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**Title** Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah: “Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth”

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**Abstract** Aston draws on his own research in Yemen and Oman as well as on the work of other scholars and researchers to explore two locations in the Book of Mormon account of Lehi’s journey through Arabia: Nahom and Bountiful. Preliminarily, Aston highlights Nephi’s own directional indications for each leg of the journey, considers the relevance of existing trade routes, and suggests relative durations of stops along the way. He reviews the research on the tribal area associated with Nahom, including the discovery of an altar dating to roughly 600 BC that bears the tribal name *NHM*—possibly the first archaeological evidence of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity. Aston uses twelve criteria taken from Nephi’s descriptions of the area to identify the fertile Khor Kharfot area at the mouth of Wadi Sayq as the most likely candidate for Bountiful. The discussion also speculates on the kind of ship that Nephi may have built and the plausibility of a trans-Pacific voyage. Taken together, the archaeological and geographical evidence of Nahom and Bountiful strongly argue for the historicity of the Book of Mormon account.

WARREN P. ASTON

# ACROSS ARABIA WITH LEHI AND SARIAH:



Desert scene south of Marib, Yemen. Photo by Justin Andrews. All maps and other photos courtesy Warren Aston.

# "TRUTH SHALL SPRING OUT OF THE EARTH"

**T**housands of years ago the prophet Enoch saw that in the last days truth would be sent forth “out of the earth” (Moses 7:62). Joseph of Egypt foretold that a latter-day seer bearing his name would bring forth the words of his posterity “from the dust” (see 2 Nephi 3:19–20), and Isaiah later prophesied of a sealed book in the last days that would “whisper out of the dust” (Isaiah 29:4). Finally, the Psalmist predicted that “truth shall spring out of the earth” (Psalm 85:11). Latter-day Saints, of course, see the coming forth of the Book of Mormon—a record literally taken from out of the earth—as the fulfillment of these prophecies concerning our day. Some 176 years later, however, we can see that these predictions may not only refer to a single event in 1830, as significant as that was, but may also allude to a broader revelatory process whereby other buried records as well as confirmation of their truth will also come from “out of the earth.” The incredible unfolding in recent years of the first 18 chapters of the Book of Mormon as new finds have placed them in their real-world setting can be seen as exactly that.

LEHI AND SARIAH'S MONUMENTAL JOURNEY from Jerusalem to Bountiful through the modern lands of Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman takes place in a setting largely unfamiliar to those who live far from the mountains and deserts of Arabia.<sup>1</sup> In recent decades, however, a small corps of Latter-day Saint researchers has begun exploring the world in which that journey was made. To date, these efforts have demonstrated quite clearly that the incidental details recorded by Nephi fit the ancient world of the Near East accurately.<sup>2</sup> A broad consensus on the route taken, in addition to totally plausible locations for almost all of the important places in Nephi's text, has resulted. My own research on Arabia (including several expeditions there) has shaped my views on what can be reasonably inferred from the scholarship that attempts to shed light on Lehi and Sariah's journey. As recent investigations have produced encouraging results, this article highlights findings that will likely influence and guide future research.

### Guiding Principles

The following three principles have governed my research for over 20 years.

1. "Proof" of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon will not result from scholarly pursuits. As Hugh Nibley stated years ago, "The evidence that will prove or disprove the Book of Mormon does not exist."<sup>3</sup> The aim of Book of Mormon research is to shed light on its message by providing helpful perspectives and to establish *plausibility* for the setting and details of the account. Those who claim to have found empirical proof of the Book of Mormon misunderstand not only doctrine but also the very nature of archaeological and historical research, which is highly tentative and subject to revision.<sup>4</sup> Ultimate vindication or proof of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon still comes to each reader only as Moroni outlined (see Moroni 10:3–5).

2. What scripture clearly says must always take precedence over other data from any branch of

science or knowledge. We must never undervalue what was written by prophets under inspiration, nor underestimate the Lord's ability to fulfill his word. While we can extrapolate and even speculate within reasonable limits, scriptural certainties must still govern all that we do. Finally, we must be careful that the intriguing details of the Book of Mormon's setting do not divert us from its message of the Messiah and from its unique ability to change lives.

3. In reconstructing an ancient desert journey, one must recognize that no amount of library research is sufficient without actual exploration in the locations involved. Parts of Arabia remain largely unexplored, so despite the stunning correlations that have emerged concerning Lehi's story, more exploratory work is needed. (As of this writing, for example, no other Latter-day Saint has visited every possible location for Nephi's Bountiful or explored the large region east of Nahom.) The setting of that record must be brought to life through competent research that does nothing to detract from its eternal, instructive truths. The Book of Mormon deserves no less.

### On Directions, Trade Routes, Duration

Most readers of the Book of Mormon have yet to fully appreciate Lehi and Sariah's contributions as leaders of an epic migration that was quite possibly the longest made in premodern times. I will focus mostly on the journey's later stages, and in particular the locations of Nahom and Bountiful. First, however, I will discuss three issues relevant to the entire journey.

#### Nephi's Directions

In the introduction to his record, Nephi tells us that it also includes "the course of their travels." And, in fact, he does record a directional statement for each of the five stages of land travel:

*From the Jerusalem area to the Valley of Lemuel:*

he departed into the wilderness . . . by the borders **near the shore of the Red Sea**; and . . . in the borders which are **nearer the Red Sea** (1 Nephi 2:4–5)

*From the Valley of Lemuel to Shazer:*

we traveled . . . [in] **nearly a south-southeast direction** (1 Nephi 16:13)

From Shazer to the place where Nephi's bow broke:

we did go forth again . . . following **the same direction** (1 Nephi 16:14)

From the place where the bow broke to Nahom:

we did again . . . [travel] . . . **nearly the same course** as in the beginning (1 Nephi 16:33)

From Nahom to Bountiful:

we did travel **nearly eastward** from that time forth (1 Nephi 17:1)

Since the first four statements are directionally correct for an overland journey from Jerusalem to the Red Sea and then down the western side of Arabia, it seems evident that Nephi's directions mean the same as they do today. Note how Nephi was able to determine that the direction (to Shazer)

was not merely southeast but *nearly* south-south-east; he could also differentiate a slight adjustment to that direction ("*nearly* the same course") in the fourth stage.

Nephi's ability to determine directions so accurately has profound implications when he writes that the final stage was "*nearly* eastward." As he had earlier done, Nephi would surely have recorded a more specific direction if it were possible. As I will later show, the site that best matches Nephi's Bountiful lies in fact almost directly due east of Nahom, which is, as this article documents, a location now attested archaeologically.

Main trade routes in western Arabia in Lehi's time.



## Are the Ancient Trade Routes Relevant?

The ancient trade routes (the so-called Frank-incense Trail) that brought incense and other products up from southern Arabia to the Mediterranean region<sup>5</sup> connected water sources but also followed desert terrain suitable for camel caravans, as Lehi's party would also have done.

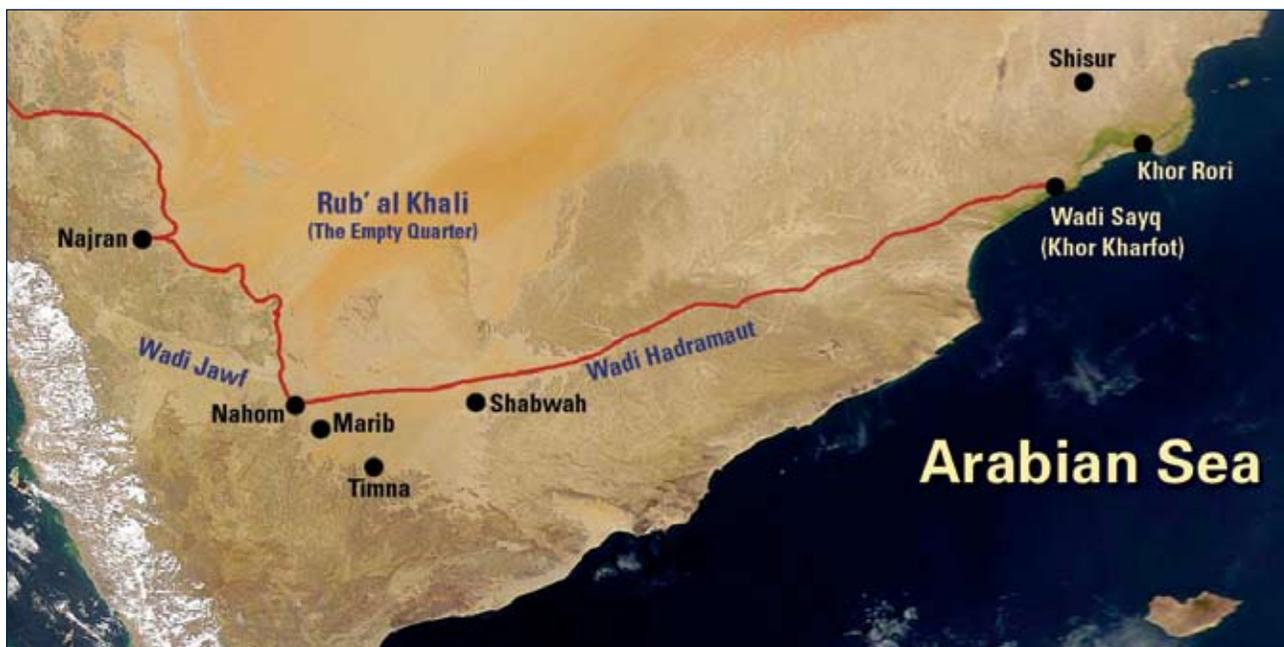
Some early writers assumed that Lehi followed the *entire* trade route in reverse, eventually arriving at the incense-growing region on the south coast of Arabia, equated with Bountiful. While there is no question that the Lehites must have used the trade routes for a significant distance, the matter is not so simple: to begin with, their time in the wilderness occupied eight years, a distance covered by traders in only three or four months,<sup>6</sup> so clearly some extended stops were made by Lehi's group. Delays and difficulties from seeking tribal permissions and paying taxes are unlikely for a small family group not carrying commercial goods; the Lehites probably attracted scant attention on their journey.<sup>7</sup> There would also seem little need for a Liahona if all that was necessary was to follow an established trade route.

Most importantly, however, as travel from Nahom to Bountiful was "nearly eastward *from that time forth*" (1 Nephi 17:1), trade routes are ruled out;

due to the lack of water sources there were *never* any trade routes in an easterly direction from the Nahom area. From Nahom the trade route veered *southeast* toward Marib and Timna, then *east* to Shabwah; the Lehites would then have needed to backtrack *northwest* for hundreds of miles in a great arc to reach the fertile coast. Such a zigzag course runs counter to Nephi's unambiguous directional statement.

Accepting that this final stage would have been *away* from trade routes helps us understand what Nephi recorded. The Lord's instruction not to "make much fire" (1 Nephi 17:12) is highly significant. In well-traveled areas the making of fire would not have presented a problem, and perhaps the group needed to conserve fuel resources. They now ate their meat raw (see 17:2), probably spiced as many Arabs still do; camel's milk would have helped them cope with reduced availability of water. All this paints a clear picture of survival in a region *away* from other people. This region today remains almost devoid of water, people, and roads.

It is testament to the literal accuracy of Nephi's record that it fits what is now known about this part of Arabia. From Nahom the stony Mahrah plateau leads "nearly eastward" between two deserts (the Empty Quarter desert to the north and the Ramlat Saba'tayn desert in the south) all the way to the



At Nahom, Lehi's party turned abruptly eastward, a direction away from established trade routes.



Burial structure east of Nahom on the al-Mahrah plateau, showing typical terrain.

fertile coast. This totally feasible “nearly eastward” pathway from Nahom is one of the most significant findings in recent years; no one knew that degree of detail about Arabian geography even 100 years after the Book of Mormon was given to the world.

### How Long Was Each Stage of the Journey?

Finally, Nephi’s text suggests that much of the eight years in the wilderness was spent in the Valley of Lemuel, in ancient Midian, safely distant from Jerusalem. The valley seems to have been a place for Lehi’s people to regroup and prepare more fully for their journey after the hasty departure from their home. From here, Nephi and his brothers returned twice to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates (and, as it turned out, Zoram) and Ishmael’s family. Sacrifices were offered here,<sup>8</sup> and it seems clear that Lehi presented to his family their own genealogy, the teachings found on the brass plates, and his own revelations, including his vision of the tree of life. Solidifying the group, Nephi, his three brothers, and Zoram married the five daughters of Ishmael (see 1 Nephi 16:7); Nephi also had at least two sisters who may have been married to the two sons of Ishmael who brought their “families” with them (see 1 Nephi 7:6). The birth of children to all these couples would naturally soon follow their marriages. Jacob and Joseph were also born to Lehi

and Sariah “in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 18:7), perhaps in the Valley of Lemuel. All this activity, forming the bulk of Nephi’s desert account, and also a “great many more things” (1 Nephi 9:1), likely took a considerable period. On the morning of their departure, Lehi received the Liahona, perhaps the reason that Nephi could determine directions so precisely.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, the other stopping places en route to Bountiful occupy only a few verses each in Nephi’s account and may have been stops only to rest and to replenish supplies. I see no good reason to suppose that the last stage of the journey, crossing the barren wastelands to Bountiful, was much longer in duration than the earlier stages. Despite its many difficulties, Nephi chose to record more positive things than negative about it, stating that the Lord provided the “means” for them to survive in the desert (see 1 Nephi 17:2, 3). This help may have included leading them to large pools of standing water, which remain for months after rare rainfall.

Nephi no doubt saw the parallels between the exodus of his family and the earlier exodus of Moses and the children of Israel.<sup>10</sup> Later in the Book of Mormon, Alma, who had access to the Lehites’ fuller account, reveals the reason that they did not progress in their desert journey at times: their lack of faith. As with the Israelites, their afflictions are specified as “hunger and thirst” (compare Alma 37:41–42; Exodus 16:3; 17:3) rather than physical bondage or servitude. This fits perfectly with what we now know of the terrain they had to cover.

### “The Place Which Was Called Nahom”

Nahom, the burial place of Ishmael, is the first uniquely Book of Mormon location that can be

verified archaeologically. The wording of 1 Nephi 16:34, “the place *which was called Nahom*,” makes it seem clear that Nahom was an already-existing, locally known name. It appears that Nephi, knowing that the group would never return to the Old World, was careful to place on record the name of the burial place of Ishmael, his father-in-law. Because it is unlikely that Ishmael conveniently died right at a burial place, his body may have been carried for some distance, perhaps for days, before being given a proper burial at Nahom.

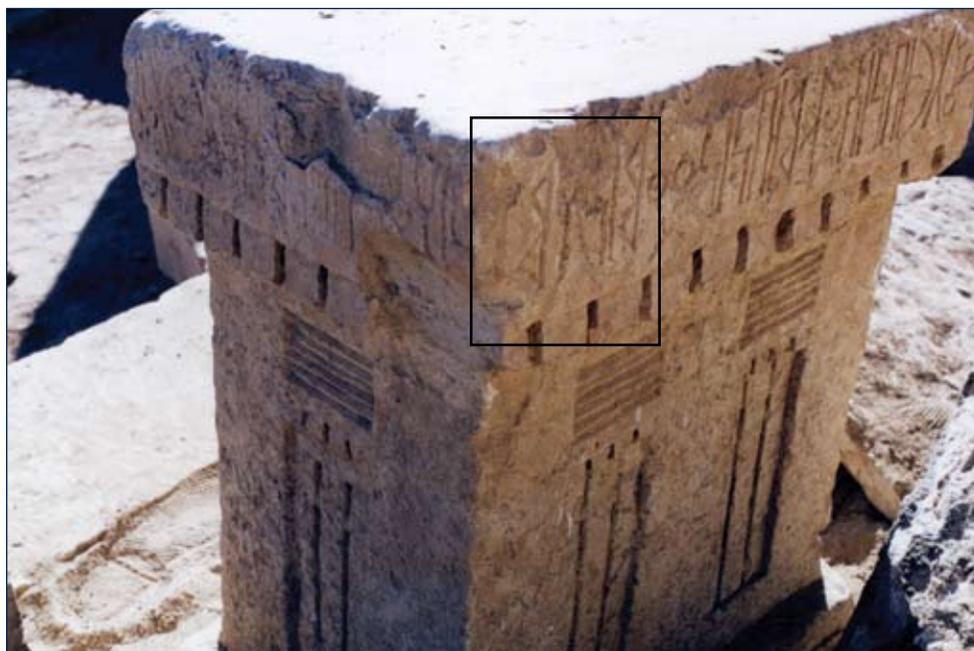
The place-name *Nahom* is found in only one location in Arabia,<sup>11</sup> and there are some strong clues suggestive of its origin. In Epigraphic South Arabian, the language of southern Arabia in Nephi’s day, *NHM* refers to masonry dressed by chipping.<sup>12</sup> Because Nahom was a burial place, it is possible that the name originally derived from the construction of aboveground burial tombs. While a local name, to a native Hebrew speaker it held peculiarly appropriate links to what had happened there in connection with Ishmael’s death. The roots of the name refer to comforting, consoling, groaning, and so on; thus there was no need to give the place another name. In biblical Hebrew, one of these possible roots (*NHM*) is often used in connection with mourning a death.<sup>13</sup> Nephi’s deceptively simple account captures all of these elements perfectly.

## The Nahom Altar Discoveries

The late Ross T. Christensen of Brigham Young University was the first to suggest, in 1978, that Nephi’s Nahom might correspond to a place called “Nehhm” on a 1763 map of Yemen.<sup>14</sup> Beginning in 1984, my research in Yemen eventually confirmed that this was a large tribal area centered roughly 25 miles northeast of the Yemeni capital Sana’a and that the name has survived to the present day. Discovering that travel “eastward” to the coast from Nahom was feasible further strengthened the likelihood that it was the same place Nephi had referred to.

Over several years I was able to document the place-name (the consonants *NHM* variously spelled as *Nihm*, *Nehem*, *Nahm*, *Naham*, and so on but always in the same location) in other early maps, in Arab historical references, and in a letter written by the Prophet Muhammad,<sup>15</sup> all these sources referring back to about AD 100, with strong inferences that the name was older still. In 1995 I presented these data at the Seminar for Arabian Studies in England.<sup>16</sup> Scholars agree that the tribe was located where it still is but may have had a wider influence.<sup>17</sup>

Until recently, however, a gap of about seven centuries remained between what could be documented and Nephi’s 600 BC reference to Nahom. In 1997 a German team’s excavation of the Bar’an temple site near Marib in Yemen uncovered a num-



Votive altars bearing the tribal name *Nihm* excavated near Marib, Yemen, date to Lehi’s time. The close-up highlights the inscription *NHM* (read right to left).

ber of inscribed limestone altars dedicated to three local gods. The inscription carved into one of these altars, which had already been dated to between 700 and 600 BC, named its donor as Bi'athtar, the grandson of Naw'um the Nihmite (or from the place of the tribe of Nihm).<sup>18</sup> Latter-day Saint scholars were alerted to the find in a 1999 *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* article.<sup>19</sup>

On 12 September 2000, two colleagues, Lynn Hilton and Gregory Witt, and I identified a second altar bearing the name *Nihm* at the site. Standing about 26 inches tall, this second altar bore an identical inscription to the first. Two months later, with the cooperation of the German archaeological team at the site, I returned to Yemen and made a complete examination of the temple complex and other altars, one of which later proved to also have the same inscription.<sup>20</sup>

The text, unchanged on all three altars, refers to the ruler Yada'il, who is likely the prolific builder Yada'il Dharih II (about 630 BC), or perhaps a later ruler, Yada'il Bayyin II (about 580 BC).<sup>21</sup> In either case, this places the making of the altars to within decades of Lehi's day. In addition, since Naw'um was the *grandfather* of Bi'athtar, the name *Nihm* itself must be at least two generations older still, thus dating to about the seventh and eighth centuries BC. The altar discovery was reported (along with a photograph) in the February 2001 *Ensign* magazine and referred to in the April 2001 general conference.<sup>22</sup> In his landmark 2002 work published by Oxford University Press, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, scholar Terryl L. Givens provided the following assessment of the find: "Found in the very area where Nephi's record locates Nahom, these altars may thus be said to constitute the first actual archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon."<sup>23</sup> The three altars provide irrefutable evidence that the name *NHM* truly dates to before Lehi's era in 600 BC, just as Nephi recorded.

### Burial Sites in Nahom

Given that Nahom was a place of burial, the 1936 discovery of the largest ancient burial site in all of Arabia close to the boundary of the modern Nihm tribe is obviously significant. This necropolis consists of thousands of circular aboveground

tombs built of roughly hewn limestone slabs spread over several ridges,<sup>24</sup> dating as far back as 2900 BC.<sup>25</sup>

At least two much smaller burial sites are also located within the modern tribal area of Nihm.<sup>26</sup> With the altar discovery confirming the antiquity of the name *Nahom*, these ancient burial areas now have a special significance for Latter-day Saints: one is likely the actual burial place of Ishmael.

### "And We Called the Place Bountiful"

The sensitive reader can detect the enthusiasm and relief captured in Nephi's words as he wrote of the group's arrival at the shores of the Indian Ocean after a journey of some 2,100 miles across Arabia (see 1 Nephi 17:6).<sup>27</sup> For those in the party with the faith to see that they had been divinely led, the green vista they had arrived at was truly a place "prepared of the Lord" (17:5). They emerged into a place full of trees and other vegetation, some bearing edible fruit, a discovery that would impress anyone after eight years of desert life; in fact "much fruit" was the very reason Bountiful was so named (see 17:5, 6).

Clearly, the group was also impressed with the vast ocean panorama before them. Nephi recorded a proper name for the ocean, *Irreantum*, meaning "many waters" (1 Nephi 17:5) and for which a plausible South Arabian origin has recently been suggested.<sup>28</sup> Since 1830, however, critics of the Book of Mormon have seen Nephi's "Bountiful" as a particularly easy target because of its claims of fruit and timber. For over a century, Latter-day Saint writers could only assign the location of Bountiful to a vague "somewhere" in Arabia.

### Nephi's Criteria for Bountiful

No attempt to locate Bountiful on today's map can be made without first carefully evaluating the Book of Mormon text. First Nephi provides us with an unexpectedly detailed picture of the place, as the following 12 observations make clear.

1. "Nearly eastward" from Nahom. There is a clear directional link between the locations of Bountiful and Nahom. Bountiful lay "nearly eastward" from Nahom (1 Nephi 17:1). Given Nephi's ability to determine directions in the Old World accurately, we should expect Bountiful to be close to the 16th degree north latitude, as we now know Nahom is.

2. *Accessible from the interior.* Clearly, the terrain had to permit reasonable access from the interior deserts to the coast, something impossible at some places along the Arabian coast.

3. *Surrounding fertility.* Nephi's mentions of Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:5, 7) suggest that a wider area may have enjoyed notable fertility, in addition to that of the initial encampment (see 17:6).

4. *Sheltered location.* Logically on the east coast of Arabia, Bountiful offered an initial tent encampment (see 1 Nephi 17:5–6) but also long-term shelter. The site had to offer a suitable place like a sheltered bay for constructing and launching a sizable ship (see 18:8).

5. *Much fruit and wild honey.* Bountiful was named for its “much fruit” and “wild honey” (see 1 Nephi 17:5, 6; 18:6), and perhaps also for its small game that could be hunted (see 18:6). It is likely that Bountiful was uninhabited when Lehi's party arrived there (see item 11); if so, this would require that the fruit there was not cultivated but was growing wild.

6. *Shipbuilding timber.* Enough timber of types and sizes to permit building an oceangoing vessel was available (see 1 Nephi 18:1, 2) and seemingly at hand.

7. *Year-round freshwater.* Year-round water is required for the abundant flora described and the group's extended stay (carrying water would have diverted significant time from the demanding labor of shipbuilding).

8. *Nearby mount.* A mountain prominent enough to justify Nephi's reference to it as “the mount” (1 Nephi 17:7; 18:3) must have been near enough to have allowed Nephi to “pray oft” (18:3).

9. *Cliffs.* The incident of Nephi's brothers attempting to take his life by throwing him into the depths of the sea (see 1 Nephi 17:48) makes little sense without substantial cliffs overlooking the ocean. Such cliffs, which typically have rocks at their base, would constitute a real danger, whereas a sand beach would pose little threat to a young man described as being “large in stature” (2:16) and “having . . . much strength” (4:31), regardless of his swimming ability.

10. *Ore and flint.* Ore, from which metal could be smelted to construct tools, was available nearby (see 1 Nephi 17:9–11, 16); and although it remains possible that Nephi carried flint with him to make

fire, some type of flint (see 7:11) seems to have been located near the ore source.

11. *Unpopulated.* 1 Nephi 17 is full of clues that Bountiful at that time likely had no resident population that could contribute tools and manpower to the shipbuilding process. For one thing, specific revelation from God was required to show Nephi where ore could be found (see 17:9–10); and Nephi expended great effort to fashion his own bellows, locate ore, smelt it, and manufacture the tools he would need. Such basic items would have been easily obtained by anyone living in, or near to, a populated seaport. In addition, Nephi would not have had to rely on his brothers to assist him had local labor been available. Lehi could easily have been directed to bring sufficient wealth from his estate in Jerusalem to purchase a ship had they been in a shipbuilding area. When the time came, the continually dissenting Laman and Lemuel seem to have left Bountiful readily enough for surely their first open-sea voyage, suggesting there was little there to entice them to remain and perhaps return to their beloved Jerusalem. It also seems unlikely that the Lord would have directed Lehi's group, at such a critical juncture in their journey, to settle where they would be exposed to the pagan beliefs then prevalent in Arabia. Rather, Bountiful may have been intended to keep them apart from other people for that reason. However, the fact that all water sources in Arabia attract people requires us to identify reasons why such an attractive place with abundant water would remain uninhabited.

12. *Ocean access.* Coastal conditions had to allow access to the open ocean and to suitable winds and currents (see 1 Nephi 18:8–9) to carry the vessel seaward, most probably east toward the Pacific coast of the Americas, as Alma indicates (see Alma 22:28). Travel eastward across the Pacific against its prevailing currents and winds is problematic, however.

Such a detailed and comprehensive description of a locale is unique in the Book of Mormon narrative. While it is true that, archaeologically, only inscriptions could definitively establish that a group lived at a specific location so long ago, from a scriptural perspective the plausibility of the many specific requirements for Bountiful that are embedded in Nephi's record has been clearly established. By describing in such precise detail a



Mouth of Wadi Sayq on the Arabian Sea.

particular location in Arabia—together with the route to get there, specific directions, and even a place-name en route—Joseph Smith put his prophetic credibility very much on the line. Could this young, untraveled farmer in rural New York State in 1830 somehow have known from maps or writings about a burial area named Nahom and a fertile site on the coast of Arabia? When the holdings of libraries that Joseph Smith and his contemporaries could have accessed before 1830 are examined, the answer is clearly no.<sup>29</sup> Long after the 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon, maps of Arabia continued to show the eastern coastline and interior as mostly unknown, unexplored territory. Even quite modern maps misplace place-names and ignore or distort major terrain features. Not one of the explorers of Arabia in past centuries explored the Qamar coast west of Salalah.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the location in Arabia most closely mirror-

ing Nephi's Bountiful remained unknown to the outside world for over 160 years after the Book of Mormon was published.

#### **The 1987–1992 Survey of the Eastern Coast of Southern Arabia**

During my first visit to Oman in 1987, it soon became apparent that the 60-mile-wide Salalah bay in southern Oman failed to fully match the description of Bountiful preserved in 1 Nephi. The only previous visit to Salalah by Latter-day Saints had been the one-day visit in 1976 by Lynn and Hope Hilton, giving time enough to establish only that many of the required features were present. However, I found that these elements did not come together in any one location in Salalah and that several essential requirements—such as fruit and timber trees and a nearby mountain—were altogether absent anywhere along the coast.



Typical verdant scene in the mountains west of Salalah.

Accordingly, the following year I began a program of systematic exploration of the *entire* eastern coast of Yemen and southern Oman, soon discovering that the Qamar Mountains west of Salalah had greater fertility than any other areas on the southern coast of Arabia.

When in April 1992 the last segment of this essential survey was completed, it was the first (and

so far only) time the entire southeast coast of Arabia had been explored from Latter-day Saint perspectives, yielding objective data in relation to the location of Nephi's Bountiful.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Climate and Coastline Change Since Lehi's Day**

A question that naturally arises is whether the climate in this part of the world has changed

appreciably over the 2,600 years since Nephi wrote his account. Also, could the coast be different now in ways that would mask the location of Bountiful? The short answer to both questions is no. Despite reduced rainfall, there has been no significant climate change during the last two millennia, and the ruins of coastal buildings firmly dated more than 2,000 years ago assure us that both coastline and sea levels have not changed appreciably since then.

At this point it is interesting to reflect on the situation had exploration of the Arabian coast *not* revealed a place matching Nephi's description of Bountiful. Our only choice would have been to conclude that either (1) the peninsula coast has under-

gone significant climatic and topographical changes over the past two millennia (for which there is no evidence) or (2) Nephi's account is not based on historical reality but is fictitious.

Nephi recorded a wealth of detail indicating that he was an eyewitness to the events and places recorded. It was not until completion of the coastal survey in 1992, however, that Latter-day Saints knew of a place on the Arabian coast that could be considered a likely candidate for Bountiful. Hidden from the outside world and largely unknown even within Oman today, this location meets all the criteria unusually well. It matches Nephi's description detail for detail.



Wadi Sayq winds eastward through mountains toward the ocean.



Seen here at sunset and low tide, the prominent mountain on the west side of the bay at Khor Kharfot has a plateau near its base with 120-foot cliffs at water's edge.

### Making a Match

This remarkable place is Khor Kharfot (“Fort Inlet”), the *most* naturally fertile location on the Arabian coast, with abundant springs, timber trees up to 40 feet in circumference, and vegetation extending over several miles. Kharfot is the coastal mouth of Wadi Sayq (“River Valley”), a valley more than 16 miles long leading through the mountains from the interior desert.<sup>32</sup> Wild figs, an important staple in Lehi’s world, are prolific, along with tamarinds, dates, wild honey, and a variety of edible nuts, berries, vegetables, herbs, and roots. In addition to small game and birds, the plentiful sea life may hold the key to understanding how Lehi’s group, with its limited manpower, could derive sufficient protein from the environment without diverting substantial time and energy to hunting. A sheltered sea inlet until it was closed by a sand bar

in fairly recent times, Kharfot was an ideal location to build a ship.

Towering over the west side of the bay is the obvious candidate for the “mount” where Nephi retired often to pray. A small plateau at its base offers a sheltered encampment and 120-foot cliffs, providing an eminently suitable place to dispose of a troublesome younger brother.

Nephi, whose skills included metalworking,<sup>33</sup> was familiar with gold, silver, and copper (he mentions their presence in the New World; see 1 Nephi 18:25); yet he says that only “ore” was smelted at Bountiful (see 17:16). Although rare, exposed surface iron deposits recently located near Wadi Sayq by BYU geologists could have yielded adequate ore for making Nephi’s tools.<sup>34</sup> Just a few miles inland of Kharfot, huge quantities of chert, a form of flint, lie exposed in limestone seams and nodules over several miles. Several areas of ruins are evident,

with the oldest found at the base of the elevated mountain on the west side of the bay. Such limited remains make it seem likely that the place was uninhabited when the Lehites arrived there, thus explaining why Nephi needed revelation for such basic items as tools.<sup>35</sup>

When considered together, all these factors reveal a location that is completely consistent with the events that Nephi describes, conforming to every detail found in the scriptural account. No other coastal location has all the features that Nephi so clearly described.

### Exploring Khor Kharfot

With the coastal survey completed, I led two FARMS- and BYU-sponsored expedition teams to Kharfot in 1993. Personnel included FARMS president Noel B. Reynolds, geologist William Christian, and noted Italian archaeologist Paolo M. Costa. Dr. Costa later presented a paper about the site at the prestigious annual Seminar for Arabian Studies held in London in July 1993, noting Kharfot's abundant flora and offering a preliminary dating for the human traces.<sup>36</sup> Data from those expeditions also allowed Latter-day Saint researchers to begin moving beyond the cautious stance that was prudent in the past regarding specific Book of Mormon locales. Late in 1993, for example, FARMS reported the first expeditions to Kharfot as follows:

Khor Kharfot and its environs have all the features mentioned in the Book of Mormon in connection with Old World Bountiful. It has no features that would conflict with the Book of Mormon account. A survey of alternative sites in the Arabian Peninsula has turned up no others that come close to fitting the criteria for Bountiful so well. On this analysis, Khor Kharfot emerges as the most probable site for Lehi's Bountiful.<sup>37</sup>

A 2002 assessment of Kharfot stated, "There now exists convincing evidence that an obscure location at the extreme western end of Oman's Dhofar coast, Khor Kharfot, is the probable location of Nephi's Bountiful."<sup>38</sup> Because Kharfot depicts so clearly what Nephi described, a photograph of the site illustrated the 1992 *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* entry on "First Book of Nephi"<sup>39</sup> and continues to be used to portray the Old World Bountiful, some-

times in official Church materials.<sup>40</sup> In 1995 Nigel Groom, the leading authority on the incense trade in early Arabia, published a major paper referring to the importance of the discovery of Kharfot and the still-emerging picture of early eastern Arabia as follows:

The recent discovery of ancient sites in the vicinity of Harfut (Kharfot) by Aston and Costa, now being investigated by a Brigham Young University team . . . raises new problems of identifying sites in Dhofar with places mentioned in the early sources.<sup>41</sup>

Periodic fieldwork at the site by BYU geologists, botanists, archaeologists, and historians, sometimes working with Omani colleagues, has continued since. The identification of previously unknown surface iron deposits near Kharfot, making Nephi's account even more credible, has been one of the most significant findings resulting from this fieldwork.<sup>42</sup> Research is also under way with phytoliths (fossilized pollens) in an effort to identify plant species at the site dating back to Lehi's day.<sup>43</sup> While fieldwork at the Nahom and Bountiful sites will continue for many years to come, the body of data about both places means that their location is no longer merely conjectural. In the case of Nahom, the location is substantiated by the most powerful evidence of all—inscriptional; at Kharfot, the weight of support rests upon the way that this pristine place uniquely meets an extended, very detailed scriptural paradigm.

Significantly, several very early Maya accounts from Guatemala speak of the traditional place of their ancestors' departure as a place of abundance, near "Babylonia" across the ocean. Some of these writings go further and also describe the Old World departure point as a "ravine" and a place of reeds, a quite specific description that closely matches Khor Kharfot.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps in these writings elements of Lehi and Sariah's epic journey are preserved.

### "Towards the Promised Land"

We now turn to the resources and possibilities that awaited Lehi's group at Bountiful.

### Nephi's Ship

The long trek from Jerusalem to Nahom took Nephi past several places where ships could be

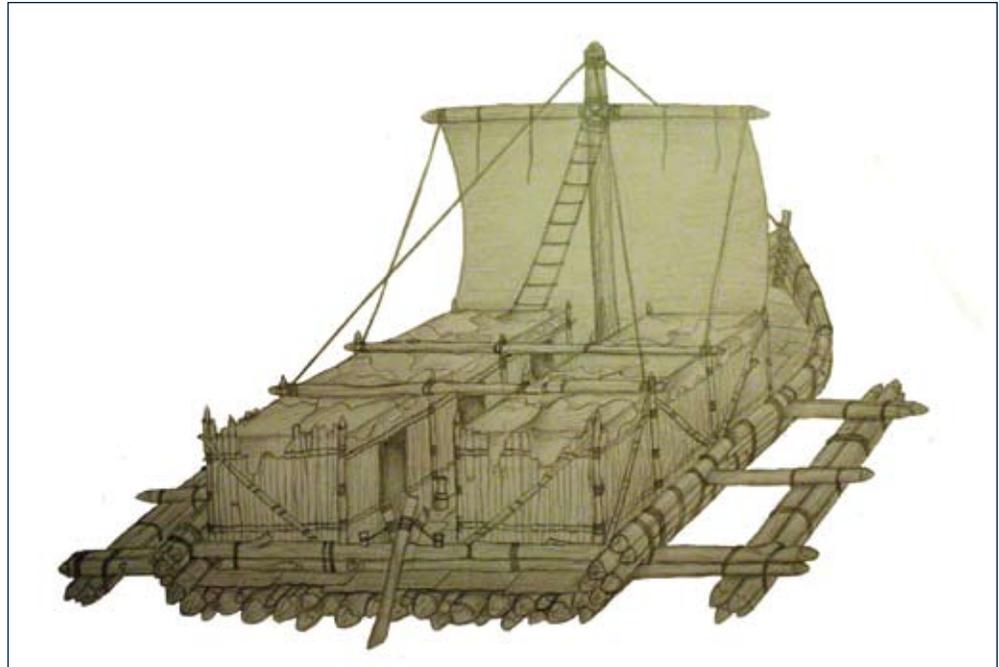
observed, including Ezion-Geber, the major Red Sea port of his day. However, a vessel capable of carrying a group from Arabia to the Americas clearly requires better design and workmanship than one making brief fishing forays or regional trading runs. Thus the Lord told Nephi that he would be shown how to construct it (see 1 Nephi 17:8), and Nephi recorded that the Lord did “show me from time to time” (18:1) how to proceed.

Nephi neither worked the timbers nor built his ship “after the manner of men” (18:2), and his choice of the phrase *curious workmanship* (18:1) implies that he was building something other than the ships of his day.

Regarding the kind of ship Nephi built, the text offers only three hints. First, the fact that the people went “down into” the ship (1 Nephi 18:5, 6 [twice], 8) suggests a decked vessel, as does the mention of dancing on board (see 18:9). Second, sails and at least one mast were involved since the ship was “driven forth before the wind” (18:8, 9) and “sailed again” (18:22). Third, some type of rudder system was used, because after binding him, Nephi’s angry brothers “knew not whither they should steer the ship” (18:13). As to the size of the ship, one estimate is that a 60-foot ship would be required; however, a smaller, more utilitarian ship seems likely.<sup>45</sup>

### The Period of Construction

With the limited manpower available to Lehi’s group and the need to also attend to domestic concerns at Bountiful, a likely minimum period required for constructing the ship is two years. It may well have taken longer. Nephi records a period of gathering “much fruits and meat from the wilderness, and honey in abundance, and provisions” (1 Nephi 18:6, 8). The account makes it seem fairly certain that no outsiders joined the voyagers. If, as



Conjectural raft design for Nephi’s ship. Drawing by Chad D. Aston.

we suppose, their journey was eastward, a minimum of 17,000 miles of ocean voyaging lay ahead of them (see 18:12, 21–22), a journey of at least a year, possibly two. Stops en route for supplies are quite possible, but rainwater, fishing, and stored supplies may have provided the basis for their diet.

### Historical Seafaring in Oman

Centuries before Lehi’s day, Oman was at the forefront of Arab sea exploration and trade, building ships that operated to Africa, India, and China.<sup>46</sup> Historians have only recently recognized this, a fact that someone in 1830 could not have appreciated.<sup>47</sup>

### Did Nephi Build a Raft?

With the Iron Age technology available to Nephi, his options for building an oceangoing vessel were limited. If indeed a hulled vessel, it was likely a lashed (“sewn”) ship rather than a nailed one. Great skill is required to ensure that the timbers are shaped precisely before being lashed together, a method taking two or three times longer than using nails. Another design possibility is a *raft* of some sort. Because it required much more timber than other ship styles, the raft concept did not

develop in Arabia. For anyone building at Kharfot, however—and, very significantly, *only* at Kharfot—availability of timber was not an issue, and a raft design, more than any other, would have been totally unfamiliar (and thus *not* “after the manner of men,” 1 Nephi 18:2) to anyone in Lehi’s party. Building a large oceangoing raft would still have been a significant project, but one more closely matched to the materials and labor resources at hand. Additionally, although equipped with sails and rudder like a conventional ship, a raft design offers greatly improved stability and safety at sea. With a broad keel of several layers of securely lashed logs, taking on water and sinking would never have been a concern, and only an unusually powerful storm could have presented any danger. A raft also offers greater deck space (perhaps using multiple decks) for storage, for the growing of small gardens, and for private quarters for each family—all significant factors that were exploited by other cultures that used rafts. Finally, the shallow draft of a raft would more easily allow stops and require less skill in maneuvering than would a regular ship, perhaps explaining why there is no mention in Nephi’s record of any predeparture test sailing.

Archaeologist P. J. Capelotti, referring to the 5,000-mile *Kon Tiki* raft voyage, makes a general point about the merits of rafts that will strike Latter-day Saint readers as significant:

By its very structure, a raft is a floating warehouse. *They were therefore the perfect vessel to carry the contents of a culture across an ocean.* They are not fast, but they are virtually indestructible. If a conventional sailboat gets a small hole in its hull, it sinks. By contrast, a balsawood raft can lose two thirds of its hull and still keep its crew and twenty tons of cargo afloat.<sup>58</sup>

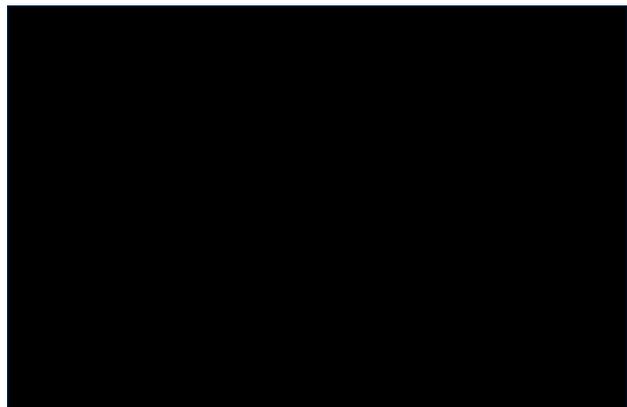
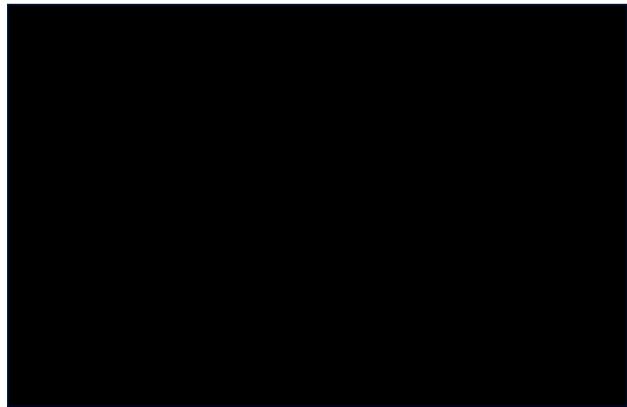
While it may require an adjustment to the cultural assumptions of most Latter-day Saints, a raft design not only meets the scriptural requirements of Nephi’s “ship,” but seems to be the optimal and most feasible structure that could have been constructed at the unique site of Bountiful.

### Modern Parallels to Lehi’s Voyage

Much can be learned about Lehi’s sea voyage from more recent voyages. One Latter-day Saint attempt in the 1950s focused attention on Book of

Mormon origins and the practical realities of life at sea.<sup>49</sup> Since then, better-known seamen like Thor Heyerdahl have demonstrated that the oceans were highways linking different civilizations, rather than barriers separating them. The closest modern parallel to the Lehiite voyage, however, was undoubtedly the seven-month voyage from northern Oman to China by the Irish writer Tim Severin in 1980–81 in an 80-foot sewn ship, the *Sohar*, built by 30 men without using a single nail.<sup>50</sup>

While the account of the *Sohar*’s voyage to China is most interesting and instructive, we should exercise caution before drawing too many conclusions. For one thing, lacking a site prepared by the Lord, Severin was forced to use timber imported some 1,300 miles from India, the practice in northern Oman for thousands of years. Nephi, in *southern* Oman, would not have needed to do the same—the timber trees at Kharfot are very suitable for shipbuilding.<sup>51</sup>



Constructing the “sewn” ship *Sohar* entailed lashing planks to the hull (top) and oiling the hull (bottom). Photos by Bruce Foster/Severin Archive.

Long ridiculed by establishment science, the so-called diffusionist view—captured so matter-of-factly in the Book of Mormon accounts of the Jaredite, Lehite, and Mulekite sea voyages—is now supported by an overwhelming body of evidence, explicable only by accepting that ocean voyaging has taken place globally for thousands of years.<sup>52</sup>

### Did Nephi Require Local Assistance?

Bountiful was far more than merely a suitable port; it was also a place “prepared of the Lord” (1 Nephi 17:5). This suggests it had all the resources needed by the prophet-led group, including the *guidance* needed to construct a ship. Nephi plainly states that he was instructed of the Lord “from time to time” (see 18:1, 3) rather than instructed to visit with an experienced local shipbuilder, as some have speculated. Moreover, Nephi emphasizes three times that his ship was *not* built after “the manner of men” (18:2). Even if experienced shipbuilders had been available to instruct him, they could only have shared information about what they knew, not the long-distance craft Nephi required. To me, Nephi’s unequivocal statements effectively rule out assistance from others outside the group; it is also very unlikely that there was even a deepwater port operating in southern Oman in Lehi’s day.<sup>53</sup> The whole sense of Nephi’s account is that *revelation* guided the shipbuilding and that the timber and other items needed were on hand, as they are today. Whether viewed from scriptural or historical perspectives, there is simply no need to claim that the resources found at Bountiful and the Lord’s tutoring were somehow not enough for Nephi.

### El Niño and the Sea Voyage to the New World

As noted earlier, continuing across the Pacific in an easterly direction is difficult in the extreme because the winds and surface currents move in a *westerly* direction—exactly opposite of what the Lehites needed to reach America. In recent years, however, science has begun to understand a phenomenon known as the ENSO effect. The acronym consists of *El Niño* (Spanish for “the [Christ] Child”)—so called because the changed weather patterns commonly reach the Americas about Christmastime—and *southern oscillation*, since these changes commence in the southern Pacific Ocean. An El Niño event expands the normally narrow and unreliable east-moving equatorial countercur-

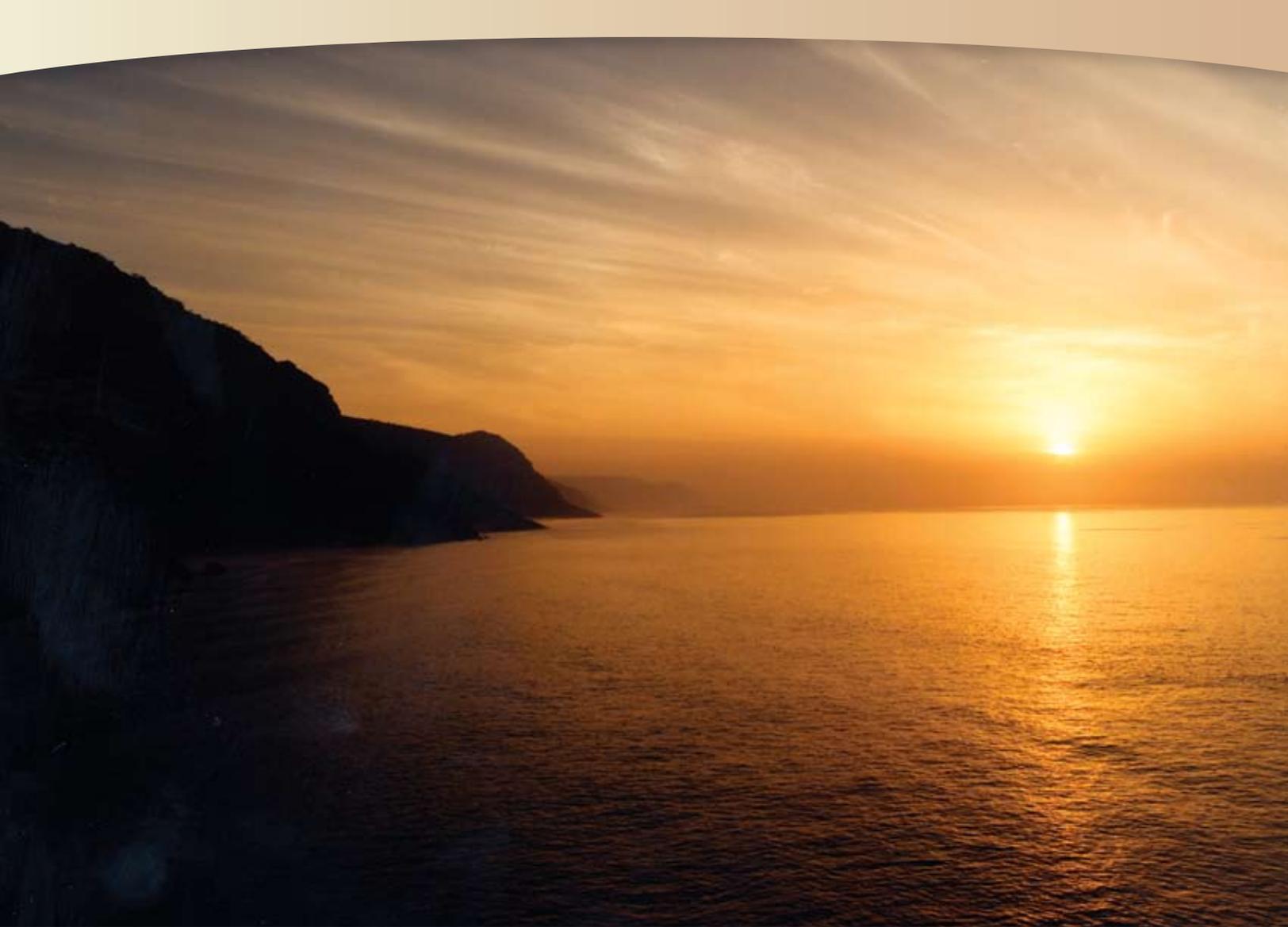
rent (the “doldrums”) for up to a year or more, thus allowing travel in an easterly direction across the Pacific.<sup>54</sup> Once again, science and time vindicate the prophetic writings by demonstrating their total *plausibility*. How appropriate, then, that the very means that likely allowed Lehi to sail east to the New World, carrying with him the religion of the Christ to come, is itself named after the Son of God!

### Using Nephi’s Criteria to Evaluate Two Candidates for Bountiful

After decades of research, only two specific locations have been seriously proposed for the Old World Bountiful—Khor Rori, an ancient port east of Salalah involved in the incense trade, and Khor Kharfot, farther west near the Yemen border.

Both sites are close to being “eastward” from Nahom. Both were originally sheltered inlets accessible from the interior, and freshwater, cliffs, and an ore source are common to both. They vary considerably, however, for the remaining six criteria, as shown below. On this analysis Khor Kharfot emerges as the better match for Nephi’s Bountiful.

1 Nephi Criteria	Khor Rori	Khor Kharfot
Surrounding area likely fertile (17:5–7)	no	yes
Much fruit and wild honey (17:5–6; 18:6)	no	yes
Shipbuilding timber on hand (18:1–2)	no	yes
A nearby “mount” (17:7; 18:3)	no	yes
Flint deposits (17:9–11, 16)	none known	yes
Unpopulated area (17:5–6, 8–11; 18:1–2, 6)	no	yes



Sunset at Wadi Sayq/Khor Kharfot.

### Sacred Text, Serious History

Somewhere on the shores of the Indian Ocean, Lehi and Sariah’s long and difficult crossing of Arabia ended. Today we can stand on the beach at Khor Kharfot and gaze inland at trees and other greenery laced with freshwater streams. The air is full of insects, birds, and the sound of waves breaking on the beach. The bulky mountain on the western side of the bay looms even more prominently against the purple twilight following sunset. Perhaps the New World saga that occupies most of the Book of Mormon began long ago at this very location when a wooden ship pushed out into the vastness of the ocean. In such a place Nephi’s spare yet illuminating account comes to life as never before.

This article has summarized compelling reasons to take the Book of Mormon seriously as history. The congruence of so many logical, historical, and geographical specifics, including a uniquely fertile coast nearly eastward from a 600 BC Nahom, argues strongly that the Book of Mormon is no less than its translator claimed for it. Henceforth, only the uninformed can claim that it lacks historical and archaeological support. The discovery of ancient altars, tombs, and the geographical realities discussed in this article—coming forth literally “out of the earth”—is confirming and vindicating the record of Joseph in unprecedented ways in our own day. 📖

## ENDNOTES

### In Search of Lehi's Trail—30 Years Later

Lynn M. Hilton

- Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976). This book grew out of a discovery trip sponsored by the *Ensign* magazine, and before going, we were set apart by a General Authority for the task. Our effort resulted in the book that was based on our two articles titled "In Search of Lehi's Trail," *Ensign*, September and October 1976, 32–54 and 34–63, respectively. Since then, we have published our further research in *Discovering Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi and Nephi in Arabia* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996).
- For discussions of possible routes, consult Hilton, "In Search of Lehi's Trail," September, 38; October, 36–37; D. Kelly Ogden, "Answering the Lord's Call (1 Nephi 1–7)," in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven: 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 17–33, especially 23; S. Kent Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 55–125, especially 56–60, 99–100; S. Kent Brown, *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2004), 3; S. Kent Brown and Peter Johnson, eds., *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2006) and the *Journey of Faith* DVD (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2006).
- Concerning "borders" as mountains, consult Alma 8:3; 21:1; Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," 77–79; George D. Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New, Documented Evidences That the Book of Mormon Is a True History* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003), 25.
- Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail*, 62–74.
- See George D. Potter, "A New Candidate in Arabia for the 'Valley of Lemuel,'" *JBMS* 8/1 (1999): 54–63, and the photo of the canyon mouth on the Red Sea inside the back cover of the same issue. Students of Arabia have concluded that there are no perennial streams in the peninsula; see Rushdi Said's statement "The Red Sea . . . is left without a single flowing river. In this respect the Red Sea is unique and without rival," in *The River Nile: Geology, Hydrology and Utilization* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1993), 7. George Rentz also writes that "Arabia contains no large perennial rivers" ("Djazirat, al-'Arab," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* [Leiden: Brill, 1960–], 1:537).
- David R. Seely has shown that the "three days" (1 Nephi 2:6) was a distance required if a person wanted to offer sacrifice away from the Jerusalem temple; see his "Lehi's Altar and Sacrifice in the Wilderness," *JBMS* 10/1 (2001): 62–69.
- See S. Kent Brown, "The Place That Was Called Nahom: New Light from Ancient Yemen," *JBMS* 8/1 (1999): 66–68; and Warren P. Aston, "Newly Found Altars from Nahom," *JBMS* 10/2 (2001): 56–61.
- Terry L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120.
- Consult Ross T. Christensen, "The Place Called Nahom," *Ensign*, August 1978, 73. The map appears in Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und den umliegenden Ländern*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: Möller, 1774, 1778, and 1837, reprint: Graz: Akademische Druck, 1968), 1:4–5. On whether Joseph Smith could have known this name from any published sources in his day, see Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," 69–76.
- Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knoth Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 5–25 and endnotes 23–26. This book was preceded by their study "The Search for Nahom and the End of Lehi's Trail in Southern Arabia," FARMS Preliminary Report (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988).
- See Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade* (London: Longman, 1981), 169–70, 181, 183–84.
- See Brown and Johnson, *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land*, 152–63.
- See Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," 89; S. Kent Brown, "Nahom and the 'Eastward' Turn," *JBMS* 12/1 (2003): 111–12; and Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 107–20.

### Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah: "Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth"

Warren P. Aston

Much of the material for this article is taken from my book *Lehi in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (forthcoming, 2007).

- The foundational works in Old World Book of Mormon studies are Hugh Nibley's *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, ed. John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); and *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988). Of immense value also are Robert F. Smith, "Book of Mormon Event Structure: The Ancient Near East," *JBMS* 5/2 (1996): 98–147, especially his section "The Arabian Nexus," which places Lehi's life in its Near Eastern context; and John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, eds., *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004). Other publications, such as Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002) and the publication of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, illustrate how completely Book of Mormon studies has expanded into all areas of scholarly inquiry and increasingly draws upon appropriate secular studies.
- Those whose roots lie in Near Eastern rather than Western culture have an immediate and instinctive appreciation of the details recorded by Nephi. See, for example, the response by an Arab member of the LDS Church, Ehab Abunuwara, "Into the Desert: An Arab View of the Book of Mormon," *JBMS* 11/1 (2002): 60–65.
- Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), xiv.
- See John W. Welch's analysis in "The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith," in Parry, Peterson, and Welch, *Echoes and Evidences*, 17–53. On the limitations of archaeology, see John E. Clark, head of the New World Archaeological Foundation, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief," *JBMS* 14/2 (2005): 38–49.
- The most comprehensive study of the ancient incense trade remains Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade* (London: Longman, 1981).
- Depending on the terrain, the season, the breed and maturity of the animal, and the loads carried, camels can cover 20–25 miles a day. See Gus W. Van Beek, "The Rise and Fall of Arabia Felix," *Scientific American* 41, December 1969, 36–47.
- On the need for Lehi to pay levies and seek tribal permission en route, see Emanuel Marx, "Back to the Problem of Tribe," *American Anthropologist* 81/1 (1979): 124, highlighting reasons why a small, noncommercial family group would have presented little threat to local tribes, who often allowed travelers the use of water and pasture. Alongside caravans of hundreds or even thousands of camels, the Lehiters would have seemed insignificant.
- For a discussion of the types of sacrifices offered, see

- S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 1–8; and David Rolph Seely, “Lehi’s Altar and Sacrifice in the Wilderness,” *JBMS* 10/1 (2001): 62–69.
9. For a discussion of a simple engineering principle possibly utilized in the Liahona, see Robert L. Bunker, “The Design of the Liahona and the Purpose of the Second Spindle,” *JBMS* 3/2 (1994): 1–11.
  10. See George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in Neal E. Lambert, ed., *Literature of Belief* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245–62; and Terrence L. Szink, “Nephi and the Exodus,” in John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 38–51.
  11. See for example G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 602. The name is rare enough that some other listings of pre-Islamic place-names in Arabia, such as Nigel Groom’s *A Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Place Names* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban and London: Longman, 1983), do not list *NHM* at all.
  12. See Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionnaire of Old South Arabic: Sabaeen Dialect* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 296.
  13. See H. Van Dyke Parunak, “A Semantic Survey of *NHM*,” *Biblica* 56 (Rome: 1975): 512–32; J. Scharbert, *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament* (Bonn: 1955), 8:62–65; and Alan Goff, “Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom,” in Sorenson and Thorne, *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 92–99.
  14. See Ross T. Christensen, “The Place Called Nahom,” *Ensign*, August 1978, 73, referring to the map by Carsten Niebuhr. This map is published in Thorkild Hansen, *Arabia Felix: The Danish Expedition of 1761–1767*, trans. James and Kathleen McFarlane (London: Collins, 1964), 232–33. The expedition (of which Niebuhr was the sole survivor) was initiated in part by a desire to complete the gaps on an earlier map, specifically J. B. d’Anville’s *Premier Partie de la Carte d’Asie*. This map also showed “*NEHEM*” and was published in Paris in 1751. None of these works, nor Robert Heron’s translation of Carsten Niebuhr’s *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), which includes a map and account in 2:46–47, 62–63, was available to Joseph Smith or his associates. See a summary of sources in S. Kent Brown, “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail,” in Parry, Peterson, and Welch, *Echoes and Evidences*, 69–75.
  15. The major historical references include the following: al-Kalbi, *Kitab al-Asnam*, ed. Ahmad Zaki (Bulaq, 1332), and al-Hamdani, *Sifat Jazirat al-Arab*, ed. D. Muller (Leiden: Brill, 1884–91), 49, 81, 83, 109–110, 126, 135, 167–68. Christian Robin, in *Al Hamdani, A Great Yemeni Scholar Studies of the Millennial Anniversary of Al-Hamdani* (Sana’a, Yemen: Sana’a University, 1986), discusses Hamdani and the surviving books of his *Al-Iklil*. The AD 620 letter by the Prophet Muhammad is found in Mhd. b. “Ali al-Akwa,” *al-Watha’iq as-Siyasiyya al-Yamaaniyya* (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriyya lil-Tiba’ah, 1976), 110.
  16. Warren P. Aston, “Some Notes on the Origin of *NHM*,” presented 22 July 1995 at the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies at Cambridge University, England.
  17. See Christian Robin’s two-volume *Les Hautes-Terres du Nord-Yemen Avant L’Islam* [The Highlands of North Yemen before Islam] (Netherlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te Istanbul, 1982), especially 1:27, 73. See also Robert Wilson’s “Al-Hamdani’s Description of Hashid and Bakil,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* (London: Institute of Archaeology, 1981), 11:95, 99–100, arguing for minimal movement among the tribes.
  18. See Christian Robin et al., eds., *Yemen au Pays de la Reine de Saba* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 144.
  19. Reported by S. Kent Brown, “The Place Which Was Called Nahom: New Light from Ancient Yemen,” *JBMS* 8/1 (1999): 66–68.
  20. Warren P. Aston, “Newly Found Altars from Nahom,” *JBMS* 10/2 (2001): 56–61, is the fullest treatment of the altar find published to date. Burkhard Vogt et al., “*Arsh Bilqis*”—*The Temple of Almaqah of Bar’an in Marib* (Sana’a, Yemen: German Institute of Archaeology, 2000), offers a brief summary of the site’s history.
  21. See Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia* (Liverpool: Liverpool University, 2000), 2:744.
  22. “Book of Mormon Linked to Site in Yemen,” *Ensign*, February 2001, 79; and John K. Carmack, “United in Love and Testimony,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 76.
  23. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120–21, 147. Givens’s balanced assessment of the discovery is in stark contrast to the deafening silence from the anti- and cultural-Mormon community in response to this discovery.
  24. For the original account of the cemetery discovery, see Harry St. J. Philby, *Sheba’s Daughters* (London: Methuen, 1939), 370–81. The significance of the site is discussed by Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 235, and by Brian Doe, *Monuments of South Arabia* (Cambridge: Oleander, 1983), 54–55.
  25. On the Ruwayk tomb dating, see Tara Steimer-Herbet, “Jabal Ruwaik: Megaliths in Yemen,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 29 (1999): 179–82.
  26. Yemeni mummies, encased in leather bags rather than wood and firmly dated to between 1200 BC and 300 BC, have been found and are now being studied. See Stephen Buckley et al., “The Materials Employed in Ancient Yemeni Burial Practices,” address given in July 2006 at the annual Arabian Seminar in London. The Awwam temple tombs are still being excavated at this time. A useful summary is contained in Iris Gerlach, “Edifices funéraires au royaume de Saba,” *Dossiers d’Archeologie* 263 (May 2001): 50–53. For preliminary data on the Shibam al-Ghiras burials, see Jean François Breton, *Arabia Felix from the Time of the Queen of Sheba: Eighth Century BC to First Century AD*, trans. Albert LaFarge (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 145.
  27. The welcome contrast of abundant greenery after desert travel has been noted in this area by others since Nephi. Compare the elation and relief expressed by Bertram Thomas when he arrived at the Dhofar coast from the desert after only a few weeks of travel (*Arabia Felix: Across the “Empty Quarter” of Arabia* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932], 48–49). Evidence for more luxurious vegetation in the area anciently is examined in Margareta Tengberg, “Wood Exploitation and Degradation of the Vegetation Cover in Eastern Arabia from the Bronze Age until Early Islamic Times,” paper presented 21 July 2005 at the Seminar for Arabian Studies, London.
  28. See Paul Y. Hoskisson, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, “Irreantum,” *JBMS* 11 (2002): 90–93.
  29. See Eugene England, “Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?” in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982). While England made his point using the scattered features of the Salalah area, a much stronger case could now be made with what is known about both Nahom and Kharfot. For a general discussion featuring Kharfot as a possible Bountiful, see Warren P. Aston, “The Arabian Bountiful Discovered? Evidence for Nephi’s Bountiful,” *JBMS* 7/1 (1998): 4–11, and its companion piece, “Planning Research on Oman: The End of Lehi’s Trail,” 12–21, an informal, very preliminary discussion by five BYU faculty members on the need for specialist research in Oman.

30. For examples showing how the Qamar coast has remained unvisited, see J. Theodore Bent, "Exploration of the Frankincense Country, Southern Arabia," *Geographical Journal* 6/2 (9 August 1895); Wilfred Thesiger's description of travel circa 1945–47 on the al-Mahrah plateau, recounted in *Arabian Sands* (London: Penguin, 1991), 181–201; and Wendell Phillips, *Unknown Oman* (London: Longman, 1966), 206. For discussion of exploration only four decades ago and as recently as 1995, see Nicholas Clapp, *The Road to Ubar* (London: Souvenir Press, 1998).
31. Reported in Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knott Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 37–43; also available in the *LDS Library 2006* (LDS Media and Deseret Book, 2006).
32. Years before Latter-day Saint scholars became aware of the place, several scholars had drawn attention to the unique fertility of the Khor Kharfot and Wadi Sayq area. See "The scientific results of the Oman Flora and Fauna Survey, 1977 (Dhofar)," *Journal of Oman Studies* (Muscat, 1980), special report no. 2, which includes photographs of Kharfot. The vegetation of Dhofar is cataloged in Anthony G. Miller and Miranda Morris, *Plants of Dhofar, the Southern Region of Oman: Traditional, Economic, and Medicinal Uses* (Muscat: Office of the Advisor for Conservation of the Environment, 1988), and in the more general works edited by Shahina Ghazanfar (with Martin Fisher): *Vegetation of the Arabian Peninsula* (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), *A Vernacular Index of the Plants of Oman* (Muscat: Al Roya Publishers, 2001), and an earlier work, *Trees of Oman: An Illustrated Guide to the Native Trees of Oman* (Muscat: Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment, 1997). Dr. Ghazanfar participated in the preliminary 1999 BYU survey in Dhofar.
33. For a discussion of evidence indicative of Nephi's trade(s), see John A. Tvedtnes, "Was Lehi a Caravaneer?" in his *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1999). After weighing the evidence, Tvedtnes concludes that the most likely occupation for Nephi was that of "metalworker."
34. Although some iron exists, copper was the primary metal mined in Oman anciently. See G. Goettler, N. Firth, and C. Huston, "A Preliminary Discussion of Ancient Mining in the Sultanate of Oman," *Journal of Oman Studies* 2 (1976): 43–56. This fact makes the recent discovery of two iron ore sites in Dhofar, one of them near Wadi Sayq, so significant. See the study by geologist Wm. Revell Phillips, "Metals of the Book of Mormon" *JBMS* 9/2 (2000): 36–41.
35. Paolo M. Costa, in "Khawr Kharfut, Dhofar: A preliminary assessment of the archaeological remains," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 24 (1994): 27–33 (presented July 1993). A summary of the extent of Iron Age settlement in early Arabia (see 1:389), major sites, exploration, metallurgy, ceramics, and so on can be found in Daniel T. Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), esp. chapter 10 of volume 1.
36. See note 37 for details on Dr. Costa's published findings.
37. "F.A.R.M.S.-Led Expedition Examines Likely Candidate for Lehi's Old World Bountiful," *Insights* (FARMS newsletter), September 1993, 4.
38. Noel B. Reynolds, "By Objective Measures: Old Wine into New Bottles," in *Echoes and Evidences*, 128. See also his 1997 BYU presentation "Shedding New Light on Ancient Origins," published in *Brigham Young Magazine* (Spring 1998), 44–45; and his article "Lehi's Arabian Journey Updated," in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 379–90.
39. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 1:145. The photograph also appears in *To All the World: The Book of Mormon Articles from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 40.
40. See, for example, *Book of Mormon: Seminary Student Study Guide* (Salt Lake City: Church Education System, 2000), 28; and John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 52. The findings regarding Nahom and Bountiful were referenced in an article that offered the general membership of the Church the most comprehensive summary yet of current Book of Mormon research; see Daniel C. Peterson, "Mounting Evidence for the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, January 2000, 18–24. Photography of Kharfot continues to be used to the present; see, for example, Welch, Seely, and Seely, *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 77, and the presentation to BYU faculty and staff by Noel B. Reynolds in March 2004, as reported in *Insights* 24/2 (2002). Fall 2005 saw the release of the BYU and FARMS documentary film *Journey of Faith*. Despite the inclusion of what I see as some highly speculative material dealing with the final stage of Lehi's land journey, the film presented both Khor Rori and Khor Kharfot as potential Bountiful sites, with the latter clearly favored in both the location filming and in the commentary by Noel B. Reynolds. Kharfot as "Bountiful" has even entered Latter-day Saint popular culture; see Keith Terry, *Into the Light* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2004), which recounts the discovery of Kharfot in chapter 2.
41. Groom, in "The Periplus, Pliny and Arabia," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard International, 1995), 184–85, makes the argument that the classical port of "Moscha" must lie west of Khor Rori.
42. See Phillips, "Metals of the Book of Mormon."
43. See Terry Ball et al., "Phytoliths Produced by the Vegetation of the Sub-Tropical Coastal Region of Dhofar, Oman," accessible at [www.phytolithsociety.org](http://www.phytolithsociety.org) but not otherwise available in scholarly or popular formats.
44. Milton R. Hunter and Thomas S. Ferguson, in *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Oakland: Kolob Book, 1950), 81, 84, first noted that the pre-Classical Nuuahatl (central Mexican) term *Tulan*—literally "place of reeds"—included the concept of abundance. Hunter also authored an article titled "Book of Mormon Evidences" containing the same material, which appeared in the *Improvement Era* (December 1954, 914). The original reference to the term *Tulan* is taken from Martinez Hernandez, *Diccionario de Motu* (Merida, Yucatan, 1930), 824.
- The texts referring to the legendary place of origin include the translation by Miguel Angel Asturias and J. M. Gonzalez de Mendoza, *Anales de los Xahil de los Indios Cakchiquales* (Guatemala City: National Press, 1934), 10–11; and Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley's translation from Adrián Recinos, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiche Maya* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972). A more recent translation is Allen J. Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*, 2 vols. (London: O Books, 2003–4).
45. See John L. Sorenson, "Transoceanic Crossings," in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, eds., *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 251–70; and his "Winds and Currents: A Look at Nephi's Ocean Crossing," in Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 53–56.
46. George F. Hourani, in *Arab Seafaring* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), deals with early trade routes, ship types, and navigation methods. Also valuable are G. R. Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese* (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1981); and the discussion of monsoon winds in the region and literature dealing with Arab seafaring in S. Soucek et al., "Milaha: navigation, seamanship, seafaring," in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: 1991). On sewn ships, see A. H. J. Prins, "A handbook of sewn boats" (Greenwich: Maritime Monographs and

- Reports, no. 59, 1986). More general treatments such as Paul Lunde's "The Middle East and the Age of Discovery," *Aramco World* 43/3 (1992), and "The Indian Ocean and Global Trade," *Saudi Aramco World* 56/4 (2005)—at [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com)—also provide valuable context and insights into aspects of early Arabian seafaring that illuminate Nephi's account.
47. See Reynolds, "By Objective Measures," 128–29.
  48. Capelotti, senior lecturer in anthropology and American studies at Penn State University and author of *Sea Drift: Rafting Adventures in the Wake of Kon-Tiki* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), made this comment (emphasis added) about rafts, accessible at [http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/acatalog/Capelotti\\_interview.html](http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/acatalog/Capelotti_interview.html). Sincere appreciation is expressed to Steven L. Carr, MD, of Salt Lake City, for his pioneering efforts, based on two visits to Dhofar, to resolve the practical realities of how Nephi's ship may have been constructed and how it functioned. From this has come a new look at the merits of a raft as a possible design for Nephi's ship.
  49. See Captain DeVere Baker, *The Raft Lehi IV: 69 Days Adrift on the Pacific Ocean* (Long Beach, CA: Whitehorn Publishing, 1959). For an overview of his life and the sailing from California to Hawaii in July 1958, see Samuel W. Taylor, "Twenty-Five Years on a Raft: The Odyssey of DeVere Baker," *Sunstone* 21/3 (August 1998): 72–76.
  50. See Tim Severin, *The Sindbad Voyage* (London: Arrow Books, 1983).
  51. Sycamore fig and tamarind are the major timber species found at Kharfot today.
  52. See John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, "Before DNA," *JBMS* 12/1 (2003): 13. An expanded and more focused examination is John L. Sorenson's "Ancient Voyages Across the Ocean to America: From 'Impossible' to 'Certain,'" *JBMS* 14/1 (2005): 4–17. The article's endnotes provide a useful index of other material related to transoceanic voyaging.
- As orthodox science accepts ancient intercontinental sea voyaging, we can expect further insights into this longest, yet least known, stage of Lehi's odyssey to emerge.
53. Alessandra Avanzini, in *Khor Rori Report 1* (Pisa: University of Pisa, Arabica Antica Series, 2002), gives a date of circa 300 BC for the earliest development at the Khor Rori site, reaching its peak hundreds of years later. See also Alessandra Avanzini and Alexander V. Sedov, "The stratigraphy of Sumhurum: new evidence," in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 35 (2005): 11–17. These dates effectively rule out any notion that an established seaport existed in Dhofar in Nephi's day or that he could have drawn upon local knowledge.
  54. See Ben R. Finney, "Anomalous Westerlies, El Niño, and the Colonization of Polynesia," *American Anthropologist* 87/1 (1985): 20. See also the discussion of the ENSO effect and its implications for the Lehiite sea voyage in David L. Clark, "Lehi and El Niño: A Method of Migration," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (Summer 1990): 57–65. The projected sailing date given in that article (August, in the midst of the monsoon storms) seems unlikely, however.
- Lehi's Trail: From the Valley of Lemuel to Nephi's Harbor**  
Richard Wellington and George Potter
- The authors lived for many years in Saudi Arabia. Richard Wellington left in 2003 after more than 18 years there, and George Potter is still living there after 14 years. This circumstance gave the authors a unique opportunity to travel freely in Saudi Arabia, where much of the early chapters of the Book of Mormon took place, something that could be done only by those few Westerners who had visas to work and live there.
1. See George Potter, "A New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel," *JBMS* 8/1 (1999): 54–63.
  2. See George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New, Documented Evidences That the Book of Mormon Is a True History* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003), 25–28.
  3. See Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976); and Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knott Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994).
  4. See S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 2.
  5. In medieval times a second route came into being that ran along the Arabian coast. This was built at great expense to provide protection from bedouin raiders who were attacking Muslim pilgrims traveling along the old Frankincense Trail on their way to perform *Haj* and *Umra* in the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. This route came into being approximately 1,400 years after Lehi traveled through Arabia. See Abdullah al-Wohaibi, *The Northern Hijaz: In the Writings of the Arab Geographers [AD] 800–1500* (Beirut: Al-Risalah, 1973), 324, 325, and map in back of book.
  6. Thus we agree with Hugh Nibley's proposal that the route Lehi took was inland, east of the Hijaz mountains. See Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 112; and Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, *Discovering Lehi* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort: 1996), 34 (map). The Hiltons drove down the west coast of Arabia and suggested that this was the route Lehi took, and a map of this route was placed on the FARMS Web site for many years. This map was removed a few years ago, and S. Kent Brown produced a map that essentially mirrors the route we proposed to FARMS in 1998 (see Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 58.
  7. See Al-Wohaibi, *The Northern Hijaz*, 325.
  8. Alan Keohane, *Bedouin: Nomads of the Desert* (London: Stacey International, 1994), 10, 11.
  9. Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (London: William Heinemann, 1952), 30.53.
  10. Hilton and Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail*, 36.
  11. Andrew Taylor, *Travelling the Sands* (Dubai: Motivate, 1995), 18.
  12. Hilton and Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail*, 33.
  13. Hilton and Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail*, 27.
  14. See Taylor, *Traveling the Sands*, 12.
  15. See Isaiah 21:13; Jeremiah 25:23; 49:7; Ezekiel 25:13; 38:13; and Genesis 10:7; 25:3.
  16. See Al-Wohaibi, *The Northern Hijaz*, 204–12 and map in back of book.
  17. For a more complete discussion of this subject see Potter and Wellington, "Jerusalem and the Way of the Wilderness," in *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 15–29.
  18. The "Judæans fled to east of the Jordan River when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in 587 B.C." and scattered themselves among the lands of Ammon, Moab, and Edom (Burton MacDonald, *Ammon, Moab and Edom: Early States/Nations of Jordan in the Biblical Period [AD]* [Amman: Al-Kutba Publishers, 1994], 46; see G. Lankester Harding, *The Antiquities of Jordan* [New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967], 46). According to the book of Obadiah, which is generally believed to have been written shortly after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, the Edomites, through whose lands the road to Aqabah ran, participated in the capture of escaping Judeans and the finding and handing over to the Babylonians of those who remained in Edom. "Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress" (Obadiah 1:14).
  19. As the walls were being breached, King Zedekiah and his sons made their escape through the king's garden by the gate between the two walls near Siloam pool (see 2 Kings 25:4). But Zedekiah's party was captured when they