

**In This Issue****Impressions of Oman**

Illustrated by Penny Williams-Yaqub

Until a few years ago Oman was one of the isolated lands. Although its Arabian Sea coastline had exposed some areas to developments from the outside world, its hinterlands—a mix of deserts and rugged mountains running back into the interior—were locked out of the 20th century.

With the 1970 change in rulers—from crusty, old Sultan Said bin Taimur to his more up-to-date son Kabus bin Said bin Taimur, Oman joined the rest of the Middle East in accepting what in Oman were radical changes: automobiles, highways, hotels, newspapers and movies and the thousands of mass-produced artifacts of industrial societies: transistors, watches, cameras, pens and of course, hundreds of articles in gaudy, indestructible plastics.

Such change, in only four years, is astonishing. For despite close ties with Great Britain since the 19th century, Omani rulers had clung tenaciously to cultural and economic traditions of another age.

In the interior, of course, such traditions are still deeply rooted. But change, stimulated by Oman's substantial petroleum reserves, is inevitable. Even in agriculture, usually a last bastion of emergent nations' conservatism, the introduction of government funds and technology is having an effect—at least in the fertile coastal plains. With increased education and more exposure to new methods it is inevitable that modern methods will seep into the mountains and deserts and have their usual dramatic impact. Already, an artificial lake near the western oilfields has changed the life of Bedouins and desert wild life.

Among the influx of visitors who flocked into Oman after its ancient doors creaked open was Penny Williams, a regular contributor to *Aramco World Magazine*. Miss Williams went to Oman to capture on her sketch pads the simple beauty of ancient buildings, clothing and jewelry before they are swept away in a torrent of glass, steel and plastic. Some of those sketches are reproduced here.

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