

Yemen – Arabia Felix - A fantastic experience – Maree Papworth – Part 3



From Hudaydah to Manakhah and Al Hajjarah in the Haraz mountains



There was interesting scenery and people along the way, with the latter being all friendly and delighted to be photographed. They did not ask for money in exchange but we always tried to give the children something, such as pencils, small notepads or, in my case, little toy koalas.



The city of Manakhah is surrounded by terraces. A daily souk (market) is held here for people from the surrounding villages. At one time, it was an important collection point for the coffee crop ready for transportation by camel caravans to the ports of Hudaydah and Mocha.

On offer was a variety of fruit, vegetables and spices along with firewood and small, short sticks for cleaning teeth (the Yemeni toothbrush). There was also an area with livestock, goats, lambs, chickens and another with baskets (mainly woven from palm leaves) for household use, woven rugs and cooking utensils. As in any souk, price bargaining was expected.

The outside of houses in this region have a lot of painted decoration. White was once only used on mosques. Pilgrims returning from Mecca started painting white designs around their windows. Now white is used much the same only with more highly imaginative patterns. It is considered to attract light and keep flies away.

Manakhah Souk



Susan and Maree with friendly locals in the souk.



The little boy below is proudly showing off his custom-made jambiya.

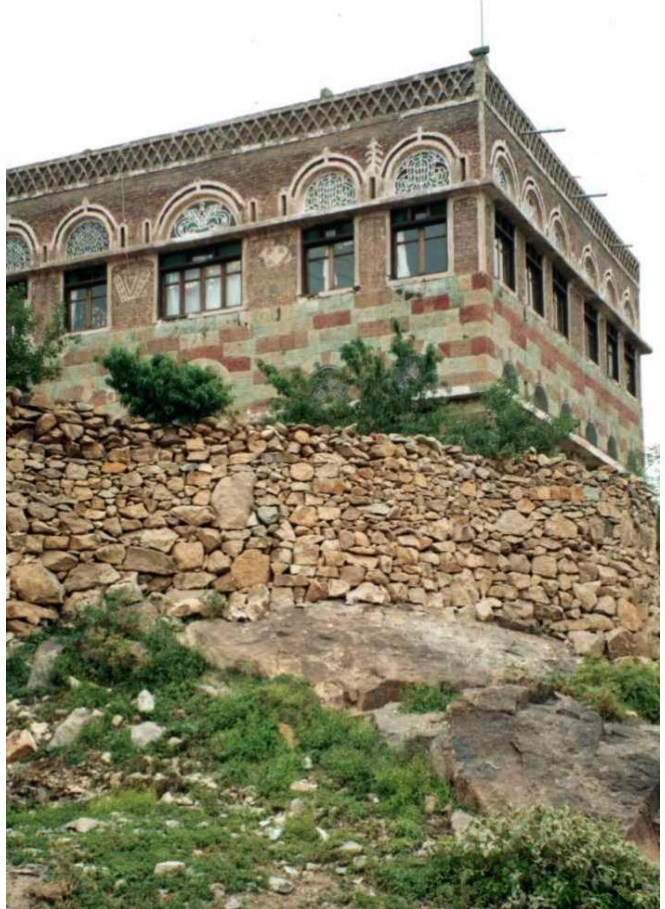


There were some amazing sights as we drove on to Al Hajjarah. Unfortunately my camera at the time did not have much of a zoom so I was unable to capture the distant villages built high on rocky outcrops.

One rather startling event as we were heading through a mountain pass was when Ali took out a handgun and placed it on the ledge under the front windscreen. He did not try to explain.

Later, on our return to Sana'a, hotel manager Jamal checked with Ali and then told us that apparently sometime in the previous two weeks a group of Scandinavian tourists and guide had their vehicle taken at gunpoint. They were left beside the road, found their way back to a local village and arranged for a taxi to transport them to Sana'a. Our direction to Jamal was to tell Ali *"No gun! If put in a similar situation please hand over the vehicle and let us all walk away alive."*

Al Hajjarah village



Our funduq (hotel, guesthouse).

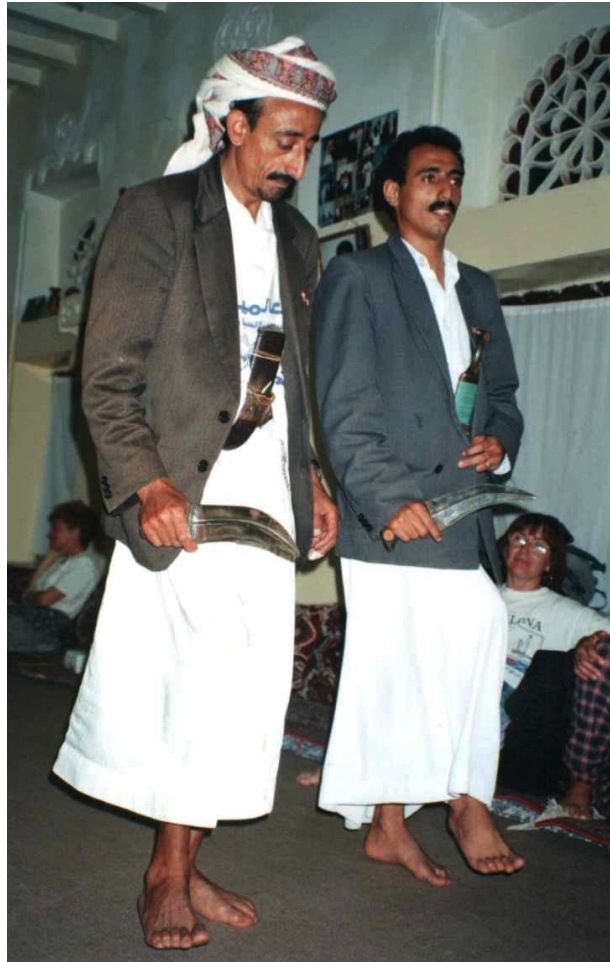
Al Hajjarah village, a few kilometers to the west of Manakhah and built on a precipice at the top of a scary, steep winding road, has high-rise stone houses some eight stories high. Dating back to the 12th century AD, it was a strategic control site when the Ottomans occupied the area.

We were amused to note that inside some of these old houses, occasionally without glass in the windows, were children playing computer games.

A family run funduq (hotel, guesthouse) was our friendly home for several nights as we explored the area.



Entertainment one evening at the funduq



The music was played on drum and oud (an instrument from ancient times. Persia 3500 years ago and Egypt in the time of the Pharaohs).

It is customary for the men to dance and they did for us.

The women stayed in the kitchen to cook. We enjoyed listening to their happy chat and much laughter.



A photo of an oud from the Internet



Maree and Susan with funduq family members and staff

Food in Yemen

At the funduq in Al Hajjarah, the meals were served on large mats on the floor.



Breakfast in most places we stayed was bread, cheese and jam. It was obviously considered the safest breakfast to offer visitors. The bread could be Arabic flat bread, French style baguette or sweet sliced loaf, whatever was available. The cheese also varied from cream cheese or soft goat cheese to hard cheddar and every type in between. Same went for the jam, anything on hand. After the first few days in Sana'a, we became accustomed to this start to the day and looked forward to it, anticipating the choice each different place would bring. The local coffee, needless to say, was wonderful, rich and strong.



Susan and Maree enjoying lunch in Ibb.



Lunch is the main meal of the day. It is always served in shared dishes, usually including:

- Malawah - flat bread layered and filled with butter, with a semi-crispy crust.
- Sorghum and other cereals.
- Fahsa, maraq or hilba - stew type dishes with lamb, goat or chicken (rarely beef).
- Foul, fava beans often cooked with onions, tomatoes, garlic and varying spices.

Fish either stewed or grilled was included along the coastal area.

Some dishes were highly spiced, something that we enjoyed.



Lunch in Zabid



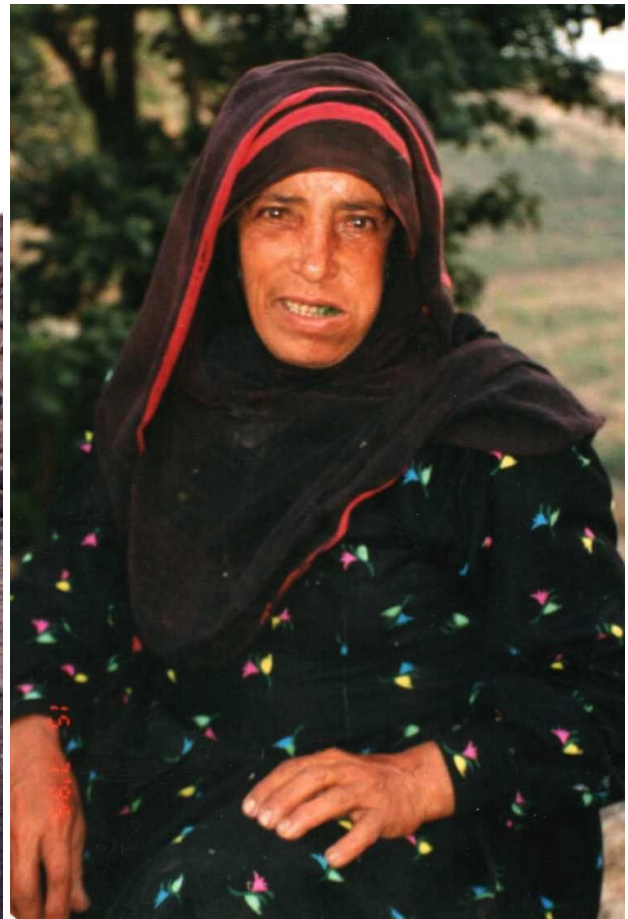
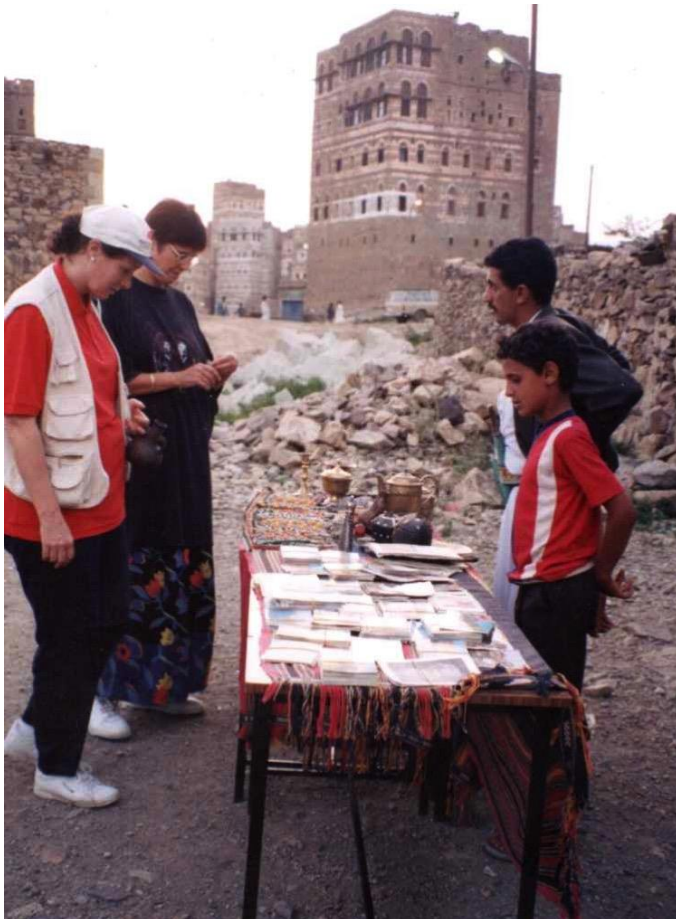
Marilyn, Susan and Ali (who was amazed that we ate everything offered)



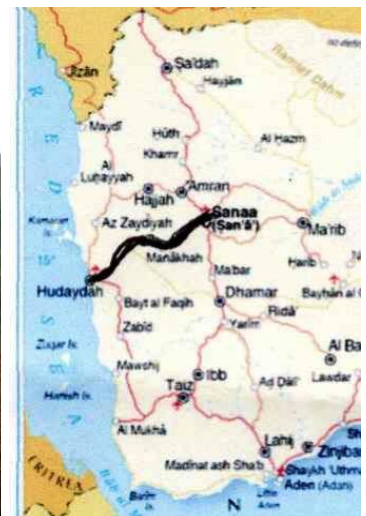
One very cheerful chef in Sa'dah, he added French fries for the foreigners.



Last look around Al Hajjarah village



Scenes on way from Al Hajjarah back to Sana'a





END PART 3 - A fantastic experience.