



## Mezyad Desert Park

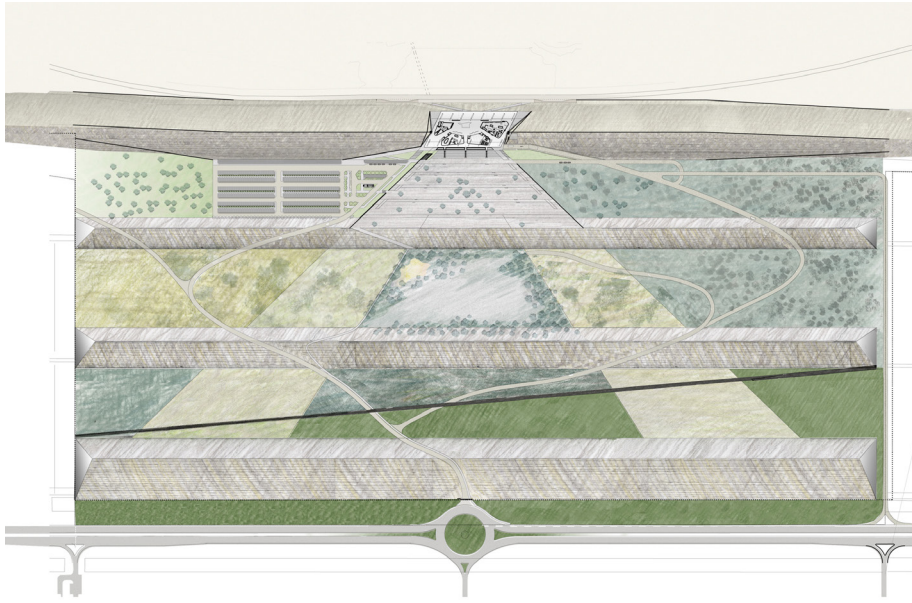
ABU DHABI | 2007-2012

Located 20km south of Al Ain between the border with Oman and the Jebel Hafit Massif, Mezyad Desert Park and Visitor Centre is comprised of 4,000 hectares of gravel plain desert, Bronze Age tombs, Lithic finds and a 19th century Fort. The site measures roughly 4 km by 9 km and is predominantly limestone rock desert with numerous small wadis exiting from the mountain and crossing the site. It has suffered from a variety of disturbances such as overgrazing, soil compaction from livestock, off-road vehicle operation, road construction for seismic testing operations, illegal building construction, and preconstruction grading.

The aim of the new park was to restore and preserve the flora, fauna, archaeology, geology, and natural environment of the area, whilst attracting visitors to the site to learn and engage with the landscape. Our role was to document, restore, and preserve the rich environment and to promote and communicate the significance of its heritage through architecture and landscape design.

Gustafson Porter + Bowman were approached in 2007 to masterplan the new park and design the visitor centre, trails, and surrounding buildings to cater for up to 200,000 visitors per year. Developed over 5 years, our work involved extensive botanical work, soil restoration, reinstating the site's enclosure with new vehicular tracks and pedestrian trails, botanic management, and the design of a tomb trailhead and the white wadi trailhead. To understand the existing conditions of the desert ecology and assist its return to a healthy and biologically diverse desert environment, we collaborated with soil scientist Tim O'Hare, soil ecology restoration consultant Thomas A. Zink, and botanical consultants from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

Altogether Gustafson Porter + Bowman were responsible for developing the brief, identifying the key landscape and heritage features for preservation and developing the visitor experience. In 2011 Al Ain (Including Mezyad Desert Park) received UNESCO World Heritage Status in recognition of the "Outstanding Universal Value" of its cultural sites that "provide important testimony to the transition of cultures in the region from hunting and gathering to sedentarization." Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (ADACH, Client) has reviewed visitor numbers and decided on a phased approach to allow public access to the two sites. ADACH are now working with a local team to develop the new visitor centres and allow public access to the two archaeological sites.



**PROJECT OBJECTIVES**  
Landscape Architecture Masterplan and visitor centre / trails with shelters, and long-term desert restoration project for a 4,000-hectare site

**PROJECT DURATION**  
2007-2012

**CLIENT**  
Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture & Heritage  
**SIZE**  
3700ha (Total)  
60ha (Visitors site only)

**STATUS**  
On hold

