



## Expedition: Her Faces of Change

### Field Study: Cultural Anthropology

**Summary:** Janey McGill led a team of women in a trek across 800 km of Rub' Al Khali, a desert in the Arabian Peninsula that spans four countries. The team, comprising Janey, who is British, and Baida Al Zadjali and Atheer Al Sabri, who are Omani, sought to encourage understanding, acceptance and respect for cultural and gender differences and identities.

#### THE EXPEDITION

The Anglo-Omani team navigated their way through the dunes from the Al Hashman in the south of Oman to Ibbri Fort in the north, at the foothills of the Al Hajar mountain range. The temperatures reached 38°C during the day and fell to near freezing during the evenings.

The life and greenery in the desert was unexpected. The region had been subject to heavy rains the year before. Lakes occupied the vast plains between the dunes, and the landscape was alive with insects, grasshoppers and locusts.

The expedition's team encountered the unrelenting hospitality of the Bedu families. Close to the Saudi Arabian border, the Al Masan family offered incredible generosity and welcomed showers. The team was not permitted to sleep in the desert that night. In the morning they were accompanied by Ghareeba, the matriarch, and her daughter for the first 2 km of the day's trek. There was an eerie, heavy mist at the time, and they were soaked through until the sun came out, which was unexpected in the desert. They learned that Bedu women had walked, with their camels, their trail for years before, collecting food and going to work for the family.

In the last week of the expedition, the team was accompanied by Ahmed Al Katheri after meeting him and his uncle several days earlier. The Al Katheri tribe had escorted Wilfred Thesiger through his Empty Quarter crossing in 1946. Ahmed arrived unexpectedly with a pick-up truck full of fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and fish to help the team safely to the end point. He hoped that his daughters would be inspired by the expedition.

When the team walked close to tracks, the many oil and gas workers would stop to enquire. Perplexed by and worried for the three women walking through the desert with



Atheer Al Sabri, Baida Al Zadjali and Janey McGill



The Expedition Route

## WHO

Janey McGill

## WHAT

Walk approximately 800km through Rub' al Khali, the largest continuous desert in the world

## WHEN

December 2018 - January 2019

## WHERE

Empty Quarter Desert, Oman

## WHY

To deliver a message that humans are better together regardless of gender, culture or identity and to foster understanding between nations and cultures.

their day sacks, they all offered whatever food and water they had in support and took pictures to send back to family and friends.

The team conducted pre-expedition questionnaires and carried out scientific research throughout the journey by filling in daily diaries. The goal of the research is to understand how teams maintain cohesion and perform effectively in difficult and challenging environments.

The team was joined by a filmmaker who is working on a project in collaboration with Land Rover MENA, due to be released in 2019. He is also producing a feature-length film set to be released in 2020. The films will assist in the expedition's goal of encouraging respect and understanding for one another and challenging stereotypes.

On completion of the expedition and returning to Muscat, the team was greeted by news crews and featured on the front pages of both Arabic and English newspapers.



Janey McGill

## CONTACT INFORMATION

[www.janeymcgill.com](http://www.janeymcgill.com)

## EXPEDITION GOALS

The goals of the expedition were to:

- Encourage respect, understanding and acceptance for each other regardless of gender, culture or identity
- Walk 800 km through Oman's Empty Quarter desert the largest sand desert in the world, spanning Yemen, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Oman, as a platform to learn about one another.
- Learn about the human condition, personalities, how we interact with together and how we survive together in an extreme environment
- Undertake scientific research on the how teams operate within extreme environments



The Expedition Team

## CHALLENGES FACED

**Time:** The departure date was postponed by 10 days as a result of unexpected paperwork delays, which put pressure on the team to perform.

**Temperature:** Operating over the winter months meant they encountered extremes in temperature between the day and night. During the day, the heat of the sun would hit at 10:00 every morning and again at 14:00. They were mindful of walking in the afternoon, and slowed their pace considerably to allow for this. They began at 05:00 to combat this and would ensure that the team were well-illuminated so they didn't lose members.

**Logistics:** The team had to be self-sufficient for a two-week period when access out of the desert was not possible for resupply. They were heavily laden with supplies of food, water, fuel and kit managed by the support team. Expert driving was required to ensure the safety of the support team and the vehicles. The Land Rover Discoveries were incredible vehicles on this terrain.

**Navigation:** The dunes were a maze to navigate. If the support team made an error in judgement on navigation, it could have proved problematic up to several days later, taking them well off the route and potentially crossing the border into Saudi Arabia. The walking team was really tested with their navigation and their sanity for over four days crossing the vast plains of Umm al Samim, with no references to navigate from.

**Fitness:** The team's fitness was tested as a result of the time delays. The first two weeks were spent slowly acclimating to the routine of walking 27 km per day, on average. In the remaining two weeks they walked up to 40 km per day. Unexpectedly they finished several days early, a testament to how the team focused on completing the objective.

**Acclimating:** Though they all began with a good level of fitness, the change in usual routine meant they did suffer from small injuries and blisters. All injuries were managed and they adjusted to their new way of life after roughly two weeks.

**Equipment:** The sand was incredibly fine, and the filmmaker, Matt, encountered challenges with his camera equipment. A huge amount of time was spent carefully removing this debris and protecting the equipment.

**Communications:** For the first two weeks there was no mobile signal. They relied on satellite phones for am/pm safety check-ins, and these were not always foolproof. The radios, used for communication between the walking and support team, would regularly fail between the dunes. Garmin InReach was relied upon heavily between the teams.

**Human element:** The women learned a huge amount about one another and how they operate together in extreme conditions for sustained periods. The shared vision and message of the expedition was a key factor in their success.

### EXPEDITION RESULTS

One of the most surprising outcomes of the expedition was the overwhelming support of the Omani people, particularly men. The pride that they had in Baida and Atheer completing the expedition on home ground will not be forgotten. It serves to encourage other men and women to push their limits and achieve something extraordinary. The film will be a legacy of the expedition and the team's success. As people, regardless of our differences, cultural, gender or identity, we are all subject to the same emotions, similar insecurities, fears and ambitions. Despite personal differences and upbringings we are better together and when we join forces we can achieve remarkable feats. This expedition was testament to that.

### EXPEDITION FUNDING

The expedition was sponsored by Land Rover MENA. Janey will also receive a Flag Carrier grant from WINGS WorldQuest.

### ABOUT THE FLAG CARRIER

Janey has an eclectic background in the arts, law and the military and a love for the vast natural landscapes of the world. Janey suffered 5 fractured vertebrae in 2010 which ended her military career and, at the time, her purpose for living. This was re-found in organising this expedition. Overcoming this adversity has given her great strength in understanding what the human mind and body is capable of and hopes that this will inspire others to face their own personal challenges head on. She is driven by her desire to learn about the human condition, gender and cultural differences. She believes that we, as people, are better together. This expedition has motivated her to do more in harnessing relationships and understanding between cultures and gender.

### EXPEDITION TEAM

Baida Al Zadjali, Trek Team  
Atheer Al Sabri, Trek Team

Janey McGill, Expedition Leader  
Matt Millan, Filmmaker

Tariq Al Zadjali, Support  
Mark Vause-Jones, Support



WINGS WORLDQUEST

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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