

Notes on the 2007 Aden Trip

Saturday Afternoon

Best daytime trip round M25 ever. 25 car 'tailback' when leaving M40 was only 'problem'.

Advised to check in at 4pm for 7pm takeoff - but check-in was very smooth so we had 2 hours in departure lounge.

Saturday Night & Sunday Morning

(Sorry Mr Sillitoe – you can't copyright that !)

Plane was as comfortable as you could reasonably expect. Low loading meant that some of us were able to spread ourselves over a second seat. Onboard meals served efficiently and quality OK (compared to other airline meals I've had, I'm inclined to say these were excellent but of course the limitations of any airline food mean you'd prefer something better still!).

Unexpected stop @ Sana'a (I had been under impression the Sana'a passengers came to Aden then stayed on plane whilst it returned to Sana'a) & even more unexpected switch to different aircraft. Surprising number of Brits (or at least Western Europeans) on board.

Slow passage through Khormaksar airport but not unbearably so. Ripped off on changing \$50 to YER @ airport bank (found later that hotel offered much rate). Hustled a bit by porters & escorted to taxis – our party of six plus luggage meant that we needed two taxis for the trip to the Sheraton.

Taxi fare was only 2000 YER (about £6) for each taxi & I found out later that many taxi drivers would probably have accepted pounds sterling or US dollars anyway. First trip through Aden showed that whilst there had been many changes much was still recognisable (and that local drivers still make extensive use of horn but not many other concessions to new-fangled safety technology !).

Arrived at Sheraton at 7am.

I knew from website that normal check-in time was 3pm but hoped that we could at least deposit luggage early and perhaps even grab a breakfast (that's a second breakfast – we'd been woken up at 4am local time to have one on plane but that wasn't exactly filling!) and perhaps somewhere to sit for awhile. Actuality was magnificent ! Hotel manager made us feel that guests turning up 8 hours early was quite normal, apologised for making us wait half an hour whilst rooms were prepared and suggested we have breakfast while waiting. Try that in an English hotel some time and see if you feel as welcome !



After breakfast, some of us repaired to their rooms for an early siesta but the hardier members of the party decided to take our first swim & sunbathe.

Sunday Afternoon

By 4pm we'd met up again & voted to take a trip around Steamer Point (I should really call it Tawahi these days but I'm sure my audience will forgive the slip). Hotel receptionist called us two taxis so we asked both drivers to take us to "The Crescent" & rendezvoused at door of "The Crescent Hotel".

A couple of hours walking around the Crescent & its side streets had us all feeling that time had stood still ! Many (but rather fewer) of the familiar shops were still there and we even thought that some of them were still displaying the same wares ! Managed to take pictures of the APA Departure Hall (completely unchanged in & out) , 'Little Ben' , Crescent Hotel,



Rock Hotel & Queen Victoria (but get there quick if you want to see her – there seems to be a lot of building activity around her & most of the Crescent Gardens plants have been ripped out). Found a taxi-rank behind the Crescent Police station and came home in an 8-seater Peugeot estate car.



Stopped briefly near the Catholic church where Mike was able to look at an apparently derelict building that used to be St Anthony's Catholic Boys High School then carried on back to hotel. Engaged same driver to pick us up following morning for a trip to Crater, Khormaksar & Ma'alla. Dined at the 'Pink Pearl' Chinese restaurant in the GoldMohur complex – good selection of dishes which we shared for around £15 per head.



Monday

Mohammed arrived to pick us up as arranged at 10am. Went first to Yemenia offices in Aden to ask whether it was really necessary to confirm the (pre-booked) flights home. It was & we did. En route we'd taken lots of pictures (indeed that has been true for every trip so I shan't keep mentioning it).



Drove via the (new to us but looks as though we only just missed it and were well in advance of its first resurfacing !) Relief Road and up the Crater Pass road (a new steep slope from the back of the cemetery leads to a new roundabout which has replaced the familiar hairpin bend) through the (now unbridged) Crater Pass & down past the Police Barracks. After calling at the Yemenia office we went up to Tawela Gardens & Tanks then drove onto & off Sira Island and on to Khormaksar via the seafront route.

Drove around Khormaksar area looking at our old houses – I'm sure they're nearly all there but most are now surrounded by walls so the wide open-plan streets have given way to narrow alleys & only a few retain the old numbers (&



needless to say most of the likely candidates were pretty anonymous !). Parked outside the old 'Main Gate' of Khormaksar RAF camp (Families Gate has become another of the narrow alleyways) and walked up to what is now the entrance of the University of Aden's Faculty of Education & asked the guard for permission to enter & take a few photos - he was fairly happy to let us in but asked us not to take any pictures (don't panic folks – read on) walked up past a row of huts that all but me recognised immediately (in my defence I was only ever upper-school & hadn't used the 'new huts' - I'm sure I would have recognised any 'old huts' but we didn't go that far in) and on to an immediately recognisable main entrance of the Secondary School building. A gentleman coming out stopped to speak to us & introduced himself as a member of staff then invited us to take a few photographs and took us inside to speak to the Vice Dean (the most senior member of staff present that day – the Dean being away at an educational conference). After a drink & a chat in what seemed to be some sort of boardroom we were introduced to a lady member of staff who as a child played various games against teams from our school in its closing years (possibly even against a team that would have included Margaret). Unfortunately it was a rather busy day in the building with various exams going on but we have at least established friendly relations and I would hope that we'll be able to organise a more thorough visit on some future occasion.



After another drive around the Khormaksar area to locate Margaret's family home (we did but she was a bit disappointed by its condition) we stopped off near the site of the RAF MCS jetty (alas it seems now to have been demolished and will shortly be covered up by the encroaching landfill (that's already taken the dhow yards) and the new container terminal. After that it was on to Ma'alla where we looked at a couple of blocks of flats on



the straight then tried to find Lyn Addison's father's grave in the Christian cemetery. Pretty sure we found the cemetery OK but couldn't locate actual grave – a possible reason is that Lyn had told me to look for a 'standard RAF wooden cross' but that most of the likely candidates seemed to have fallen apart so we were really looking for a 'standard RAF wooden stump now become anonymous'. Plenty of other Brit graves stretching back nearly 100 years & including a couple of 'unknown soldiers' graves. Possible that a check with relevant Church authorities will narrow down field.

After a gentle drive back to Sheraton for 4pm we sunbathed (or slept or updated this journal) till dinner time.

Dinner was taken in the main hotel restaurant and was a bit of a disaster. Nothing wrong with food – I think we all agreed quality was excellent – but mixup in order left most of us without a starter.

And so to bed. . .

Tuesday Morning

Mohammed booked again but to avoid the afternoon sun we asked him to pick us up at 8:30am – turned up promptly & we set off for Little Aden. Seemed a lot further than I ever remembered but trip took less than an hour; (probably against his normal practice !) Mohammed wasn't pushing it (all those yells of 'maalish' must have been sinking in) so plenty of time to shoot pix en route. Continued past Little Aden towards Bir Fuqum & were stopped at a military checkpoint near Silent Valley cemetery. Apparently area is still a 'security area' & Mohammed warned us against taking pictures too obviously. Passed a Yemeni Army camp – which Mohammed described as 'English' so I guess it would have been the old Falaise Barracks : most buildings now in service with Yemeni Army though others apparently left derelict (but you have to realise there's only a fine distinction between 'derelict' & 'slightly below average maintenance standard' !). Carried on to Bir Fuqum village , turned round & returned. Stopped again @ Army checkpoint & asked permission to enter the Silent Valley cemetery. Excellent standard of grounds maintenance & apparently a full time attendant on duty. Not really as many occupied plots as I'd expected to see (perhaps 150-200 ?) but really distressing to note that many of these were really young children (several less than a year) as well as the expected KIAs.



Returned via Slave Island, Khormaksar, The Aden Mall to Ma'alla cemetery (again). Very helpful attendant on duty today at Ma'alla cemetery (it was a bit earlier than previous day) but he seemed to have no plot records & wandering around didn't turn up the John Ryan grave - afraid we have to assume that the wooden cross didn't stand test of time : there were several anonymous ones adjacent to 1963 stones.

Back to Sheraton. Had given Mohammed Wednesday off – we were hoping to arrange a boat trip. Evening meal taken at 'The Fish Market' superbly cooked local fish but a mix-up in ordering left the waiters thinking that only the crazy English would eat a piece of fish with no accompaniments (that's not of course quite what we were thinking at the time !).

Wednesday A.M.

Majority of party decided to stay on beach but Mike & I took a cab back to Tawahi to call at Christ Church &/or Catholic Church to make further enquiries about Ma'alla cemetery. Vicar was away in Cyprus but Mansour – his admin assistant – made us very welcome and advised that his uncle was the honorary British Consul & keeper of the cemetery records. Wasn't unfortunately possible to raise Mansour's uncle on telephone but Mansour promised to keep trying and to leave a message at our hotel. Asked if Catholic Church was open for business (had heard rumours that it might not be) & told that it was although priest spent a lot of time in India. Mansour insisted on his driver taking us to Catholic Church – just as well he did as church manned by a watchman who spoke little English who told us through the driver that Fr Matthew was indeed in India. Driver arranged with him that we could view church (doubt we'd have managed that unaided). Could see convent over wall but no obvious entrance (even after walking around building).



Walked into 'Steamer Point' & did a bit of window shopping. Taxi back to Sheraton.

Wednesday P.M.

Received 'phone message that our boat trip wasn't possible so went to office to discuss. Apparently boatman's day off & asst boatman not happy taking parties. Rearranged booking for Thu. Decided to revisit Aden Mall & perhaps find somewhere in that area for dinner. Plans changed when one member of party taken ill so we returned to Sheraton & packed invalid off to bed. Remainder of party ate at main restaurant but stuck to the self-service buffet where food was excellent (& service outstanding !)

Thursday A.M.

Party split up – some going in search of Dhow Yards, rest taking trip to high ground behind Steamer Point then on to Ma'alla. Drove up Chapel Hill to hospital site which is still in use. Unable to take pictures there (part



of a military base) and in any case most of the 1960s buildings apart from hospital have been demolished. Moved instead to an area near foot of 'Little Ben' which gave even better views over harbour. On to Ma'alla where Mike discovered his old block of flats then to Khormaksar area & back to hotel.



Thursday P.M.



Boat trip went ahead as planned. From hotel beach past Ras Tarshyne to a point near President's Palace (Governor's House to most readers) then back in opposite direction several bays beyond Goldmohur & back again to hotel.



An hour or two on beach then dinner at the 'Fish Market' again (this time we asked for a menu !!). Fish just as good but tasted even better with a few chips.

Friday A.M.

Most of party lazed around on beach but Mike & I walked into Tawahi. Called at Christ Church where service was in progress (following local custom to celebrate Sabbath on a Friday) & spoke to Vicar afterwards. Mansour hadn't managed to contact his uncle but Simon (an English teacher from the site whom we'd met on the plane) offered to try & photograph John Ryan's grave at a later date. Walked on into Tawahi & took cab back to hotel.

Friday P.M.

We'd checked out by then but were able to remain in hotel using facilities. Spent most of afternoon on beach and had dinner at 'Pink Pearl' again. We chose that because of the excellent service we'd had on the first night but it was a bit crowded this time so service nothing like as good (food OK though). Took taxis to airport & caught plane to Sana'a.



Saturday A.M.

Arrived in Sana'a at 00:45. Met at airport by minibus from Sheraton (Aden manager had arranged this for me). In bed by 01:30. I was up again at 5am (not rest of party though !) hoping to get an internet connection but their computer broken too (Aden Sheraton's comp hadn't been available since Wed). Wandered around hotel grounds at dawn. Sana'a



wasn't as cold as I'd expected (high altitude means it doesn't seem 'tropical' but it's more 'Mediterranean' than 'Arctic'). Great breakfast – they have the only breakfast waiter I've ever met who can pour coffee faster than I drink it. Panicking a little when we were still at hotel half an hour after the time we'd been told to check in at airport but forced to admit we were delivered to airport in plenty of time to spend an hour in departure lounge. Met a chap from Sheffield who had availed himself of the 'free' bed & breakfast in the airport hotel and

confirmed we'd made the right decision to stick with the Sheraton – it had taken him a couple of hours to get to his bed and his breakfast bore no resemblance whatsoever to ours.

Plane ride uneventful. Yemenia's in flight catering no worse than anyone else's but I don't think any airline offers really good meals. Seat pitch much better than any other economy flight I've ever taken and I had the added bonus of being the only occupant in a block of three seats so was able to sleep for most of flight.

Arrived back in London to a mild evening & learnt that we'd missed by far the worst week of the winter.

Great trip !! Sorry for all those who missed it.

I SHALL BE GOING AGAIN !!! Watch this space.