

# Sinai Journey Report September 2022

**Makhad**  
People Spirit Environment



*Part of the gigantic new visitor centre nearing completion*



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***News from Sinai  
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## The News

The remodelling of St Katherine's continues apace with the town's outdated infrastructure being ripped apart and then being replaced. This must be a good thing surely, but when it is happening throughout all of a working town, without back-up systems, it means chaos with daily power cuts for hours at a time, the loss of the internet for over 2 weeks, raw sewage in the street, and people living in the dusty mess of a construction site. It is not uncommon to see pedestrians quickly sidestepping a massive digger as it reverses into built up areas. And, as all the roads have been taken up, to access the old pipes and cables in order to lay new roads, pipes and cables, sometimes it is difficult to find ones way through the town. Road layouts change by the day. And all the old tarmac has to go somewhere so there is a constant stream of lorries driving out to all the surrounding valleys, dumping mixed loads of gravel, stones, tarmac, pipework and rubbish. This desecration of the landscape outside of construction areas is causing a real soul pain in the Bedouin. Faraj has said many times that he feels sick when he sees this rubbish in the valleys and the pain is clear on his face. What cost modernisation to the collective soul of indigenous peoples who live and breath the lands they live in? For a visitor it is hard to live with the destruction for 10 days, yet local people have been living with it for 2 years now and no end in site. From the dust, new hotels, apartments, shops and entertainments for future visitors are rising. And hundreds of trees were being planted. In the future there will be a modern St Katherine's with working infrastructure, but it is all for visitors benefit and little thought for the local people. There are a few silver linings to the project but difficult to see much benefit yet.



COP27 is due to be held in Sharm El Sheikh in November and there is a lot of talk about it and the impact it will have on the lives of ordinary people while it is in progress. Like many top level international conferences, security is a big issue and it is likely that Sinai will be closed off with no travel allowed through Suez, from North to South Sinai, or through the "Great Wall of Sharm". A few years ago, to improve security for tourists, a long concrete wall - not unlike the Berlin Wall was constructed around the land side of Sharm El Sheikh with border posts to check all vehicles. There is no doubt that terrorism in the Middle East has been a thorn in the side of many governments and Egypt has a zero tolerance approach by its armed forces which seems to have been successful against ISIS insurgencies in Northern Sinai. Finding the balance between security and individual freedoms is difficult for any country to make, and there is a cost to both outcomes. It is to be hoped that the conference will be a huge success with countries making stronger commitments to preserving the earth.

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## Well Stories

The history behind the wells program, is that it was started by my predecessor Susie Drummond around 2007, to support Bedouin whose orchard gardens had died because their wells had gone dry. After enabling the successful restoration of many gardens, there were requests from communities whose drinking wells had also gone dry or been damaged by floods, and so the programme has been expanded and we have just exceeded 560 well restorations. This has made a huge difference to thousands of mountain Bedouin, who now have the security of being self-sufficient as water allows them to grow food, sell their crops and keep goats.

### The community of Iggreyradt

What we are beginning to see now, are that some communities managing their water resources collectively, rather than keeping some wells just for individual gardens and others for drinking for the community. The community at Iggreyradt has been collecting water from around 8 wells at a central point beside the houses, though at times, water is allowed to flow to water tanks beside gardens on its way down the mountains. Each time we visit it seems that they have made a new garden, planted more trees, or hatched some new plan to support the community. This time they had bought a second-hand poly-tunnel from a Bedouin who wasn't using it. The cost was minimal because the Army had given out poly-tunnels about four or five years ago. They cleared the ground of rocks, put in leaky hoses and now they are growing beans, tomatoes and aubergines which will supply the community for most of the winter alongside onions, leeks and garlic which they are planting soon. The community now consists of 15 families, living there most of the time. Because there are no government water deliveries to this remote place, the wells must provide water for washing and household tasks as well as for drinking, for goats, and for growing food. The people here are now able to live self-sufficiently.



Another place where the community is managing their water resources is in Wadi Arbaeen where we have recently started to restore their wells. The houses nestle together at the bottom of the valley, close to the two huge monastery gardens full of olive trees. Many of the Bedouin ancestors



here worked directly for the monastery, in their gardens, and one family still does. The community is right beside Mount Sinai, in the centre of the picture below, and many of the men here work with tourists taking them up the mountain on their camels. The community is around one and a quarter hours walk from the town and provisions so it is important to be able to grow their own food.

However most of the gardens have been abandoned due to wells having run dry, and drinking water was a problem too. There are a string of gardens along the valley leading away from the mountain. The third restored well was for a garden but they have been re-routing the water to provide drinking water to the houses, at least until the

fourth well, which is a drinking well, is complete. This may seem an obvious thing to do but it shows community leadership and cooperation not much in evidence in the past.

### Wadi Arbaeen - The Women's Story

In March we made new site visits for 4 wells and started two of them to provide water for gardens. In June we started 2 more wells and now three out of 4 are complete. On this trip we were fortunate that one of the women from the community greeted us with tea on arrival and we were able to get hear the story of how womens' lives have been influenced by water availability.

Abdullah has taken the lead with organising the well restoration work and showing us the wells. His wife, Kerima, told us that for women in her community life is much harder than for women in the towns. They are over one hour walk from St Katherine's and there is only a path, no road. They cannot buy bread but have to make it. The clothes have to be washed by hand as they do not have electricity here. They use gas for cooking but when the canisters run out, it can take weeks to get replacements and so they have to gather wood for cooking. They take the goats out to graze each day, look after the children and the chickens and organise collection of food supplies. Before the wells were re-dug a few months ago, they had to take a donkey to collect water from a well half an hour's walk away, and bring it to the houses. Now that several wells have been restored, hoses have been installed so that there is water direct to the houses and one of the big tasks of the day is no longer necessary. Kerima was very happy and grateful for the provision of water to her door. In future they will be able to grow more vegetables and they will have a better diet. They had actually just made a new garden near to the houses to grow vegetables that could easily be picked just before cooking. Bedouin women are very reluctant to have their photos taken so it isn't possible to post one of Kerima or her family here.



### The least accessible well visited so far!

This well, or to be more accurate, a series of three nearby cracks in the rock are situated high up above the beautiful wadi El Freya and supply water to a large garden below. The wells are on a very steep mountainside composed of loose rock. The wells belong to Saha, sister of Mohamed Mousa in the photo, and they share the garden. When Mohamed engaged well diggers to come



and deepen the pools, the first team declined the work on the basis that it was too difficult and too dangerous to work on the mountainside. It was certainly very difficult and a bit scary getting up there for me, and attempting to write the report on site was impossible so it was left until we returned to the garden. Fortunately the second team of well diggers had done a good job and now there is sufficient water. Mohamed just has to climb up to the wells once a week to connect the hoses.

#### Well Statistics

28	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	273	8	20	64 + 172 = 236
Community Wells	289	13	25	82 + 149 = 231
Totals	562	21	45	467

#### ERIK - Emergencies, Repairs and Incidentals Kitty

This fund, set up just a year ago, has enabled us to help people when they really need it and enable small projects that have a big impact.



The first beneficiary of this fund was Sulieman Salah, a Bedouin in St Katherine's, whose garden wall was bulldozed at the beginning of the construction program. He has installed the fence that ERIK funded and this is keeping animals out of his large garden and protecting the crops. His well had been scheduled for demolition by being filled in to accommodate a new road, but now there are plans for a bridge across his well to take the road. It hasn't been started yet but he still has the well and is in discussions with the construction company. The fence has worked well for Sulieman too as his garden boundaries have changed with the new roads so he has been able to move the fence to accommodate that.



Salah Faraj, who has a lovely garden in the town, needed a new pump for his well and we were able to fund this, plus new switches supplying water from his well to a house.



The community of Iggreyradt now has lots of water due to the restorations of 9 wells, but only had large blue plastic tubs to store it in. These tubs are used a lot but the Bedouin worry about using them because they may have been used to transport toxic chemicals and scrubbing them out may not be enough. What they needed was a stone built water tank above the houses, so that water could run by gravity down hoses to a tap beside the houses. The water tank is in the process of being built and this fund has paid for cement, steel bars and cement transport. We hope it will

be finished before the winter.



Salem Faraj has a big garden in the high mountains and has worked with the Trust on many of the dams we have built, so he is known to many people who have been on working journeys. We have often stayed in his garden too. Salem is feeling his age, and his responsibility to his family to leave them with a living. He is expanding his garden and has built a new wall, but it needs a water tank beside it. He had started to build it, and in a novel way by building it into the ground so that it doesn't need extra strengthening. However he asked us if we could possibly help with paying towards the costs of cement, especially as prices have

doubled over the last few years. We were very happy to be able to help him. Salem is building his water tank, birka, in the shape of a heart, to show his love for his family.

We are waiting to hear if the community in Gharba also require support with the building of a water tank. Water tanks beside the community are of particular benefit to Bedouin women as it reduces their work load hugely if they do not have to collect water several times a day by foot.

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## News of Other Projects

The Carpentry School The construction works in the town has affected several of our other projects and continues to do so. There are still no young men or teenagers coming forward to learn carpentry because there are menial jobs available with the construction companies. It is really good that they have some employment and are earning money, though it is a shame that they are not learning a trade for the future. We hope this will change once construction work in the town is completed.

The Herb Growing Project This project is continuing with existing students though they only need intermittent supervisor now that they have their own small herb gardens. Their teacher, Selim, is continuing to be busy with his work teaching about herbs to medical students at Alexandria University. We hope he will start a new herb growing course in the future if his teaching work decreases.

The Laundry Project This is another project on hold due to the construction work. The plan is to make a laundry Eid's garden in St Katherine's, but Eid still doesn't know what the fate of his garden is. He remains as committed as ever to the project and we see him regularly.

Drying Racks for Fruit The provision of drying racks to garden owners is a project taking time to grow. Zahra, an Egyptian businesswoman, has been working with Bedouin women garden owners to market their produce and she has been pushing for them to use drying racks to increase the quality of the fruit. More Bedouin women are coming forward and asking about the racks for next spring.

The SeedBank is continuing to support garden owners under the management of Mahmoud Hassan. He is supplied with vegetable seeds annually, many of which he grows and saves the seeds in the seed bank. New seeds, plus the saved seeds are then available for Bedouin to buy for a token amount, and many Bedouin are going to him for seeds because locally available seeds grow poor quality plants. This means that garden owners are able to grow more and better quality food for their families. Heirloom and traditional varieties give strong seeds through the following generations and enable quality seed to be saved and used year after year.

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## Spring Journeys



Now that travel opportunities have returned to normal, we are able to resume working journeys and there will be two opportunities to support the Bedouin in person next spring with our dam building program. It is also fun and an exciting adventure!

In March there will be a dam building journey combined with climbing Mt Sinai followed by a short desert retreat experience,  
Mountains and Desert Journey - 11 to 22 March Cost £900 not including flights

In April there will be another dam building journey with Rachel and Dick, two of our trustees.  
Rachel's Dam Journey - 22 - 30 April. Cost £750 not including flights

Both journeys include trekking in the mountains, working alongside the Bedouin, sleeping under the stars in a Bedouin garden, enjoying delicious Bedouin food, and snorkelling over a coral reef in the Red Sea.

For more information and a booking form please email [helencranston@makhad.org](mailto:helencranston@makhad.org) for the March Journey and email [racheldevas@icloud.com](mailto:racheldevas@icloud.com) for the April Journey.

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## Winter Social

Join us to hear more about the work of the Trust at our annual gathering. We will meet for Sunday lunch and a walk in Gloucestershire in January or February next year. The date will be confirmed in the November newsletter. For more information please email at the address at the end of the newsletter.



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## Scrap Heap or Repair Workshop?



This neat pile of junk is Salama's workshop. When one has very little money, people who can fix things for you instead of having to buy new are really important. Salama can turn his hand to fixing most things, particularly generators but also a motorbike and there was even an old classic Singer sewing machine awaiting attention. Things that can't be fixed get broken down for spares. This make-shift repair shop is a new addition to Salama's house. He used to repair things here before but now he has shade to work under and it's more organised. Bedouin seldom throw away much because it may be useful one day, they have a lot to teach us about reducing consumption.

We arrived in Wadi Gharba to visit a well in progress saw this wonderful human powered winch. Mahmoud had a go at operating it. Wells here are deep at around 12m or more and it would take a lot of strength to haul up buckets of granite or even the well diggers at the end of a shift. The big wheels in front of Mahmoud act like gears and heavy weights can be lifted with very little effort. In other places, where you can get a vehicle near the well, a car is used to pull the the winch and get buckets out of the 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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