

# Sinai Journey Report and Newsletter February 2025

**Makhad**  
People Spirit Environment



*Helen Cranston  
Project Manager*

***News from Sinai,  
Wells Project,  
The Seedbank,  
ERIK Projects,  
MT Winter Gathering  
Sinai Journeys Ltd -  
Trips to Sinai***

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## The News

We have had a bit of a reboot at base in Cheltenham. I'm back again, keeping the projects moving along. Unfortunately, our prospective new Project Manager found the work wasn't a good fit for her and so we have been recruiting again, and we hope to have someone new in the post by the summer.

On this trip, I was accompanied by a new member of the Makhad Team. Susan Plastow has been asked to share skills she honed amongst the refugee women of Gloucester, with the Bedouin women in Sinai. The basic question has been, what do the Bedouin women want that would increase their quality of life. Susan had several very productive meetings with groups of women and they have formed What's App groups so they can take their ideas forward. Two projects they want to start are to raise chicks for sale so people can have eggs to supplement their diets and some occasional chicken, and they want to breed more productive goats. They also want to cook together, share recipes, grow vegetables beside their houses and make better use of household water. There are sewing initiatives in the pipeline too. This is all very exciting as the initiatives should help increase family incomes. There will be more to report in the next newsetter.



The other big news in Sinai is the lack of rain. There is never enough rain but the drought is rarely as bad as this. Water levels are down throughout Sinai and everyone is dreading the summer when water is needed in greater quantities for people, growing food, watering trees for crops and watering animals like goats and camels. The lack of water has caused something of a panic amongst garden owners who are worried about their trees dying in the summer and we have had an unprecedented number of people asking for help. Many of them usually have good supplies of water on an average year, but this year is starting badly. Everyone is praying for rain, and we hope

that it works. The Bedouin people are experiencing the effects of climate change at first hand. Around forty years ago, rains happened regularly each winter and were sufficient to keep the water table topped up continually. There is no such thing as regular rain now.

The reconstruction of St Katherine's is still ongoing. The heavy construction is mostly finished with the exception of laying sewage pipes around the town - something that should have been done in the beginning to my mind. Part of this reconstruction has been to renew efforts to get the water pipeline which runs from the coast in the West up the side of the mountain road to St Katherine's, a mere 1,700m higher. Engineers are planning to pump desalinated sea water through the pipe to big storage tanks above the town, supplying water for the hundreds of tourists expected to fill the numerous new hotels in the town. They are also expecting the Bedouin to access the water too; however, desalinated water comes in various grades and the verdict by the Bedouin is that it is undrinkable and unsuitable for watering most of their trees. Olives can cope with this sort of water but it would kill almond and apricot trees which react badly to salty water. While it is good to know there is a fallback option on the water front, it is not a long term solution to the problem of accessing good quality water for all from wells.

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## Well Stories - Grit and Determination

There were three wells that we saw as First Site Visits, wells that the owners wanted to put on our Waiting for Sponsor List, that were true examples of Grit and Determination.

The first well was for a garden near the village of Tarfa. It was a highly unusual setting as most rocks in the area are hard and made of granite but this well was in a sandstone canyon with vertical sides, making it a blind canyon. The well was in the centre and they had made a new garden near the entrance because both the well and the garden had been abandoned a long time ago, due to lack of water. The upper part of the well was huge! Much bigger than most wells we see and helped give access to the lower part of the well which was a standard sized hole with a track down to it. The owner, Hamid Oda Mohamed, and his brother, had dug out the well which had been flooded, and is now 20 m deep and they have reached the water. They had already prepared the new garden and planted around 30 new trees and some winter greens. Now they need the help of a well digging team to dig into the granite layer at the bottom by another 5m and the well will need lining all the way up and the top stabilised and protected against floods. They had done an enormous amount of work and showed huge determination to have a garden to provide for their family.



Not far away, we were asked to do a New Site Visit for a community well for the village of Tarfa. The population here is large and they need many wells. Ramadan inherited the well from his father 8 years ago. It was a small well tucked into a ravine on the side of the mountains, several kilometres from the village. The well had a little water in at first but then the water table changed and the levels dropped. Ramadan has been digging the well bit by bit by himself or with a brother for most of the 8 years. In the photo he is standing on the spoil heap he has dug out, equivalent to digging 4m through solid

granite using only an electric powered hand drill. He has achieved such a lot so far but now needs help to dig through another 2m of granite to provide enough drinking water for around 14 families. Mountain water from a well like this, is highly valued because it is purer than the water from sandstone wells in the village. Ramadan has put in a huge effort to provide water.



Later we went up the mountain track that leads to the high mountain area where we were going to visit a large number of wells. We started with the small community at El Mather where around 6 families live up here like their ancestors did for all but the coldest months. They are keeping the old traditional ways alive. Mousa Sbael and his brothers have a lovely mature garden that they inherited from their father. It has a well inside it but they have to use a pump with a generator to get the water out to water the trees. Buying fuel here costs quite a bit of money as they have to hire a camel to transport the generator fuel and fuel prices have risen so the cost of accessing the water is too high for the garden to be viable at present. Mousa and his brother looked for another well and there was an old one that had been completely filled in a short distance above the garden. They excavated this old well, digging down until they got to the water level, having dug out 6m over



6 months. They found the old stones lining the well around two sides and have got some water but the rest of the well needs lining and they need professional well diggers to dig into the granite at the bottom to deepen the well so there is enough water for the garden.

We often see wells where the owners have dug out as much as they can to reach water and then need professional help to finish the well, but the well owners of these three wells all showed huge grit and determination to dig out the wells to access the water as much as they could. We only help wells where there is evidence that there was water there before, even if it was many years ago.

While we were visiting wells in the High Mountains we walked past several new garden projects where we have helped with restoring the well. There are around 4 old abandoned gardens that have been completely restored by young men in their 20's and 30's in Wadi Gibal. We helped Kamal in 2020 when he and his cousins took on his grandfather's garden with the intention of making it into a small farm, to support his wife and four children and his extended family. They planted over 200 trees 4 years ago and although it was only just spring and only the almonds had blossom on, we could see that he has a huge thriving garden. Kamal and his family spend the long summer months up here. The olive trees were looking good too. Another garden further down the valley, also restored by a young man, is looking very good with at least 150 new trees planted. We also made new site visits for other abandoned gardens and hope to get them started later this year.



## Well Statistics

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	331	10	39	84 + 168 = 252
Community Wells	342	10	25	108 + 139 = 247
Totals	673	20	64	499

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## Seed Bank

We brought more quality seeds from UK for the spring sowing. Many Bedouin will probably not grow vegetables unless they are fortunate enough to have plenty of water or it rains soon. At least the seeds can be kept for another year, but they will miss their vegetables which are of much superior quality to the ones found in the shops which are often not very fresh and of very restricted variety. Hassan is all set with the seeds, to start planting some which he can give or sell on, and for harvesting a lot more seeds for next year.



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## ERIK - Emergencies, Repairs and Incidentals Kitty

No new ERIK projects were initiated during this trip because Ramadan is taking place now and everyone's focus is on that rather than building. We have two community water tanks (birkas) on our list for the next visit, both of them to store water for nearby communities enabling a constant source of water. The climbing harness we bought for Farhan last time is seeing good service in his work well digging.

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## The Weaving Project

Many years ago, the EU helped Sheikh Mousa of the Mouzaina tribe with funds to support a weaving project by the Bedouin women of the Mouzaina tribe. We have been in discussion with Sheikh Mousa to see how the project can be brought back to life. At a time when there is still massive inflation, everyone is feeling the pinch and looking for extra income. The families of the Mouzaina tribes largely rely on income from selling their goats which they graze on the high plains. The weaving project would enable the women who herd the goats to collect hair from the goats, and some fur from the camels and sell it to women who can weave. They would then weave bags and carpets to be sold to tourists. The project has the potential to increase family budgets considerably but there is quite a lot of initial funding needed to get it off the ground. Weaving requires few tools or materials beyond the goat hair so it is relatively easy to fund the initial buying. They would also like to set up small workshops where they can make clothes on sewing machines, and then have a shop to sell the crafts. Sheikh Mousa has been given verbal assurances from the Governor of South Sinai that a shop will be provided just outside St Katherine's, where the tourist coaches have to stop to book in their passengers with the National Park office. We met up with Sheikh Mousa and agreed to an initial payment to enable the wool to be collected for the first round of weaving.



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## Winter Social - meeting held in February

We had a lovely gathering at the Bear of Rodborough, near Stroud on Sunday 2 February, to enjoy a delicious Sunday lunch. Eighteen people, including trustees and Journey participants came to share their experiences of their time in Sinai. We also had a quick round up of Makhad news to bring everyone up to date.





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## Sinai Journeys Ltd

After two successful dam builds last Autumn Sinai Journeys is offering two more Journey dates for Autumn 2025. Rachel and Dick, two of our trustees, will be taking a group to build a dam in mountains and to visit the monastery. Helen plans to take a group into the higher mountains, also to build a small dam, then followed by a trek up Mount Sinai and two nights experiencing the silence of the desert.

Rachel's Dam Build - 27 September to 4 October

Helen's Mountain and Desert Adventure - 4 to 14 October.

For more information please see the Sinai Journeys Ltd website <https://sinaijourneys.org/>



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## Hadj Tents come to St Katherine's.



During the trip we spotted a very superior bright white canvas tent in a garden that was about to be renovated. Hooda's husband had bought the tent as a temporary house while they rebuild the stone rooms in the garden which was abandoned many years ago. There was another tent like this in Amria's garden in the High Mountains too. This sort of tent is made in Pakistan for the Hadj in Saudi Arabia, and it seems that many get sold off afterwards at very good prices. This tent had a beautiful red and black block printed design on the ceiling and the walls, giving it a cosy feel. It had carpets inside it and looked both exotic and comfortable. The roof over the tent is necessary

because these tents are not waterproof. I know because my husband and I owned one more than 15 years ago and it got very soggy in the rain in England! It was quite nostalgic to see a Hadj tent again.

Sometimes we are offered incentives to go and see wells that are quite a distance from the road or a long way off the beaten path. The incentives may consist of offering a delicious lunch or even a camel ride. Usually we ignore this sort of encouragement, but while we were walking in the high mountains one young man was very insistent that we see his well for a new site visit because he had been waiting for a very long time. It was quite a lot further to walk than we had expected to go that day and a heavy backpack wasn't making life easy, so I gave in and gladly accepted help for the extra hour's walk. The camel certainly speeded up our progress and we were able to make reports for the man and for his brother. During the three days we were visiting wells in the mountains, we walked around 54km and climbed around 3570ft, so I probably earned a reprieve. Mahmoud walked the whole way as he is used to these long treks.



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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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