PDO joins the people of Oman in welcoming His Majesty on his return to the Sultanate.
‘The great ambitions of nations and peoples are not achieved accidentally or by depending on others. They are only achieved by self-reliance, hard work, creative efforts, wholehearted and responsible participation. This is what we call upon you today to achieve, for our country and in the future.’

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said
Dear Readers,

A very warm welcome to the first issue of al manhal for 2015. Inside you’ll find another varied batch of stories about Oman’s oil and gas industry and the people who work within it.

With oil and gas typically sitting many hundreds of metres below the surface, the concept of drilling wells to reach it is as old as the industry itself. In this issue we showcase both the theory and the practice of world-class well engineering: our main feature leads off with an in-depth look at some record-breaking drilling activities in our Amal oilfield, plus we turn the spotlight on our new Wells Learning Centre, a state-of-the-art facility that opened in November last year.

This issue also takes time out to celebrate PDO’s work in the community, and in particular, the social investment project now known as Banat Oman. This might not be a name familiar to many of you just now, but in time we hope Banat Oman will become a by-word for Made in Oman quality as well as providing economic and employment opportunities for those members of society who can benefit most from them.

Eagle-eyed readers will notice a change in this issue. Our long-serving ‘Day in the life’ feature strand has been given a makeover and a new name, Our People, giving us the chance to delve deeper into our amazing employee base to find interesting and inspiring stories. We kick off with a profile of Ahmed Al Shukaili, who combines a ‘day job’ in IT with a passion for photography. Ahmed has kindly supplied us with some of his favourite images and they’re really not to be missed!

While celebrating the talents of Ahmed, we haven’t forgotten our own star photographer, Mohammed Al Mahrazi. Once again Mohammed has given us a wonderful image with which to decorate our centrepiece feature, focusing this time around on Jabal Al Akhdar, the ‘Green Mountain’.

We hope you enjoy this packed edition of al manhal and, as ever, if you have any comments, questions or feedback we’d love to hear from you. You can find all relevant details on the right side of this page.

Regards,

Karima Farid Al Shahaibi
On behalf of Team al manhal

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Meet the record breakers!

World-class Wells Learning on our doorstep

Opportunity knocks for Omani craftswomen

Ahmed Al Shukaili: portrait of a prizewinner

Jabal Al Akdhar
Meet the record breakers!

PDO is drilling wells faster than ever, and that’s great news for the Company’s efforts to meet tough production targets while keeping the books balanced. *al manhal* looks at some of the tricks and techniques the drilling teams are using to set new speed records.

Since it began operations PDO has drilled more than 7,500 wells across its concession area, of which a little under 6,000 are still active. Today, the Company has around 40 drilling rigs contracted to work throughout its oilfields, together with a fleet of service rigs dedicated to maintaining and repairing existing wells.

This is a mammoth undertaking in its own right, and yet the drilling workload continues to intensify, as PDO seeks new sources of oil that will enable it to achieve the challenging production targets it has been set.

The scale of the operation means drilling is something of an everyday business, but that doesn’t mean it comes cheap. As ever within the oil and gas industry, time is money: every hour of every day that a drilling team is active, the cost to PDO builds.

Look more deeply and it is easy to see why drilling is such an expensive undertaking. The drilling rigs themselves cost millions of dollars to construct, plus each rig unit has around 35 crew members, ranging in seniority from the drilling supervisor to the lowliest roustabout. And the total crew deployed on any given rig is effectively four times this size, since the rigs operate 24/7 and thus are crewed by two teams that each work 12-hour shifts for 14 straight days, before handing over to another pair of crews who take the next two-week stint, and so on.

With such a sizeable portion of its budget soaked up by drilling, it’s no surprise that PDO has focused on doing the job faster and better for some years now. As long as a decade ago, the Company smartened up the process for moving drilling rigs between locations, introducing ‘twilight moves’ whereby rigs could be transported under artificial light, instead of being moved only during daylight hours. And in 2011
*Al Manhal* reported on the deployment of a new system to optimise the well drilling process, known as 'electronically Delivering the Limit', or eDtL for short.

Between 2013 and 2014, though, progress on reducing drilling time stepped up several notches. This reached its zenith on 10 April last year, when the crew of Rig-82 set a new record for the fastest well ever drilled within PDO’s oilfields. The rig took just 3.29 days to drill well no. 212 in the Amal field (AMAL-212 in industry code) – the time being measured from the point the rig was released from its previous well to the moment it was released from AMAL-212.

To put this in context, the average well drilling time throughout 2014 was 5.28 days, a figure that in itself represents a major step forward from the average of 6.8 days seen in 2013.

**How did they do it?**

As you might expect with a process as complex as drilling a well, there is no single step that broke the mould. Instead the team’s success was down to an aggregation of small but significant gains, which were achieved through a whole variety of initiatives.

While technology certainly played its part, it was far from the only factor in Rig-82’s success. A major element came down to building enthusiasm and engagement among the various shift crews. It helps that there is a natural competitiveness among rig crews, but their PDO paymasters deliberately channelled this in a positive manner, making sure to celebrate success, encouraging open communication and giving the crews the freedom to try new things, with the only stipulation being that any mistakes were learned from.
For Rig-82 this also involved talking openly about previous setbacks, notably a tendency in the past to suffer equipment failures. The result of this dialogue was a new preventative maintenance programme that enabled the crews to work out ways to mitigate any mechanical issues they might face at each point in the drilling process.

One of the most important elements in setting the record occurred before the rig moved an inch. This was a process dubbed ‘drill the well on paper’ – or DWOP for short – by which the complete drilling programme is worked through as a theoretical exercise. Undertaking a DWOP gives the rig crews a comprehensive blueprint to follow and so removes the need to make judgement calls on the fly.

The key to DWOP is breaking down every activity and sub-activity in the drilling process and compiling two target times to complete them. The first is the average achieved by the rig across a range of recent drilling campaigns, while the second figure represents the very best time the crews have managed for each operation, this being drawn from a composite of recent wells drilled.

The average for RIG-82 in the run-up to its Amal project was 5.33 days, while the composite ‘personal best’ time was just 2.86 days. Compare the latter figure to the 3.29 days achieved with AMAL-212 and you start to get an idea of the breakthrough success that well represents.

A winning campaign

Around 20 new wells were required in Amal field, all of which were located within close proximity. Having the wells near to each other naturally made the rig moves a speedier process, but to maximise this advantage the programme was arranged into what drillers call a campaign.

This campaign was planned like a military operation, with PDO’s head office team of well engineer, geologist, production technologist and drilling engineer visiting the Amal field with the drilling crew to talk in detail about the work that lay ahead.

Such conversations were vital in ensuring total buy-in among the rig crews, enabling them to feel ownership of the campaign and its record-breaking aims. During these sessions the crews were split into mixed teams and worked through different scenarios that might save time. Time-saving tricks were soon identified: for example, an electrician spotted an opportunity to complete his task while drilling was paused to allow servicing of the topdrive (which is the device that turns the drill), instead of having to stop the rig again later. There was also the idea to service the topdrive during the time that drilling is paused in order to perform circulation (which is when fluids are pumped down to the bottom of the well to cool the ambient temperature). Piggy-backing these different tasks instead of doing them on separate occasions proved a major factor in optimising overall drilling time.

The next stage was all about making the activities themselves as efficient as possible, and here PDO made use of the techniques staff have been learning as part of the company-wide Lean process improvement initiative.

The core principle of Lean is about making incremental improvements to processes by breaking a job into bite-sized chunks, so that each can be given total focus, then building in sustainability and transferability to any improvements that are subsequently made.

Taking a Lean approach to drilling involved forensic analysis of the drilling process, with a view to finding the optimal drill bits to use, as well as the most efficient and effective bottom hole assembly (which is the name given to the part of the drillstring that contains the bit, the motor that pumps the drilling mud and the stabiliser among other elements).

Even the quantities of drillpipes (these are the steel pipes that connect the surface equipment with the bottom hole assembly) to be used were optimised, with the crews stipulating an even number of pipes. This allowed for the fact that the rigside racks on which they are stored are built to hold pipes in pairs, so an odd number would be less efficient.

Once work got underway, as each section of the well was drilled, the crew conducted an on-the-spot post-
Anatomy of a drilling rig

**Derrick** – this frame supports the equipment used to lower and raise the drill string in and out of the well-bore.

**Travelling block** – the moving end of the block and tackle pulley system, to which the drill string is attached.

**Standpipe** – this thick tube transports the drilling fluid, known as mud, into the drill string. Pumping drilling fluid into the well helps to maintain pressure, which in turn prevents subsurface liquids or gases entering the well while it is being drilled. The mud also helps to keep the drill bit cool and clean, while carrying rock cuttings to the surface.

**Motor** – this is the rig’s power source, used to drive the rotary table, the mud pump and the drill string’s lifting mechanism.

**Drill pipe(s)** – the drill string rotates so that the drill bit can cut through the earth. As this rotation is powered from the surface, the string must be a rigid tube all the way down to the bit; therefore it is constructed of steel pipes which are fixed together in interconnecting sections. The pipe sections are stored beside the rig, ready to be used when called upon.
mortem known as an ‘after action review’, in which any learnings or ideas for potential performance improvement could be discussed.

The crew of Rig-82 also made good use of PDO’s ‘electronically Delivering the Limit’ (eDtL) system. With eDtL, the ‘Limit’ refers to the technical limit, defined as ‘the theoretical shortest possible time taken to perform an activity, assuming flawless operation, on the basis of current knowledge and design technology’.

In practice, the eDtL system uses a range of sensors to capture a large quantity of data while drilling is carried out. This information is then analysed by both a human specialist as well as advanced artificial intelligence software called ARAD (Automated Rig Activity Detection). The analysis is focused on finding opportunities to improve performance, which eDtL Performance Engineers work together with the rig teams to try to implement.

Last but not least, a Performance Road Map, packed with data about the drilling completed so far, was available to help the teams spot situations where they were falling below par. For example, the road map showed the rate of penetration (ROP), essentially the speed that the bit was cutting through the earth, for each section of rock. If drilling slowed below this average rate, the crews were alerted and could try to discover why.

What next?

With the record in the bag, what now for Rig-82 and the other drilling crews working across Oman? Those involved with the activity believe there is scope to cut the times still further, although the quantum leap from 6.8 days average in 2013 to 5.28 days in 2014 may be tough to replicate in future.

One of the areas being looked at concerns the stabilisers that are used to keep the bottom hole assembly fixed in position. The more powerful the stabilisers the more torque is required to turn the drill string, which in turn impacts the speed at which the bit revolves. However, if the stabilisers could be scaled back without affecting the rigidity of the equipment, the RPM of the bit could be increased, enabling it to cut through the earth more quickly.

These and more ideas will be trialled in the coming months, as the rig crews seek ever greater efficiencies. Given their dedication, plus the support and encouragement of PDO, it would not be a surprise to learn of a new drilling record being set in the coming months.
World-class Wells Learning on our doorstep

Thanks to the combined efforts of PDO and Shell, Oman is now home to one of the world’s foremost Learning Centres. We take a look inside the state-of-the-art Wells Learning Centre at PDO’s Mina Al Fahal complex to discover what it offers.

The Minister of Oil and Gas, HE Dr Mohammed bin Hamad Al Rumhy, HE Dr Muna Al Jardani, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Manpower, and PDO’s Managing Director, Raoul Restucci, were all among the distinguished guests when PDO’s new Wells Learning Centre was officially inaugurated last November.

Such a high-powered presence at the opening ceremony underscores the importance to Oman of this new facility, which aims to bring about a step-change in developing Wells expertise not just in the Sultanate but also across the wider Middle East region. The primary focus of the Centre is on enhancing process safety and building local capability. As we report elsewhere in this issue, drilling (and then maintaining) Wells is an activity that continues to grow exponentially, with the Wells themselves also becoming ever more complex and challenging as companies like PDO seek out unconventional oil reserves. The Wells Learning Centre will help to ensure that locally available skills keep pace with this expansion.

At the heart of the new Centre are its three well control simulator rooms. Each simulator has all the gauges and information read-outs which an operator would find on a ‘real’ rig, providing an environment that is as close to the
OUR APPROACH
real thing as it is possible to get without actually standing on a working rig floor.

Many of the news reports on the Centre’s opening naturally focused on its most striking simulator, the DS5000 (pictured), which is seen for the first time in Oman. The DS5000 incorporates a Cyber Chair, replicating those found in the very latest rigs. The chair itself is surrounded by banks of screens displaying a range of simulated data read-outs. It has its own joystick-based control system, so the occupant merely has to set the various parameters he or she requires and can then start drilling. Having a DS5000 on board puts the PDO facility up alongside its peers in the Shell network, and it’s sure to be a growing attraction as more rigs are rolled out which feature ‘cyber’ control technology.

“The DS5000 simulator emulates a real rig floor – the only difference being it is more spacious and obviously much cleaner,” said Angela Smith, Wells Learning Manager. “We also have three Completion and Well Intervention Simulators. These simulators are the fourth to be installed globally; this is a real step change for Well Intervention training delivery.”

During training sessions the instructors are able to programme the simulators to test the trainees’ responses to a range of different scenarios in a totally safe environment. CCTV cameras record the simulations in real time, so the trainees can see and hear how they reacted to command and control situations and then use this knowledge to look for ways they can improve.

Universe model room provides a vital learning resource

Well Engineering is a physical job that involves real tools and real equipment. So to help students get a better
understanding for what they are doing, the Learning and Development Centre has created a ‘model room’ where examples of equipment typically found in the oilfield can be examined close-up. Some of these models feature cutaways, revealing the inner workings of the component as well as what can normally be seen from the outside. The room also features a wonderfully detailed model of the Amal steam facility (see Issue 2, 2014 for details) which has been supplied by oilfield services contractor Weatherford. Other Oman-based contractors have also been keen to showcase their technology in the room, among them MB Petroleum, Cameron, Baker Hughes, Halliburton and Schlumberger.

Typical courses at the Centre combine practice and theory, covering both the technical aspects of the role and the ‘softer’ elements, such as Human Factors including situational awareness, leadership, communication and teamwork.

PDO Learning and Development Manager, Hamed Al Hadhrami, added: “It is now an industry requirement to introduce Human Factors training, to test the ability of crews and individuals to work together under pressure. The Wells Learning Centre will enable us to do this.”

PDO Well Engineers can also now complete their Shell Advanced Well Control programme at the Learning Centre, whereas previously they had to travel overseas to attend this course. Feedback to date has been excellent, with comments such as “great learning tools” and “brand new simulator sessions (which) added excitement” being typical.

The Centre is additionally making available a version of Shell’s Wells Fundamentals training programme (known as Round One) to graduate level recruits at other local operators and contractors, helping to fulfil the promise that the Centre will be good for all of the industry, not just PDO.

As well as playing host to today’s Wells Engineers, the Centre is also focused on the future, since it welcomes students from schools, colleges and universities to come and find out more about Well Engineering as a career. This appreciation of the broader picture perhaps explains why the Centre has already secured a Gold Award (the highest accolade) in PDO’s annual Chairman’s Award for Excellence competition, while also being put forward for a national awards programme run by the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (Opal).

When fully up and running the Wells Learning Centre expects to train several hundred students each year, alumni who will provide a steady stream of talent as the industry gears up to take on its future challenges.

For more information please contact Wells Learning Manager, Angela Smith: angela.as.smith@pdo.co.om
Opportunity knocks for Omani craftswomen

We profile Banat Oman, a new name that signals an exciting new phase of PDO’s project to promote self-employment, entrepreneurship and skills among Omani women.

“Made in Oman”... has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?

Few things give shoppers a greater sense of pride than the chance to buy goods made in their own country. In Oman, this concept provides the foundation to a social investment initiative by PDO that is changing the fortunes of low-income families across the Sultanate.

Right now, readers may not be overly familiar with the name and logo of Banat Oman, but in the months and years to come it is set to become an established by-word for quality craftsmanship. Perhaps more importantly, the products made under the auspices of Banat Oman will provide gainful employment for women who might otherwise be overlooked by the world of work.

Banat Oman is the brainchild of PDO’s Social Investment Adviser, Hanan Al Rumhy. She explained: “The idea of vocational training for Omani women is not a new one. We invested in training a group of female artisans to carve camel bones almost 10 years ago, an initiative that helped to prevent this traditional Omani craft from dying out.

“Since then, we’ve provided training on an ad hoc basis for a range of crafts and other vocational skills, working in partnership with the Omani Women’s Association. Over the years these initiatives have helped to transform lives and empower women to raise their families’ living standards. However, as new requests for training continued to flood in, we realised we had a unique opportunity to expand our
project to become a true centre of excellence for Omani crafts, while at the same time touching even more families.”

And thus Banat Oman was launched as both the umbrella for the project and a trademark that can be applied to the products made under its auspices. “In time we want 'Banat Oman' to be a recognised sign of Made in Oman quality; a brand that will boost the commercial success of the craftswomen involved,” said Hanan.

Women will remain the exclusive focus of Banat Oman, as will families on low incomes, since these are groups among which opportunities for economic betterment are most prized. As such, most of the crafts and skills have the ability to be applied in the comfort of the women’s homes, enabling them to continue to look after their families while earning their living.

“The women can fit their jobs around their family commitments, usually working in the evenings,” Hanan explained “One exception is our dairy in wilayet Taqa (see panel), where there’s a need for separate premises to house the equipment in a properly sterilised environment. Here the women come into the dairy each morning between 7am and 10am, though all live locally so it hasn’t proved a problem.”

While the training sourced by PDO is always top class, long-term sustainability can only be achieved if there is a ready market for the goods produced. This is an area where PDO’s commercial flair and business connections have proven invaluable. Agreements have already been signed with major outlets such as the hypermarket chain Lulu, the national carrier Oman Air Duty free in-flight and the five-star Juweira Boutique and Rotana Resort hotels, both of which are in Salalah, and Al Fawaries Bakery in Muscat and Salalah.

**Silver shines**

One of the crafts provoking major interest among hotels and other retail outlets is silversmithing. In late 2014 a group of 20 women successfully completed a Banat Oman vocational training programme and are now able to create a range of silver items including jewellery, key chains and napkin rings. Already the women’s order books are filling up and with PDO’s marketing support, demand will surely grow, given the proud and enduring tradition of silver craft in Oman.

The positive effects of Banat Oman have not gone unnoticed locally, nor within the wider Gulf region. The project was a finalist as Best Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative in the Abu Dhabi International Petroleum Exhibition and Conference (ADIPEC) Excellence in Energy Awards of 2014; achieving this position from among more than 100 submissions from across the region.

Closer to home, Hanan’s work on the project earned her the Al Mar’a Excellence Award for Social Responsibility in 2014. These awards, run by the publications Al Mar’a and The Woman, are designed to celebrate top female achievers in the Sultanate.

And the project also scooped an award for its contribution to In-Country Value (see *al manhal* Issue one, 2014), the national initiative championed by PDO which aims to boost home-grown goods and services as well as jobs.
Hanan believes such progress – encouraging though it is – represents merely the tip of the iceberg, with Banat Oman having the potential to support thousands of women in the years ahead. For 2015, a number of projects are already in place, involving crafts such as tailoring and embroidery, natural soap production, training women in cotton weaving, making natural jam, and training coastal women in drying and packing fish products.

In future issues of *al manhal* we will profile some of these initiatives and the women who are forging rewarding careers as a result.
Say cheese! Omani dairy delicacies are tickling the taste buds

For a perfect example of the power of Banat Oman, look no further than the dairy recently established in wilayet Taqa.

Given the plentiful supply of milk from Salalah’s numerous cow herds, the dairy is ideally located for securing raw materials. But it is what the female workers can do with that milk which is really inspiring. The local variety of white cheese – labnah and akwai – that is the dairy’s speciality has already developed a sizeable fan base. It is to be sold in Lulu hypermarkets, served in five-star hotels and also transported in special refrigerated containers all the way to Muscat, to meet growing demand in the capital.

PDO provided all the dairy equipment and hired a specialist trainer from outside Oman who could show the women selected for the project how to use it. Everything has passed rigorous food hygiene examinations, something that is vitally important when marketing the produce to prospective stockists.

And already the dairy is making a real difference to the lives of its workforce. One of the ladies involved had been without paid employment for some 19 years before seizing the opportunity provided by Banat Oman. Now she enjoys a regular monthly income of not less than 400 rials.

The dairy was just one of a host of Banat Oman projects completed in 2014. Others included:

- Tailoring and embroidery in Taqa, Shaleem, Bahla and Muscat
- Leather craft in Rabkoot (wilayet Thumrit)
- Silver craft in Muscat
- Sweets and bakery in Taqa and Muscat
- Palm frond crafts in Muscat.
Ahmed Al Shukaili: portrait of a prizewinner

For the first in a new series of employee profiles we meet Ahmed Al Shukaili, who balances a successful career at PDO with a passion for photography.
Look at the faces of the elderly Omani whose pictures are showcased on these pages. Each face captures a life well lived, with every wrinkle telling its own story of hard work and the hardships faced by previous generations.

In English, the title of this photo series translates to ‘Glistens with Grey’. The striking images are the work of Ahmed Al Shukaili, a PDO employee who is earning a global reputation as a special talent within the field of photography.

You may have been lucky enough to see these photos as part of Ahmed’s recent exhibition in Muscat. If you did and you were impressed, then you are in very good company: these were the images that last year earned Ahmed the HM Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Art & Literature – without doubt Oman’s most prestigious cultural award.

He explained: “I have won a few national and international photography prizes in the past, but for me as an Omani winning something with His Majesty’s name on it is by far the most valuable – it’s priceless in fact. I was also honoured within the category of ‘Personal Achievements’ in the third award ceremony for those working in the field of joint youth work that was held in Qatar attended by Highnesses and Excellencies the Ministers of Youth and Sports of GCC countries which was held in Qatar.”

The award was earned not just for the quality of Ahmed’s submitted photos, but also for his efforts to promote photography in Oman and to spread knowledge among the next generation of photographers. He is a popular teacher and sits on the board of the Photographic Society of Oman, as well as participating in several of the Society’s working committees.

He is also one of the prime movers in the Society’s new initiative to hold more photography exhibitions across the Sultanate, leading from the front with his own recent show.

“Photography has really helped to broaden my horizons as well as expanding my circle of friends and contacts,” he said. “Most of all, it has triggered the explorer in me: I even
Our People

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Don’t forget the day job

While Ahmed admits that much of his spare time is consumed by photography, he also has a ‘day job’ to look after. He is currently based in PDO’s Exploration Directorate, where he leads a team of technical data managers. These IT professionals are embedded within the various departments, their task being to help manage the daily flows of corporate and technical data both within the Company and between it and the outside world.

Ahmed noted: “This industry produces a tidal wave of data and we aim to help the teams and departments to keep on top of it. We also have to ensure that the information PDO feeds into the national oil and gas data repository is complete and correct, since this resource is something that everyone involved in the industry relies upon.

“Our approach is to try and engender the same attitude to data quality as we have to HSE (health, safety and the environment) within PDO – i.e. that it is everyone’s responsibility. This is not always easy, since it involves something of a cultural change, but to balance this challenge I also get huge satisfaction from being able to interact with so many different people inside and outside the Company.”

Like photography, the world of IT is one that fascinated Ahmed from a relatively early age – he can recall experimenting with the family’s first PC when still at high school – while involvement with the oil and gas sector also runs in the family, given that his father worked for oilfield services group Schlumberger before setting up his own business.

“With that family background I guess it was always likely I would find my way into this industry,” he said. “The work keeps me on my toes, but one of the things I value about having an office-based role within PDO is the ability it gives me to disconnect once the working day is over, so I can switch my brain over to photography!”

PDO is an enthusiastic supporter of Ahmed’s photographic talents. The

Awarded by His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani, Deputy Emir of Qatar, in Qatar

changed my car to a four-wheel drive so I could explore more of the country and its culture!”
Company awarded him a special Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of his HM Sultan Qaboos Award win and, as al manhal went to press, plans were being finalised to bring Ahmed's photographic exhibition to PDO's offices in Muscat.

Though he sells photographic prints (and scooped a cash prize as part of his HM’s Award) Ahmed recognises that his working career is very much the foundation for his photography. Indeed, he remembers using wages from his first-ever job back in 2006 to buy the camera that kicked off his hobby. With no idea of how to get the best out of his new ‘toy’ he taught himself from scratch using tutorials he found on the internet, subsequently polishing his skills with the help of Oman’s online community of photographers.

“I think it is really healthy to have a passion or a hobby, whether it relates to your work or is something completely separate,” said Ahmed. “If you get satisfaction from your work or your hobby it will improve your wellbeing, making you a less stressed and more positive person, all of which means you’ll be more productive.

“Most important, though, is to see success as a by-product of doing something you love, and not the be-all and end-all. If you are passionate about what you do then you won’t have to worry so much about what is around the next corner. Even with HM’s competition, I entered out of a love for photography and a desire to spread the word about it. Winning – wonderful though it is – was just the icing on the cake.”

• To find out more about Ahmed’s photographic exploits, and to view some of his favourite shots, why not visit his website http://www.ahmedshukaili.com
My Oman

Jabal Al Akhdar

In this first issue of *al manhal* for 2015 we continue our feature series showcasing the work of PDO employee and keen photographer Mohammed Al Mahrazi. This time around Mohammed has focused his lens on Jabal Al Akhdar, the ‘Green Mountain’.

Jabal Al Akhdar sits within Oman’s most prominent mountain range, the Al Hajar, which is located around 150km inland from Muscat. Much of the range is a desert landscape, but the high peaks, including Jabal Al Akhdar, receive enough rainfall each year to encourage vegetation – hence the ‘green’ in the mountain’s name.

Growers working on the mountain enjoy bounteous crops of fruit from their terraced orchards, while Jabal Al Akhdar is also famous for its rose water. The rose-petal harvesting season takes place from mid-March to mid-May, during which time the mountainside becomes a lush carpet of pink flowers. The petals are collected, prepared and simmered in boiling water to extract their much-prized essence.

Visitors to Jabal Al Akhdar are always impressed by the mountain’s fresh air and biodiversity, especially so since His Majesty Sultan Qaboos decreed the area a nature reserve. The measure, enacted in 2011, gives the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs jurisdiction over access and developmental activity within the reserve.

In recent years the mountain has also become well known among cycling fans, since it represents the toughest climbing test on the annual Tour of Oman professional cycle race. TV viewers from across the world have tuned in to watch superstars such as Alberto Contador and Chris Froome battle for victory on the steep mountain roads.