

AAINews

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The Arabian Peninsular Revisited

After three year's away, I was recently given another chance to set foot on the Arabian Peninsular. While my previous mission had been in the Las Al Khaimah, UAE, conducting research on water-saving vegetable cultivation, my destination this time was the town of Salalah, 1,000km southwest of Oman's capital Muscat. I have been working in the area of dry land agriculture since I was a student, but this was just my second experience of work in the field.

This time my work was in a neighbouring land to the country where I did my first fieldwork but it is in the same Arabian Peninsular, and by now I have started feeling some attachment to this part of the world. My position on this second visit was as a JICA expert and my duties were to conduct training in the field of vegetable cultivation. The actual work was in the Nejd Agricultural Research Station (NARS), 160km north of Salalah. Built in 1994 with technical aid from Japan, NARS has received experts on dry land agriculture from AAI since 1996. The series of articles titled "Agriculture in Dhofar" that was published in earlier issues of AAINews was based on AAI's work in NARS.

I received a big surprise on my first journey from Salalah to NARS. In order to reach NARS we had to cross a mountain range called the Jabal. It was a scenic drive past camels and grazing cows. Had I arrived during the monsoon season itself, visibility would have been limited to just a few metres due to heavy fog but my visit was right after the monsoon's end. The mountains were green all over, and I felt as if I were in Japan. However, a short drive beyond the mountain range revealed a completely wild desert. I could have never imagined such a contrast between distinct natural environments located only a few kilometres apart. Although I had been pre-warned about the natural conditions in this area, it was still rather surprising for me as I had not expected the change to be so drastic.

NARS can be reached after another hour's drive through the same desert scenery with the mountains looming behind. NARS is surrounded by nothing but desert, and for researchers from Japan where there is no real arid land, it is an ideal place for fieldwork. The Arid Land Research Centre of Tottori University, from which I received my degree, has just built an arid dome this year. This is a glass dome in which climatic conditions can be controlled and dry land conditions can also be created. This facility, equipped with state of the art technology, may be sufficient for basic research. However, fieldwork is still necessary for applied research. I thought that it would be fantastic if we could establish some sort of supplementary research relationship in which researchers and students visit NARS to conduct research which would not be possible in Japan, then return to Japan to conduct complicated analyses and so on.

Luckily, arrangements were made for one of the NARS staff specialized in pasturage to come to Japan to study on a scholarship which commenced October 1998. He is now in Japan and under going language training. Later he will start graduate study at Tottori University. I hope that in the future he will make positive contributions to the agricultural development of Oman and at the same time that the friendship will grow stronger between Japan and Oman.
(By IYAMA in Oman, Dec 1998.)



Mountain range swathed in green: Jabal



Counterpart staff, Mr. Gahzey (at NARS vegetable farm)