

# THE GREAT ARAB REVOLT PROJECT 2006 AND 2007 FIELD SEASONS

*Neil Faulkner, Nicholas J. Saunders and John Winterburn*

## **Introduction**

The Great Arab Revolt Project (GARP) is planned as a ten-year project to investigate the history and archaeology of the Great Arab Revolt and the origins of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and through this investigation to develop new heritage tourism attractions, particularly in southern Jordan.

The archaeology of the First World War (and modern conflict generally) is a growing sub-discipline concerned with the investigation, conservation, and public presentation of sites and artefacts of this period. Archaeology can deepen understanding of recent conflicts by helping to locate and characterise sites, and by reconstructing the circumstances and ‘materiality’ of war. It can also connect with, and contribute substantially to, wide public interest in the First World War. Huge numbers — school parties, relatives of soldiers, and battlefield tourists — regularly visit sites on the Western Front. This interest is likely to increase as we approach the centenary of the war (2014-2018). Other theatres of the First World War have been little explored but offer great potential for research and public engagement with heritage. The remains in Jordan are especially important for six reasons:

1. They represent the struggle from which emerged the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the modern Jordanian Army, modern Arab nationalism, and many of the states of the modern Middle East; they also have particular importance for the history of the royal family in Jordan.
2. They represent the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and therefore the background to the emergence of the modern Turkish nation-state and national identity.
3. They offer a range of military landscapes,

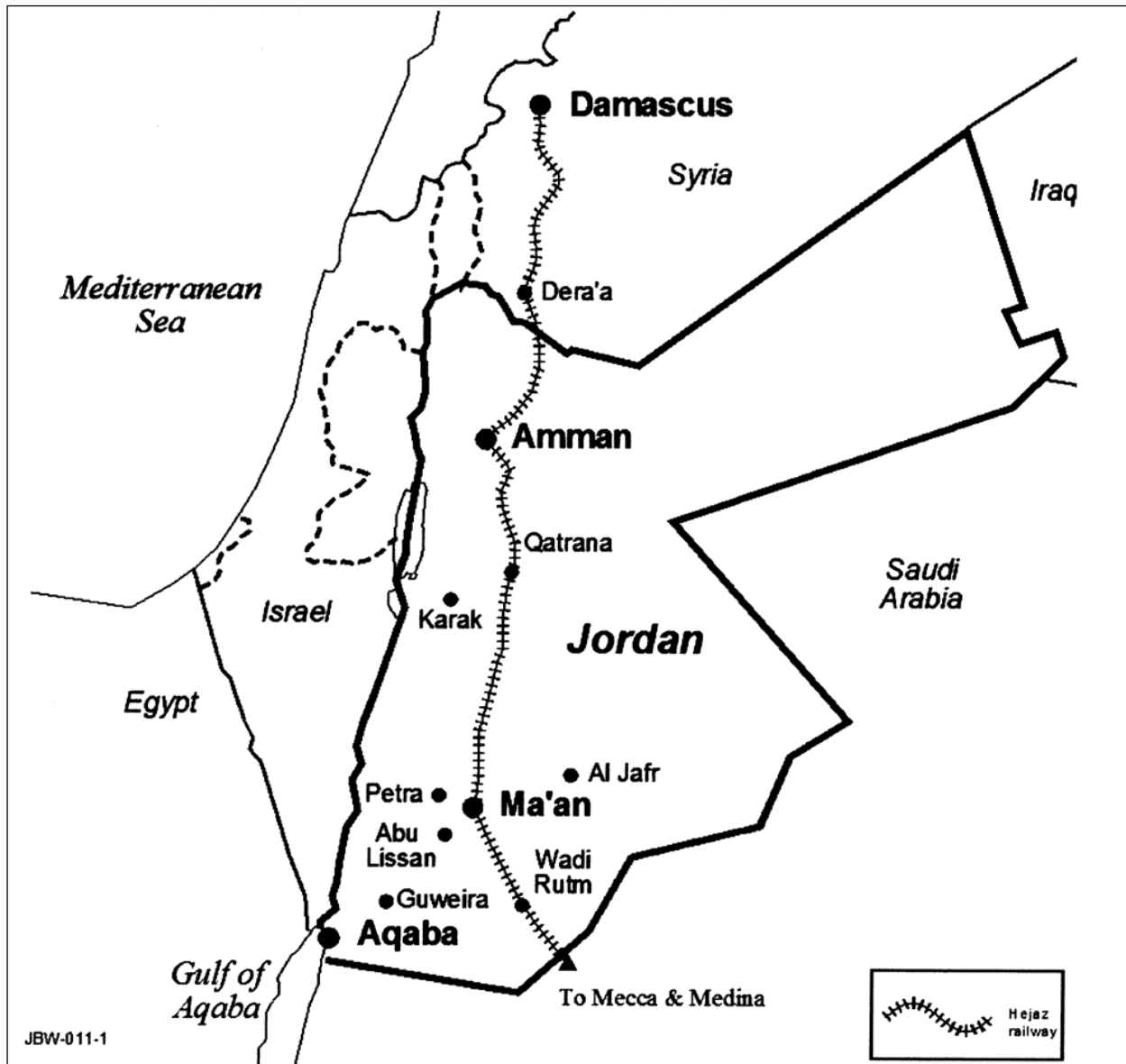
sites, and artefact assemblages, and a range of memories, associations, and modern significances, which contrast with the more familiar archaeology, commemoration, and tourism of the Western Front.

4. They are associated with the exploits and legend of Lawrence of Arabia, an iconic historical and cultural figure in the English-speaking world.
5. They represent one of the latest phases in a long sequence of human activities imprinted on the landscape in the archaeology of southern Jordan.
6. They are subject to rapid destruction and vandalism, due partly to development pressures, partly to folk myths about ‘Ottoman gold’, such that recording, public information, and preservation are urgent.

## **The Organisation and Methodology of the Project (Fig. 1)**

GARP is supported by the University of Bristol, the al-Hussein bin Talal University, the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, the Jordan Museum, the Council for British Research in the Levant, and HRH Prince Hasan. Generous support has also been given by Mr Tayseer Dhmour, Deputy-Governor of Ma‘ān, Engineer Hussein Kraishan, Director-General of the Aqaba Railway, the Chief of Police in Ma‘ān, and the Head of the Intelligence Department in Ma‘ān.

The academic leaders of the project are Neil Faulkner and Nick Saunders. They are supported by two field directors, David Thorpe and David Hibbitt, and by four Jordanian colleagues, Hani Falahat, the representative of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, Zeyad al-Salameen and Mansour Shqiarat of the al-Hussein bin Talal University, and Jihad Kafafi of the Jordan Mu-



1. General location map.

seum. Other current members of the team are: Fizz Altinoluk (planner), Ali Baldry (photographer), Susan Daniels (administrator), Cat Edwards (site supervisor), Jules Evan-Hart (metal-detectorist and finds specialist), Angie Hibbitt (geophysicist), Roger Ward (metal-detectorist and IT specialist), and John Winterburn (landscape archaeologist).

The project's main activity is a two-week fieldwork season in November involving a team of about 10 archaeologists and 15-20 volunteers, and the research, analysis, interpretation, and publication associated with this fieldwork. Two seasons have been completed (2006 and 2007),

and this summary report covers both. Work takes place at four distinct but overlapping levels:

*Level 1:* Archive research and general field reconnaissance in vehicles to locate and map military sites within the southern Jordan study area (broadly the area from the Wādī al-Ḥasā southwards to the Saudi border).

*Level 2:* Archive research, field reconnaissance on foot, and GPS-based surveying to identify and plot military sites and features within specific militarised landscapes identified at Level 1 (mainly, to date, in the area around Ma'an Station, and in the Wādī Rutm /Baṭn al-Ghūl / 'Aqabat-Ḥijāz area.

*Level 3:* Metal-detector survey, geophysical survey, and measured ground survey to map and characterise a) groups of features forming coherent sites, and b) spreads of diagnostic artefacts, within the specific militarised landscapes surveyed at Level 2.

*Level 4:* Surface clearance, excavation, standing-building survey, and detailed recording to characterise and phase typical and or significant features within the areas surveyed at Level 3.

### **Ma‘ān: a First World War Trench Fortress (Figs. 2, 3 and 4)**

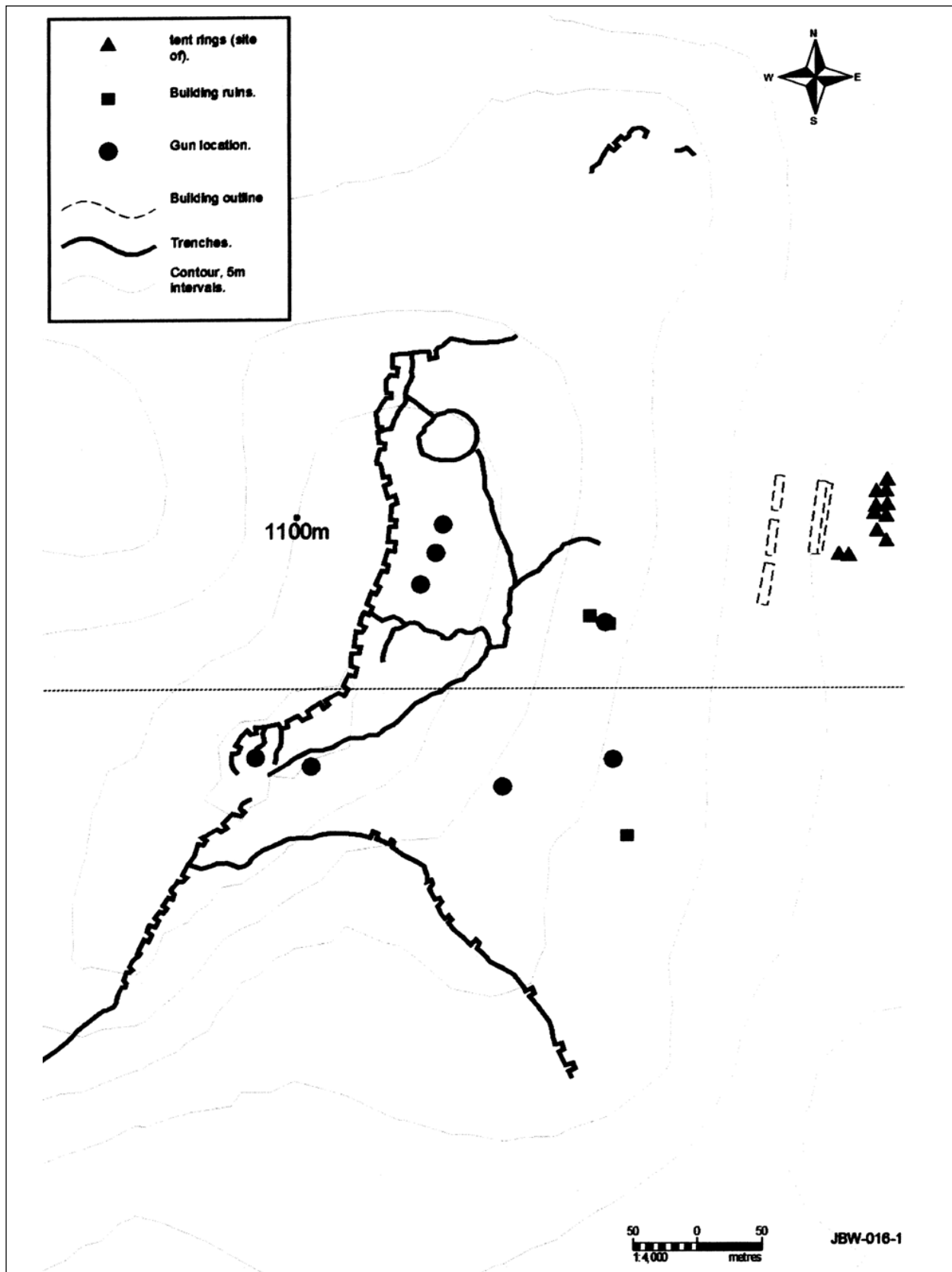
In 1916-1918, Ma‘ān was one of the most important Turkish military bases in what is now southern Jordan. It was a major communications node with good water supplies. It lay on the ancient pilgrim route along the western edge of the desert that linked the cities of Syria with the holy cities of the Ḥijāz. It was also a traditional stopping-place for traders moving between the deserts to the east and such places as Petra, Gaza, and ‘Aqaba. When the Ḥijāz Railway reached Ma‘ān in 1904, the town comprised about 500 flat-roofed mud houses 1.5km west of the station, with another 200 or so about a kilometer to the north; the total population was around 3,000. A large station complex was established, and Ma‘ān came to be regarded as the ‘Gateway to Arabia’.

Control of Ma‘ān therefore gave the Ottoman Army a strong base for the accommodation of soldiers, *matériel*, and supplies that could be moved rapidly in any of several directions: by train north or south to support station garrisons under threat; by road westwards into the relatively rich, heavily populated, grain-producing uplands beyond the desert fringe; and again by road south-south-west along the route to the Red Sea coast and the port of ‘Aqaba.

Because of its strategic importance, Ma‘ān was heavily garrisoned between the summer of 1917 and the autumn of 1918 by between 4,000 and 6,000 Ottoman troops, and in April 1918 it was the target of a direct (and unsuccessful) assault by Hashemite forces. The town and railway station were therefore heavily defended by trench-works. Many of these were recorded at the time on British air-reconnaissance sketches and photographs. We are currently researching various archives to flesh out the details of these

valuable resources. Many of the trenches survive as visible earthworks. A selection appear on a set of air photographs taken by Bob Bewley and David Kennedy in 2000, archive copies of which are held at the offices of the Council for British Research in the Levant in ‘Ammān. These trenches and many others can also be seen on Google Earth (again, research is in progress). During the 2006 and 2007 field seasons, field reconnaissance and GPS survey by John Winterburn allowed us to map five groups of Ma‘ān trench-works on the high ground west of the Ḥijāz Railway, these are:

1. The Jabal Abū aṭ-Ṭuyūr group immediately west of the station: It includes: two linear firing-trenches 725m and 500m in extent; communication trenches serving these; at least two ring-trenches forming hilltop redoubts; four closely spaced and aligned artillery emplacements with two associated observation/sighting positions; and a hilltop command-and-control bunker. Trench excavation revealed two main phases of activity, the first represented by shallow linear firing-trenches, the second by deeper, better constructed ring-trenches. It seems likely that a change in defensive tactics from linear firing lines to separate fire-bases with interlocking fields of fire is implied. The distribution of expended munitions recovered by metal-detector survey has been plotted along the main firing-trenches. Evidence has also been found between Jabal Abū aṭ-Ṭuyūr and Ma‘ān Station for a possible Ottoman Army camp, with low earthworks representing sizeable rectangular buildings of standard size (approximately 30 x 10m) and in regular alignment, as well as the probable site of a group of bell-tents.
2. The ‘Northern Ridge’ group approximately 1km to the north: It comprises one main linear trench of 500m and up to four redoubts.
3. The ‘Southern Ridge’ group approximately 1km to the south-west: It comprises a linear trench of 400m, with a second trench laid out, surviving as a distinct earthwork, but never cut (Further out again, 2km to the south-east, is another 220m extent of linear firing-trench).
4. The ‘Western Hillock’ group lies approximately 0.5km to the west: It comprises a hill-top redoubt and a communication trench.

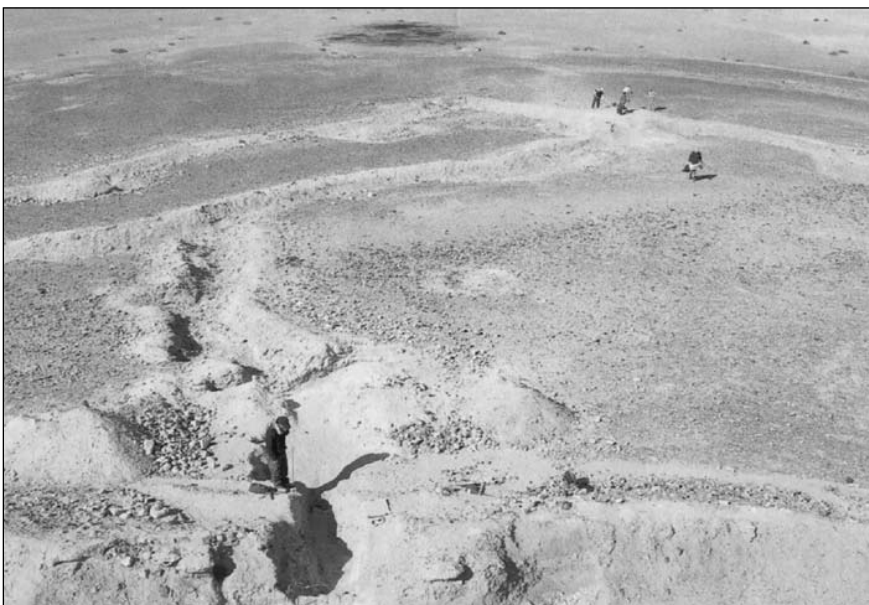


2. Plan of trenches on the Jabal Abū at-Ṭuyūr west of Ma'an Station.



3. Air photo of the Jabal Abū aṭ-Ṭuyūr trench system taken by Bob Bewley and David Kennedy in 2000.

5. The Jabal Samnah group lies approximately 6.5km to the west: It comprises a series of trench systems and associated tentage extending northwards along the Samnah Ridge. A large redoubt lies 300m north of the point



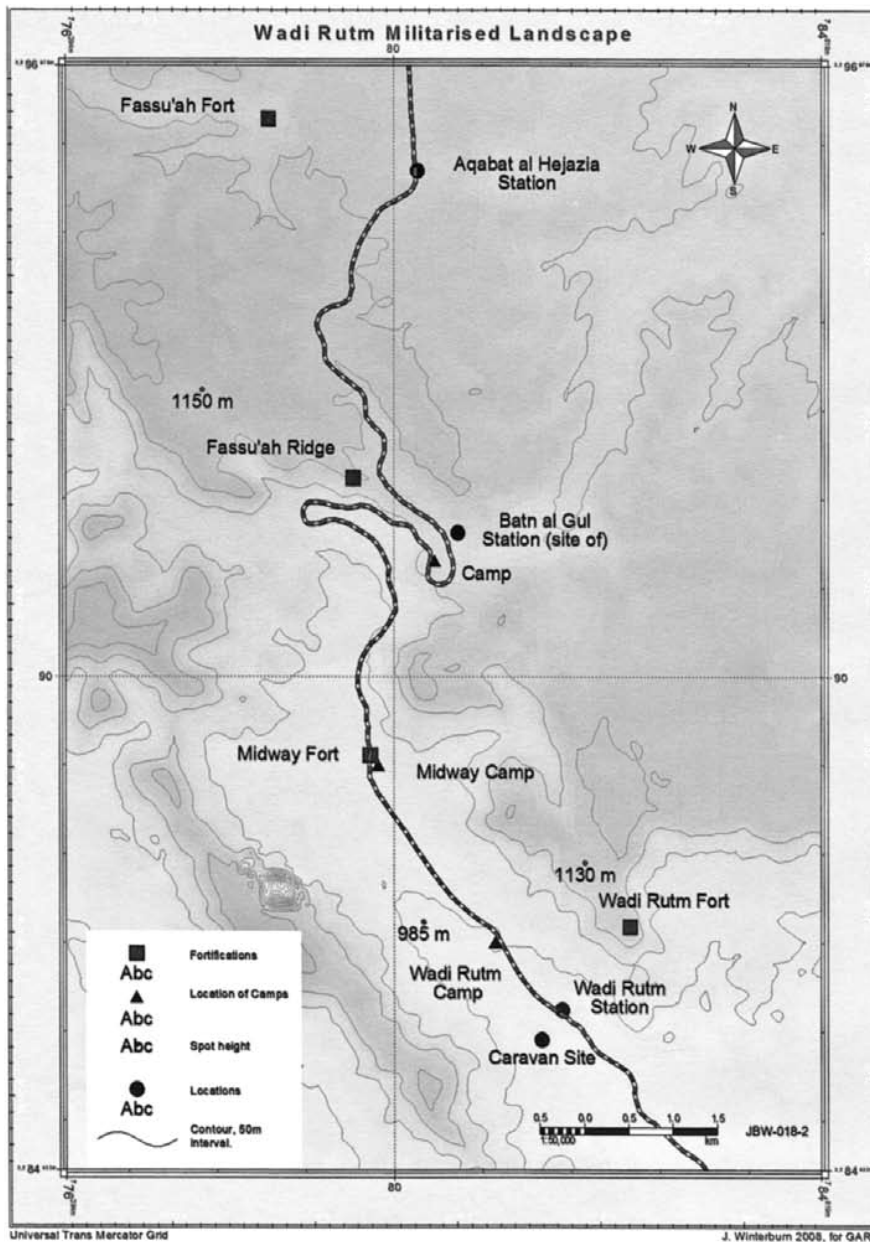
4. General view of trenches on the Jabal Abū aṭ-Ṭuyūr looking approximately west from the Northern Redoubt.

where a main road cuts through the ridge.

**Wādī Rutm / Baṭn al-Ghūl / ‘Aqabat-Ḥijāz: a Heavily Defended Desert Railway (Figs. 5-8)**

Our second ‘Level 2’ study area is centered on three former Ḥijāz Railway stations approximately 50-60km south-south-east of Ma‘ān adjacent to the desert highway: these are, from north to south, ‘Aqabat-Ḥijāz (at 50km), Baṭn al-Ghūl (at 55km), and Wādī Rutm (at 60km). Work so far has concentrated on the southernmost, Wādī Rutm Station. The following sites within the study area have been explored:

1. The ruined buildings of ‘Aqabat-Ḥijāz Station: Rapid survey, surface clearance, and standing-building recording has provided a basic plan and description of a small fort formed of Late Ottoman station buildings and associated improvised breastworks and blockhouses. This site is under extreme threat from industrial development and private ‘gold-digging’.
2. The ruined 16th century fort and cisterns at Faṣṣū‘ah: These lie in a wadi approximately 1.7km west of ‘Aqabat-Ḥijāz Station. They were reused in the Late Ottoman period to supply water to the railway via a mule track, and trenches and breastworks on the surrounding heights have been recorded.
3. The site of Baṭn al-Ghūl Station: This has been identified and plotted; no standing buildings survive.



5. Plan of Wādī Rutm militarised landscape.

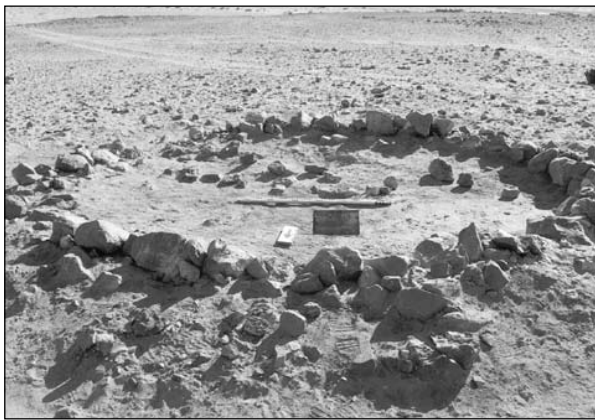
4. The site of an Ottoman Army camp at Baṭn al-Ghūl: This has been identified and plotted. It is represented by stone tent-rings and such diagnostic finds as Ottoman Army uniform buttons.
5. A large ruined fort on the escarpment above Baṭn al-Ghūl Station: This has been identified and plotted. It comprises an outer perimeter wall with sentry posts, and an inner complex of defended courtyard building with associated breastworks, trenches, and blockhouse. Various trackways link the fort with other positions, and there is a large ex-

tramural oven. Faṣṣū'ah Ridge (as we are calling this site) is believed to be the former Ottoman command-and-control centre for the entire area.

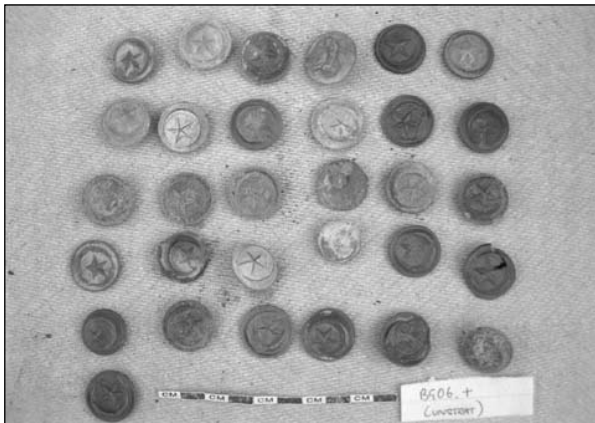
6. The Ḥijāz Railway embankment. This comprises a modified extent that is still in use as an industrial railway, and an extent that is now redundant running from the Baṭn al-Ghūl escarpment down Wādī Baṭn al-Ghūl and the Wādī Rutm. The remains include cuttings through rock and a gravel embankment. Careful examination was made at Wādī Rutm Station, which includes a substantial



6. An Ottoman station building with improvised defenses.



7. An Ottoman Army 'tent-ring'.



8. Ottoman Army uniform buttons from the Wādī Rutm camp.

siding and passing place. All rails and sleepers have been removed, though a rail section, several sleepers, and numerous fish-plates, bolts, and other railway engineering artefacts have been found on the site. The line of the embankment close to Wādī Rutm Station has been GPS plotted, a section through it

has been cleared and recorded, and railway engineering artefacts have been comprehensively catalogued.

7. The ruined buildings of Wādī Rutm Station. Three Ottoman station buildings, which we have numbered 1, 2 and 3 from north-west to south-east, survive. All are ruinous and roofless, though 1 is otherwise fairly well-preserved, 2 is largely demolished with only one wall and a corner surviving, and 3 has substantial wall survival. These three buildings stand on what appears to be a siding and passing place on relatively low-lying ground. The buildings, especially Building 1, have been partially cleared and fairly comprehensively recorded, and all show evidence for improvised fortification.
8. The old pilgrim road: a stone-paved caravan and pilgrim road that ran roughly parallel with the railway embankment through the Wādī Rutm. It branches into two as it approaches the caravan site (see below) from the north-west. This road was in use until the modern desert highway was built, and several short stretches have remains of an asphalt layer on top of the stone-paved base. The line of the road close to Wādī Rutm Station has been GPS plotted.
9. An ancient caravan site: a probable place of assembly, camping, and trading on the paved road roughly abreast of the railway station. The site is represented entirely by finds of coins and other small metal objects of medieval and later date. The site has been metal-detected and its location and approximate limits defined. A total of 101 coins were recovered in 2006, and analysis has shown these to span the entire period from the first century AD to the present, with a predominance of Mamluk and Ottoman coins.
10. A defended Ottoman Army camp on a commanding hill approximately 1km north-west of Wādī Rutm Station. The hill dominates the railway to the north-east and the road through the wadi to the south-west. The main archaeological characteristics of the site are: firing dugouts with stone parapets at either end of the hill; approximately 20 stone tent-rings across the plateau; numerous finds of domestic military artefacts such as tins

and buttons; and an oven pit, a latrine, and a probable parade ground and sundial. The site has been fully surveyed, excavated, and recorded.

11. A small defended observation post on a hillock 200m north-west of Wādī Rutm Station. Most of the hillock has been quarried away, probably for gravel for railway embankments during an abortive modern (1960s?) reconstruction project. The feature, which may have been an observation post and/or a firing position (for a machine-gun?), appears to have been deliberately respected during quarrying. The location of the site has been plotted.
12. A ruined fort at Wādī Rutm. A hilltop defensive complex comprising a small fort, a defended occupation area, outworks formed of trenches and breastworks, and mule tracks down to the wadi, has been identified and GPS-surveyed on the high ridge on the north-east side of Wādī Rutm, approximately 1km from the station. Metal-detector survey has revealed significant quantities of expended munitions.

### **Conclusions**

The first two seasons of the Great Arab Revolt Project have confirmed the huge potential of modern conflict archaeology in southern Jordan. We have revealed an extensively militarised landscape designed to defend wide areas against a threat which appears to have been, on the one hand, dispersed and low-intensity, but on the other, chronic and pervasive. The archaeological imprint, reflecting a very different kind of war, contrasts sharply with that of the Western Front. Early results have fully vindicated the decision to establish the Great Arab Revolt Project, and give every reason for assuming that the project will fulfill all its aims and realise our highest expectations in the years ahead, culminating in the creation of new heritage tourism attractions for southern Jordan, and possibly a complete 'Lawrence of Arabia trail'.

Neil Faulkner  
Nicholas J. Saunders  
John Winterburn  
Department of Archaeology and Anthropology,  
University of Bristol