

Islamic Archaeology in Al-Juḥfah and the Hijaz, Saudi Arabia
Report on Fieldwork in November 2025



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An Archaeological Investigation of the Hijaz Hajj/Hijrah
Route between Makkah and Madinah, Volume 1

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with contributions by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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The first season of archaeological fieldwork was completed between 29th October and 25th November 2025 as part of the partnership project, *An Archaeological Investigation of the Hijaz Hajj/Hijrah Route between Makkah and Madinah, 2025-2028* involving the Saudi Heritage Commission and the University of Exeter, funded by the Saudi Heritage Commission, Eng. Anas Serafi, and the Al-Medad Foundation. This developed from the ground-breaking research of Professor Abdullah Alkadi, also a project partner, who identified 55 milestones demarcating an ancient caravan route, the *Darb al-Anbiyā*, or ‘Way of the Prophets’, that later became a Hajj route surviving in sections between Makkah and Madinah (Alkadi 2021). Preliminary survey was completed on this route in March 2023 (Insoll and Alkadi In Press) indicating the immense potential of many of the sites associated with the route.

One of the key sites identified was Al-Juḥfah, approximately 185km north of Makkah where there are the remains of a substantial stone-built town and

qaṣr (Figures 1 and 2). This was the location of a *mīqāt*, one of five *mawāqīt* which denote the fixed boundary where pilgrims adopted *iḥrām*, thereby entering the “state of temporary consecration” (Van Donzel 1994: 166) for Hajj and ‘Umrah denoted for men by wearing “two pieces of white seamless cloth” (ibid.). However, Al-Juḥfah was apparently abandoned by the early 12th century CE (all dates are CE unless otherwise specified), and replaced by Rabigh, 4km south, where new facilities were constructed in 1985 which remain in use (Alsubaie 2018: 34).

Al-Juḥfah was also important in the earliest Islamic period as it was visited by the Prophet in 1/622, during the Hijrah, as well as the Farewell Hajj, and is believed to be a place of revelation (Alsubaie 2018: 36) of Verse 85 of Surah 28, al-Qasas, of the Qur’an (web reference 1). The aims of the 2025 season were thus to:

1. Determine the extent of the settlement at Al-Juḥfah.



Figure 1. Excavations inside the *qaṣr* at Al-Juḥfah (photo. Saudi Heritage Commission).

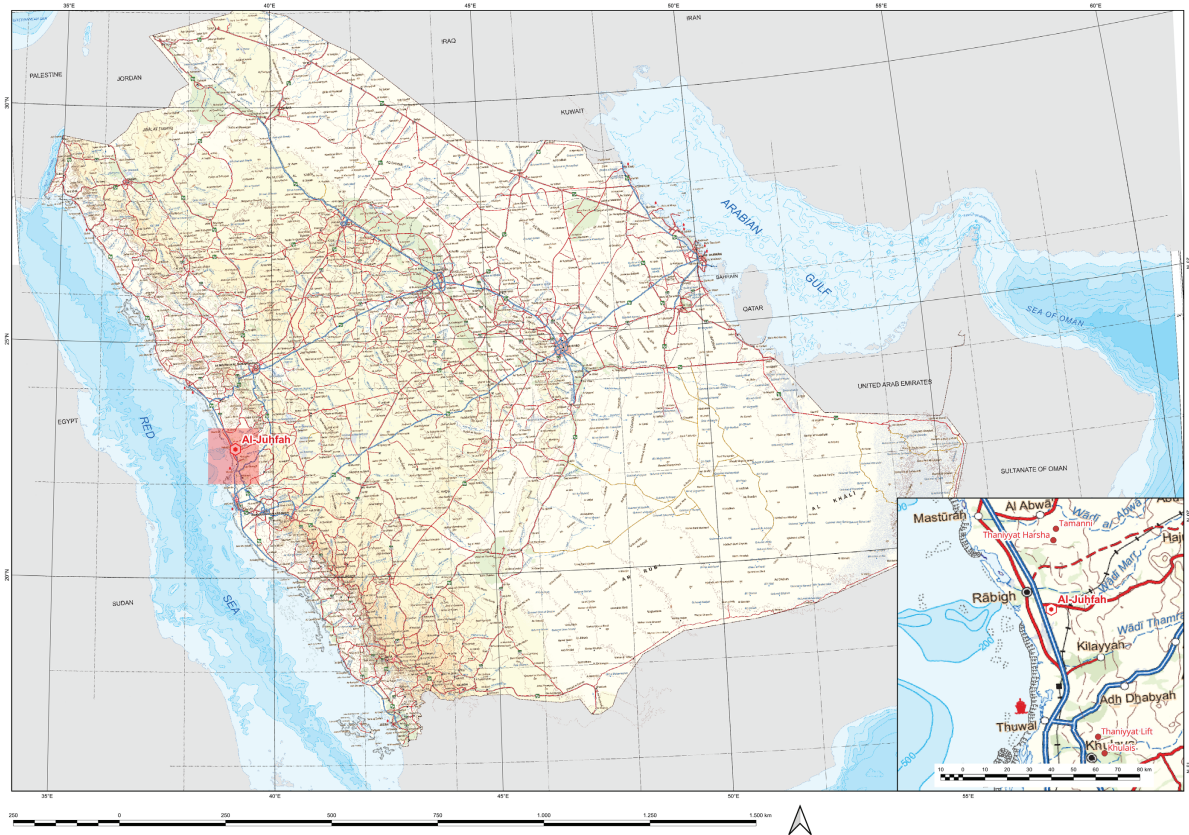


Figure 2. The location of Al-Juhfah (c) General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information. King Fahad National Library Legal Deposit No. 1445/665.

2. Reconstruct its chronology using C14 and artefactual dating.
3. Reconstruct the ceramic sequence.
4. Establish what other categories of archaeological material survived.
5. Place Al-Juhfah within its wider archaeological landscape.
6. Identify promising areas for large scale excavation.
7. Complete reconnaissance survey of other sites on the route.

Previous archaeological research in the region has been minimal and in addition to the work by Alkadi (2021) and Insoll and Alkadi (In Press) had largely been confined to preliminary survey of the area around Madinah (e.g.,

Eskoubi 2006, 2010). An exception, however, is provided by the investigation of Al-Juhfah completed by Alsubaie (e.g., 2018, 2025) as part of doctoral research but his excavations were limited being confined to two test units, one in the town (T1) and the other in the *qasr* (T2) with limited finds other than ceramics. A useful overview of the history of the site and its function as a *miqāt* is, however, presented and Alsubaie also argued that some of the architecture is of Umayyad date and more specifically can be linked “to the reign of the caliph Mu‘āwīya ibn Abī Sufyān (AH 40 – 61/661-680)” (2025: 135). As will be discussed, the C14 chronology, as yet, does not permit such a level of precision, though some Umayyad period ceramics were recovered during the recent excavations as described below.