

In the limelight

Wilfried Colonna

Go sat down with one of the country's foremost authorities on all things outdoor, **Wilfried Colonna**, to learn a thing or two about Jordan's "off-the-beaten-path"



Image by: P. Brass



Image by: F. Strauss

Go: You're from France, but you've been in Jordan for decades now. What brought you out here?

Wilfried Colonna: Yes, I'm originally half French and half German. I was born in Paris, but very quickly moved to the French Alps, where I'm still based when I'm in Europe. But I've spent nearly as many years in Jordan as in France — this is kind of my second homeland.

I discovered Jordan by pure chance, when I watched the movie, *Lawrence of Arabia!* You may laugh, but it's true! As a young climber and mountain guide, I totally fell for the amazing landscapes depicted in some of the film's mythical scenes.

Then in the autumn of 1984, I was contacted by my friends — Tony Howard and Diana Taylor — who said the magical words: "What about an exploration trip to Wadi Rum? It seems free of modern sport climbers!" That was the beginning of my love story with Jordan, which is still going on, 30 years later!

Go: Tell us about your ranch in Wadi Rum.

WC: As long as the people, the environment, and the animals are respected, everything is possible there! Our offers range from short horse rides — enabling people to get a glimpse of the magic and immensity of the desert — to long treks of 6 days (or more) where riders go deeper into the mountains. These tours are possible in the whole

south of Jordan, from Dana to Aqaba. We also offer treks, mountaineering, climbing, and camel riding!

Go: You're an avid rock-climber and one of the first to have bolted routes in the Kingdom. Which are "musts" for climbers in Jordan?

WC: I'll be climbing until my last breath, *InshAllah!* Sometimes abandoning the sandstone walls of Wadi Rum to explore other parts of the country, I've discovered lots of climbing possibilities all around Jordan, such as in the country's north and center, where I've set some limestone cliffs with bolts. Young climbers of Amman, like Hakim Tamimi, Aboud Hijazi, Hussein Abdali, and others followed. They've discovered great places like Irbid's Dur Moursud cliff or the nearest climbing spot to Amman: Fuheis.

With a friend from Wadi Rum, Mohammad Hammad, we equipped Sami's Cliff (near Ajloun) in the most eco-friendly way we could. We used stainless steel bolts glued with epoxy resin and as a result they are discreet and strong, but also very expensive. The bolts are necessary to protect routes on compact limestone, whereas sandstone and granite allow natural protections.

Go: What are Jordan's best crags?

WC: That depends on your taste, there are so many available now! For example, Ajloun's and Kerak's crags are the best in terms of amount and quality of routes. But there's also Dur Moursud near Irbid, Sami's Cliff, and Wadi Mahmoud near Ajloun, Weida's low-angle slabs,

the overhangs of Iraq al Kerak, or Ba'ada near Dana, which offers unusual conglomerates.

A word to climbers: please respect the land. Don't leave things behind and dispose of your garbage properly.

Go: What are your top tips for those who want to "trek" Jordan?

WC: If you opt for the walking option, even off-the-beaten-track, you'll always meet the population first. They may be farmers, shepherds, or Bedouins. Humility, kindness, and hospitality are the passports to start a good relationship with those you encounter. Never ignore a person — on the contrary, pay discrete interest to what he/she is doing. But don't over do it either! The key is to be open, respectful, and friendly.

Also, don't hesitate to hire a guide when necessary. It may be essential for hikes through canyons or for the ascents of Rum's "Bedouin routes."

Go: Which is the one spot that you think people shouldn't miss?

WC: Without a doubt: Wadi Rum. It's an absolutely world-class spot with incredible charm. Just imagine: baroque rock formations, a proud local population, and a stunning semi-desert environment.

I should however point out that there are no campgrounds here nor an official mountain rescue force. Fortunately, the hospitality of the Bedouins help hide these imperfections. And hopefully, Rum's new denomination of *UNESCO's Natural and Cultural Patrimony* will boost improvements in terms of facilities and environment! ☺



Image by: C. Menle

NEED TO KNOW

For a great trekking, mountaineering, and climbing Website that focuses on Jordan's offerings, check out [www.desertguides.net!](http://www.desertguides.net)

WILFRIED SAYS To sum up, the "must do's" are:

- Wadi Hassa or Wadi Assal leading to the Dead Sea
- The amazing descent of Wadi Gweirh from Dana or Shaubak
- The Feynan area in Wadi Araba
- The marvelous crossing through the mountains between Dana and Little Petra
- I would of course add Wadi Rum with at least one real "Bedouin route" on Jabal Rum — this is *the* must do!

SCAN HERE FOR WEBSITE



GETTING THERE

Wilfried Colonna's Wadi Rum Horse Ranch can be found approximately 10km from the "Rum Junction" on the Amman – Aqaba highway. Ask for Atallah Sabbah Al Sweilhin or call (079) 580 2108. For packaged horseback tours you can email desert.guides@wanadoo.fr or visit the ranch's official Website at www.wadirumhorses.com.