

PARTNER CONTENT

THE HERITAGE SERIES: EPISODE 1

# THE ROAD THAT UNITES A NATION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE E11 HIGHWAY TELLS THE STORY OF OVERCOMING OLD DIVISIONS AND BUILDING THE UNION



DUBAI

BY IONA STANLEY  
Special to Reach by Gulf News

**A**s we drive along the many lanes of the modern Dubai-Abu Dhabi highway, it is hard to imagine that only 45 years ago, today's one-hour journey was a long and unpredictable voyage. It was easy to get stuck in the sand tracks or to lose one's way, and travellers were forced to stop at a formal customs post at the border between the two emirates so inspectors could check the contents of each vehicle. Each emirate was fiercely independent and ran its own police, customs, and security forces, while developing its own separate economy. The unity inspired by the federation had yet to be felt, so the development of what is now the E11 highway represents the story of the country's unification and its rapid development.

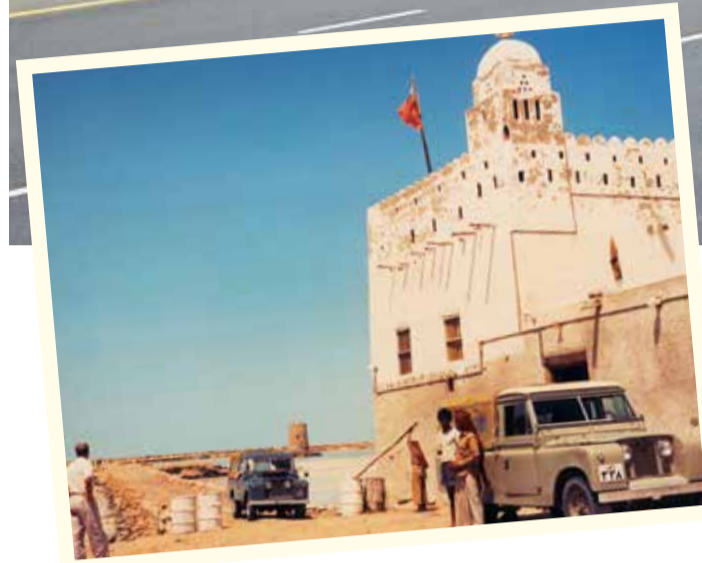
**There were some dirt tracks between these three states that would sometimes disappear, and we had to carry our passports to cross over from one to the other."**

**Abdul Salam Shaik** / UAE resident

One early traveller was Abdul Salam Shaik who arrived by boat from India in the early 1960s. The UAE resident remembers Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi as distinct entities. "There were some dirt tracks between the three states that would sometimes disappear, and we had to carry our passports to cross over from one to the other. The travel time ran into many hours," he says, talking from his son's home on Shaikh Zayed Road. In the 1980s when the tar-



Stefan Lindeque/ Gulf News



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### Halfway house

This police post sheltered travellers to Abu Dhabi in the 1950s if they arrived too late in the day to cross the causeway. It still stands today beside the modern Maqta Bridge. For the full story see the web version of this story.

macked road had been laid down, the journey from Abu Dhabi to Dubai was marked by two distinct landmarks. "My parents remember that The Dubai World Trade Centre symbolised their entry into Dubai, but when I was a child, my signpost was the old Hard Rock Café," says Rand Abdul

Jabbar, Director of The Centre for Architectural Discourse. The landmark, behind which grew Dubai Media City, was demolished in 2013.

Businesses have also lived the change. One of these is Mashreq, which began operations as the Bank of Oman 50 years ago. With its first

### Two emirates, one nation

The change in tarmac colour today indicates the Dubai-Abu Dhabi border on the E11 at Seih Shuaib. Up till 1971 a formal customs post stood at this spot. The greenery of today's hedges on the Abu Dhabi side marks where a long raised concrete platform (like a railway station) used to stand where travellers were asked to unload their goods for food inspection by customs officers. The long-deserted platform was still there right up to the late 1980s.

branches in Deira and Bur Dubai, it now covers all seven emirates and serves both ends of the E11 at NBB Worker's City and Al Nakheel. CEO Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair, who recalls carrying his passport on a road trip to Abu Dhabi in 1971, champions the highway as a symbol of growth, unity and prosperity. "The E11 joined the country: it brought us closer together, doing business became easier, and the tangible activity along the road spells out its success. Our visionary rulers, Shaikh Zayed and Shaikh Rashid

sensed the need of the people and they drove this project together."

Across its length, with different names in distinct sections, the road is a physical metaphor for the story of the UAE.

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