

## OMAN

### The Sultanate of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is situated in the south east of the Arabian Peninsula between latitudes  $16^{\circ}40'N$  and  $26^{\circ}20'N$  and longitudes  $51^{\circ}50'E$  and  $59^{\circ}40'E$ . It is the second largest country within the peninsula with a land area of some 312,000 km<sup>2</sup>, a coastline of more than 2,000 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone of 545,062 km<sup>2</sup>. More than 70 islands and islets lie offshore, the principal ones being the Daymaniyat group off the north east coast, Masirah off the south east coast and the Halaaniyaat group to the south. Oman borders on south east coast and the Halaaniyaat group to the south. Oman borders on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to the west and on the Republic of Yemen to the south. It is bounded by the Arabian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz to the north, the Gulf of Oman to the north east and the Arabian Sea to the south east.

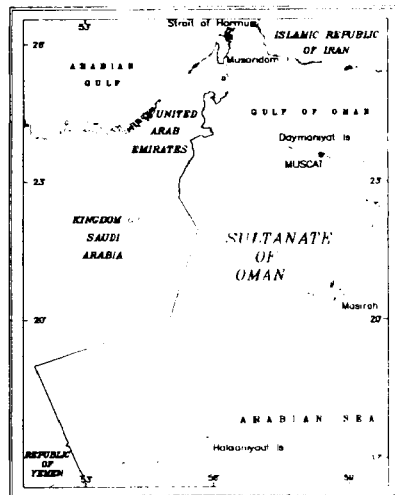


FIG. 1.- The Sultanate of Oman.

The Sultanate can be divided into a number of distinct geographical regions ranging from the sands of the Rub al-Khali (the Empty Quarter) to the west; the

fertile Batinah plain backed by the 3,000 metre Hajar mountain range facing the Gulf of Oman; the Dhofar region to the south; the vast gravel plain (Jiddat al Harasis) of the interior and the rugged mountains of the Musandam region to the North which guards the Strait of Hormuz through which passes 60% of the world's oil.

The climate varies with each region. North eastern coastal areas are hot and humid in summer and pleasantly warm in winter with occasional rain. The interior is generally hot and dry, and the mountains of the southern Dhofar region are transformed from brown to green by the annual south west monsoon (Khareef).

The Sultanate has a rich national heritage with a maritime tradition stretching back for more than 1,000 years. Its population is now just over 2 million. Within the last 25 years, His Majesty Sultan QABOOS BIN SAID has led a remarkable and massive economic and social renaissance which has made the Sultanate a modern and tolerant Moslem State. A diverse industrial base has been established with oil, gas, agriculture, fisheries, mining and manufacturing underpinning the economy. Two new major port expansions and an LNG Terminal are currently under construction.

### **The Hydrographic Service**

The Sultanate of Oman had a limited hydrographic capability in the early 1980s, but full development was not commenced until 1991. The following year, the Ministry of Communications, as the authority responsible for the safety of navigation within Sultanate waters, delegated responsibility for the conduct and supervision of hydrographic surveying and charting to the Royal Navy of Oman. This decree announced the formation of the National Hydrographic Organization, which would be advised by a Working Committee comprising representatives from a number of Ministries and authorities with a maritime interest. The Committee meets annually to advise Ministers on the hydrographic priorities for the forthcoming five years, and to provide the budgetary estimates necessary to meet them.

Since 1991, considerable progress has been achieved with the development of a national hydrographic capability, particularly in the selection and training of dedicated Omani hydrographic surveying specialists and marine science officers. In 1990 there were just 3 specialists and 6 support personnel in the hydrographic branch. In 1996, there were 42 qualified or trainee specialists and 13 support personnel with an Omanization rate of 83%. In the year 2000, it is planned to have 67 specialists and trainees both ashore and afloat, supported by 17 other personnel. The Omanization rate will be 92%, with full Omanization being achieved in 2004.

The Royal Navy of Oman currently has three survey vessels. RNOV AL RAHMANIYAH is a small fully Omani manned vessel capable of conducting digital surveys of coastal and inshore areas in sheltered locations. Two launches were acquired in 1994. One is used for training and the other for inshore surveys.

The continental shelf has a total area of 71,440 km<sup>2</sup>. On 1 January 1997, 24% will have been fully surveyed, 15% partially surveyed and 61% will remain unsurveyed. The present hydrographic assets will carry out the backlog of high priority shelf surveys, however they need to be supported by a dedicated specialist

coastal survey vessel of about 45 m in length. The requirement for this vessel has been endorsed by the National Hydrographic Organization Committee, and initial procurement investigations have been raised. It is hoped that the new vessel will enter in service by the year 2000.

The offshore zone carries a lower priority than the continental shelf although surveying and research is necessary for defence and economic reasons, particularly near the fracture zone area where deep mineral deposits might exist. The total area of the offshore zone is 473,630 km<sup>2</sup> of which less than 4% has been surveyed. Approval has recently been given to embark a survey team in His Majesty's Royal Yacht Support Ship on an opportunity basis. Procurement action is in hand to equip this 11,000 ton vessel with a suitable modular surveying suite to carry out ocean surveys.

### **National Hydrographic Office**

The Sultanate's first bilingual chart OMAN 1 was published on National Day 1994. It was generously compiled and printed by the UK Hydrographic Office with the assistance of some Omani staff. This was the first of a planned series of about 50 charts covering Sultanate waters, many of which will form part of INT scheme J. The National Hydrographic Office, collocated with the terrestrial mapping National Survey Authority, was established in April 1995. The first two home produced charts were published in November 1996, and five more are now in various stages of production. Approval to procure a digital charting system has been given and procurement will start shortly. Following a massive observation programme during the past 5 years, national Tide Tables were published for 5 standard, 16 secondary and 22 minor ports in November 1996. National Radio Signals and Light Lists were produced in 1995. National Sailing Directions are due for publication in 1997. A bilateral arrangement was signed with the UK Hydrographic Office in June 1996, and direct links with other national Hydrographic Offices have been established.

The development of hydrography within Oman could not have been achieved without the direct support and advice provided by the International Hydrographic Bureau and other hydrographic services. The Sultanate is most grateful for this assistance and looks forward to continuing close cooperation with the international hydrographic community.