

record at all of his hotel's historic role in *Star Wars*. In exchange for a couple of coveted widescreen stills, he kept out many dozens of irritated European tourists while we shot our video footage at leisure.

Our route next saw us crossing the Chott el-Djerid, a great salt pan that once swallowed caravans into brine mud when the salt crust collapsed beneath them. A military highway makes this a remote possibility today, but the area is still fantastically desolate: flat as a pancake all the way to the horizon in many places. The cities of Tozeur and Nefta lay on the other side of the Chott, and in this region were our remaining targets. These were much more uncertain than those behind us, mere spots in the wilderness rather than sites in any town.

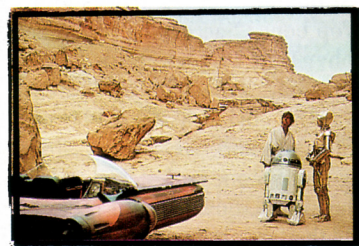
On the other side of the Chott we drove through low hills, which rose to a lofty ridge on one side and stretched out to infinity on the other. Somewhere out here was "Star Wars canyon." You may have read that the place is now formally so called, after its use in the film and later in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Well, let me tell you, you won't get very far with those references around here. They've never heard of what some Americans and Brits have decided to call the spot. But directions from Watts and responses to my trusty photo collection had me headed towards what had to be the place. We turned on to a road leading up the mountain, and after nearly sliding off it twice, reached a remote holy shrine perched on the edge of a cliff. We disembarked, and as I walked around the shrine a spectacular vista came into view. I had found the Mos Eisley overlook, there hanging on the horizon like a still from the film. An old caretaker emerged from the ancient structure. "Are you pilgrims?" he asked. I thought about it. "You might say that," I told him.

Wind thundered out of the breathtaking canyon as we skirted its rim, seeking the exact spot where the cameras had been in 1976. Soon enough, the angles on the overlook lined up perfectly. Ryan re-created the shot from the film as I walked out there on the distant rock platform. My view looking back was not of a spaceport, but of a magnificent gorge cut deep into the Earth, far off the beaten track and completely unknown to tourists. Farther along the rim, I tried to survey the canyon floor from a precipice and nearly got blown off my feet by the wind. But down there below, amongst titanic cracked boulders, I spotted the location where Ben Kenobi first finds Luke after the attack of the Sand People, recognizing the site by a particular hollow in the cliff wall (take a look at *Star Wars* wide-
 vision card #25. I had it in hand). Another half

THE JUNDLAND WASTES



COMPARE THE SKYLINE TO THE SCENE WHERE LUKE AND 3PO CATCH UP TO R2... JUST AHEAD OF US IS THE SECRET TUSKEN RAIDER SACRED WELL.



mile up the rim I recognized the point where the Tusken Raiders try to take a shot at the landspeeder cruising along the valley. This place was full of shots from the film; we were really traveling the Jundland Wastes. To see it all linked together out here was amazing. Hollows in the tumbled rocks could have hidden Sand People. The view over the gorge could have been that of Beggar's Canyon. There was even a natural arch that could have been the Stone Needle that turns up in the Brian Daley radio adaptation! I could just see the skyhoppers jockeying for position as they screamed down the canyon.

A day later we were set up in Tozeur, and I began making inquiries at the cafes and cab stands. Venturing into some of these dark, smoky dives in search of someone who could get us where we wanted to go gave me a real sense of déjà vu from the movie. Our first target was the exterior of Luke's homestead, which was filmed on part of the Chott. As I've mentioned, the Chott is huge, and what I was looking for was a set of low crater rings—not exactly something that stands out on a blank landscape. I knew that the domed



BLOWN AWAY AT THE MOS EISLEY OVERLOOK



FILMING AT STAR WARS CANYON.



YOURS TRULY AT STAR WARS CANYON.

