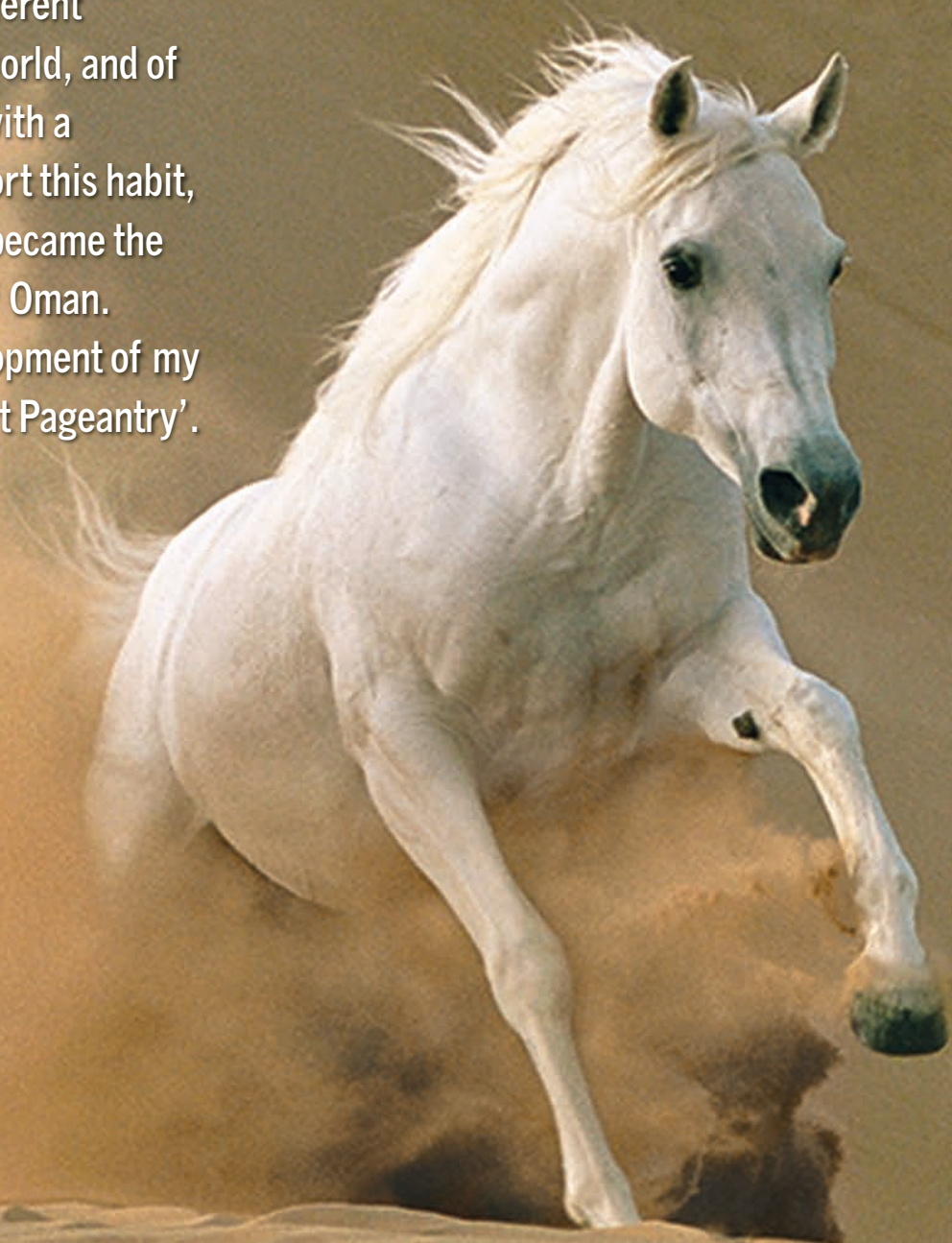


# DESERT PAGEANTRY

ARTICLE BY HENRY DALLAL

My quest in life is to have adventure through travel and experiencing different cultures of the world, and of course, always with a camera. To support this habit, one destination became the lovely country of Oman. Hence the development of my new book 'Desert Pageantry'.







The Massed Mounted Band included female musicians.

A seven year journey into this beautiful country, its people, the nature, and of course, the horses of The Royal Cavalry. To then be able to share the moments that I shot on film with others is a particular joy to me. Hence giving an exhibition or a multimedia presentation using images and music in a stirring audio visual experience gives me particular enjoyment. I was honoured to share these and some stories

when invited to The Anglo Omani Society last year.

I am very proud that the book *Desert Pageantry*, which has been translated into Arabic as well, has been awarded a gold medal for most outstanding design by the Independent Publishers' Book Award in 2013. The award was given at a ceremony in New York out of a pool of over 5,000 coffee table books.

Beating the Retreat on Horse Guards Parade.







The Omanis ride past Buckingham Palace.

A very proud moment for me was in 2012, when The Royal Cavalry was invited to participate in the Diamond Jubilee Pageant at Windsor Castle for Her Majesty The Queen's Diamond Jubilee, to see female members of the Royal Cavalry on the drum horses with the kettle drums, leading the mounted band during the procession. I know of no other mounted regiment that can boast of having female mounted drummers that would lead the mounted band.

Since I was familiar with The Household Cavalry etc. through my book *Pageantry and Performance*, I suggested to The Household Cavalry and the GOC of The Household Division and The Royal Cavalry of Oman, to stay on in the UK following the Diamond Jubilee Pageant, and participate for the first time in Beating Retreat on Horse Guards Parade. This idea became a reality with a kaleidoscope of bright colours of The Royal Cavalry to dazzle the crowds during three nights' performance at Horse Guards. This included The Royal Cavalry escorting The Household Cavalry on one day during the guard change at Horse Guards Parade.

On another morning, The Royal Cavalry paraded in front of Buckingham Palace as a rehearsal to Horse Guards. I don't think throughout history there has ever been this many horses and their riders in traditional Omani saddles parading in front of Buckingham Palace and Horse Guards Parade with both rider and horse without shoes.

The Royal Cavalry of Oman is close to the heart of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, whose vision is to keep the equine tradition alive among his countrymen.

The wonder and splendour of a 1,000-horse jamboree exploded into my senses during my first visit to Oman. From the gleaming uniforms and traditional dress of the riders, to the equally ornate Arabian horses galloping, trotting, dancing and marching past, in time with the band's triumphant music, it was captivating to experience. This dress rehearsal foreshadowed the magnificent Annual Royal Horse Racing Festival to take place on New Year's Day at Maidat Al-Adiyat, home of The Royal Cavalry of the Sultanate of Oman. With the waters of the Sea of Oman as a backdrop, the smell of burning frankincense mingled with the sea air and the excitement of the galloping steeds, I was overwhelmed as I tried to absorb the enormity of the pageant with my camera.



So began my relationship with Oman, which over the next seven years was to involve many such memorable moments as I endeavoured to experience and photograph as much of The Royal Cavalry and the country as possible. It created for me a connection with the country which I look forward to continuing and embracing in the future.

Oman is a dramatically beautiful country with a rich history and culture, as well as a country noticeably comfortable in its own skin. It has historically been a nation of seafarers, trading horses across the seas as reported by Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo. Hence I should not have been surprised to hear, in addition to a range of Arabic dialects, Swahili, Baluchi, Persian, Urdu and English commonly spoken.

The Omanis value the rich traditions passed down through the generations, while embracing the challenges of modernity. It was a thrill to be able to travel into the heart of the country to experience equine pageantry and desert racing, the traditions which The Royal Cavalry oversees, and to see tribal communities gathered in their hundreds to proudly participate in ancestral games and displays.

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One of many highlights for me in the creation of my book was the Royal Equestrian and Camel Festival, which is held every five years on New Year's Day.

Royal Cavalry offers to children. Women participate actively alongside men – and Oman boasts the world's first and probably only all-women mounted band – in addition to mounted pipe bands, both on horseback and camels.

One of many highlights for me in the creation of my book was the Royal Equestrian and Camel Festival, which is held every five years on New Year's Day, and in 2011 came shortly after the 40th anniversary of His Majesty's ascent to the throne, in 1970. It was a joy to watch the Omani and international participation in 27 different displays. Every rehearsal had its

excitements, not merely from a photographer's perspective, but through the sheer thrill of being there, weaving in and out among the 2,011 members of the massed bands to capture that special photograph during the programme's finale.

Oman provided me with cherished memories, from the vast Empty Quarter to the craggy mountains of the Hajar and Dhofar. Peering several thousand feet down a deep, multi-layered chasm in the Musandam Peninsula; to stumbling into an abandoned shepherd's hut built into the rock, with remnants of life from anything up to a thousand years ago, all gave me a sense



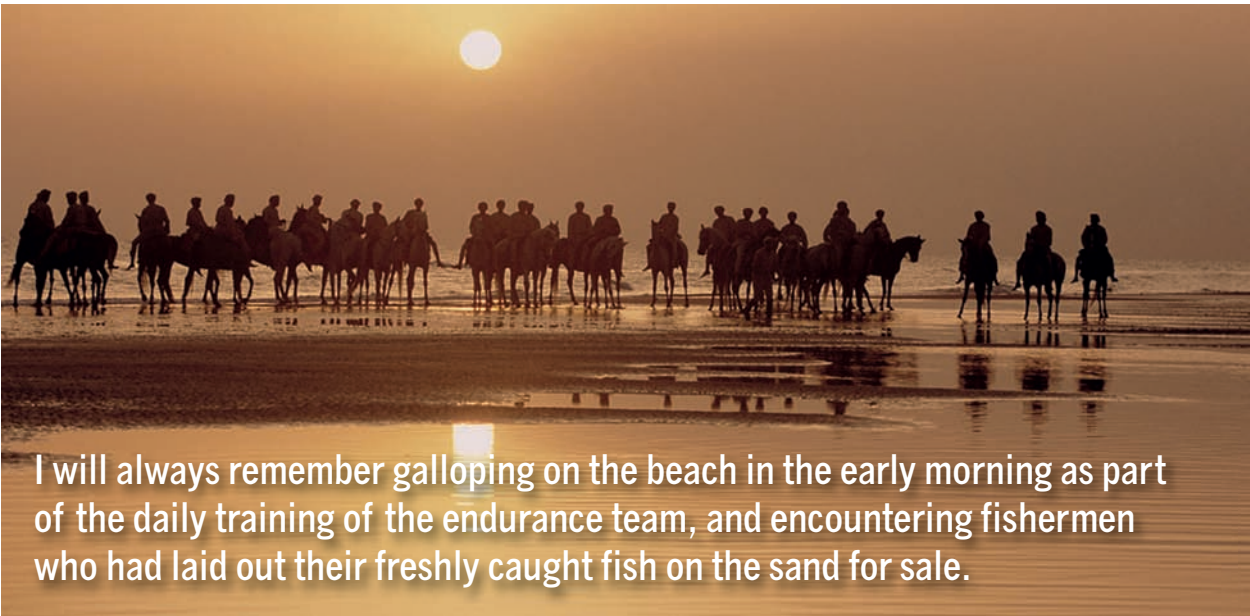


of being a voyeur into a bygone era. Another, almost mystical, experience was a visit to Salalah, in Dhofar, Southern Oman, during the annual khareef, or monsoon, which coincided that year with the holy month of Ramadan. Thick, low-hanging clouds, mist and rain transform the dry countryside into a verdant oasis. The lush landscape, fog and mist rewarded me with some of my favourite photography moments.

I will always remember galloping on the beach in the early morning as part of the daily training of the endurance team, and encountering fishermen who had laid out their freshly caught fish on the sand for sale.

During the creation of this book, photography continued a major transition from film to digital technology. I continue to use slide transparency film, although this preference is becoming more difficult to sustain. All the photographs in this book were taken with film, with the exception of those of the Royal Equestrian and Camel Festival, where I used digital cameras to capture images which would otherwise have been too dark.

To fully portray The Royal Cavalry, it is important to provide a glimpse of the beauty of the country which is the wellspring of the regiment's traditions. Images of nature, tribes, village life and the hugely varied landscape, interspersed throughout the book, will, I hope, provide a window into the spirit of The Royal Cavalry and the splendour of The Sultanate of Oman. ■



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