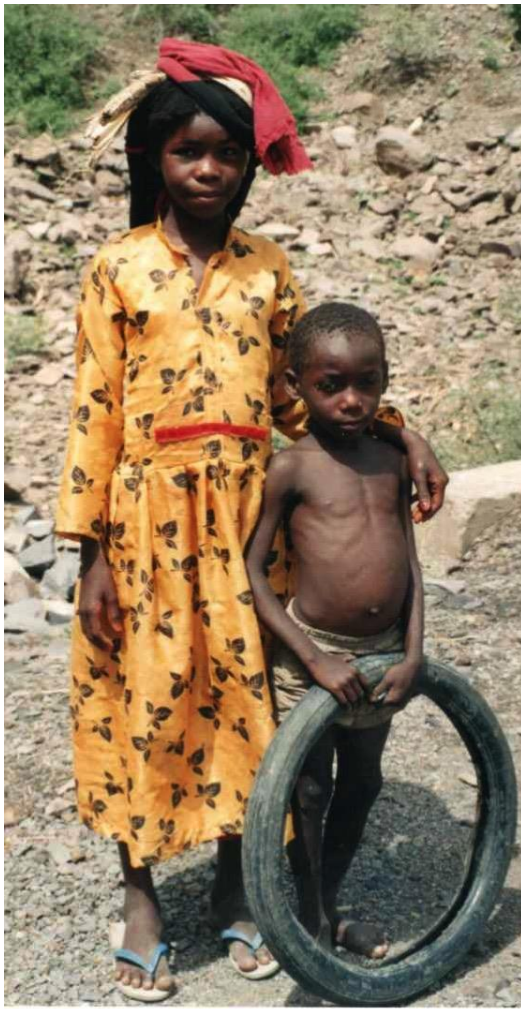
From Ibb we continued towards Taiz, with a stop in Jiblah to visit one of Yemen's oldest and most beautiful mosques – the Queen Arwa Mosque. This building at the start of construction in 1056 was to be a palace. Queen Arwa, who ruled the area 1085 to 1138, had it completed as a mosque and she is apparently buried inside it.

### Jiblah and the Queen Arwa mosque

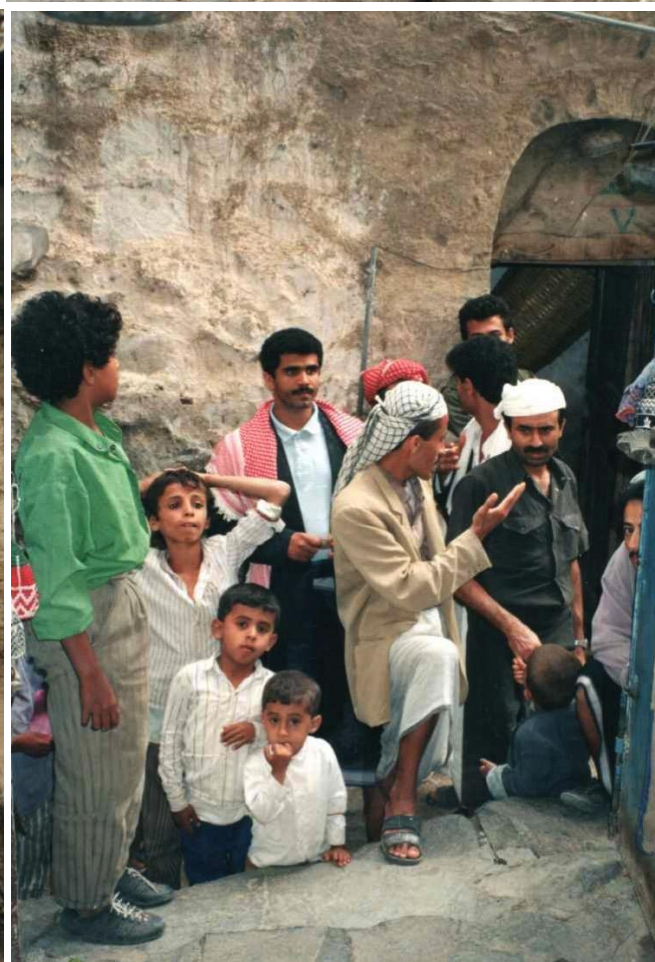
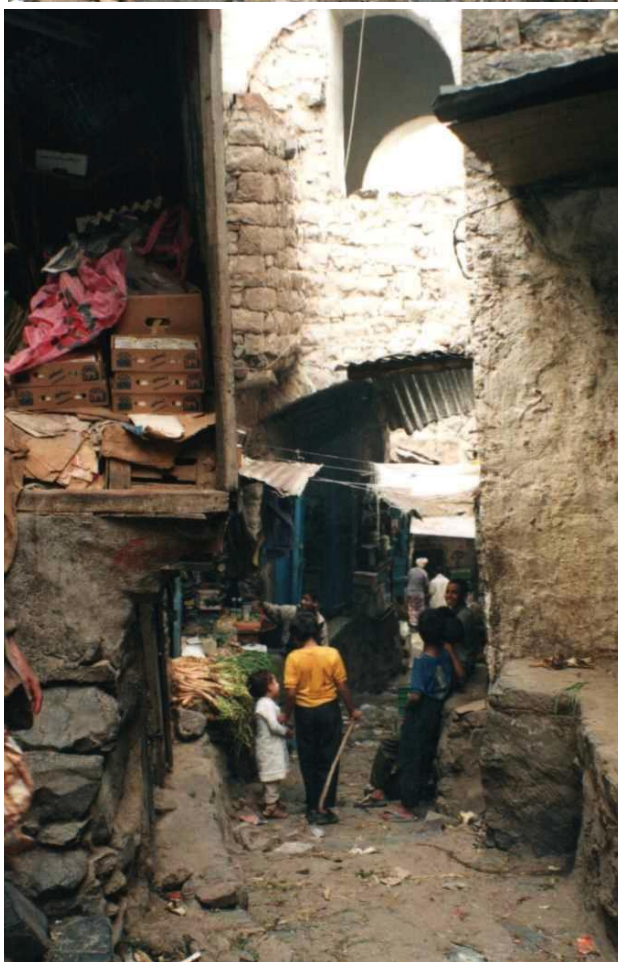
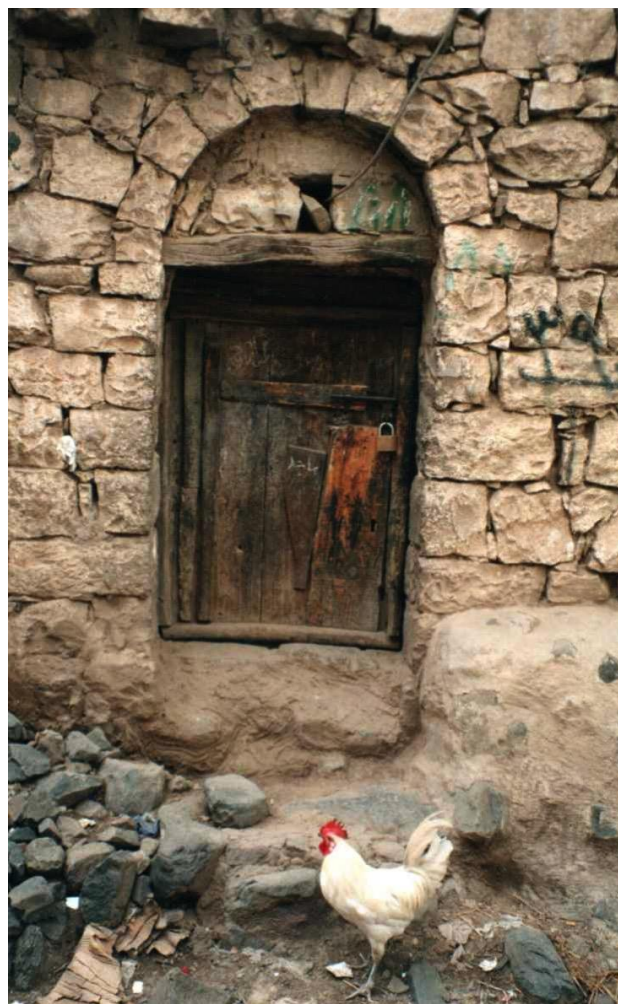




## In and around Jiblah











Marilyn with two new friends watching the making of Qamaria windows at the workshop in Jiblah

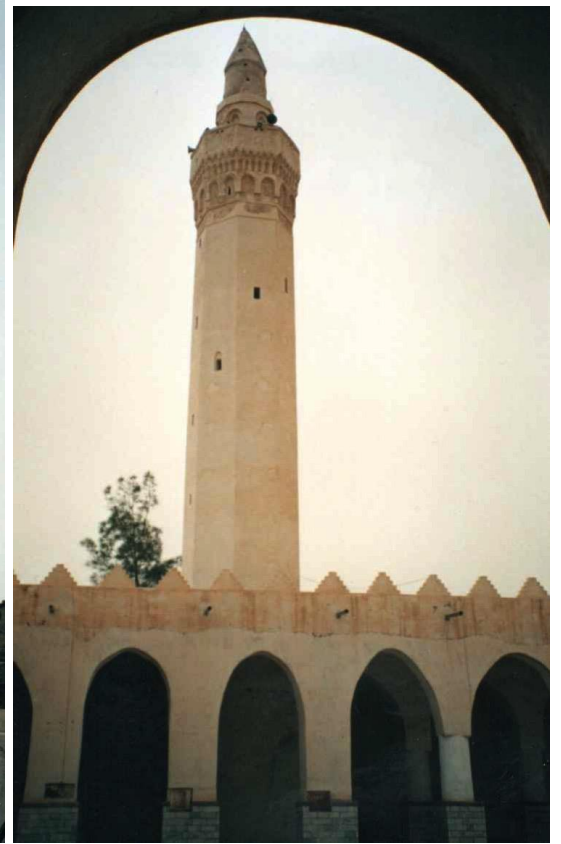
We had hoped to visit more workshops, metal, weaving, etc but siesta time (qaylula, midday in Arabic) meant they had closed so we moved on.

We followed the road southwest, still in the Yemen highlands, to the more modern urban centre of Taiz. Once known as the capital of culture Taiz, Yemen's third largest city has now become a battlefield. It was a major place for education with many Koran schools (Islamic Universities) and a government experimental farm and agricultural school nearby. The University of Taiz was to open later in 1995 with faculties of Education, Science, Medicine, Arts, Administrative Sciences, Law, Engineering and information Technology.

We were so fortunate to visit when we did as this city and many others in Yemen have been devastated by war. This was our first overnight stay in a hotel that, although it had seen better days, was comfortable and the shared bathroom clean.

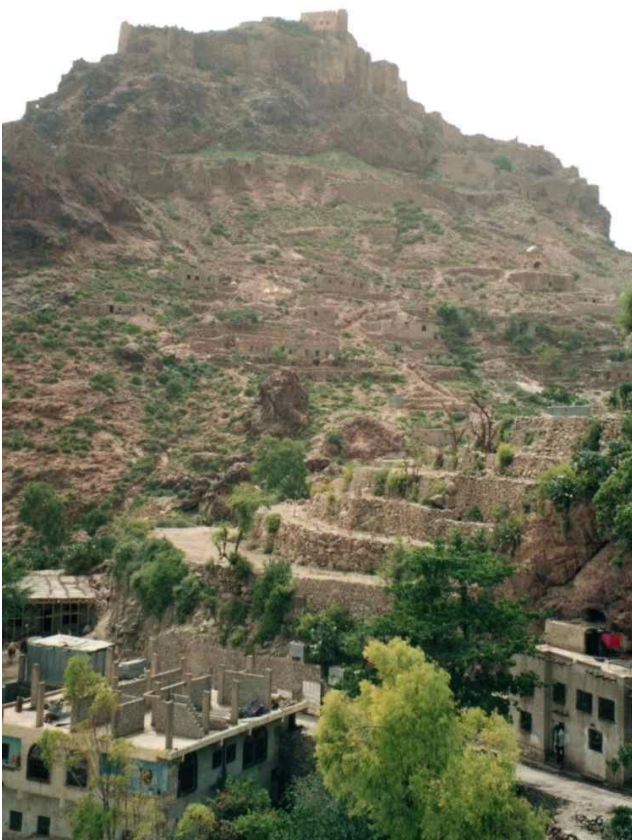




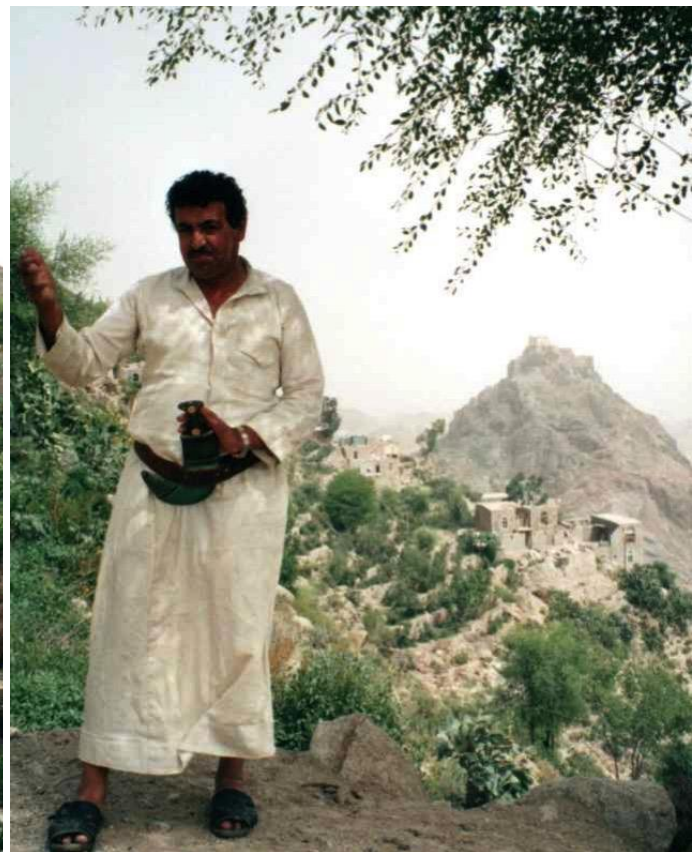


City street and minarets in Taiz

In the southern area of Taiz is one of the highest mountains in Yemen – Jabal Sabir – 3070m. Fearlessly, Ali drove us up the winding road (55 switchbacks) to the top of this granite formation.



Jabal Sabir



Our driver Ali



From Taiz, we headed west toward the western coastal plains and then turned north toward Al Hudaydah.

The climate until this point had been pleasant, cool at night, hot but not uncomfortable during the day. Now, as we approached the coast it, became hotter and very humid. Bottled water replaced the hot drinks at our roadside stops.

We visited Zabid, which is one of the oldest towns in Yemen. Zabid once had 236 mosques and still has 86. The Citadel, Naar Palace and Iskanderiya Mosque together dominate the town.



Al Iskanderiya Mosque Zabid



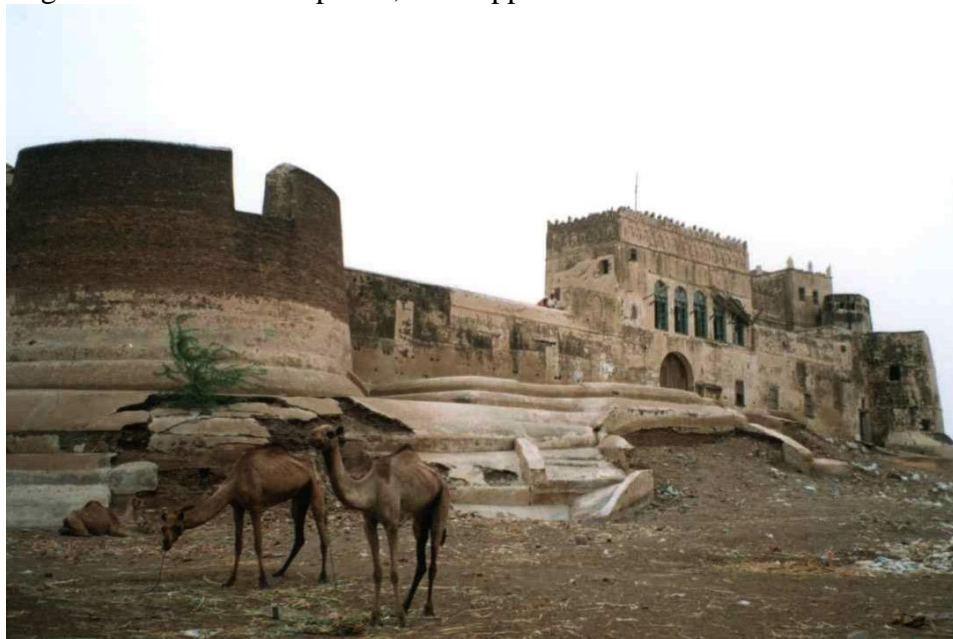
Susan and Marilyn attracting attention from the locals.





Mustafa Pasha Mosque, Zabid

Before continuing along the western coastal plains, we stopped to admire this abandoned fortified building.





Then, as a complete contrast, these African style huts on the plains between Zabid and Hudaydah.



## Hudaydah

Situated on the Red Sea, Hudaydah has been an important port, exporting coffee, cotton, dates and hides. It was developed as a seaport in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by the Ottoman Turks. The port was a bustling area of activity.

Ali, as I mentioned before, was not happy here but he dutifully escorted us around the port and city.

The hotel was rather basic although the rooms did have beds. The bathroom could be considered as a forerunner to today's designer wet rooms. Due to poorly maintained plumbing the ceiling leaked. There was nowhere in that room to escape the drips. At least we had a sit upon toilet which gave our muscles a rest from the crouch type of which we were doing our best to cope.

The mosquitoes and a variety of other flying insects were a worry, no nets supplied, so we emptied an aerosol can of repellent into the room, went off for a meal, and on return managed a reasonable nights sleep.







The port area and fishsellers.

**END PART 2 - A fantastic experience.**