Postcards from Iraq

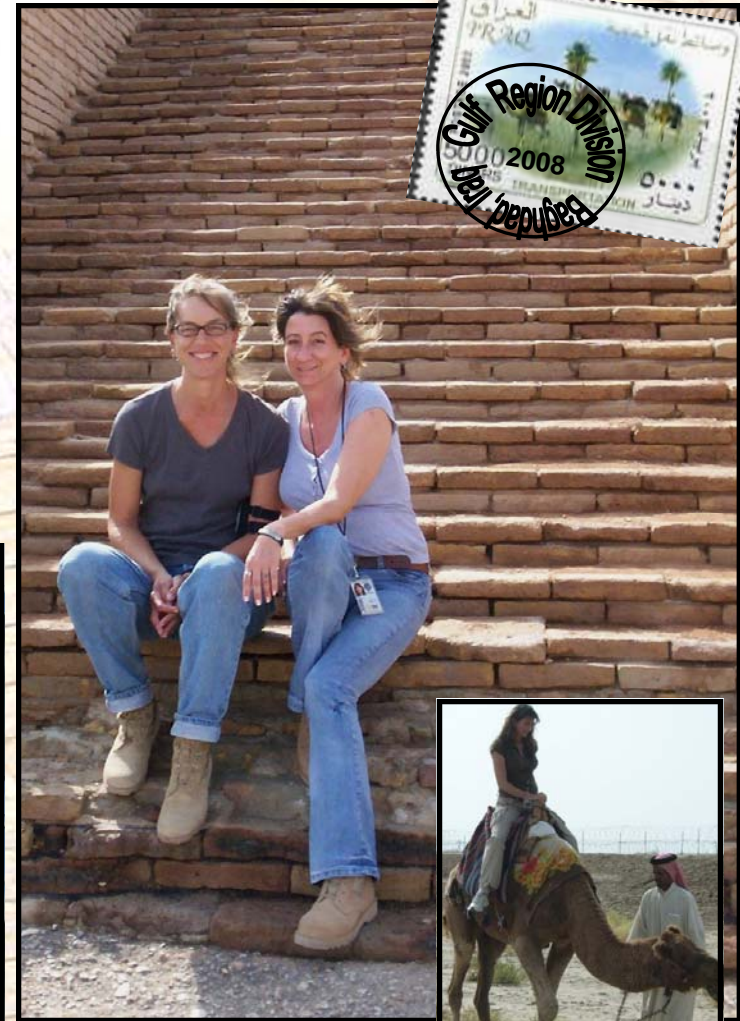## Mapping the South

by Crystal K. Bond
Tahlequah, Oklahoma

Working in Iraq, I'm doing the same thing I did at home for the American Indian Tribes of Northeastern Oklahoma: making maps. As a cartographer for the US Army Corps of Engineers, my job is to use a Geographic Information System (GIS) to develop geographic data and create maps for nine provinces in southern Iraq. These are used for navigation, planning, spatial analysis, general reference and to track the status of reconstruction projects.

Crystal Bond, GIS administrator with the Gulf Region South District of USACE in Iraq.

Working in this environment, I seem to learn something new every day. I've become familiar with aerial photography, satellite imagery and the military grid system since beginning my tour here. The Corps really encourages the development of new job skills, knowledge and technical proficiency.

The office working environment is quite pleasant with air-conditioning, refrigerators, state-of-the-art computer equipment and a view of the ancient Ur Ziggurat from the upstairs windows. I toured the Ziggurat with my friend Natalie Sudman, and at home I ride horses; but here I got to ride a camel! Corps vehicles are available for driving on base…not a bad gig, overall.

From left : Natalie Sudman, former GRS employee, with Crystal Bond with the Gulf Region South District in Iraq.

By the time my tour ends in October, I will have been here for over 2 years. What I hope for now, is the opportunity to pass on the skills and knowledge I've acquired during those two years, preferably to an Iraqi employee interested in learning GIS. Gulf Region South (GRS) did not have a GIS section when I arrived at Tallil in September 2006. Through trial and error and occasional calls to my counterpart in Baghdad for technical assistance, many GIS processes and procedures have been painstakingly developed, enhanced and documented, geared specifically for work taking place at GRS. The United States, Australian, Romanian and British Armies all utilize the GIS capabilities that have been developed by the GIS section here. "Technology Transfer" is the term we used back home for training one or two tribal members how to use GIS, so they could return to their reservations and teach others, transferring GIS technology to more and more tribal employees. I'd like to do something like that here, and pass on what I've learned, to an Iraqi National who can then continue operation of the GIS in Southern Iraq for years to come, long after I've returned to my own Tribe in Oklahoma. *Essayons!*