

WARREN ASTON INTERVIEW November 2, 2015, Provo, Utah

[Transcribed by Carol H. Jones 11-10-15]

(Neal Rappleye) I was thinking to get started, we'd like to just maybe have you tell the story a little bit, how did you first get involved with Book of Mormon research and doing research in the Arabian Peninsula specifically?

00:00:12 I had already developed a very keen interest in the Middle East (*overtalk*) and that was sparked by seeing the movie that we were all told not to go see when it came out, *Jesus Christ, Superstar*. That came out I think in '74 - '73, '73 - '74 and I was just hypnotized by the scenery, you know, in combination with the music and I still regard it personally as an absolutely inspiring film. You know, once you understand its perspective. But anyway, that got me hooked and I began making plans to go to Israel and actually live on a Kibbutz, but then I met my future wife and plans changed.

00:01:10 But after we got married, the first trip we did as a couple was to Israel. So we had a week there; we joined an LDS tour group for several days and it just reinforced everything I'd felt. I felt very comfortable with the culture, the people, for me it was a great thrill to actually see these places where the Savior lived and one or two places where unquestionably, he was right there. For example, Jacob's well. We know it's the original well.

00:01:55 And so that began a program where we began traveling. The next country, in fact, was Iraq, this was back in the Saddam days; we then went to Egypt, Jordan, Syria.

(So you've been all over the place out there?)

Yah, but really just as a tourist trying to get a perspective on this particular part of the world which is very different from my upbringing which was in New Zealand, although we were then living in Australia because my wife is from there.

00:02:36 And one morning, I was going to work on the bus and I always took something along to read and I took a copy of the *Ensign* which was, I think from memory, around 6 years old so I had read it previously but in reading it again, a letter that Ross Christensen had had published in there; he was a professor at BYU. He wrote about a map that he had become aware of. It was a medieval map and it showed a location in Yemen which was spelled Nehem. And he made several suggestions. He said this could

be the *Nahom* referred to by Nephi in 1st Nephi 16:34 where Ishmael was buried. And of course it marked the major turning point in the direction of the journey and he said someone should go and investigate this map and find out are there others you know, are there other historical references to it and I became very excited about this and for some reason it wouldn't let go of me.

00:03:53 I was aware of FARMS which had just – Jack Welch had just relocated from California to Utah and so it was very early days for FARMS. In fact, when I joined I think I was member 112. So goes way back. And I wrote to Jack and said this letter published all these years ago, what's happened? What did they find? And for some reason this had a particular attraction to me. You know I never had a particular interest in history or archaeology.

00:04:34 And of course he responded well nothing's happened. And so I kept getting this idea in my head that I should go over and do something and when I looked at it logically, no, I don't have the experience, I don't speak the language, you know, some survival words in Arabic; I don't have any degrees, I don't have any resources – financial resources – but it kept plugging away in the background.

00:05:06 And then I decided, I'm going to do it. This is not going to go away. And when I made that decision, a whole series of little miracles, as I look back on them now, began to happen. The first was that I was offered the first and only time in my life two free tickets to Cairo which made it financially possible. We were a young family, we were just starting our family and on a single income and it wasn't a great income. We used the tickets to get to Cairo and once we were there, we had another series of miracles in getting a visa because tourism to Yemen was almost non-existent.

00:06:00 And in getting a visa and the tickets so we then flew to Yemen. My wife was seven months pregnant I think at the time and she was very hesitant about going but we got there and became familiar with the place. It's still my favorite country in many respects. And on the very last day, I was feeling a little discouraged because of the language barrier and the fact that we hadn't been able to go outside of the capital area very much, but I managed to locate another map and this showed the same name and this was a much more recent map. And so that was a very modest success but that was enough for me to think, hey, you know, this is not just a one-off map and I started doing research and of course most of the research I did in the beginning was primarily online

when the internet arrived, rather than just library research and eventually over a period of several years I was able to locate the name and various maps and other historical references back to about 100 A.D. So we're getting close to Book of Mormon times.

(Right. Awesome. Alright, so Bountiful.)

00:07:42 Yes. So I'm now making annual visits, at least, pursuing this. And this was around the period just after the visit of the Hiltons, Lynn and Hope Hilton from Salt Lake. They were asked by the *Ensign Magazine* to go and see if they could locate where Lehi's family had travelled and they used the works of Nibley to focus on going to Oman, but there was a civil war underway and they were actually only able to spend about 24 hours in southern Oman which is where potential candidates for Bountiful would be located.

00:08:30 And so I thought well, that's the very next country, next door, you know since I'm in the area I'd like to go see Bountiful. And so that started another process. The difficulty there was getting a visa; they were not letting tourists in and I had to wait a number of years before I was finally able to get a visa to go to Oman but I did with absolutely no expectation of doing anything other than seeing the candidate for Bountiful that the Hiltons had identified which was basically the capitol of the area that they saw in their 24 hours there.

00:09:14 But at the end of the first day I wrote in my journal that this was not the Bountiful that I'd read about in the Book of Mormon. It had many of the features but they were scattered over a wide area. I had a rental car and I went around and visited everything and it just didn't feel good. So I started asking questions. I talked to people; I said, you know, what's further down the coast which was almost inaccessible; there were no roads, and I did get a report from a Pakistani fellow who said that he had worked down closer to the border with Yemen and had seen large trees and that, of course, then became the hook for me to say to myself, someone's going to explore the whole coastline. No one will ever know what else there is, and I felt sure that there would have to be a more convincing candidate, and remember we're only talking about plausibility here.

00:10:20 Nothing proves anything but there has to be something that matches Nephi's description and that made me look more closely at what he had written and I started feeling that there was a lot more there than any of us had appreciated at the time. And

so the next four years I kept returning to Oman and Yemen and combining the two and it required two days to go from one country to the other; you couldn't go direct across the border into Yemen, you had to go via the gulf of Egypt or something like that to get there, and eventually completed the whole coastline, about 900 miles down to Aden at the bottom.

00:11:10 And at the end of that we had every potential candidate; the minimum requirements were simply a fresh water source and access to the ocean and from the interior desert and just those two factors and at the end of it there was only one that really met all the criteria and stood head and shoulders above the rest and that, as you know, was Khor Kharfot in the very south of Oman.

(Okay, so from there you're able to eliminate and pinpoint just this one place. What happens next; how does the research proceed at that point?)

00:11:55 Well I was feeding everything back to Jack. FARMS was then publishing preliminary reports which, you know, was just like the name suggests, just very early stages of research and I completed the exploration of the coastline in April 1992 and made my report to FARMS. I used to fly over here quite often so it was often done in person, and Jack became – he stepped aside and Noel Reynolds became the President of FARMS and so I began working more with him and he arranged funding and we put together an expedition team in April 1993 which was the first time that we had professional people down there.

00:13:00 We had a geologist who was LDS; we had probably the best qualified archaeologist who was not LDS but he had worked for the Oman government and so he knew the people; he knew the land and so on. And we went down there with this team in April and then we took a second team in October that year, just after the monsoon period and that was the beginning of it. Over the years since then, BYU has taken various teams to the site and to other parts and I have also continued to take teams down there, basically self-funded.

(Off the top of your head, about how many trips have been made there to do research in Kharfot?)

00:14:03 Oh, that's a very good question, well over a dozen. I would say probably around 15; that's just a guess.

(Okay, so what are maybe, if you would like to you could maybe describe some of the findings that have been made there at Kharfot that convinced you, at least, that that was the best place to locate for Bountiful.)

00:14:27 Okay, I actually first saw Khor Kharfot on my second trip to Oman. I had my wife with me and we stumbled across a postcard, of all things, in the airport in Muscat which showed this green panorama with trees and vegetation and I knew it wasn't anything I'd seen before in the Salalah area and we were trying to work out where it was and I asked some young, local men and they said, yes, Rakhyut, Rakhyut. So I wrote the name down. When we flew down to Salalah, of course we headed straight there and fortuitously, they had just – they were just finishing the construction of a road that allowed us to go there.

00:15:20 And so we went to Rakhyut which was a coastal fishing village. It takes - in a straight shot it takes about an hour and a half to get there driving from Salalah and as we were going down the mountain, we were right at the coast and so I stopped the car and we got out and climbed down the cliffs a little ways to see what I could see along the coast because that was the interest, of course, and here was this even better panorama and it was very, very impressive so I got the camera out, put it on the tripod and used a zoom lens and took a shot that some of us now refer to as a classic image of Khor Karfot, you know it shows an inlet, it shows vegetation with a very distinct mountain behind it.

00:16:17 And that's as close as we could get, we just weren't prepared to try and get any closer than that but we saw it and were impressed by it. Then the following year I went back and this time, my daughter Claire came with me; she was 14 at the time and she acted as my assistant carrying the tripod around and we arranged to charter a fishing boat to go down the coast and the idea was actually not to go to this place. We didn't even know the name of it at this point, and you've got to remember, this is before satellite mapping was available; it was, you know, you were just really working in the dark.

00:17:02 And we went right past in the fishing boat – we went right past it and didn't think anything of it. It did not look particularly impressive. My interest was in getting right down to the Yemen border as far as they could take us, and then we wanted to stop there and get out of the boat and explore around there on the ground. So we got

down there and then they wouldn't go any further because we were almost at the border area and it was restricted by the military, and the waves coming in were too big to land at this little town called Dhalqut and so we turned around and headed back and Claire was determined to get our money's worth and she said, "Let's stop at this other place that we saw coming down," and I – to be honest, was so tired and sunburned and probably jet lagged, that I would have been quite happy to go back to my hotel.

00:18:06 But she insisted and so we landed on the beach, the surf coming in there made it possible and it was late afternoon and we walked into this place and as we landed on the beach, we walked up this sandbank and then here's this great lagoon stretched out around us is trees, all kinds of stuff flying in the air, late afternoon – bugs, birds and stuff and Claire kept saying, "It's Bountiful Dad, it's Bountiful!"

00:18:45 Yah, and that was the beginning and, of course, I was more impressed than I let on to her, but the problem for me was that it appeared to be just like a bay surrounded by these steep mountains and I thought, there's no way they could have got here, and if I had known that hidden at the back of the bay, back a mile or so, there was a wadi going 22 miles back up through the mountains into the desert, I probably would not have looked too much further, but we didn't know that and we had no maps to show what it was like.

00:19:29 You couldn't get geological maps, terrain maps and so we spent time over the next few years searching the coastline. But at the end of it, and in the meantime, maps became available and I got maps from London that showed that it was the end of a wadi and that's when everything changed because as you examine Nephi's account of Bountiful, there's twelve, very clear, defining characteristics that must be there if this is the place and we now have all twelve of them there.

00:20:13 The last one was the presence of ore, metal ore. We found that in a number of areas; it's a high quality iron and various impurities that would have resulted in quite a strong, robust type of metal suitable for tools.

(Okay, and maybe for, just out of interest or to get maybe some more details, what kind of – obviously, Nephi needs to build a ship there. What kind of resources are there for ship-building? What kind of woods for timber and things like that are available?)

00:20:54 Okay, Khor Khafot we now know is the last remnant of the ancient forests that used to be present in Arabia and we're going back thousands of years; it's the last remnant so there's significant timber growing there. The two main species are Sycamore Fig and Tamarind and they're both very different woods in terms of how they can be used. But there's an abundance of timber available there even today, although I have to say too, that in the last few hundred years the place is desiccating, slowly and that process has been accelerated in the last 15-20 years because they're now diverting most of the water that used to come down the wadi, they've diverted it into a place to pump it up to the villages.

00:22:02 So it's one of the big challenges we have. The largest tree there, for example, has died and collapsed and it's quite sad. But in terms of timber, to answer your question, yes, it's got natural resources there; they're not planted by anyone, they're just there and we know that back in Nephi's time it would have been even more abundant but even today, there's more than enough timber available.

(And I'm remembering you wrote an article maybe a year or so back for Meridian Magazine talking about, I think it's – I don't remember what culture it was in the Indian Ocean area that built their ships out of coconut and they built everything – everything about their ship they used from the coconut palm. Is that right? Could you maybe explain a little bit of that and how it might be significant for Nephi's own project?)

00:23:05 Okay, yes, that was quite a revelation to me because I'd always seen coconuts as something that gave us useful fruit and weren't much use for anything else. Turns out that's wrong, and there are societies and cultures around the Indian Pacific area have used – did I say *Indian Pacific?* - around the Indian Ocean periphery have used coconut to build very large ships, you know, ocean-going ships and the timber it turns out is extremely hard; it's a very dense, salt water resistant timber. And so I started thinking in terms of we need to be aware of that.

00:24:02 Now there are no coconuts today at Khor Kharfot; there are coconuts growing five miles away on either side. Whether there were coconuts ever there we don't know. We'll wonder until we do phytolith research and examine what species were there in different epochs back in time, but it just needs to be a possibility that we are aware of and conscious of. But the coconut also gives a whole range of useful materials for

making rope, sails, the obvious ones: milk, food, storage vessels and so on. And so it's an extremely useful, valuable product, and possibly timber.

(Yah, there we go. Alright so now let's switch gears and go back to Nahom for a moment because you're doing all of this research in the Bountiful area, but then there was a pretty significant find related to Nahom in the late 90s. Why don't you take us from there and talk about what happens.)

00:25:17 Okay. In 1990, a German team completed its excavations just outside of Marib. Now, Marib was an oasis town, famous in history because they had a huge dam there which you can still see the remnants of and in modern times the Yemen government has now built a new dam so it's a perfect area for storing large quantities of water that come off the mountains. And they excavated a complex called the Bar'an Temple. And I have actually been there and seen this; it was all totally covered by sand with just these six pillars or really 5-1/2 pillars sticking up out of the sand, very picturesque.

00:26:18 But no one knew what was under the sand until they excavated and took several years and they cleared the site and then they were able to restore the original structures pretty well. They've been well-preserved and one of the finds they made was that there were a number of these altars there and some of these were sent on a traveling exhibition through various museums in London and around Europe and even here to the U.S. And Kent Brown of BYU was reading a catalog of one of the museum exhibits and noticed that the inscription mentioned that the donor of the altar, this particular altar was a man who was the grandson of a man from Nihm was how it was transliterated. But again, the same name.

00:27:25 Nahom, Nehem, Nihm – and that put the dating back right to the Book of Mormon period, in fact at the time we thought it was somewhere around 600 or 700 B.C., exactly Nephi's time. And he published a very small article through FARMS saying that this was very probably linked to Nephi's Nahom.

00:27:53 A few months later, I was in Yemen and actually took a tour group – we had around 40 people and I had Lynn Hilton there and another man Greg Witt from here in Utah and we went to the site. You know I said we could show people where this altar had come from. We got to the site and to our amazement, his – what looked like the very same altar sitting over there. Now the site had not actually been open to the public. We had to get special permission to go there.

00:28:34 They were still restoring stuff. But here's this other altar and so we naturally zoomed over to have a look at this thing and it was the same inscription. In fact, we had a local tour guide with us and he was able to read it to us, and I recognized the same characters. It was written in early South Arabian script. And so our time was very limited; you know it was a very tight schedule so we quickly got photos, we measured it. I actually, when I was fairly sure no one was looking put my arms around it and tried to lift it to get an idea of the weight, it was quite heavy.

00:29:20 And so that became – we now realized that there were two altars that had the same inscription on them and with the same style. One is still touring in Europe. Now we had this one here. And I was very excited by this and so two months later I returned to Yemen specifically, made arrangements with the German team to go back and make a proper examination and document this other altar and in the process found that there was a third altar and this was hidden out of sight with about twenty others, so they had found roughly two dozen altars of various shapes and sizes but there were, in fact, three altars with this identical inscription.

00:30:15 That in itself is significant because it's the only time that I'm aware of that someone has donated three altars with the same inscription, obviously at the same time. One altar alone is a significant contribution in terms of what it would have cost back then to have made and contribute to the temple but we have three. Subsequent to that we got the fact that the dating on these three altars was actually older than the other altars.

00:30:55 Which is interesting but it puts it back to around 700 to 800 BC so those altars were in existence before Nephi passed through the area.

(Matt Cutler) I was going to ask, was that because those inscriptions are on that altar because the people of the tribe of Nahom were stonecutters?)

00:31:19 Well, the inscription – all of the altars bear inscriptions so it just means that this was the center for worship and they basically, from what we know, worshipped Venus, but they had various sub-gods and each tribe had its own particular deities, and so the temple was a place where you would come and either offer thanks or petition for something that you would want, so if someone was very sick, a significant member of the family, or if you were grateful, you would go to the temple, commission an altar to be carved out of limestone and tell them what you wanted on it and then it would be

given to the temple as your offering and they may or may not, we don't know, they may have offered sacrifices or they may have put little votive statues on the top, we don't really know. They may have been painted; some of them have traces of red paint. And that would then be contributed and kept at the temple as your offering.

00:32:38 And the fact that there were three tells us, obviously and logically, that this person – well firstly, he was of the tribe of Nahom or Nihm, and that he was wealthy. You know, as I said earlier, people didn't normally offer three altars or even two and that's the only instance. I've corresponded a lot with the leading experts including people from the German team and they're quite unique and for some reason, belonged to an earlier period than the other altars that are there. Did that answer your question?

00:33:26 Oh, okay. So but yes, that all links into what ultimately is the origin of the name and that's where it starts to get interesting but also a little bit speculative in the sense that the roots of the name as LDS scholars have pointed out since Hugh Nibley, seem to refer to things that are quite appropriate for burial, you know mourning, sighing, fasting, hunger. So in that sense, very, very appropriate but going beyond that, the actual roots seem to refer to something to do with stonecutting. So it's even possible; we don't know and probably have no way of knowing at this point that it's even possible that the altars were made by the tribe by people in the tribe, and I've come up with a logical sequence that would account for what we know at this point about the altars and about the tribe and its possible origins but it's still speculative but it fits very well.

(And so in addition to the name itself of the tribe and the territory there, what is significant about this place that makes it likely that this is the Nahom of the Book of Mormon?)

00:35:03 Okay, the biggest factor is that this is actually the only place where you would turn eastward towards the coast and arrive at the only fertile area in the whole of Arabia. And we didn't appreciate that until all the pieces began to fit together in the last ten years or so. Now interestingly, though, the incense trade routes – now there's no question that from the Valley of Lemuel down to Nahom, I should say *Naw-hom*, they were on or near the incense trade route; that was the only source of water and there was simply no need to go anywhere else; they obviously made detours, you know, in order to go hunting, we know at Shazer.

00:36:07 But Nephi, in 1st Nephi 17:1 says, *and we traveled nearly eastward from that time forth*. Now if you take a general eastward track from Nahom today, which is a largish area, it's not a tiny pinpoint, but if you do an easterly track, it brings you out in the southern coast of Oman so that then correlates perfectly with what we now know about Bountiful. There are no other plausible areas and unless something major has happened that science has yet to detect, the coastline has not changed.

(Kirk Magleby) In your experience in Arabia on how precise the text really is, because there's a wide variety of ideas once you get in the New World on the degree of precision to which we can rely on these words and that's what causes a lot of confusion.)

00:37:06 Well I can really only comment about the Old World precision.

(Yah but we're interested to know from your perspective, in your explorations in the Old World, how precise or how ambiguous is the text?)

00:37:21 Okay, so the question is, how precise is the language that Nephi used when he recorded? Now if you read the chapter heading which I know most of us don't do of 1st Nephi, one of the things he says is that he will record the directions and then as you go through the whole journey from Bountiful – sorry – from Jerusalem, then as you go through the whole journey beginning at Jerusalem and ending at Bountiful, in fact, there's a precise direction statement given for that leg of the journey and so he does what he says he will do and over the years, the impression I have now is that it's a very precise, detailed account. His description of the directions travelled, which I mentioned earlier briefly, is very precise. He says – he doesn't just say we travelled southward, or we travelled southeast, he says we traveled south, southeast. But then what we haven't picked up is the fact that later he says, *we traveled in nearly the same direction* and so he's going even more precise.

00:39:00 Now probably, my guess is, probably they had the ability to determine some of those directions through natural means, but I'm sure the Liahona was able to not only guide them but he was able to use it as a literal compass that gave him true, geographical, not magnetic, directions. And so then when you come to Nahom, you find this convergence of detail and there's no other Nahom or any name like it anywhere else in Arabia. And that's one of the beautiful things for me is to realize that there's no competing candidates.

00:39:51 And so now we've traced the name back; we have a partial history of Nahom that goes back to roughly 800 BC, possibly a few centuries earlier even. We have this convergence of directions, of historical details and you put it all together; it's a beautifully complex but very convincing picture, and then when you do what Nephi says and travel nearly eastward, within one or two degrees of due east, you find the only area on the whole Arabian coastline, which no one can contradict, it's so precise I feel like putting it on a banner and flying it over Temple Square.

00:40:46 So it's very precise and I think the implications for the New World setting has to be – have to be that the New World setting is also precise. Now bear in mind that they are in a new continent; it's something new to them; they don't have a history there. But I think, you know, taking that into account, it's got to give you hope that the New World setting, which I personally believe is fairly well already defined, but now needs work on the ground, is going to emerge very quickly and very convincingly in Mesoamerica.

00:41:37 And then we'll see that it correlates very literally because the Old World was the same, is that way, which we can demonstrate. And when you look at the caliber of the arguments that have been made against the Old World setting, it's actually quite encouraging and I really believe that once we focus on the New World setting the same thing is going to happen. It's just that we haven't done the work necessary to do that.

(Neal Rappleye) Speaking of arguments made against the old world setting, one common argument that you find online floating around there is people will point out that on the altars the name Nihm or Nahom is a tribe rather than a place. In your interactions with scholars of Arabia and your other research, is that really an issue at all or ..)

00:42:45 That demonstrates lack of understanding. It's both. It's a tribal area – the name of the tribe and the place are connected, and that's the same with all other tribal areas in Arabia so for someone to say it's one and not the other is just embarrassingly – it's embarrassing nonsense; it's a place and it's also a tribe. And has a very specific name.

(Alright and I also – you mentioned being able to trace back the history back to about 900 B.C. or so and I understand you found some additional early inscriptions and on like palm leaf stalks and things like that mention, can you talk a little bit about those and the research you've done on that?)

00:43:43 Well, the name itself has been – can now be traced in a number of media – we have, of course, the altars which are actually the earliest references that we had to the name, but it's present in a great number of texts. The Nahom tribe or the Nihm tribe is a large and influential tribe, always has been from what we can see and it certainly is today, so it's – it has sub-tribes but this name, this tribal name which is also a place, obviously, they have to live somewhere, is found in historical references; we have a text from the Prophet Mohammed where he's sending one of his ambassador missionaries to Yemen and he mentions the tribe and so that puts it back to around 600 A.D. and then we have these earlier references through various Arab historians and one of the mediums that is only just coming to the attention of scholars is the use of palm wood, it's actually the rib of the palm leaf and it lasts very well, it will last a millennium or more and so they were used as backup copies or for texts that weren't as important and didn't justify being chiseled into a stone. And so the name appears on some of those as well.

(About what do those date to? Just for reference?)

00:45:36 They can actually be carbon-dated, of course, because they're organic material. They range back around – now doing this from memory – I think it's around the 700 or 800 A.D. and some of them maybe earlier. There hasn't been a lot of focus yet on dating them; they've been more concerned with what do they say and why, then, would we be interested in going back?

00:46:07 I was actually shown one of these in person by the son of the tribe of Nahom and it's like an heirloom, a tribal heirloom. And in one of the two meetings I've had with him; he's a very powerful, influential man in Yemen. He brought this out and showed me. Of course they keep that because it establishes land rights and that's one of the reasons that it was kept.

(Okay. So connected somewhat with your research in Bountiful, naturally Bountiful connects to an ocean voyage in the Book of Mormon, and you have written at least some brief material on Lehi's voyage and the different winds and currents that he would need to use to get to the New World. Can you maybe comment a little bit on that?)

00:47:08 When they depart on the ship, the whole sea voyage becomes very nebulous until they arrive in the New World. My preference based on the evidence that we do have is that they continued traveling in a generally an easterly direction which would

have taken them across the Indian Ocean through the islands in Asia and then across the Pacific at some point. Now the Book of Mormon, I think, indicates very clearly in Alma that they landed on the west coast of the New World. So wherever you believe it happened, it was on the west coast, and so the evidence to me suggests that the voyage was made in that way and we now know that the El Nino, the ENSO effect actually provides a means for traveling across the Pacific against counter, prevailing winds and currents normally, but makes it possible and effective being examples where fishing boats had got lost and ended up on the west coast of the U.S. you know, a year later.

00:48:42 And so I don't think at this point, given our knowledge of the different parameters, that we can rule out anything. They may have, and the winds and currents at different times of the year allowed, they may have gone down under the African continent and then either up the Atlantic which would mean an East Coast landing or up further then up the west coast of the Americas. I don't think we can rule them out but my preference at this point would be across the Pacific.

00:49:24 The winds and currents at different times of the year with the monsoon patterns allow either of those as a possibility and that then comes into what kind of ship might they have built?

(Right. Let's get your thoughts on what kind of ship they might have built. What do you think about that?)

00:49:45 Okay. Firstly, they absolutely did not require experienced ship-builders to be present to show them how to build the ship. Nephi's account makes it very clear that he received constant revelation by going up to the mountain; the Lord showed him from time to time what was necessary in terms of design and the materials. We know that they were in an area that didn't have a resident population; otherwise, why would he have needed a specific revelation and then go to all that work in finding ore, smelting it, fashioning it into tools; it's not easy work, why would he do that if he was in a populated area?

00:50:38 So those who feel that he was in a populated area as we know Khor Rori which is north in the Salalah area, we know that was heavily populated I think are underestimating the ability of the Lord to give us those instructions as he did with Noah, for example, a prime example. But I think we need to be very open-minded as to why it wasn't a ship built after the manner of men. Now a ship built after the manner of

men was basically, when you talk about an ocean-going ship was basically a hulled vessel and it may have been, but I think we need to start seriously considering the possibility of a raft or a hybrid vessel, maybe an out-rigger type raft. Now a raft doesn't have to be something that sits six inches above the surface of the sea; you can have layers, you can have something where you would go down into a vessel; you can have decks and so forth, and a raft has some unique advantages in terms of you know, what you can do at sea.

00:52:01 So I think all bets are off at the moment but we need to think outside of the box and not assume that it was the type of vessel that Nephi and his father and his brothers undoubtedly saw before arriving at Bountiful. They knew what ships were like in that period and if the Lord just wanted to get them across the Americas, why wouldn't he have just sent them to the Mediterranean Coast just near Jerusalem; it's only a few hours travel, and taken a Phoenician style vessel you know, across the Mediterranean, across the Atlantic would have been a very easy, short trip in comparison to what they ended up doing.

(If I recall, I think you have actually done a voyage on a Phoenician vessel a little bit.)

00:53:00 Yes. In 2009 there was a project to reconstruct a 600 B.C. Phoenician ship and it was built in Syria according to a traditional Phoenician design and sailed - the idea was to show that they could have sailed all the way around Africa so through the Suez Canal down the Red Sea under Africa and back up through the Atlantic, and it was successfully completed. And I applied to - I volunteered as crew on the ship for the leg from Aden in Yemen up to Salalah for some reason because I knew that that would put me in the very waters that Nephi, the whole family of Lehi and Sariah had sailed through at some point - we would be there, and it was also an eye-opener to me to think about their voyage in terms of the day-to-day realities and as I did so, the idea of a raft became much more appealing because the biggest job on a ship - the hulled vessel - is bailing out the water which you get even in the modern ships, much less something 2600 years ago. That would have been a significant - and we had a pump - it was still a big job.

00:54:44 So I think there is still a lot to learn that certainly made me aware of some things that I appreciated, and some of them I didn't appreciate until afterwards when I was able to recover from the experience; it was physically a very demanding thing; we

had a one third of the normal crew complement. No one wanted to go because of the piracy that was then at its peak in that period and they couldn't get anyone to go. We had one fellow who tried to jump ship in the middle of the ocean and he was going to steal a life raft and – it will all be in the book when I write it.

(The expose right?)

00:55:37 Oh, you don't know the half of it. But yah, seriously though, it was interesting. No, I could not refer to him as Laman or Lemuel. No, I think we're going to find that it was something quite different from our preconceptions and one of the interesting things is that the only time that a raft has been – of some sort – there's different types of rafts – that a raft has been depicted as the ship – it was actually Arnold Friberg's painting which appeared in the *Ensign* and it was actually a giant catamaran type raft with two sides to it and a big tank and huts and gardens and things on it. That's what people built back then.

00:56:38 We know in South America off the coast of Peru they used to sail and they used to have livestock on them and they used to grow vegetables and it's all in the book.

(So switching gears just a little bit, because we want to just get some pick your brain or get some thoughts on this one real quick. You published a short research note on the rings of the gold plates some years ago. Could you maybe talk a little bit about that research and how you came upon that?)

00:57:13 Well, I was living in the Bay area, lived there for two years, and one morning I went into buy a ring binder, they had a particular – what do you call them here? Stationery shop? Office supply store. Okay. And while I was – when I just walked into that area of the store, there was this big sign pointing out that a D-shaped ring offered more storage, and of course the bells went off – bing, bing, bing, bing like a poker machine, not that I've played poker, but I've seen them – and so that night I started researching because I recalled that someone had described the rings as D-shaped but I couldn't remember anyone commenting on it and so I began researching and I got in touch with a fellow in England whose lifelong passion is tracing the development of office – storage – paper storage basically. And he – it's all in the paper, I can't remember his name now, the institution, yah, he confirmed that that, indeed was the case and why it was the case and it's because the straight side allows the paper to settle better than if you just have an O shape or an oval shaped ring so it came together very nicely.

(Right. But you, in your research it kind of uncovered the idea that this wasn't something that was widely recognized in Joseph Smith's own day.)

00:59:16 No, and wasn't widely recognized even in our day as being of any possible relevance. You see one of the great things about the Book of Mormon is that there are opportunities for almost anyone regardless of their training and background. If your mind is alive to – first of all, well you've got to have the grounding in it, be aware of the text and what's being said about it – but if you're alive to it, then things like that will happen.

00:59:52 I had another experience years ago when I was married, we had missionaries over for dinner and one of them was an Australian missionary and he said, Oh I've – you know he was fascinated by what I was doing with, you know, Nahom and Bountiful, and wanted to talk all night about it and he said, "Well I've been working on something that I came across in a magazine – something like *Scientific American* or it was something of that sort, and so he showed it to me and it was absolutely brilliant; it was how science now has developed a material, I think it's called an aerogel that will glow when it's energized by electricity and it's just a small charge, and he related it to the sixteen stones of Ether.

01:00:52 So these are, how they were used to provide light and so we pursued this and I sent it over, I sent it over to someone in FARMS who will remain nameless partially because I've forgotten the name but so anyway, he got transferred out of the area and I continued contact with him and I was really disappointed that I felt that it hadn't been looked at and so I sent it to Jack Welch personally with the background of it and he looked at it and he put a whole team to work on it and it ended up coming out as a paper which made an original contribution and here's a guy who was like 20 on his mission and came up with something that no one else had picked up on.

01:01:48 And to me, things like that have always been very encouraging in – when I look at my own situation, I think, hey, if I can find stuff like that – I mean look at the Valley of Lemuel – candidate George Potter and Richard Wellington stumbled across this, they weren't even looking for it – they were looking for an alternative Mt. Sinai and came across what is our only credible candidate although more work needs to be done. So there's stuff that people can do and it needs a coordinating body, you know, to

make sure that all this gets funneled through and assessed by people who have the expertise.

(Matt Cutler) just before we go on to the next things, I had a couple of questions about Nahom and also Bountiful. What – is there still work to be done in both of those areas and if there is, then what specific work do you see contributing to further research in the future?)

01:03:04 An excellent question. This week, this very week, there's an archaeologist from this Provo area flying to Oman I don't know what week he was leaving but it's this week and he is Ric Hauck. He's back there now with two other archaeologists who are not LDS. Two years ago we set up the Khor Kharfot Foundation specifically to fund-raise and coordinate what needs to be done at Khor Kharfot. Last year we had two teams and we took over archaeologists on both of them and one of them is Ric Hauck who's well-known through his involvement with the BMAF over the years and he's this week flying there to meet with the government with the other two archaeologists to meet with the government officials to get permits.

01:04:22 He's actually hoping to piggy-back off the permits that Kent Brown had some years back but didn't use and we're aiming for early next year, perhaps February, and you may need to sort of check before you use that in any sense but it was set up and meant to be kept confidential that in February 2016 we are hoping to take a team and finally, because it should have been done a decade and a half ago, finally do an excavation to identify the main structures at Kharfot.

01:05:06 It's never been done; it's been talked about and you know we've waffled all these years; you can't touch anything, you can't lift up the stone over there without getting yourself into big trouble which is as it should be, so we've had to focus on the botany and geology and so forth. The archaeology needs to be done.

(Awesome. That's exciting.)

Yes, it is.

(Neal Rappleye) Alright, so have you – in all your years doing this, and you've been at it for a long time, what has been some of the most memorable experiences you've had as you've gone to Oman and Yemen and other places doing this research?)

01:06:00 There have been so many it's difficult, actually, to pick even one or two. Obviously, as in most things, the people that you meet and work with make it special. I remember one time in the very early stages when I was going to Khor Kharfot on my own before we could get teams to go there, and I used to go there and camp for a week or two weeks, and I remember one day I just felt the need to just stop the constant exploring, walking, photographing, you name it; there are still things down there I would like to do, but I felt the need and I went and sat in the middle of all the vegetation in the reeds, in the trees and I sat there for most of the morning. I remember it was like two or three hours and didn't do anything except sit there and listen and I replayed the story from 1st Nephi in my mind and just tried to absorb the place because this almost certainly is where they were, so long ago and that really had a big impact on me and it's one of the few times I sort of took a break from you know, the normal activities that I used to do down there.

01:07:47 Doing anything in that environment was tough; it's hard work, it's hot – you get up around 50 degrees Celsius – okay, I'm not too good with my conversion.

(Kirk Magleby) You would be well over 110)

Yah, okay, well that rings a bell, so you know, you'd get to be about really, major temperatures; you can't be out in the sun from mid-morning to mid-afternoon. You really dehydrate very rapidly and it really made me appreciate what they went through, must have gone through, because nothing much has changed since that day.

01:08 34 And I think it's a – probably not wise that we expect to find anything specific when people mention we'll find an inscription, well we have found some inscriptions but they're not from Nephi I don't think. Or we'll find something that we can specifically link – it's not the only realms of possibility but that's typically not how the Lord works. It's typically not how archaeology works. All you get is plausibilities but the fact that there aren't any, as with Nahom, there aren't any credible, competing sites to me is very significant and the fact that it's there is enormously significant because I keep coming back to one point. *If* Khor Kharfot was not there, what a situation we would be in as believers of the Book of Mormon is something that we have a spiritual witness of, but can't demonstrate the presence of this unique place.

01:09:56 Now Nahom, of course, has exceeded all their expectations. None of us ever thought the place would turn out to be a place that's still known by that name today in

the 21st Century. Bountiful, on the other hand, is a very concrete description, a very detailed, specific description and if Khor Kharfot was not there, we would have to change our reading of Nephi's text to conform to some other place. But as it is, we can take Nephi literally and precisely. Everything he said is there and so I really think we've nailed the place and that, in turn, then begins to inform the text. For example with the mount that he went and prayed oft, we can now see what he meant – not just see the place that it must have been, but understand why he says some of the things he says: *I went into the mount*.

01:11:09 Well how do you go *into* a mount? Doesn't make a lot of sense until you go there and see *the mount*, there's only one place, and see that it's pocked with giant cave systems and if you wanted some privacy and a sacred place where you'd go and retire and pray and so forth, that's what you'd do. You would go into one of these places – it's still a decent climb but it's doable on a regular basis and you are literally going *into* the mount.

01:11:46 And so there's all these cool ways of looking at it. And one of the things I've found is every time I've taken the tour group down there, almost everyone comes up with new ways of looking at things; I remember we had one of the early groups that I've taken there; we had a fellow from Wyoming, I think he was, and he was a farmer and he looked like a stereotypical outdoor rough, you know, farming type person and he started pointing out stuff about animal trials and there are things like this – you know if just blew our minds because he was able to see things from his training; we had a geologist down there, a guy who is a retired geologist from California and he started reading the whole landscape and it was amazing. You know we're all furiously writing down notes and trying to get him on camera and so it's been an eye-opening experience, it's something I'll always be grateful for. But other places will wait.

(Kirk Magleby) Warren, I'd like you to describe the way you felt when you were on the bus in Australia and you picked up the Ensign and read this 4-1/2 year-old article from Christensen.)

01:13:17 Well firstly, I don't know why I picked up that particular issue. It was apparently at random. I suspect it may not have been at random. I read it and although I had read it when it came out because one of the few things I'll say in my defense is that I used to read the *Ensign* cover to cover, literally, everything in it, and it just hooked me. I couldn't let it go and I kept thinking about it and then I kept re-reading it and I

just had to see it through and pursue it. And that was a process over many weeks until I contacted Jack and he assured me that no one had followed it through.

01:14:10 I actually met Elder – Christensen – Ross Christensen once. I came over and gave a paper here in Salt Lake and met him which was a great privilege, but he was just happy to see that someone was actually following through on his lead.

(How have you financed all of this travel and exploration all these years?)

01:14:42 Well, it hasn't been easy. Putting together the teams that we've taken to Oman, we basically had to say to people, hey, you're a geologist, you're a botanist, we can't pay you; we might be able to cover your camping costs, but you know, you'll have to come up with the air fare and of course not everyone can do that, but once people get excited about it, they will do it. I know two occasions individuals have stepped forward with a few thousand dollars that have let us pay the air fares for some of these people.

01:15:31 But yah, it hasn't been easy and sometimes I feel like crying when I think what could have been done by now if the resources, and I'm not just talking money, but if we'd had the resources and the commitment from qualified people to do it.

(What has been your profession that allowed you personally to travel so many times to Arabia?)

01:15:58 Okay, well my – after my mission, I worked in the temple in New Zealand then when I got married and moved to Australia, I sought employment and I worked for the airlines because I figured that would be the only way that we could – I was your typical, poor missionary; I had nothing. Hasn't changed very much since then. But I figured that was the only way that we would be able to travel and I had this burning desire to travel and that became refined to the Middle East – to the Holy Land and so I worked for the airlines for a number of years. I then worked in the travel industry, travel companies and eventually set up my own which supported the family for about nine years until I sold it and basically that was it. That helped.

01:17:03 Now days no it wouldn't be a route that would work because air fares have dropped so much, you know, a person can locate very good deals if they put the effort into it.

(Almost all explorers pay a very steep personal price. What price have you paid?)

01:17:27 Well, I'm divorced. That is not totally unrelated to what we've been talking about and it's very, very difficult when you're not equally yoked in your interests and in what you aspire to do. I never wanted to have an ordinary life and just be content with you know, the house and the two cars and the family and the white picket fence. Although I never thought in terms of Book of Mormon archaeology. It came and took me away – yeah, the price has been wow, I probably should answer that in writing when I can sit down and give it a better context and come up with something more coherent.

(Well I apologize for putting you on the spot. It is important for people to know that passion requires commitment. And sometimes, it's a lifetime of commitment.)

01:19:03 Yes, well, I'm 64 now and want to keep going; there's so much that needs to be done and I don't see myself as anything special, certainly not, but the one thing I think I've had going for me is that the lack of a specialty has been my bonus. It's enabled me to be a generalist and to see a bigger picture because you know I've seen what happens when someone goes over who's spent their whole life in one discipline focused on that. They're great when it comes to that, but they don't see the rest of it. And you've got to get this in context.

01:19:50 It's something that needs a big picture; it needs all of those elements to be integrated, you know, so that we know what we're dealing with and so that we get the lessons that we can from it and I've seen that in and out of the church, obviously, it's – I guess if I see myself as anything, it's a facilitator of sorts. And I think it needs people to do that. But yeah, it comes at a price. You pay a price. My kids, fortunately, have loved it and been involved in it to one degree or another so they have testimonies of it although I don't think they fully appreciate it until they get into their 20s and 30s that so the benefits have outweighed the costs significantly and it's kept me poor which is a blessing.

(The other LDS explorer who has spent significant time in Arabia is George Potter. Have you ever travelled with George?)

01:21:15 No, we've never met; we've had contact, very limited contact but no, we've never met.

(You obviously appreciate the work he's done relative to the Valley of Lemuel.)

I think they've probably got the spot. I've examined it through Google satellite imagery; I've actually seen it from across – from Egypt, from the Egyptian side of the Red Sea. At particular times you can actually get a very clear view and the latest satellite mapping was just released last year and it's amazing. They upgraded everything on Google Earth and I would say 90 percent he's got it, but still, no competent person has done a systematic survey of that area; it's got to be in a fairly defined area.

01:22:15 But his other speculations, I don't regard very highly at all. That's being very kind but he's settled on Peru as the New World setting as you know. He's proposed an alternative Bountiful location which is all based on his reading before ever going to Oman and he has finally after many years, gone to Kharfot. Yah, so, I mean he's made his contribution in that sense. The other people I have a lot of respect for were Lynn and Hope Hilton who looked at a lot of the practical realities of life in the desert based on their experience and so that was valuable.

01:23:21 Of course no one comes up with everything on their own; we build on the efforts of others and there's been very far and few between that – yeah, you have to take all of it into account and there's plenty still to do and –

(Have you ever shared the Book of Mormon with any of your friends in Arabia?)

01:23:52 In a very limited way. You can't proselyte, of course, being a Muslim country and the Church tells you that very clearly, so I've never had any problems taking a Book of Mormon with me but you can't go giving out copies of it. I did meet with a group of Pakistani and Indian Christians once and was invited to talk to them but I had to keep that so general about the purpose of life and why it was important to remain faithful to your wife while you were away for a year or two years and stuff like that rather than the Book of Mormon per se. And that was a very spiritual experience and probably not something I should admit to.

01:24:53 But the people like the academic people from the universities in Oman that I've dealt with, they're all well aware of the Book of Mormon, the basic Mormon story. They – when they see that you're not there to convert the local people, including them and that your interests are, you know, scientific, they're quite happy with it. I mean Muslims generally don't have a problem with anything in the Book of Mormon in terms of the Old World setting.

01:25:34 You know, I mean you can talk to them about you know, there was a great prophet called Lehi (*lay-hee*) who came through here and we think this is the place and it's made it into the mass-media down there. I mean stuff has been published by newspapers in Oman about the Mormons. I mean Khor Kharfot now is known as Mormon Beach by locals and by archaeologists. I mean I've never had opposition in that sense. The only time I've encountered opposition, it's been from western sources who don't want anything to do with it.

01:26:29 But not from local Arab people. They're very comfortable with prophets wandering around and building ships and so on.

(We're pretty confident with a number of sites in the ancient Near East that come from the text of the Book of Mormon. We like Jerusalem, obviously, the Red Sea, and Valley of Lemuel, we have Nahom, Bountiful. Are there any other sites along that trail that have been convincing to you?)

01:27:07 Well just the route from Nahom to Bountiful and that's an area that needs more exploration. I've explored chunks of it and I'm the only person who has which is kind of sad, but if conditions ever stabilize in Yemen, there's stuff that needs to be done. Shazer is another area that no one has really come up with a very good candidate. George Potter has come up with a suggestion. See the Hiltons came up with all kinds of places, but have let most of them go as better information has come out.

01:27:55 They had a proposed location for Nahom, for example, and it was way off, way off. That was before we knew about, you know, the location. Yah, I would say it's just the crossing, the most difficult time of the journey; it would be good if we had a better picture of that, even though we've had glimpses of it; some aspects of it have revealed themselves but you know, once they leave Bountiful, of course it's all finished, and one of the things I've been focusing on in recent years has been how much of their homeland, the Old World, did the people of Nephi and the Lamanites, I guess, remember as they looked back to their ancestral beginnings?

01:28:59 And so I've done quite a bit of work on that and my new book has a whole section on that where I look at Mayan texts that describe where they left from and there are some very, very interesting correlations; they're very specific. In fact, I suspect that

people who want to argue about it will dismiss it as being overly pedantic in accepting it but when they describe it as a valley, a ravine, and that it's full of reeds and watery, yah, I think it's very telling. And when they describe a peculiar instrument as a ball and it gave them directions, it's not a coincidence.

(How do you get from the interior down Wadi Sayq to Khor Kharfot?)

01:30:09 Okay, no one has actually done that. I have been to the very beginning of the Wadi Sayq out in the desert but now they have built a huge military base and you can't get anywhere near it. So I have come down various stages of the wadi and walked overland and walked inland. I haven't always used a boat. I've come in on probably about four places, but it comes – it begins in the plateau and now on Google Earth you can actually get down and it's like flying a helicopter. You can go right through and see everything, rocks and stuff but it becomes arid and barren very quickly; it's only got greenery in the last mile, mile and a half – something like that.

01:31:11 As you see when you go on Google Earth you can go right through it. That's, of course, how they must have accessed the place and that's why it's remained uninhabited most of the times because it's so hard to get to it, except coming from the interior desert. Who does that? Except a prophet and his extended family?

01:31:38 But the people, you know, living on either side, are more or less prevented unless they go by boat or unless they have a helicopter to drop them in, it's just not a place that's conducive to – although it's so attractive and it's got fresh water all year round and fruit growing and trees and no end of food sources and magical fishing, lobsters on the rock. Yah, unless you come through the wadi, which no one does, it's not a place that's conducive to long-term settlement.

01:32:21 People say well how could such an amazing place like this not have permanent population? Well that's why. Access.

(We find in Mesoamerica seasonality defines many aspects of life and it's very abrupt. Is there a similar type of seasonality at work in the South Arabian Coast?)

01:32:47 Yes. But here's the interesting thing. The biggest climatic factor is the monsoon that comes every year and it only touches the Arabian coastline in this one, small area, southern Oman. Now very occasionally, they'll have a super event and get flooding and you know, high winds and that get further than that, but basically, every year it's just

southern Oman extending a little way into Yemen which I have seen of course. That's the only area and what happens is it comes off the ocean and gets immediately forced upwards, cools and then releases all its water on the mountains then the water gushes through the wadi and that takes place over an area roughly less than a hundred miles, anyway.

01:33:55 Basically, the eastern end of the Salalah Bay right down to just over the border in Yemen, an area called Hauf is where that takes place. But that's it and that's why that's the only fertile area. I mean you can see it from space from satellite without going to Google Earth. After the monsoon there's this green area; shows up quite nicely.

(Does this pattern of seasonal monsoons have any implications for the text of the Book of Mormon?)

01:34:31 Yes. I think we've got textual evidence that they arrived at the place they called Bountiful and soon after the end of the monsoon when it was at its greenest and most abundant because when you read Nephi's text, the enthusiasm for what they're seeing after all these years in the desert is overwhelming and I don't think they arrived in the winter period when it begins drying off. They very clearly arrived in probably the September/October period when it's the most lush. So that's been an interesting thing too.

01:35:21 We know that they could not have arrived during the monsoon because you get high winds and it says that they camped by the seashore; you couldn't camp by the seashore when the monsoon is on. So it had to be after that and by the same token, they then must have moved to something more substantial on higher ground and what's interesting is that the most logical area is also where we get the oldest ruins.

01:35:55 So they probably lived in stone dwelling places rather than their tents. I suspect their tents became useful for sails and things like that. But yes, very definitely, and you appreciate it more when you actually go there and you experience this for yourself. The monsoon period is just at times it's like a London pea soup fog; it's so dense; you can't see anything. You certainly couldn't get out on the water. In fact the government in Oman forbids fishing boats to go out in that period. They have set dates when they can then take their boats out again. And a lot of local people head off to other places.

(A very good geographic model has predictive value. You can say, based on the correlation that we see here, we could predict we'll probably find something over here. Has anything like that occurred in your explorations there at the proposed Bountiful?)

01:37:07 Not yet.

(Well we have relatively few data points, relative to some of the other geographic locations that we're working with in the Book of Mormon.)

Yah, and right now I'm thinking in the Bountiful area you could at a stretch predict that we would find traces of a community and – I mean there's always pottery and stuff like that around but there are so many variables at this point, I certainly don't anticipate anything like that, but it's not beyond the bounds of possibility.

01:37:53 You know, if we came up with some way of dating some of these traces and they date back to around 2600 that would be very interesting. I know one LDS archaeologist has interpreted one of the ruins, one of the structures there as being similar to an Israelite temple and he's the only LDS archaeologist who focuses on that same period of time, late Iron Age, but it's still speculative at this stage.

01:38:37 We don't know what's underground, what's out of sight. There's been erosion on the cliffs there, you can see where one of the ruins actually comes literally up to the edge of the cliff, hangs off it, of course the cliff over the last few thousand years has eroded away but yah, there's all kinds of possibilities but I don't think we need to be disappointed if none of them materialize, because the real test for the location of Bountiful is how well does it meet Nephi's criteria?

01:39:18 And does it does it exactly, precisely and there's no – you don't need to exaggerate anything or minimize anything.

(Based on your experience in the Near East, is there anything that is so fundamental to life in that area that you're surprised it's not yet – it's not in the text of the Book of Mormon?)

Well camels are not mentioned. That's the obvious thing. Water is not mentioned that I can think of, but those are so much taken for granted that it shouldn't surprise us. In fact, I would see that as evidence of it being an ancient text; you take it for granted like if you said we're going to go down to St. George this afternoon, no one says, well how are you going? Are you hitch-hiking? Are you flying?

01:40:22 You know obviously you're going to drive, go by car. And so same thing. They unquestionably relied on the camel, but it's never mentioned. They also no question had contact with other people during the journey up until they reached Nahom, although the only textual support for that is the fact that they knew the name of Nahom which they could not have known without talking to someone because it was already the name of the place; they didn't give it the name.

01:41:04 From that point on they would not have met anyone until they arrived at Bountiful so there's things like that, the way Nephi talks about *the* mount is interesting because, you know, that implies very clearly that it's something that obviously stands out as being distinct and you know, you wouldn't reference something like that otherwise. Probably think about it more and come up with a few others but there are things like that.

(At the camp of broken bow, Nephi goes up into the elevations and comes back with some sort of a game animal. What might that animal have been?)

01:42:04 There's a surprising number of animals, actually. It could have been an ibex, a gazelle, any number of species like that; I do have a list of them in the book. One of the more interesting points is what sort of animals would have been a danger to them? And that one came as a surprise; it's a hyena. They hunt in packs and they will rip a person to shreds worse than lions and leopards and so forth. They used to have lions back then in that area.

01:42:58 We still have leopards around today even at Kharfot; it's one of their last strongholds. We have pictures of them taken with camera trips there but there's not many of them; we think there's only like two families of leopards – the Arabian leopard. Yah, there's any number of animals that it could have been. I just don't want to try and remember the entire list. Ibex, but some sort of a deer-related critter.

(Does hunting take place in that part of the world today?)

01:43:45 No. Not really. There's a lot of livestock around and so they might shoot a leopard because it's molesting their animals, their livestock, cows, camels, but not hunting per se. No. Fishing – a lot of fishing. And that would have been no question, probably the major source of protein that they relied on that because it's so easy; you can fish off the beach, you don't even need a boat. You can throw a net out and you

know, not even be able to lift it, it's just full of sardine which is an amazing source of protein for animals as well as people. But you can catch big fish any time right off the beach.

(Going back to the south Arabian script that we find at the temple in Marib, what is the etymology of that script?)

01:44:47 The etymology?

(What other scripts is that one related to?)

Well, that's actually a controversial point. Some people have actually hypothesized that it comes originally or has some connection with Greek because it's very angular, very regular shapes. I mean it's a beautiful script to look at and it's something that you could easily like even a rank outsider can come and because the symbols are so simple and clear, anyone can sort of have a list of all the letters. I have done it myself just like that.

01:45:36 But I don't know that they have a very clear understanding of it, there's local variations so the script at Khor Kharfot, for example, is a very early script; we know that it pre-dates Arabic and there's also an Arabic inscription there that you can read, but the older texts we don't know really what it is and hence we don't know what it says. I've been corresponding with a fellow in Saudi Arabia and people in England who are the leading authorities on that period and there's no consensus. So there's a lot still to learn about the different scripts.

(Neal Rappleye) Actually some of those comments just reminded me, you have done some work on or mentioned the meaning of Kharfot to the word Bountiful there. Could you maybe tell us a little bit about that?)

01:46:40 Yes. The word *Kharfot* – okay Khor is just Arabic and that means an *inlet*. But *Kharfot* actually comes from an earlier term which is *Kharifot* is how we would represent it in English but *Kharifot* actually is an ancient term – goes back before the Arabic began being used in Arabia and it's called *Mahri* language. And it's one of I think it's six or seven pre-Arabic languages that are almost dying out; there's only a few hundred speakers of most of some of them. Others have effectively died out, and it means *place of abundance after the rain*.

(That's a pretty good correlation if you ask me.)

01:48:01 Yes. And I have attempted, so far without success, to push that back or push it further with people who are authorities on the Mahri language, but that's basically what it means, *after the rain that there was abundance*. And there's more to the story but you'll have to read the book. But yah, it's a good question and the fact that it's survived down to the present, even though it's been modified, is interesting in itself because that tells us something about a continuation of the reasons for it.

(Matt Cutler) *In the caves in Bountiful, you guys found human skulls? Is that right?*

01:48:49 We found a skull along with a lot of bones – human bones that are mixed up. It may be more than one person who was buried there but we've had them dated – carbon dated and they weren't more than two centuries old. In fact, the range of dates we were given went right into the 20th Century so maximum two centuries. So people have lived there. In fact, we met a fellow last year who claimed he was born there and he was born around 1960 from memory, and people have lived there off and on and sometimes in a very low-key way, you know maybe just a couple of families – related families had gone there and lived there, taken advantage of the fertility, I mean fish, water, you have your cows, you've pretty much got everything you need.

(Neal Rappleye) *So speaking of your forthcoming book, maybe we could just get you to mention the title and where it will be available so that people who watch the video will be able to – and when it will be available or at least an approximate date if you have one, so that people will be able to – who want to learn more will be able to find it.)*

01:50:27 Sure. Well the book – the new book that I've done is the successor to my first book which was published by Deseret back in '94 and that was called *In the Footsteps of Lehi*. So it's been a long time coming but the new book is called *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia* and the subtitle is *the Old World Beginnings of the Book of Mormon*. So it's focused entirely on the Old World setting but not forgetting the possible connections with some of the New World texts that we now know of. It's a full-color book, very highly illustrated, but I've written it basically to be accessible to the average reader so it doesn't require any specialist knowledge. It's not a scholarly book for example as *Mormon's Codex* is, which, of course, is a milestone in Book of Mormon research, I think I see it sitting behind you there. Looks like it – no, just on the shelf right next to the water bottle there. Is that?

(Matt Cutler) *No, that's something else.)*

01:51:51 At the moment, it's – I'm hoping that we'll be able to release it later this month or early next month. It's taken a lot longer and that will also be a chapter in my expose one day. Yah, so it will be out soon.

(Neal Rappleye) And people will be able to purchase it on Amazon or?)

Oh yah, yah. But we may - my son Chad has just released his documentary that he's been working on for some years and it may be initially released only through his website as we see his documentary and the book as complementary, not competing obviously; they're very different.

(And what's the website?)

01:52:53 LehiinArabia.com

(Alright, and with that, would you mind if you could just share your testimony of the Book of Mormon with us to close out here?)

01:53:05 Sure. Well, I'm trying to avoid the usual clichés. I'm pretty much a nuts and bolts type of person. I like things to make sense. I like to have a big picture and see where everything fits. I spent my mission – served as a missionary three times – trying to encourage people to read the Book of Mormon but I now feel that I'm a babe in arms really where when it comes to the Book of Mormon, there's just so much more there than any of us realize.

01:54:05 The ancient writing patterns and now in my own experiences since the 1980s I've seen how Nephi has recorded a very precise, accurate and profound travel account and it doesn't reveal itself until you really go digging deep. You can just read it as a nice description full of these wonderful, spiritual experiences that he and his father Lehi had, or you can dig deeper, and I think as we begin to do that with the rest of the Book of Mormon, some of the competing viewpoints and some of the confusion that they have engendered amongst the membership of the church, particularly here in the U.S. is going to fade away. I certainly hope so.

01:55:14 The Book of Mormon deserves the best we've got. Seeing these places and being able to identify through a mental image, it's like going to the Holy Land and once you become familiar with this route, you can never read the New Testament or even the Old Testament again in the same way. Geography is so important because we have to

read the scriptures as if they are real and took place in a real place, a real time, real people. The more we can do to make that reality, the more we're going to become what Elder Maxwell used to talk about, how we need to drink deeply; we need to go beneath the surface and there's – you know we can read through texts that become so familiar we can almost recite it without having something that will drag us deeper.

01:56:30 So my testimony is that the Book of Mormon truly is an ancient record and truly and accurately records what took place 2600 years ago. I've seen – well one of the things I guess I could say humorously, is that I'm, and I don't say this in a boastful way, but I'm the only person in the Church who can say without fear of contradiction that I have been to Bountiful because I've been to every single place that it could have been and quite a few places that it could not have been and one of them has to be the place and I think we now know which one that is.

01:57:18 And so yah, it's been a wonderful journey; it's one that's not over, by any stretch, and I think the New World beckons more and more. I spent some good time in Guatemala last year renewing my familiarity with the place, I hadn't been there for several years, in making some good contacts and I think what lies ahead is going to be even better.

(Well, thank you for your time Warren and I guess ...)

I just really hope that *Book of Mormon Central* takes off and becomes – reinstates what FARMS was doing before it's unfortunate demise and fills that role because it's badly needed and I really hope it goes well.

END – 01:58:38