

THESIGER CATALOGUING PROJECT 2003-2004.

Sir Wilfred Thesiger, the distinguished explorer and travel writer, took over 35,000 photographs during his life time of travels. They cover the Arabian Peninsula, the Marshes of southern Iraq, Kurdistan, Iran, Morocco and, finally, East Africa, which he made his home for many years.† Many of his photographs are well known through their appearance as illustrations in his famous travel writing, such as *Arabian Sands*, and more recently through books dedicated to his photography alone, such as *Visions† of a Nomad*. The Collection as a whole constitutes an unparalleled historical document of the regions in which he travelled.

Thesiger's photographs were initially deposited at the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1993 as a permanent loan. Since his death in August 2003, the collection has been accepted by H.M. Government as Art in Lieu of Inheritance Tax as being of national and international importance, to be held at the Museum.

In November 2003 a team of three began systematically cataloguing Thesiger's photographs on a year-long project funded by a donation from His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.

There are around 38,000 negatives, 75 albums of photographs, and thousands of loose file prints. All these formats are being collated, numbered, documented and archivally stored. This process involves a careful piecing together of information from many sources, such as Thesiger's own notes, many publications and internal evidence within the photographs. Each photograph is being described and indexed, peoples and places identified where possible, and dates and sequences established. The photographs have also been digitally scanned and printed for ease of access.

By the early spring of 2004 all the negatives had been inventoried and identified, a crucial first step for navigating this massive collection. Work is now under way to enhance these records and create related entries for the albums and loose prints. So far nearly 50,000 catalogue records have been created, covering both negatives and prints.

The Thesiger Cataloguing Project will continue until the end of December 2004. The text catalogue of the collection will be available through the Museum's On-line Photograph Collections database in January 2005. An on-line gallery of a substantial selection of previously unseen images will also be made available early in 2005.

An exhibition *Wilfred Thesiger's Iraq, 1949-1958: Photographs of Travel* is on display at the Fox Talbot Museum, Lacock, until 31 October 2004 in collaboration with the National Trust and from 18 December 2004 to 15 May 2005 this exhibition will be on display at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

A small selection of Thesiger photographs is currently to be found in the Upper Gallery of the Pitt Rivers† Museum.

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