Chapter 3

Preliminary Report on Fieldwork
in The Farasan Islands
and Jizan and Asir Provinces by
The DISPERSE Project,
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3.1 Introduction

The aims of this period of fieldwork were to spend brief spells of work with a small team to:

1. Complete excavation at the Janaba 4 (JE0004) shell mound, Farasan, and collect a stratigraphic sequence of shell and dating samples through the full depth of the mound
2. Re-visit some of the areas identified in the May–June 2012 fieldwork in Jizan province to look more carefully for evidence of archaeological sites
3. Plan more extended fieldwork campaigns in both areas for 2013

The fieldwork on Farasan took place between from 11–23 November, and on the Jizan mainland from 24 November to 2 December (Figure 3.1). During the Farasan fieldwork, the British Ambassador, Sir John Jenkins, visited Farasan and this gave us an opportunity to show him and the Governor of Farasan, Mr. Hussein Aldajani, the excavations in progress and some of the other shell mounds of the area (Figure 3.2).

3.2 Farasan Excavations

Previous excavations were carried out in 2006, 2008 and 2009. The focus of this season was to complete work at Janaba 4 (JE0004), and re-fill the trenches and restore the site to its former condition. The site is located on a small but prominent headland, is approximately 20 m in diameter and 1.5m deep at its deepest point in the centre. Previous excavations had exposed a section through the centre of the site on a North–South axis, excavated down to bedrock for all but the central 3m of the site (Figure 3.3). This unexcavated section was the target of this season of fieldwork. The aim was to complete the longitudinal vertical section through the mound, draw and photograph the stratigraphy in the exposed section, and remove a column sample through the full depth of the deposit, comprising a sequence of bulk samples for shell and soil analysis and radiocarbon dating.

After the 2009 season, the base and sides of the excavated trenches were covered with a protective tarpaulin and the trenches were partially filled in to provide protection. The first task in 2012 was to remove this protective material. The remaining in situ deposit at the base of the trench was then removed quite rapidly in order to expose the sections of the trench down to the bedrock. The sections were

then cleaned, drawn and photographed, with particular emphasis on the west-facing section, which is the most complete and undisturbed (Figures 3.4 and 3.5). The sections clearly demonstrate the varied nature of the deposits in the mound and the nature of their accumulation and stratification. In the central part of the mound the deposits show a near-horizontal banding with thick layers of shell dominated by the small gastropod, *Conomurex fasciatus*, alternating with thinner ash-rich layers, often rich in fish bone, which show up as black bands in the section (Figure 3.6). Higher up in the section, it is clear that the deposits have become truncated by slumping or removal of deposits on the slope of the accumulating mounds, particularly near its edge, with overlying accumulations of shells, often dominated by the larger gastropods, such as *Pleuroploca pleuroploca* and *Chicoreus trapezium*.

For the column sampling, we selected two columns in the west-facing section, representing the deepest parts of the mound with the most complete and representative sequence of layers: 11G near the thickest part of the mound at its centre; and 14G, which samples a wider range of shell layers with differing characteristics nearer the north end of the section (Figures 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9). A square, 20 cm x 20cm, was marked out at the top of the section, and the deposit was removed in successive 5 cm-thick layers, the thickness varying where necessary in order to respect stratigraphic boundaries recognized in the section, as identified by changes in shell content and the nature of the sediment matrix. Ash lenses, for example, were removed separately from shell layers, even if these were less than 5cm thick. All the deposit from each excavated unit was bagged and labelled separately, resulting in 36 samples from the 11G column, and 33 samples from 14G. The resulting samples were packed and prepared for export to the UK in order to allow analysis under laboratory conditions, including sorting of shell material, analysis of sediments, and removal of shell and charcoal samples for radiocarbon dating. A similar column was removed from the northernmost end of the mound, 1G, in order to provide fresh material for sediment analysis and dating from this peripheral part of the mound. After completion of excavation, the open trenches were backfilled (Figure 3.10).

Finally small test trenches were excavated into the other mounds in the vicinity (Figure 3.11), and sections were drawn and bulk samples removed according to the same procedures. Since these other shell mounds are small and shallow, the number of samples removed from each site was much smaller, ranging between 2 and 4.

Sites in Janaba West and Janaba East were also visited for reconnaissance purposes in order to determine the suitability of the sites for future study in the forthcoming field season in January 2013.

3.3 Jizan and Asir Fieldwork

Seven days of fieldwork were devoted to two principal aims: (1) to make additional observations on the archaeological potential of the various landscape zones identified during the May–June 2012 fieldwork ahead of systematic survey in January–February 2013; (2) to sample potential lake sediments exposed in a quarry near Hajambar, As Shugaig (WP304), Asir Province, for palaeoenvironmental analyses and dating.

The fieldwork was split between areas west of Al Khushal (1 day) and Bayish and Qura (1 day) in the south and central parts of Jizan Province, and five days around the southern end of the Harrat Al Birk, Asir Province (Figure 3.1).

During this period, artefacts, including stone tools from multiple periods and pottery, were recorded and collected at 12 locations (Figure 3.1). All artefacts were archived in the Sabiya museum for future study. WP304, the potential lacustrine or alluvial sediment sequence exposed in a quarry, was sampled for bulk sedimentological and soil micromorphological analyses to be carried out in the UK, as well as dating by Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL).

3.3.1 Al Khushal Area

The area to the east of the 'Magmatic Line' of hills, which run parallel to the escarpment, was only briefly visited during the May–June 2012 season, and a further visit in the November 2012 fieldwork sought to clarify the archaeological potential for the heavily cultivated area west of Al Khushal. This visit focussed on the eastern edge of the Magmatic Line (WP005-012), since here, the impact of agricultural disruption was potentially reduced. The Magmatic Line also provides potential raw material, as well as commanding views of the surrounding landscape, both of which could have been attractive to early human populations. Finds were limited to a few pottery sherds (WP008) and rare undiagnostic lithics (WP011, 015-016), and further survey will be needed in this area in order to pinpoint locations where earlier archaeology may be preserved and accessible.

3.3.2 Wadi Bayish Dam/Qura Area

Exploration of the area directly SW of Qura sought to clarify aspects of the sedimentology of the area directly below the foot of the escarpment, particularly the nature, development and archaeological potential of a number of alluvial fan deposits (WP027-031), as well as that of the wadi terraces in the area (WP020-026). An area of sandstone in the foothills of the escarpment, near to the town of Ar Rayth, c.377 m asl, was also visited to gain an understanding of the impact such a change of lithology would have on the smaller-scale landscapes of the escarpment. Whilst no artefacts were observed at any of these locations, the visits provided valuable information on the sedimentary environments and landscape development that can be used to guide future survey in the area.

Rare non-diagnostic lithics and pottery fragments were recovered from an old wadi terrace that now overlooks the southern end of the Wadi Bayish dam lake (WP015-6, equivalent to WP165). The entire surface of the terrace is covered in a scatter of rolled wadi boulders that would provide a good source of raw material, and if present, Palaeolithic material should be easily visible on the surface of these areas around the dam, and in similar locations around this area.

3.3.3 The Southern Harrat Al Birk

The lava flows of the Harrat Al Birk, Asir Province, contain sites previously identified by the Comprehensive Archaeological Survey Program (Zarins et al. 1981), mainly along the edges of the lava flows. The survey of this area identified Palaeolithic artefacts at a number of sites in the area in different settings (Figure 3.1). These include the following:

WP041. A concentration of basalt flakes and cores on the flat top of a volcanic jebel (Figure 3.12) This location has a particularly fine-grained area of basalt within the more common porous boulders of lava. Artefacts were also found on the slopes of this jebel (WP040).

WP045. Multi-period lithics on a range of raw materials including basalt, chert, and granite, and potentially quartz were found around the base of a linear granite jebel of basalt (Figure 3.13). This is located to the east of the Hajambar/Muhayil road in an otherwise flat landscape dominated by deflated surfaces dominated by quartz but including other raw material.

WP055–057. An area of sites west of the Hajambar/Muhayil road, clustered around a linear outcrop of quartz, schist and basalt in an otherwise gently undulating landscape of shallow wadis (Figure 3.14).

Two small rockshelters in laminated volcanic sediments under lava exposed by a wadi were observed at WP049 (Figure 3.15). The talus slope of one of these rockshelters yielded undiagnostic lithics, and this may be a good target for future excavation to assess whether any deposits remain stratified within the shelter or on its slope. Additional rockshelters may occur in the same lithological setting.

The survey also located, both on the ground and through the use of satellite images from Google Earth, a large number of circular structures built on the edges of the lava flows. Extending around the entire lava field, these structures are of unknown date, but yield pottery as well as lithic artefacts (WP037-038), and are similar to those observed during the May–June 2012 season. Such structures demonstrate the long-term use of the landscape during later prehistory, although they are being destroyed in a number of places by the bulldozing and quarrying of the sediment within the lava fields.

3.3.4 Hajambar Quarry, WP304

This quarry was located in the May–June 2012 survey c. 8 km North of Hajambar on the Hajambar/Muhayil road, and contains a series of stratified deposits, the lowermost of which were initially interpreted as lake sediments (Figure 3.16). On this occasion, we sampled these lower sediments for additional analysis. Three dating samples were removed from the section for OSL dating, as well as a column of 68 small bulk sediment samples for sedimentological analyses, along with 13 intact blocks for analysis by soil micromorphology. A mixture of stone tool types and materials, predominantly quartzite were recovered from various unstratified locations within the quarry, although two quartzite flakes were removed from the most recent unit of wadi deposits at the north end of the quarry.

3.4 Conclusion

The work carried out at the Janaba 4 shell mound brings to a conclusion the excavation of this site begun in 2006, and prepares the way for new excavation and sampling of a wider range of shell mound sites on the Farasan Islands, which is planned for 2013. Similarly the survey of sites on the Jizan mainland has provided

a basis for more intensive survey work in 2013. Although all the sites identified in the present survey consisted of surface scatters of lithics, which probably represent palimpsests of activity over many millennia, and no stratified sites were located during this survey, this limited work has shown that Palaeolithic artefacts are distributed and preserved in a wider range of landscapes than previously thought. This highlights the potential for locating an abundance of Palaeolithic sites in the area in future seasons. The analysis and dating of the potential palaeolake sediments at Hajambar will also allow us to constrain the nature and the age of the deposits and their contribution to our understanding of the landscape and climate evolution of the area and its potential significance to early human populations.

Acknowledgements

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The fieldwork team included Geoff Bailey, Robyn Inglis, Matthew Meredith-Williams, Niklas Hausmann, Abdullah Alsharekh, Saud Al Ghamdi, Hussein Mofareh, Mohammed Al Halwi and Abdu Aqeeli.

Figures

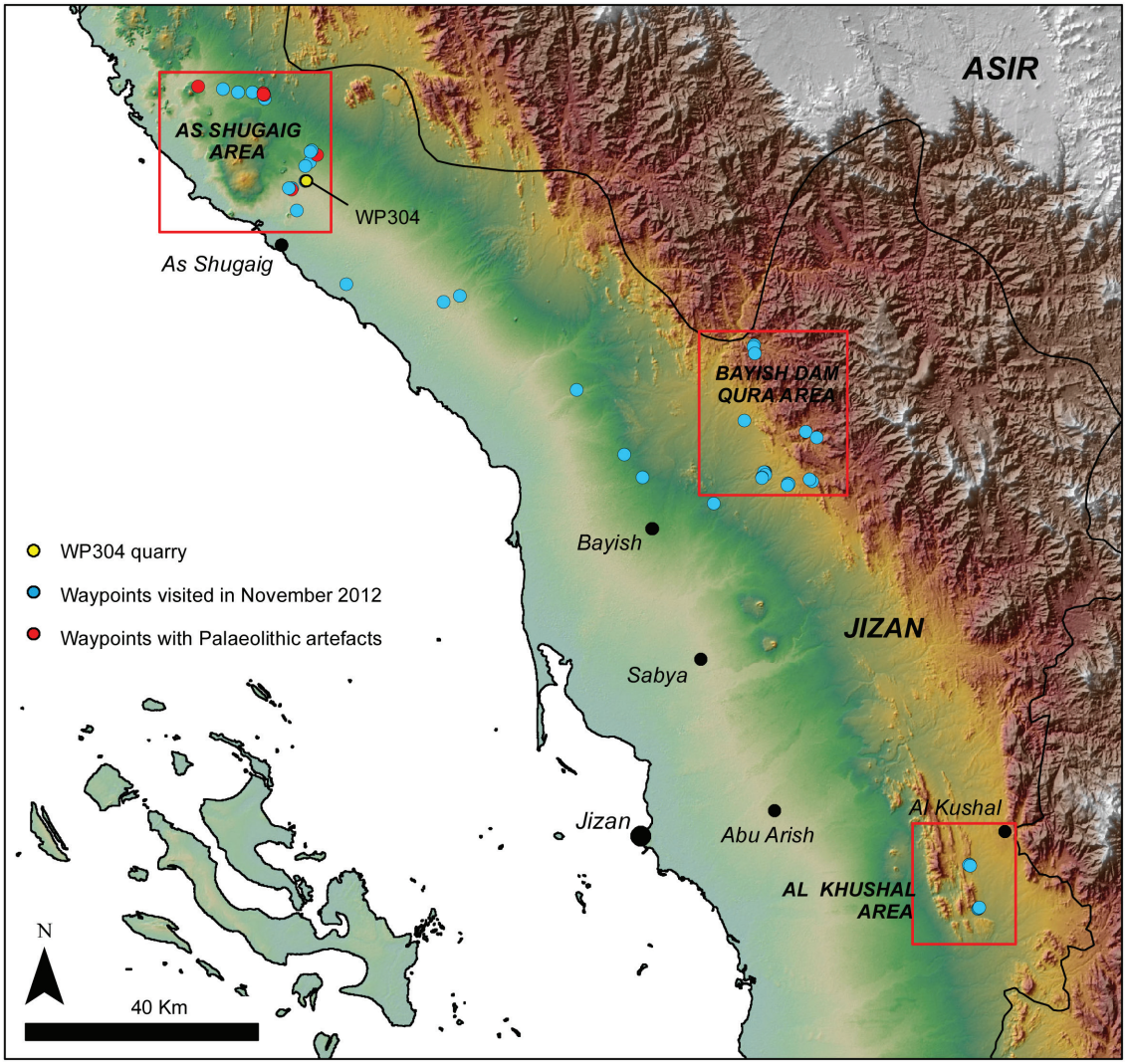

Figure 3.1. Location map of Farasan Islands and Jizan and Asir region, showing the areas on the mainland visited in November-December 2012, and the location of sites and waypoints. Map prepared by Robyn Inglis.

Figure 3.2. Geoff Bailey (on left) giving an overview of the Janaba 4 excavations to the British Ambassador, Sir John Jenkins, and the Governor of the Farasan Islands, Hussein Aldajani, standing above the east facing section of the excavation trench. Photo by Niklas Hausmann, 20 Nov 2012.

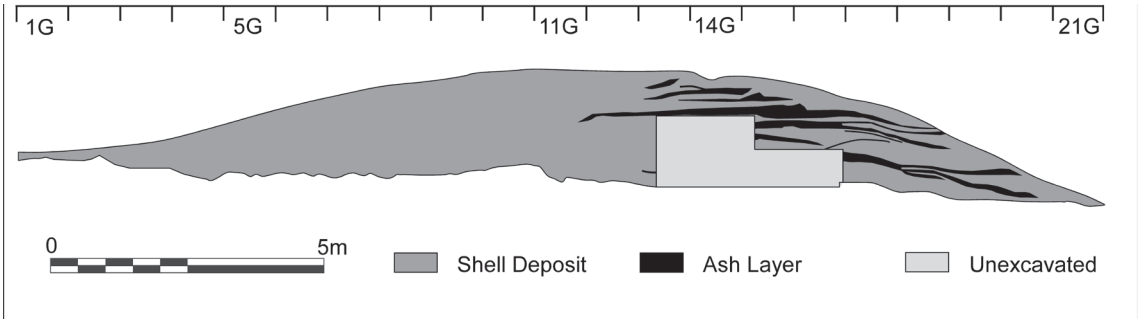

Figure 3.3. Simplified section through the Janaba 4 (JE0004) shell mound on a North–South axis. The vertical scale is exaggerated to aid clarity, and is 1.5 x the horizontal scale. The lower central area shown as unexcavated was the area targeted by the 2012 field season. Column samples were removed from 11G and 14G. Drawn by Geoff Bailey and Matthew Meredith-Williams.

Figure 3.4. Part of the west facing section of Janaba 4, after excavation of the central section of the trench down to the bedrock. The horizontal banding of layers with clean *Conomurex fasciatus* shell alternating with dark ashy layers is clearly visible in mid-section. At the top right of the section, there is a layer dominated by large gastropods of *Pleuroploca* sp. and *Chicoreus* sp., with an earthy matrix. This layer rests unconformably on the horizontal layers of small shells and ash, and lenses out towards the left of the image. The sign board is 30cm wide (excluding frame). Photo by Geoff Bailey, 14

Figure 3.5. General view of the east facing section of Janaba 4, looking towards the South. The horizontal banding of *Conomurex-rich* layers and ash lenses is clearly visible. Photo by Geoff Bailey, 14 November 2012.h

Figure 3.6. Close-up of west-facing section of Janaba 4 in 11G, showing layers of clean shell separated by a dark ash-dominated layer. Photo by Geoff Bailey, 18 November, 2012.

Figure 3.7. West facing section of Janaba 4, after removal of the column samples from 14G. The sign board is 30 cm wide (excluding frame). Photo by Geoff Bailey, 17 November, 2012.

Figure 3.8. West facing section of Janaba 4, after removal of the column samples from 11G. Photo by Niklas Hausmann, 18 November 2012.

Figure 3.9. General view of west-facing section of Janaba 4 after removal of column samples, looking towards the South. Note the layer dominated by large gastropods (*Pleuroploca* sp., *Chicoreus* sp.) at the top left of the section and thickening towards the left of the image. Photo by Geoff Bailey, 21 November 2012.

Figure 3.10. Janaba 4 shell mound looking North, showing the line of the main trench after completion of back-filling. Photo by Geoff Bailey, 21 November 2012.

Figure 3.11. Google Earth image showing the location of the Janaba 4 shell mound and the other shell mounds in the vicinity, from which samples were collected. Map prepared by Matthew Meredith-Williams.

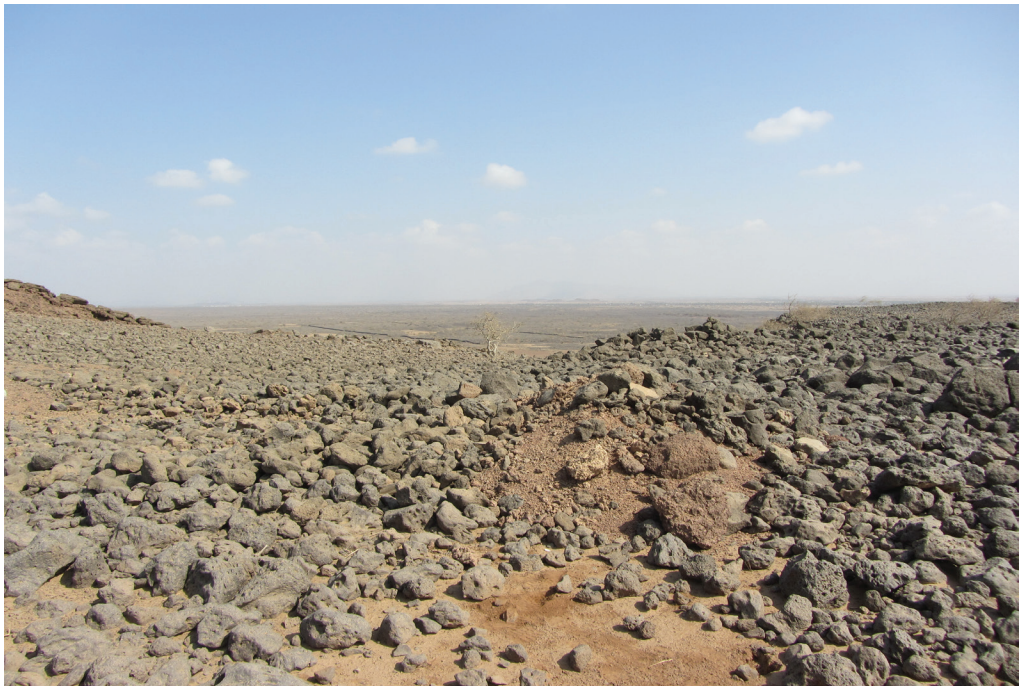

Figure 3.12. WP041, looking NE. Lithics were concentrated in an area of particularly fine-grained basalt boulders and cobbles on the flat surface of the jebel in the foreground. Photo by Robyn Inglis, 27 November 2012.

Figure 3.13. WP045 - the easternmost end of the linear granite outcrop, looking NE. Lithics of multiple types and raw materials were found across the surface around the base of the outcrop. Photo by Robyn Inglis, 27 November 2012

Figure 3.14. View from WP056 looking N towards WP057 and 055, visible as dark linear features on the otherwise relatively flat landscape. Photo by Robyn Inglis, 29 November 2012.

Figure 3.15. Rockshelter formed in a sandstone cliff capped by a lava flow on the edge of a wadi near As Shugaig at Waypoint 049. Photo by Geoff Bailey, 27 November 2012.

Figure 3.16. Quarry at WP304, 8 km N of Hajambar. Note in-situ lava to the centre right of the photos, as well as the extensive horizontally-laminated potential lake sediments at the base of the quarry cut which were sampled for palaeoenvironmental analysis and dating. Photo by Robyn Inglis, 29 November 2012.