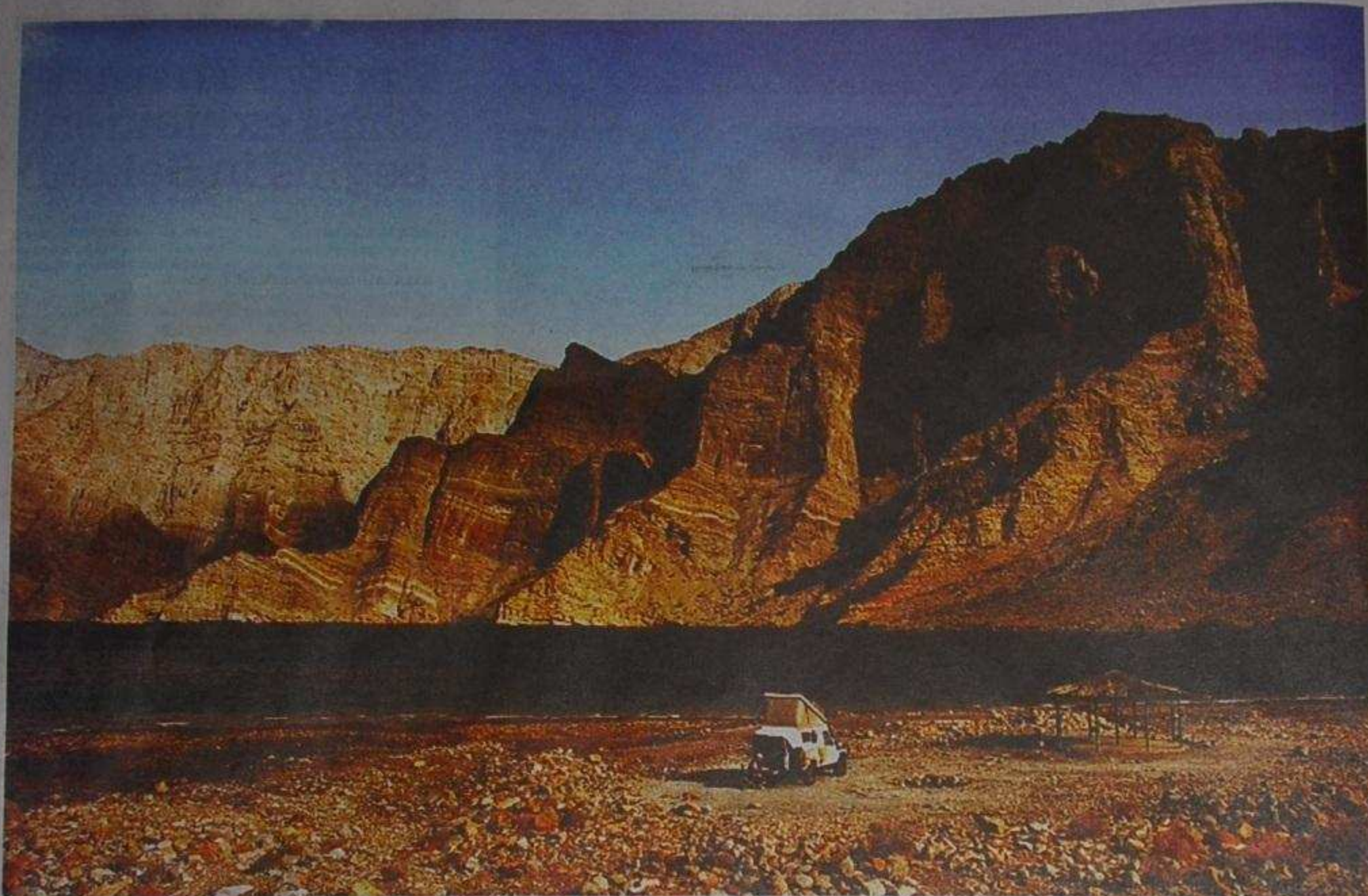


OMAN



OUTDOOR LIVING: The camp at Musandam, where the adventurers spent the night. (Below right) The couple at Bilad Seit, with village and green fields in the background.

Couple's tryst with Oman on wheels

With their primary goal of exploring and learning about different countries around the world, Paul and Brigitta prefer the relaxed way to savour the cultures of a country. So, **their Oman sojourn will last for about three weeks. The intrepid couple, who cook their food on board the Landcruiser, was wowed by the boat-building yard at Sur and also the Sharqiyah (Wahiba) Sands**

AFTAB H. KOLA
aftab@timesofoman.com

MUSCAT: All the focus is on Graham Hughes who is all set to create history with a new record as the first man to have travelled to all the countries in the world in one sweep ... on the last count he had travelled to 196 countries and is still travelling ... But there are many like him on a smaller level venturing out across the world.

One such couple is currently in Oman. Paul Bohlen and Brigitta Juni, natives of Switzerland, reached Oman a few weeks ago after having driven through 37 countries in their home-like Land Cruiser. Paul is excited to be in Oman. He has that uncanny knack to develop bonds of friendship with anyone, anywhere.

Little wonder then, when Mohammed Sabak, an Omani, whom he had first met in 1998 during his earlier visit to the Sultanate, invitation for dinner from the Omani friend was easy to come this time. Says Paul, "Mohammed makes you feel at home... he served us amazing Omani dinner which included *samak bil narjeel*, fish marinated in spices and topped with rice coconut sauce..."

It was in 2006 that 87-year-old Paul and his enterprising wife,

Brigitta, set out from Switzerland for a world tour on a four-wheel drive. Shares Brigitta, "We took off from France and so far have covered 37 countries and plan to cover a lot more. From Oman we will move into Sharjah and then getting to Bander Abbas in Iran (car will be shipped to Iran) and then to Pakistan, India and the Far East".

Recounts Paul, "Some countries are not bad as people perceive them to be. We have been to places like Djibouti, Botswana, Costa Rica, Saudi Arabia and Honduras, Sudan, Rwanda, Venezuela where hardly tourists go. But they are as amazing as Europe and the Middle East".

Brigitta explains further, "...And in Sudan, we were given a warm welcome by the Omani consulate while Uganda is sheathed in greenery, a fact which is little known to others." With their primary goal being to explore and learn about different countries around the world, Paul and Brigitta prefer the relaxed way to savour the cultures of a country. So, they are here for about three weeks.

Threading their Land Cruiser through the breadth of Oman, going down to Musandam and covering Nizwa, Sur, Rustaq, Paul and his wife have special bonding with Oman's wadis. Says Paul, "Driving through wadis is an amazing ex-

perience. It thrills us ... we put out our tent, sleep under the stars with peace all round".

Continues Paul, "Oman is a balanced country with tolerant people. I have seen massive development since I last visited the Sultanate. When you are in Oman you feel at home". He shares another fascinating account, "In a Muslim country like Oman, we don't require an alarm clock to wake us up early... we wake up hearing the muezzin's prayer call".

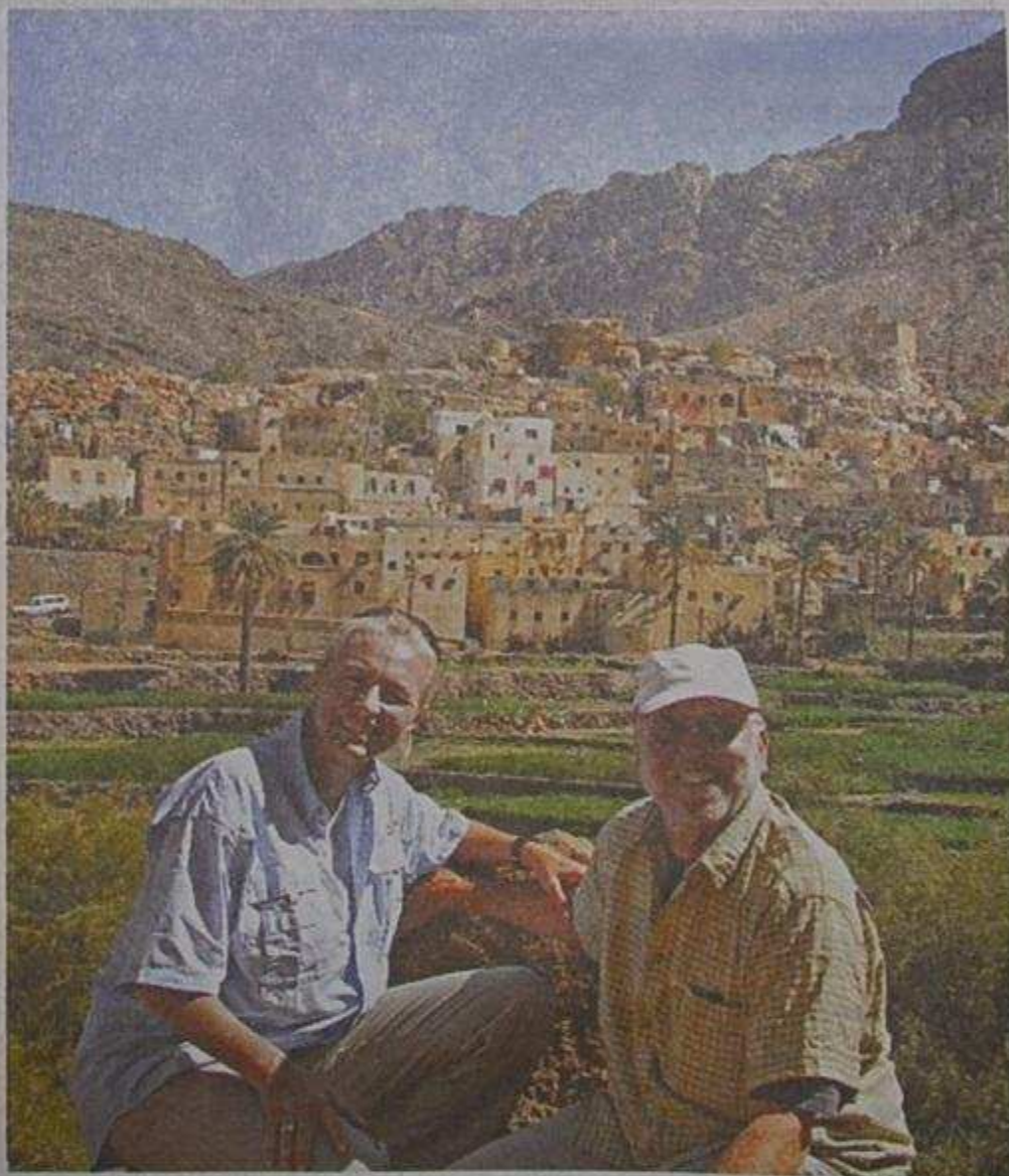
The intrepid couple who cook their food on board the Land Cruiser was wowed by the boat building yard at Sur. Says Paul, "Bygone maritime air still pervades Sur where I saw some Sur people repairing the dhows."

Sharqiyah (Wahiba) Sands also impressed the couple while they had a rare opportunity to peep through the gaping hole of the Majlis Al Jinn. The duo are quite gung-ho about the next leg of their journey that will take them through Iran, Pakistan, India and Far East. "I look forward to be in some culturally fascinating places."

How did the two get together? Paul smiles, "Globetrotting is in our blood. How else can one explain that we met and fell in love while scuba diving in the Caribbean, cemented our relationship in Australia, got married in Namibia and spent our honeymoon travelling in a 4x4 through Argentina and Chile. We went on board a Russian icebreaker and travelled from Ushuaia to Antarctica and have finally planned this immensely long trip. Travelling doesn't only educate, it's also a bug that has infected both of us!"

The Land Cruiser they drive is armed with all the travel necessities like navigation system, solar panels to supply power, cooking set-up, fridge, snow chain, car breakdown equipment, etc.

Their website, <http://www.circumnavigation.ch>, lists out countries they have so far visited. One can also read the travel adventures posted regularly on this website.



OMANI FEAST: Savouring dinner with an old friend, Mohammed.

NATURE'S BOUNTY: Paul Bohlen at the Wadi Bani Canyon.