

THE GREAT ARAB REVOLT PROJECT: 2012 AND 2013 FIELD SEASONS

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Introduction

The Great Arab Revolt Project (GARP) was planned as a ten-year project to investigate the history and archaeology of the Great Arab Revolt (1916 - 1918). It commenced in 2006, and earlier work is reported on in three successive ADAJ reports published in 2008 (covering the 2006 and 2007 seasons), 2010 (the 2008 and 2009 seasons) and 2012 (the 2010 and 2011 seasons). A general introduction to the project, its organisation and its methods appears in the first of these reports.

The academic directors of the project are Neil Faulkner and Nick Saunders (both Bristol University). They are supported by a field team which, during the 2012 and 2013 seasons, included: David Thorpe (field director 2012), Susan Daniels (project administrator and planner), Ali Baldry (photographer), Cat Edwards (site supervisor), Anna Gow (finds supervisor), David Spencer (site supervisor), Roger Ward (metal-detectorist and IT specialist), John Winterburn (Landscape Archaeologist) and Odette Nelson (finds and planning assistant). Additional support was provided by our Jordanian colleagues: Fawzi Abudaneh (al-Hussein bin Talal University), Hani Falahat (Department of Antiquities), Sate Massadeh (Department of Antiquities representative), Abdullah Rawashdeh (Department of Antiquities) and Sa'ad Twaissi (al-Hussein bin Talal University).

The main foci of our first two field seasons were: (a) the Late Ottoman trench-fortress around Ma'an; (b) the Late Ottoman defences in and around Wadi Rutm station, which lies approximately 60 km south of Ma'an on the Hejaz Railway.

The main foci of our second two field seasons were: (a) the Late Ottoman defences in and around Baṭn al-Ghūl station, approximately 55 km south of Ma'an on the Hejaz Railway, and (b) the Late Ottoman redoubts and Hashemite tribal army base at Wuhayda, approximately 18 km west-south-west of Ma'an on the Aqaba road.

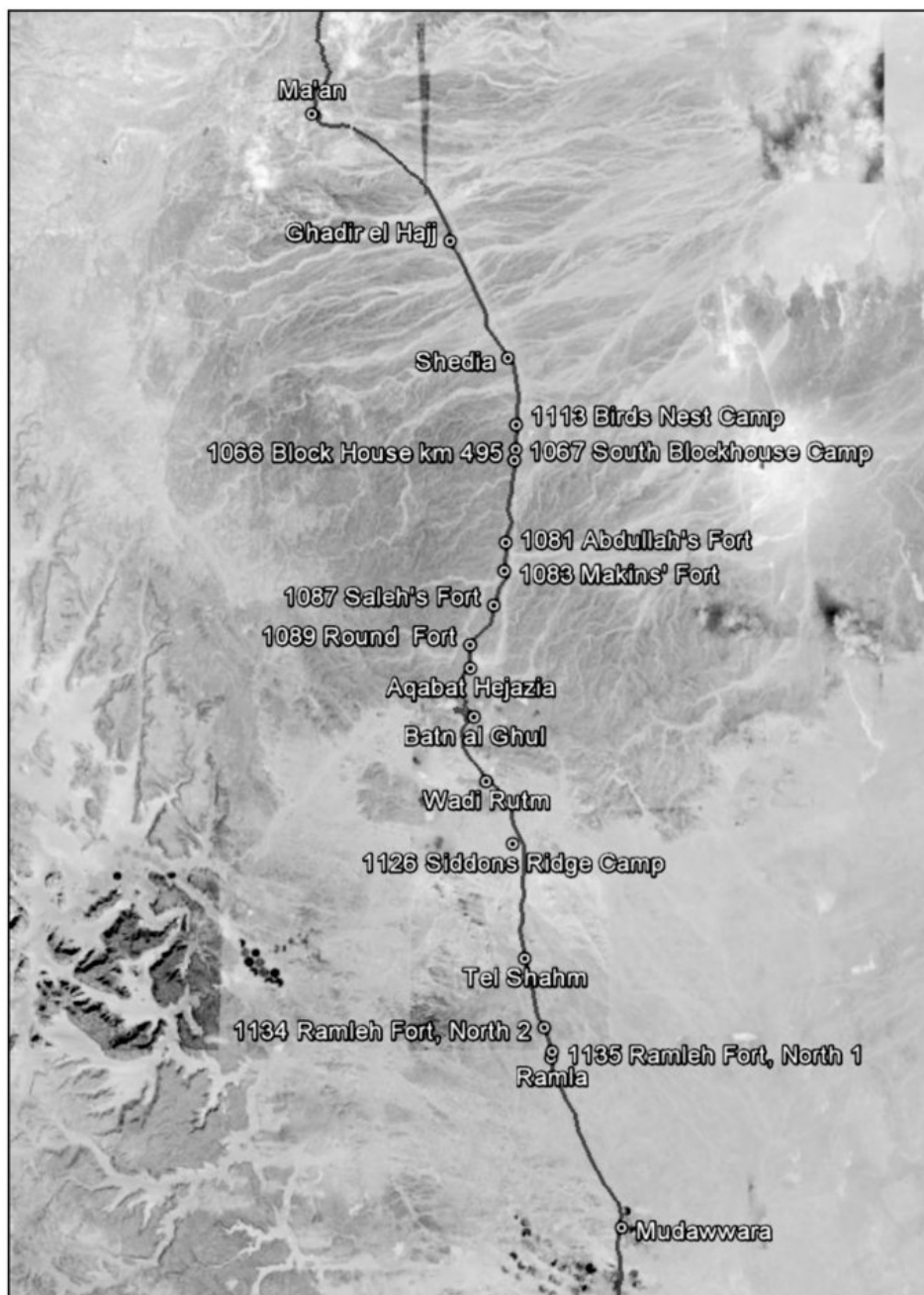
The main foci of our third two field seasons were the militarised landscapes along two stretches of the Hejaz Railway as follows: (a) the northern extent, between Ma'an and Aqabat-Hijaz, and (b) the southern extent, between Wadi Rutm and Mudawwara (**Fig. 1**).

This report summarises the results of work in 2012 and 2013 on:

Wādī Rutm and Mudawwara

We returned to Wadi Rutm in order to investigate the hilltop fort and associated complex which lies at the top of the ridge to the east of Wadi Rutm station. This location has commanding views to the west, south and east, and was clearly central to effective control over the entire stretch of landscape from the Baṭn al-Ghūl escarpment in the north to Tall Shahm in the sand desert to the south.

We also investigated Mudawwara, an extensive complex comprising three large hilltop forts and a reused Late Ottoman (18th century) fort and associated buildings. Mudawwara was (and is) a major oasis on the Darb al-Ḥajj route through the sand desert and was heavily militarised during the Great Arab Revolt period. *Wadi Rutm fort (Fig. 2)*



1. Map showing sites investigated by GARP. Copyright: 2012 Google Earth, 2012 Cnes/Spot Image, 2012 GeoEye.

A Late Ottoman hilltop redoubt on the eastern escarpment overlooking Wadi Rutm station comprising an oval dry-stone breastwork perimeter. The main northern entrance is hidden and protected by a small extent of projecting wall, while a subsidiary southern entrance leads to a track running down the escarpment towards the station. On the western edge of the plateau extending northwards beyond the fort are two observation posts. The eastern side of the plateau, in contrast, appears to have comprised

a domestic area, including two small structures with small ovens. Large quantities of expended munitions were recovered, with the heaviest concentration on the western wall of the fort, implying a fierce firefight for control of the position.

Siddons' Fort (Fig. 3)

This is a small but exceptionally well-constructed Late Ottoman intermediate fort (i.e. one lying close to the former Hejaz Railway but between stations).



2. Wadi Rutm fort.
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3. Siddons' Fort.
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It was probably intended to guard a large multi-span bridge. Although the defensive circuit is incomplete, there being a wide gap on the eastern side, the rest of the construction is impressive, with a wide U-shaped ditch (a feature unique to this site), a wide earth bank and a carefully coursed and tiered dry-stone wall behind. The interior is dominated by two conjoined circular banks. It is likely that these served as troop accommodation, perhaps with an awning over the top supported on poles and weighted around the edge with large stones. Munitions were concentrated at the

north-western corner of the fort and in and around a small external structure of indeterminate purpose immediately east of the fort.

Mudawwara (Fig. 4)

Extensive Late Ottoman remains comprising southern, central and northern redoubts were surveyed and plans were drawn of each complex. Sample excavation and a metal-detector survey were completed at the northern redoubt. The northern redoubt comprises two main elements:



4. Mudawwara northern redoubt.
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(a) an outer perimeter dry-stone breastwork wall enclosing an extensive area in all but the south-eastern quarter (the latter left open probably because it was secure from attack); (b) an inner defended zone on the highest part of the hill, enclosing sunken, high-walled tent-rings. Munitions were abundant and included outgoing and incoming small-arms, shell and grenade shrapnel, and shrapnel balls; there was also clear evidence for high-explosive damage to the walls, either by artillery or aerial bombardment.

Wuhayda (Fig. 5)

We surveyed and sample-excavated two campsites: (a) the headquarters and main encampment of Prince Feisal's Arab Northern Army at Wuhayda; (b) a small British camp at a site near Tall Shahm. Both of these sites will be the subject of further investigation and analysis, and will therefore be reported on more fully in due course.

Hallat Ammar Ambush Site (Near Mudawwara);

Baṭn al-Ghūl Ottoman Army Encampment; Mudawwara Southern Redoubt

Hallat Ammar Ambush Site (Near Mudawwara) (Fig. 6)

This site is located very close to the Saudi - Jordanian border and required special permission to work. Our aim was to investigate the archaeological remains

of the train ambush and demolition carried out by Arab forces in September 1917 and recorded in T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

A GPS survey was carried out of the entire battlefield, subject to military restrictions on movement on to the high ground towards the southern extent of the site, as was a metal-detector survey of much of the battlefield, mainly to recover expended munitions indicative of exchanges of fire. The large dump of railway debris believed to relate to the demolition carried out in September 1917 was investigated, as was a large mound and some disarticulated human remains found on the surface believed to relate to a field cemetery established immediately after the battle in September 1917. The final work on this site was the recording of a blockhouse beside the railway, believed to have been built by the Ottoman Army after September 1917.

Baṭn al-Ghūl Ottoman Army Encampment (Fig. 7)

We returned to this site, previously investigated in the 2007 and 2008 seasons, in order to increase the size of our sample of material culture relating to Ottoman military occupation. In fact, we not only achieved this, but also considerably enhanced our understanding of the form, layout and anthropological implications of the tent-rings characteristic of such occupation.

A GPS survey was carried out of the entire extent of



5. *Wuhayda.*
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6. *Hallat Ammar ambush site.*
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tent-rings and other features comprising the southern, northern and north-eastern encampments, with a total of 104 tent-rings recorded. A metal-detector survey was carried out of the entire area, but with a focus on the northern and north-eastern encampments, rather than on the less finds-rich southern encampment. Eleven stone enclosures, comprising four sunken-floored tent-rings, two surface tent-squares and one surface tent-ring in the northern encampment, plus

four sunken-floored tent-rings in the north-eastern encampment were cleared and recorded.

Mudawwara Southern Redoubt (Fig. 8)

The heavily militarised landscape of the Mudawwara oasis was first explored in 2012, when we focused on the northern redoubt, one of three hilltop forts covering the western approaches to Mudawwara station in 1917 - 1918. On this occasion, we explored the southern



7. Baṭn al-Ghūl Ottoman Army encampment.
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redoubt. Our aim was to test contemporary accounts of the three major actions fought here, in particular the well-documented final and successful attack in August 1918, and to add to our understanding of these events.

We added further detail to the GPS survey carried out in 2012. A metal-detector survey was completed of the entire redoubt, mainly to recover munitions so as to establish the direction and identity of both outgoing and incoming fire. Three sections of breastwork, two small integrated blockhouses, one deep tent-ring, one substantial building of uncertain use and one small circular feature of uncertain use were cleared and recorded.

Conclusions

The 2012 season advanced our knowledge and understanding of the Great Arab Revolt in southern Jordan in three main ways. First, it revealed something of the extent of British military involvement, both in providing special weapons units (artillery; aircraft; armoured cars; camelry) and in supplying the Arab forces (as evidenced by the finds assemblage from Wuheida). Second, it yielded evidence of the development of combined arms and special forces-type operations in this theatre of the First World War. Third, it highlighted the dramatic intensification of the war in the spring of 1918 and then, on a yet greater

scale, in the autumn of 1918.

The 2013 season confirmed the location of the famous Hallat Ammar ambush described by T. E. Lawrence in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, increased our understanding of everyday life in an Ottoman Army camp and added important detail to our knowledge of the sequence of military clashes at Mudawwara between September 1917 and August 1918.

In our first report, we concluded that the Great Arab Revolt Project had confirmed the huge potential of modern conflict archaeology in southern Jordan by revealing the survival of an extensively militarised landscape dating from 1916 - 1918 in the desert areas. We argued that the remains indicated a military response to a threat that was, on the one hand, dispersed and low-intensity, but on the other, chronic and pervasive. We further argued that this contrasted sharply with the experience of the First World War on the better-known Western Front.

Our second report confirmed the intensity of the Late Ottoman militarisation of the landscape. In particular, detailed work at Baṭn al-Ghūl showed that the density of military remains previously revealed at Wadi Rutm is not exceptional.

Our third report amplified the growing surviving evidence for the intensity of the war,



8. *Mudawwara southern redoubt.*
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but also added rich detail about the character of the counterinsurgency effort necessary to defend the landscape. Crucially, we are witness to the archaeological imprint of imperial ‘overstretch’. The imperative was both to keep the whole line under observation and to ensure that information could be relayed fast enough to facilitate a rapid response to attacks. This meant that the Ottoman Army was strung out in many small packets, like beads on a necklace, depriving the individual posts of security through strength, as well as draining resources both from a more proactive counterinsurgency effort east of the Jordan river and from the defence of the trench-lines facing Allenby’s army west of the Jordan river. The impression grows of a large-scale counter-

insurgency operation in southern Jordan between July 1917 and October 1918 - testimony to the effectiveness of the Arab military effort.

With our findings from the 2012 and 2013 seasons, the Great Arab Revolt Project continues to contribute substantial new information and ideas to at least three distinct archaeologies: that of modern conflict, that of southern Jordan and that of desert movement and warfare. It also continues to reveal the potential that exists for the development of major new heritage tourism attractions in the region.

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