

Unfortunately, my review of the information available on *Star Wars* revealed that descriptions of the exact filming sites were vague at best. Only the hotel Sidi Driss, an underground establishment filmed as the courtyard of Luke Skywalker's home, was a pinpoint. As for the rest of the places, there were a few clues, but it was a big country to go searching at random. I needed more information.

I contacted the only appropriate person: Robert Watts, production supervisor of the original Lucasfilm crew, who probably knew the locations better than anyone else. If anyone could provide me with the missing information, it would be he. In a momentous conversation, he generously provided the crucial clues. I hung up the phone in a daze. He had just turned the project from a possibility into

LANDSPEEDER WAS STOPPED RIGHT BACK HERE.



FALSE DOOR BUILT HERE FOR CANTINA ENTRANCE IN FILM.

MOS EISLEY PLAZA TODAY

CRASHED SPACESHIP WRECKAGE WAS HERE.

a full go. Now, nothing would stop me.

The final element was a second team member, who would document the whole journey on video. The best man for the job was Michael Ryan, a Canadian paleontologist, and veteran of many dinosaur expeditions who had already faced the worst Africa can offer, with terrorism and civil war in Niger during a dig he'd participated in in 1993. I knew I could depend on him.

In April 1995 I joined my fellow adventurer in Paris, and we were soon in North Africa. We began with the offshore island of Jerba, which has, for thousands of years, been traditionally identified as legendary "Land of the Lotus-Eaters" from Homer's *Odyssey*. Somewhere on Jerba was the plaza filmed as the spaceport of Mos Eisley. I found that the signature "look" of the buildings in Mos Eisley, with the domes and vaulted roofs and all that, was all around me on Jerba. It was incredible to look around and see that all this was real architecture, but it is



CANTINA JUST OVER HERE

the traditional style of the Jerbans, and it was hardly altered at all by the *Star Wars* crew for the movie, just dressed with high-tech additions like the antennas and vaporators. The challenge was, to find the exact place used for the film: the plaza appearing in the scenes where Luke and company are stopped by the stormtroopers, and where the landspeeder glides over to the exterior of the Cantina. This site was the first test: would anything at all recognizable remain after nineteen years? I knew from my Lucasfilm source that the plaza used in the movie was not the main square of the particular town I was searching, but one off to the side. "But there is no other plaza," my driver told me. This didn't sound good. We circled the city, and I saw that the old architecture had lost ground to many new apartment complexes and other buildings. "Stop!" I shouted suddenly, leaping out of the vehicle before it could skid to a halt. There in front of me was the Cantina. The crashed spaceship, the dewback, the landspeeders...these were present only in my imagination. But here, surviving intact in front of me, was the one most identifiable building. I talked with local people and found some who remembered the "strange people who had done such odd things" in their town almost twenty years ago. With their help I located the alley



LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO HITCH A RIDE!



FILMING MOS EISLEY ON THE ISLAND OF JERBA.

