

# Sinai Newsletter August 2020

**Makhad**  
People Spirit Environment



*Two Carob Dam and Wadi Itlah Dam filled with rainwater*



*Helen Cranston  
Project Manager*

***News from Sinai -  
snow, rain, floods  
and the pandemic***

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## The News

During April I had planned to be sending out a journey report following my March trip to Sinai. However, like most things this year, the trip was cancelled at the last minute. We are concerned for our friends in Sinai, as we are for our friends and family in the UK. There is now coronavirus in Egypt but the authorities were swift to act with all flights in and out of the country stopped in March. No tourists from Sharm were allowed to visit the monastery of St Katherine's until this month, which can only be a good thing at present, and there is still a ban on trekking the mountains with the Bedouin, though there were very few people coming in any case. The Egyptian government is taking the threat very seriously and has closed all the schools, and banned all public meetings and religious events, which was particularly painful over Ramadan and Eid, usually very sociable times for all muslims. We hope that the virus outbreak will be continue to be contained and not infect many people.

There is however, very good news from Sinai on the water front. During the winter there has been two significant snow falls and rain at least twice, one time there were big floods. All our dams have had water in them for a good length of time. The amount of rain means that the water table has risen significantly and working wells have good water in them for the summer. Even in Wadi Gharba and Tarfa, where the water situation was becoming dire, they have benefited from the floods coming down the mountain valleys. The sodden ground from snow then rain, has enabled all the mountainsides and wadis to bloom with herbs and flowers so





there is plenty of grazing for goats this year. The gardens are flourishing which is especially reassuring as the lack of tourists are forcing more people to look to gardens for income. However, the floods in mid-March were massive, bringing destruction as well as water. The main road from the west coast to St Katherine's has been washed away in places with cars and lorries buried under sand and silt. The floods must have come very fast to cause so much damage and now it will take some time for repairs to be made.



After the snow, then the floods, now the coronavirus pandemic has hit Egypt like it has everywhere in the world. Mahmoud, our Sinai Manager, said that there were some of cases in Dahab and Nuweiba on the coast so we hope that the virus has not spread very far.



Many Bedouin are taking advantage of school closures during lock-down to take their families out to the high desert and remote areas where they can live in their tents as their grandparents did, tending flocks of goats. Hopefully, by living in these remote valleys, they will be avoiding the disease and the risk of spreading it further.

Previous work by the Trust, restoring wells in these remote desert areas has facilitated this possibility. Without access to water, people just would not be able to go and live there.

Over the last 13 years, the trust has restored a total of 476 wells, giving reliable, local access to water for about 30,000 people, and probably many more. As a result, the Bedouin population is in a far better position to weather this current health crisis than they might otherwise have been, and are able to take advantage of recent rains.

We expect it will be a bumper year for the orchard gardens with an abundance of fruit and nuts for sale, plus lots of vegetables for local people.

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## Projects

The projects are continuing as much as possible but without detailed reports until international travel is resumed and visits to Sinai are feasible, which we hope will be in September.

There are still some well projects in progress, and we will start new well restorations once travel restrictions have been lifted. There are many more people still on our waiting list who will be eager for the next visit.

Ahmed will continue with the Carpentry School teaching later in the summer, and we hope that the new apprentices will be honing their skills on carpentry projects at home. With schools closed and meetings prohibited, it has not been possible to continue classes in the town.

However Selem has continued teaching the children on the Orphan Herb Project, all about herbs over the winter, and they have been potting-up the tiny seeds they have collected from wild plants in the mountains. Once the plants have become established, the children will be able to plant them in their new gardens by their houses. Selem is continuing to teach continue the children in the

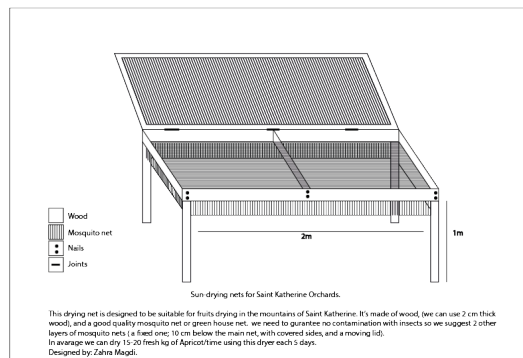


large herb garden in a mountain valley. In June three if the students started a herb farm on some ground in the town. They have planted up dozens of herbs such as oregano, rosemary, sage (all Sinai varieties) and other herbs that only grow in South Sinai.



One of our trustees, Dick, went to Sinai in February, shortly before international travel stopped. He was investigating the potential for installing solar powered pumps in wells in the mountains. We plan to start a new project in the future, funding permitting, to replace petrol driven pumps which are very expensive to run. Solar pumps provide free power, need little maintenance, pump water automatically when the owner is away, and are quiet and clean. In addition, the solar panels could provide small amounts of power for lighting and phone charging when they are not being used for pumping water.

We had a request from some women garden owners to provide some drying racks, especially for producing dried fruit for sale in trail mix packs with nuts. The racks protect the fruit from insects, dust and dirt while they dry, thereby making a better quality product. The garden owners can get a good price for their produce this way and can sell it throughout the year not just in the season when they are ripe. One of our supporters offered to help get this project running and so we hope our carpentry students will be able to make the drying racks over the winter in time for next year. This small project will give added value to the orchard crops and bring extra income to the garden owners. If the initial project is successful, then we will look for help to fund more drying racks.



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## Photos from Sinai



Mahmoud, our Sinai Manager has been busy making Annual Site Visits to wells that were completed in previous years. He checks that the well is still productive and that the water is being used appropriately. While he was up in the mountains he saw lots of gardens doing very well due to the rains, as well as many herbs and wild trees in leaf. There is plenty of grazing for goats so we hope people will survive the no-tourist economic storm for some time to come.

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## Autumn Journey 2020

The next working journey was due to take place from 3 to 10 October, but due to quarantine restrictions on travellers arriving back from Egypt, the trip has been postponed until next year. The plan is to build another dam in the high mountains, visit to the Monastery of St Katherine's, trek in the high mountains, and sleep out under the stars. New dates will be published in the new year. Please let us know if you are interested in participating.



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## And Finally

Our Sinai Manager, Mahmoud, has just become the proud father of a fourth child and third son. We wish them all well.

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## Contact the Makhad Trust

If you would like more information about any of our projects or about the Trust in general, we would love to hear from you.

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