

WAHO Conference

Manama, Bahrain

November 2 – 6, 1998



On the way to Bahrain—Yes! Camels!

Submitted by: Lorry Wagner
Delegate, IAHA

The WAHO Conference in Bahrain was a “once-in-a-lifetime” experience. I cannot truly describe this adventure, except to say that it was like stepping back into the pages of one of Lady Ann Blunt’s or Homer Davenport’s books relating their travels in search of the Arabian horse back in the 1800’s and early 1900’s.

As the International Arabian Horse Association’s delegates to the World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO), representing the U.S.A. and Canada, Mary Anne Grimmell, President of IAHA, and I met in Chicago on Thursday, October 30, 1998. We then flew on to London, arriving at 7:00 a.m. Friday morning. We spent the day touring in London on a double-decker bus, got a good night’s sleep and caught a 10:00 a.m. flight for Bahrain the next morning. We arrived in Bahrain at 8:00 p.m. (r-hour time difference from London). We were met by government officials who were set up to meet the WAHO attendees and enjoyed the luxury of a special room and refreshments while our passports were being processed. We were then taken to the Sheraton Hotel in the city of Manama.



1. Lorry Wagner (native dress) and Mary Anne Grimmell at WAHO Welcome Dinner in Manama, Bahrain. A glass of watermelon punch was served each attendee as we walked in the door. Alcohol, although readily available, is against the religion of the Koran.

From that time on, we entered a world comprised of a blend of the modern and the ancient. We were surrounded with the mystic of seeing people in the traditional dress of white robes and head coverings, the Crown Prince’s immediate family in the black and gold robes, women in black robes...some with open faces, some covered to their eyes...and some completely



covered up except for slits for eyes. Yet some Bahrainians wore conventional European or Western dress, including women. We went to modern shopping malls and ancient “souks” which are an area of tiny shops in winding streets that had fascinating merchandise from not only Bahrain, but around the world.

Especially interesting was wonderful gold work, mostly jewelry, that was all 22-karat gold. Mary Anne and I felt safer on the streets of Manama than places here in the U.S.A.

Entrance to the “Souk” (market place) in Manama. We hopped a cab and were there within 5 minutes. Mary Anne and I both bought lovely 22-karat-gold jewelry. What fun!!

The business of WAHO started on Monday, November 2, with the fall of the gavel by President Jay Stream. First order of business was the introduction of our hosts, who were seated across the front of the room (who happened to be the Crown Prince's family) in their robes and head scarves, including Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalid al Khalifa who was the conference chair. I met and spoke to Mohammed, whom all kiddingly called "Big Boss." He was a wonderful man who did a fabulous job of making all delegates and guests from 39 countries feel welcome at this conference.



Mohammed "Big Boss" & Mary Anne in the Bedouin Tent where we saw the horses of UMM Jedder, the Stud Farm of His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Sulman Al Khalifa.

There were approximately 250 attendees, including delegates and guests. Countries absent were Belize, Columbia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Israel, Sweden, Switzerland and Zimbabwe. The executive committee with Jay Stream as President was unanimously re-elected to continue in office for the next 4 years. All countries then gave statistics of their purebred registries; i.e., how many total registrations, new registrations in 1997 and 1998, etc. (WAHO meets every 2 years so 2 years of statistics were reported.)

Mary Anne and I were introduced as the delegates from IAHA and Bob Harvey was introduced as the Registrar of the newly-accepted U.S. Purebred Arabian Horse Registry (PAHR). This is now the world-wide and WAHO-recognized registry for the United States. No WAHO-member registry may do business with the old AHRA in importing or exporting purebred Arabians, shipped semen, etc., to and from the United States. All transactions must be done through PAHR as of January 1, 1998. I have written a separate article on this subject entitled "Import/Export Problems."

Even though the "official" language of WAHO is English, not all attendees speak English. We all had headsets and there were translators for English, French and Arabic, plus a few other languages, so we could all understand what everyone else was saying, regardless of language. The now infamous "Definition" was unanimously reaffirmed by motion from the floor, this time it is made mandatory that all WAHO members must accept and follow the dictates of this requirement. In the past it has always been accepted and followed by all WAHO members except AHRA and England until they got sued and lost the case. The creation of the European Union which recognizes WAHO now requires all EU members to only recognize purebred Arabian Registries that are WAHO members. This is the definition that the AHRA has refused to follow for many years and finally came to a head at the Abu Dhabi WAHO Conference in 1996 when a fellow WAHO member complained about AHRA refusing to accept some of their registered Arabian horses based on certain the bloodlines of certain ancestors. This conflict finally resulted in the termination of AHRA as a WAHO member and the acceptance of PAHR as the U.S. member. It is quite lengthy to explain. It will eventually affect all of us who breed purebred Arabian horses here in the U.S. A. It currently affects anyone wishing to buy or sell Arabian horses, shipped semen or entering competitions in foreign countries.

One of the most fascinating discoveries I made during the course of attending one of the Executive Committee meetings was that the Bedouins of many of these Middle Eastern Countries have for many, many decades been afraid to bring their horses out of the desert for any kind of count or registration process in fear of having them taken away or confiscated by revolutionaries or occupying governments or troops. This fear goes way back for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years. They have finally realized that they can trust WAHO and now are applying to have their horses incorporated into the newly established registries of those Middle Eastern countries. Wow! We will have a direct source of blood "to the desert" that has been there all this time, but just hidden except to a privileged few like the Blunts, Homer Davenport, Carl Raswan and a few others. That in itself was a most exciting discovery.



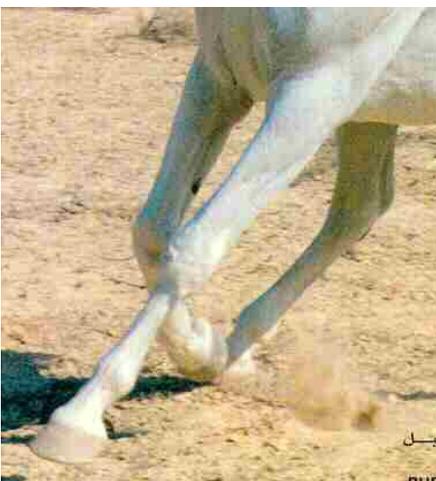
Interspersed throughout the week of conference meetings were many activities provided for the attendees. We spent half a day at the Amiri Stud at Saffriya owned by the ruling Khalifa family under the supervision of His Highness Shaikh Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, The Crown Prince. We were cleared at the gate by armed guards (see picture on left). We did not feel threatened in any way. Actually we felt we were being guarded and safer than at home. We then proceeded to a beautiful grounds for the showing of the horses. We were all greeted by the Crown Prince of Bahrain and Jay Stream, President of WAHO, in a receiving line. Here is my back after

having just been introduced to the Crown Prince and getting a hug from Jay.



We were then presented a fabulous showing of the Prince's mares (some with foals at side) and stallions. I was extremely impressed with the wonderful way all these horses moved over the ground...graceful, just skimming the ground, tremendous length of stride...it was as though they were just floating along without touching the earth.

My next impression was their conformation. They were very deep in the girth, extremely long and laid back shoulders, fantastically long forearms and just as fantastically short cannons as seen here in this picture.



Most had excellent legs (straight), lovely hind quarters, including what I call "square" hips when viewed from behind which are very strong as opposed to rafter hips which we see predominate in our U.S. show ring, and beautiful balance. Most had acceptable heads, however, the majority were not the "extreme" classic type we are used to seeing in our show rings and pictures here in the U.S. However, one must keep in mind that they were not clipped, altered or oiled in any manner. They were absolutely natural.

As I looked around (between snapping pictures and just admiring these wonderful, truly Arabian Arabians) I found myself in an exquisite setting of cultures and dress from around the world, the Middle Eastern people wearing their traditional robes and dress interspersed throughout other traditional dress. What a wonderful experience!



This special mare Mlolesh Alyatima, heavy in foal, was presented as a favorite. Flea bitten greys are highly prized. She foaled just a few hours after we left and the fill was named WAHO!

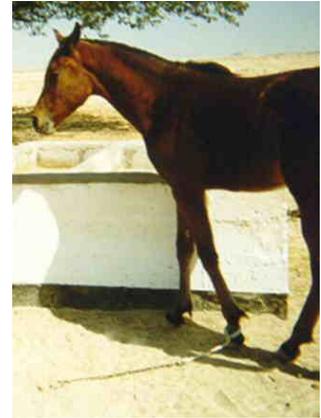
The next day was a full day of Conference back at the hotel, during which time problems of individual registries were taken up in the Executive Committee and on the floor the problems the world's registries have with AHRA in general were discussed. It was demanded by all, unanimously, that the AHRA "MUST" recognize and abide by all the rules of WAHO, including the definition as now mandatory after yesterday's vote, if they are ever to be re-accepted as a WAHO registry in the future. They would also have to buy out the new U.S. registry, PAHR, so that PAHR would suffer no loss of revenue since PAHR is providing an absolutely vital service since the termination of membership of AHRA.

As the Conference business was concluded this day, Thursday, the delegate from Egypt stood up and thanked Jay for his leadership, at which time Jay received a standing ovation.



On Friday, November 6, we were taken out to the desert to view the horses of UMM Jedder Stud Farm of his Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Sulman al Khalifa. These horses are managed and kept in the

traditional manner. As we arrived, we drove through the middle of the yard where horses stood next to concrete feed bins. At first I thought they were free, but then realized they were tethered by one front fetlock to a peg driven in the ground (see picture), the way the Bedouins tether their favorite war mares to tent pegs. The tradition is based upon a very old saying, "Do Not Insult the Horse By Tying It By the Head." Mares, stallions, colts and fillies were all very contented in this tradition.



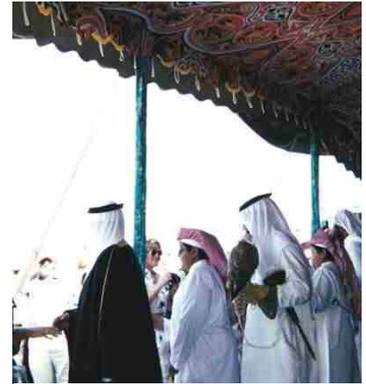
As we stepped off the vans, the sight that greeted us was out of the pages of time long ago. There were the Bedouin tents awaiting, Arabs in robes, some with hooded falcons on their arms standing in front. We were escorted to the tents where we sat on lovely red-velvet chairs which were on a floor of Persian carpets laid upon the desert sands. Below you can see the falcons in front that had by then been set on the pegs driven into the ground for their perches. Can you imagine sitting in this glorious tent watching a presentation of horses that had not



seen that many people in their entire lives, had never been asked to trot and stand up for viewing and behaved wonderfully?

Mary Anne and I (below)

enjoyed the traditional greeting of Arabian coffee which was served to all of us after we had been seated in this tent. It was served in tiny porcelain cups before the showing of the horses.



His Highness (in the black robe) greeting us with some of his family in the white robes, one holding a falcon.



Each horse presented had a colored ribbon around his neck indicating family strain. These people still carry on the traditional strain breeding, with the mare being the important genetic contribution partner.

After the showing we were allowed to walk among the horses. They were calm, curious and had wonderful soft eyes. They (the horses) begged us to come close to them so they could nose and smell us.



Lorry and filly that was wonderfully curious.



Mares and stallions were tethered next to each other and all were very calm. These horses truly exhibited the wondrous dispositions of the traditional Bedouin Arabian horse.

We ended the afternoon with an authentic Arabian barbecue, (was delicious but neither Mary Anne nor I asked what it was) then we ladies went to the day quarters of the harem for a bit of rest before going back to the hotel. These women's quarters were exquisitely decorated with carved wood, beautiful vases and perfume bottles, Persian carpeting, lounging cushions and even a hot tub! WOW! I never imagined I would ever enter harem quarters. I'm still amazed at that experience.

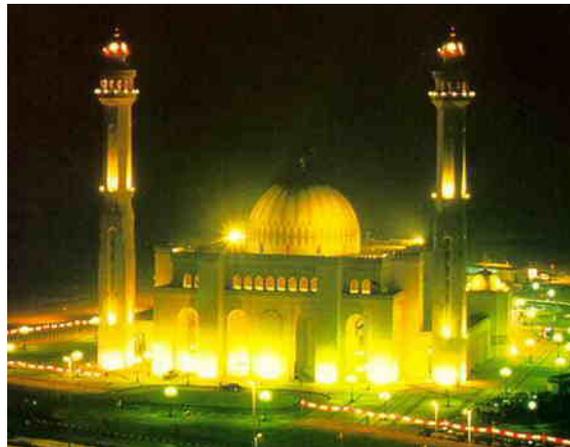
Scheduled for one evening's activity was a trip to a museum in Manama which housed much of Bahrain's history. We saw much evidence of the era where Alexander the Great had marched his army near Bahrain on his way to India. A couple of grave sites of his soldiers who had died in route near Bahrain had been moved into the museum. We had driven past a large grave site out in the desert where these had come from on our earlier visit to the UMM Jedder Stud Farm. It turned out that Bahrain was the preferred burial location for many groups of people down through the centuries, as we saw when we drove by this site. This museum contained some wonderful artwork and wonderfully designed sections depicting much of life and history of Bahrain.

A second activity scheduled one afternoon was a trip to the Museum of the Koran in the heart of Manama. This was also a gorgeous place with fascinating exhibits. There was a mosque there and very special arrangements were made so that we "foreigners" were allowed to step inside, after removing our shoes, where a guide explained services to us. I went shopping in the small store within the building and bought a very nicely framed verse from the Koran, which I have displayed on my wall in my gallery in my house with a translation in English which I had done upon my return home.

This WAHO Conference was fascinating in two ways. First, the work done by the Conference, itself, was so interesting. Then the hospitality of the hosts who arranged all the wonderful meals and side trips to see horses and the highlights of their country were absolutely fascinating. Upon leaving, Mary Anne and I were taken by van to the airport where a guard from the Royal Family sat with us and then escorted us right onto the plane. We were sad to say good bye to Bahrain as we took off in the dark about 10:00 p.m. and flew back to London where we once again stayed overnight, catching an early flight back to the U.S.A. Mary Anne and I said good bye at the Chicago O'Hare Airport, she continuing to Minneapolis and I on to Los Angeles connecting to another flight home to Inyokern.



This is the shopping center where we spent one afternoon. And...yes we shopped. I bought wonderful jewelry, among other things very Bahrain!



**Al-Fateh Islamic Centre
Manama, Bahrain**