

## Jordan Wadi Rum 15 November 2008

Submitted by Naz.

Here's my first trip report from afar in Jordan, discovering climbing in the Middle East for myself. To say this was my first excursion in an attempt to find good rock would be a lie. Two weeks prior I went north up from Amman, the capital of Jordan, and bypassed historical tourist sites such as Jerash, an ancient Roman city, and Ajloun, a Crusader fort, to navigate my rental car through narrow dirt roads that descended into a wadi (valley, ancient river bed, gorge) of ancient olive groves, easily cultivated before the time of Jesus.

The farmers were very curious and very helpful to the three gringos who were obviously trespassing through several farms on our way up to a cliff 6 KM east of Ajloun, which was apparently Jordan's premier sport climbing crag. After hopping over cultivated patches of land, scrambling loose crumbly limestone-y like rock, we arrived to this cliff with spectacular views of the hills and wadi. The cliff was easily 30 meters high in some places, the sport lines generously bolted, but the entire length of the cliff was probably about as wide as the downriver section of Carderock. There were a few easy trad leadable climbs, but the rock was very crumbly. Reminded me a bit of the easier climbs at Little Stoney Man :) Pics can be found here: <http://www.flickr.com/gp/70421282@N00/23892k>. With the short amount of time allotted to us because of the return to Standard time, we only had time for one route. An easy 5.5ish climb with the crux move at the bottom. The closest town to this crag is Kharanjah and its about 40 mins north of Amman.

So far the big one, Wadi Rum. I went on a reconnaissance mission just to do a bit hiking or what the inhabitants of this Royal Conservation Society for Nature designated area call the 'Bedouin roads.' This refers to hairy scary 3rd classing up the mountains where the Bedouins have traditional grazed their goats and sheep, sometimes they have helpfully carved out a foothold on an otherwise sandy slope-y 20 foot slab. My friends and I hired a guide, as once past the village, only vehicles run by guides are allowed to frisk travelers to and fro the steep

red sandstone mountains. The area reminded me of Joshua Tree, as far as the spaces between the mountains, but on the scale of the mountains, it reminded me of Zion National Park. It was huge ... this place is great for people with a traditional climbing background, and even better for the aid climbing background. I had the newest edition of Tony Howard's book, *Treks and Climb in Wadi Rum, Jordan* and was attempting to match up the book's topos to the easily 1000+ foot massifs on each side as we bounced in the back of a rusty Toyota 4X4 to the furthest reach of the park, the Burdah rock bridge. The rock bridge requires about one and a half hours of scrambling, mostly 2nd and 3rd class (our Bedouin guide didn't break a sweat and chain smoked cigarettes along the way). The rock bridge was not at the summit but joined two ridges together and was quite exposed. We scrambled down a different, way, crab walking feet first down what was easily 160 foot slab, and I noticed the bolted hangers (hmm ... perhaps this was meant to be rappelled?). I bouldered a bit to test the rock and it was soft, a few pieces easily broke off in my hand. I hoped that Howard's book would reveal safer rock, but as I read closely, he did mention Wadi Rum was an 'adventure' climbing area. By car, Wadi Rum is 3 hours and 15 minutes, but rental cars arouse the curiosity of the highway patrol who will pull you over in a heart beat but flag you through upon finding out one possess's a Western passport. You can also fly into Aqaba, which is a half hour from Wadi Rum. Staying in a Bedouin campsite is supposed to be a real treat, but I haven't tried it yet. They allow camping virtually anywhere, but don't expect much in the way of facilities outside of the village, which has a restaurant with passable Middle Eastern food and bottled Amstel (Jordan's locally brewed sud). Pics: <http://www.flickr.com/gp/70421282@N00/2vi8z6>

But it is not the end! I returned for some serious climbing with my own rack and rope and armed with a climbing partner who was passing through Jordan four days later. We started for the Jebel Rum massif, which is the biggest mountain in Wadi Rum. According to Howard's book this had some good moderate 3-5 pitch climbs with bolted rappels and was reachable without hiring a Bedouin driver, only 15 minutes walking from the Village. We talked to one guide who attempted to convince us to go trekking with him, he was taking two French climbers who had just done four days of climbing. We passed another campground of four French climbers. As we started towards the face of Jebel Rum, we were surpassed by another and different party of three French climbers. They asked what we were doing and I told them I was heading for Goldfinger, one of the 3 starred routes in Howard's book. They told me it was an excellent climb and they had done it the day before. Howard's book gave it an ambiguous 5+ in the French scale of rating (which I found out encompassed 5.6-5.8). One of the French guys showed us where to start our belay after warning us there was an exposed traverse of scree and it was better to go down a bit and scramble up a different way to the start. I was leading the whole effort and I would probably only climb a short distance (we weren't even really at the base) of 3 (5.4 rock) to get to the Goldfinger crack. We saw the French party already finished on the first pitch of Inferno and their leader yelled to me that Goldfinger was mostly 5.6 rock and the crux was a 5.9. After being scared off by the 5.9 crux and getting my route names confused, I told him I was going to do the Mummy instead. He told me The Mummy was a bad route, exposed, bad rock, very little protection, and that I might as well start heading down if I wasn't going to do Goldfinger. At that point I decided to change our plans and go for the easier Wall of Lace, but as I neared it, I saw it was pockmarked sandy barely held together stone, exposed and virtually unprotectable. After enduring three pitches of sandy (flowing under my fingers and acting as ball bearings under my feet) with usually only two pieces of scary pro (think hitches around keyholes of newly formed sandstone), I made a hasty belay on a ledge to bring my partner up and rethink our plans. Just then, we saw a guide, Bedouin, pop up. He made chatter with us and the resulting conversation concluded with 1) my single 60m Petzl Nomad (how appropriate?) rope was not sufficient to get us down the route, we needed to use his two ropes to rappel and 2) I should

climb Goldfinger because it was better protected even though Wall of Lace was easier climbing. It turned out this guide was no other than Mohammad Hammad, who bolted the routes at Ajloun and climbed with Tony Howard, and was probably one of two of the Bedouin guides who trained in the U.K. and Switzerland still guiding rock full-time.

He

sold me on the idea of Goldfinger. The route ate pro, like a gumby I sunk most of my double set of cams into it. It was a pitch easily over a 160 feet (we may have combined two). It started out with a great hand crack in a flaring chimney and then it traversed slightly across the face with very exposed moves onto a diagonal crack. It was probably one of the best trad routes I ever lead, easily sustained 5.6, 5.7+ move in there for the crux (the Frenchies lied!). By the time my partner was belayed up to the bottom of the last pitch, Mohammad was getting cold and rather than wait for me to lead the finishing pitch, just threw his end of the rope down and brought me up so I could make a quick belay and bring up my partner while he set up the rappels. After that it was about four rappels to the beginning of the series of ledges, all but one rappel being a two rope rappel. We were happy to have our headlamps as we were doing our last rappel at 5:15 PM, fifteen minutes after sunset. Mohammad showed us the way before scrambling away in the dark. We got back to our car by 6 PM, with the sky clear enough to see the Milky Way glittering brightly above us. Pics: <http://www.flickr.com/gp/70421282@N00/d52445>