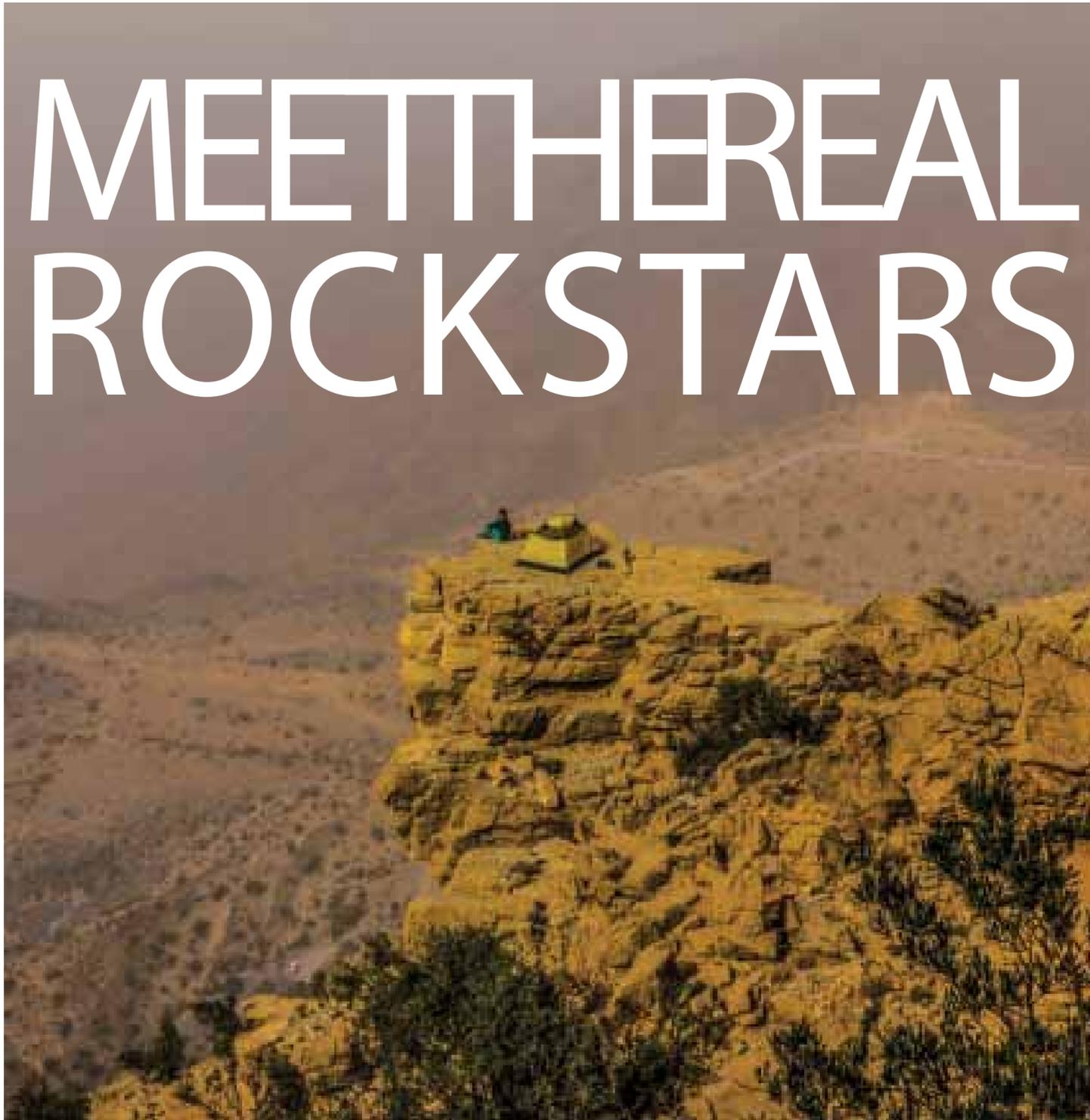


MEET THE REAL ROCKSTARS



German adventurers Benny Trautmann and Andi Burger came to Oman to climb the great Hajar Mountains and ended up creating new opportunities for future climbers along their way

Story by T.A. Ameerudheen | Photography by Andi Burger & Benny Trautmann



Andi Burger and Benny Trautmann were bombarded with questions when they decided to embark on a climbing trip to Oman early this year. “Why did you choose Oman?” asked a friend. “Does the country have beautiful climbing spots like Europe,” queried a family member.

The seasoned German climbers, who have undertaken climbing expeditions throughout Europe, in Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and France, had read a lot about Oman’s splendid culture, its courteous people and their traditional lives, and were particularly fascinated by the stories about the first ascent out of Majlis Al Jinn, the second largest known cave chamber in the world which is a good three hour drive from Muscat by Chris Sharma and Stefan Glowacz in 2014. But it was Oman’s distinctive, towering mountains that really captured their imaginations.

“The canyons and beautiful rock formations make the country climbers’ paradise. We got tremendous support from the local people. They helped us with plenty of information,” Andi said. “Most of our friends and family members weren’t aware of Oman until we planned our trip. But we had done a lot of research before finalising the itinerary.”

Rock climbing is an activity in which participants climb up, down or across natural rock formations or artificial rock walls. The goal is to reach the summit of a formation or the endpoint of a pre-defined route without falling. Rock climbing is a physically and

mentally demanding sport, one that often tests a climber’s strength, endurance, agility and balance along with mental control. It can be a dangerous sport and knowledge of proper climbing techniques and usage of specialised climbing equipment is crucial for the safe completion of routes.

Two major styles of climbing are sport and traditional, the former is extremely versatile, offering a range of difficulties as well as a range of route-lengths. Sport climbers predominantly focus on the moves and techniques they use to get to their destination. In sport climbing, falling is expected and planned for accordingly. A climber working on a difficult route may fall dozens of times before he finally accomplishes it. Ropes threaded through a number of pre-fixed anchors bolted into a wall or crag keep the climbers safe. Traditional climbing is all about the holistic experience and the mental game of scaling a mountain, as such, the routes typically do not have fixed anchors permanently bolted into the wall/crag, instead, the climber is responsible for inserting protective anchors into cracks in the rock.

One of the aims of the adventurous duo was to encourage and enhance sports climbing in Oman by inserting pre-fixed anchors into the cliff sides to create new climbing routes. The biggest challenge for Benny and Andi was figuring out how to prepare for such an expedition in a place with a limited history with the sport.

“It was not easy to get information about the climbing spots. But we combed Facebook, and thoroughly read the



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Climbfit Middle East
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guidebook for rock climbing in Oman written by Jakob-Oberhauser and sourced information from the Internet," Andi said.

On February 18, 2015 the pair arrived in the Sultanate, beginning their visit with a whirlwind overview of the country. "Starting from Muscat, our first stop was at Wadi Al Mayh. Then we went to Wadi Daykah, drove right over the Bimmah Sinkhole, Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi to Sur, down to Masirah Island and on south to Salalah. After spending a few days on filming and photography in the southern part of Oman, we headed back to the north and had a stopover at Wadi Bani Khalid," Benny described.

Then it was time to explore the mountains they had come to climb. "The journey took us back to Muscat and right into the Hajar mountains. We drove to Kubrah Canyon, Wadi Mistal, with the climbing area Hadash, Wadi Bani Awf, and Sharaf Al Almayn before climbing to the top of Jebal Shams. Excellent climbing spots welcomed us in all the places," Benny said.

"All the climbing spots had excellent rocks. The grading we encountered in Oman was pretty comparable to European climbing areas. But they had different character thanks

to the unique vegetation and the locations themselves," Andi added.

Climbing grades are systems of letters or numbers (or in some cases letters and numbers) that let climbers know what to expect from the routes they are going to take. Without these ratings systems, it would be difficult to know from place to place what a climb is going to be like, and whether or not you have the skill, ability and guts to handle it. The talented pair was able to open eight new climbing sectors in the Kubrah canyon by grading them and adding anchors. "We chose Kubrah as it is just a one hour drive from Muscat. The new route opens up the possibility to climb in the shades from late noon till evening," Benny said.

Andi and Benny came for the mountains and the adventure, and, as taken as they were with the climbing, and as thrilling as it was to blaze new trails and open new routes, but it was the people of Oman that won their hearts. "Oman is a beautiful and lovely country with a lot of places you have to see. Omani people are open-minded and respectful. Their culture is amazing and it fascinated us. We will definitely be back."

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