

Sinai Journey Report March 2017

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



St Katherine's and Fox Camp in the late afternoon



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***News from Sinai,
Wells Project,
Beekeeping Training
Project, and other
Initiatives***

News from Sinai

Spring arrived during my first trip of the year to Sinai. It was cold when I arrived and the almond trees were only just coming into blossom - a few weeks later than last year. Due to the October rains, and a few other days of rain since, the roadside verges are very green and there is even **GRASS** growing !! Great areas of the high desert between Nuwamis and St Katherine's are going green with shrubs and herbs growing rapidly. This has brought many Mouzaina tribe people up to these areas for the grazing and there were lots of tents at the edges of the plains. It is the time for babies animals and we saw pregnant camels being tended near the tents. Faraj has a camel about to give birth too. It will be a very good year for goats and grazing. It is still quiet on the security front though interesting news from Mahmoud who keeps up-to-date with news on his phone, that the Egyptian Army is having a big crack down on terrorist forces in North Sinai. In case terrorists try to flea to South Sinai there are lots of extra Army checkpoints throughout the whole area including one in Wadi Arbaeen, a camel path round the back of Mt St Sinai. It might be a gateway into St Katherine's but difficult for terrorists to sneak along this open wadi and not be seen by local Bedouin. Mahmoud and Faraj are very amused by the Army security and say the Bedouin security is much more robust.



The Economy.

As I explained in my last newsletter in November, the Egyptian government has devalued the Egyptian pound so that one GB Pound is worth twice as much as it was before. This is good news for us but the accompanying rampant inflation is making life even more difficult for the Bedouin.

Apples have increased from 7LE to 17 LE per kilo and rice has increased from 4LE a kilo to 8.5LE a kilo.

There did seem to be more tourists visiting the monastery with people from India, Japan and Indonesia arriving by coach. Very few looked as if they would be climbing the mountain and thereby using bedouin labour for the camels and guiding. Our visiting guest went up to the top of Mt Sinai and had it all to himself which would have been unthinkable 5 years ago.

The Wells Project

Slow funding during the latter part of last year, meant we were only able to fund 4 new wells last November so there were fewer wells to check this time. However we were able to start 10 new wells which was much better. This was due in part to one of our loyal funders plus the favourable exchange rates which meant that the money could actually cover 7 wells instead of 4. A few other donations brought us up to 10. It was very nice to have one of our funders accompanying us on the trip to see how the project runs.



One of the highlights of the trip was the completion of a well in the remote community of Eggreyrad. I have written about this place before in previous reports as it is one of the most interesting places and most remote. In places the track more closely resembles a mogul field on a ski slope. Even taking into account the difficulty of driving the moguls it is about one hours drive from the main road. People living here tend to only go to the town once very three weeks so access to water and the ability to grow their own food is critical. Last year we restored the well of Fatma for the community and it is now giving good water. In November we

started the well of Taleb for the other side of the wadi and this time we found it completed. We were greeted by his mother, an elderly lady called Farhana and while we were waiting for her son to arrive she talked about life before the first well was restored.

Farhana said that every other day she would take a donkey and walk 7 km to the next nearest well and fill up with just 60 litres of water, the maximum the donkey could carry, then walk 7 km back. The 60 litres would have to last the community 2 days and was used for drinking, washing, goats and camels. There was not really enough for all of them and nowhere near enough to use for growing food. Now that they have good water, with more than one and a half cubic metres of water a day. Taleb said having the water was like a dream. They have planted up the big garden with lots of different vegetables already and have several small plots too. The wells project has improved life immeasurably for this community.



In the community of El Exhorea, they had only a dribble of water from one well until we started restoring two of their wells in November. When we visited they had done about 75% of the work



and had good water from the wells. This is another community where the water trucks were unable to deliver and before they had to take their pickups to wells in other communities to get water. When we visited there were pickups coming from other nearby communities to fill up from this new well!

The Literacy Project

Mahmoud Abed, our program manager for this project, said that the first workshop to train the literacy teachers was magnificent. There were 12 people attending for training including 2 men and 10 women. Everyone passed the exam at the end and are ready to start teaching. Each class has to have 10 to 12 students to run and at present only 3 classes are ready to go with the requisite number of students. Mahmoud said it is difficult to find people to sign up for the courses as it is difficult to reach them, especially as they can't read the posters that have been put up! The three classes that are ready to go will be run by local Bedouin women teachers and they have found their students by word of mouth from people they know. Mahmoud said he would speak to the local Imam to ask him to spread the word. He also has an idea to start a weekly film night in the library to attract in people who wouldn't usually come and they can talk about the literacy classes to the filmgoers. He would also like to produce film nights in the more remote communities too, he just needs some transport. It is great to have Mahmoud pushing this forward with great ideas.

The Beekeeping Project

When we visited the Beekeeping course they were learning about the frames. Salem (teacher) filled us in on the training so far. This had included, a trip to see bees in Wadi Ferrian and Wadi Tarfa to practise handling the bees as it is warmer there and the bees are disturbed less, learning about the smoke, how to open the hives, handling, about bee stings, cleaning the hives and keeping them clean. They learnt about bee diseases and a small mite which attaches itself to the bees head and sucks the brains of out the bees. This sounds really grim but there is a local herb which works very well to protect the bees against the mite and is better than using pharmaceuticals.



Each hive will have 3 frames when they have finished the course and Salem is teaching them how to make more frames so that they have 9 per hive, making one every 15 days. In winter a plastic trough shaped like a frame is added to hives with sugar water to feed the bees. Salem said that other Bedouin are asking questions and learning about bees too so the knowledge is being spread about. The course is teaching many more than just the trainees.

Salem went to Cairo to collect the bees a few days later. He kept the swarms for a couple of days for them to settle down and then gave them to the trainees to take to their gardens. The bees have to be kept warm until May with extra coverings, and then the hives will need a stand to protect the bees from ants. This has still not been resolved and is a taxing problem. One of the trainees is a carpenter and will try to come up with a solution for strong racking that doesn't weigh much and can be transported on a camel.



On our last afternoon, we visited a garden and well just behind Fox Camp and saw one of the beekeeping trainees in a nearby garden with his new bees, so we went over to have a look. The bees were buzzing around exploring their new environment and we hope they will be happy here.

The Horticultural Project

After the success for the trip to Habiba Organic Farm in November, many Bedouin were keen to go on another visit. This time we arranged to visit Little Oasis Dahab, a permaculture garden created by Olivia Dupont. Olivia started making the garden just three and a half years ago, starting with the large pool. Since then, with the help of a series of volunteers, they have made beds and structures for animals and built the base for a diverse permaculture garden. As well as the plants, there are two donkeys, sheep and goats, chickens and even budgies. The dung is used on the garden for fertilizer. Water is pumped from the well into the pool and then used for watering the garden. It is possible that one major reason for having the pool is because the well water here is really quite salty and if used constantly on the garden it would kill the plants through salination. The aquatic plants, fish, frogs and other creatures clean the salt out of the water, preparing it for plant watering. Besides the large pool was a smaller wildlife pool with fish. There are frogs and goldfish living in the large pool and lots of aquatic plants all of which help to keep the water clean. Produce from the garden is used by Olivia and her volunteers but also sold at the Friday Dahab Market where organic produce is much in demand.

The Bedouin who had visited Habiba all said they much preferred the Dahab garden, though I think the pool may have had something to do with this. The visits have created much discussion and cross fertilisation of ideas. Olivia would like to learn more about grafting which the Jebeliya are experts at and the Bedouin want to try more varieties of vegetables and different ways of growing.



The Library

We visited just before the schools finished for the day so it was very quiet. There is less happening at the library just now but Mahmoud Abed has some plans for activities to draw people in, including a weekly film night. Children still come in for activities and love colouring. Farhana is back in the library most of the time but her sister was standing in for her when we visited.

Abu Giffa Update

Hussein (who has a garden in Farsh Rumana) and his party of Bedouin builders had not been able to start reconstruction of the path because it was too cold to use cement during the winter months. They plan to start very soon now that St Katherine's is much warmer. We have heard that the ladies with the goats still go up the path, as does the occasional camel. The beekeeping trainees did not envisage any problems with getting the bees up to their mountain gardens when it is time to take the hives up.

The photo is of Wadi Esbaia looking towards St K.



The Orphan Herb Project

This will continue during the long school holidays from May onwards, so there is no more news of this project at present.

Museum

I talked to Faraj about what is happening with the museum. He said he is now getting wood for the shelves, and then glass. He needs a sign and it will say "Hostelry of the Jebeliya" and will be one that illiterate people can read too. He also plans to have pictures of the Sheikhs of the Jebeliya tribe, and will put in pictures of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd successions to show the history. Faraj says he has a lot of work to do on paper too, before it will be ready.



These young ladies were playing just outside Safsafa house, beside Fox Camp and our base for the trip. They insisted I took their photo with cries of 'saura, saura', (photo, photo) and would probably be absolutely delighted to have made it onto this newsletter!

More News and Information

The next Project Manager visit to Sinai will be in mid April, though the project visits will be delayed until after the next Dam Journey with Rachel and Dick. Rachel still has places on this journey so if you are interested please call or email the office.

While the journey is in progress, Helen will be venturing onto the new Sinai Trail for a 200km trek through the desert from the East coast near Nuweiba to the highest mountain, Mt St Katherine's.

You can find occasional news posted on our FaceBook page and the next Newsletter will be sent out in mid May.