

Sinai Journey Report Autumn 2017

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



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***News from Sinai,
Wells Project,
Beekeeping Training
Project, Orphan Herb
Project, & two new
initiatives***

Camels!!

People are not the only living beings here that need water to survive. While travelling through the deserts around St Katherine's we have seen lots of camels roaming wild and free. They nearly all belong to Bedouin but with no tourists they are not needed for work. However that doesn't mean that the Bedouin will sell their camels unless they absolutely have to; their whole culture is based on nomadic living with camels, and many people still live the traditional way.

Last year's heavy rains and floods have meant that grazing has been particularly abundant this year and so camels have been set free to forage for themselves. They do need water too, and many of the wells we have helped to restore have had small pools built alongside to be filled with water for camels and goats.

Camels often drink 18 litres in one session, over half an hour, which may seem a lot but they don't have to drink again for a week. This enables them to travel vast distances to forage away from water sources, but it does mean they need a lot of water at once, particularly when 20 or more camels come together.

Camels are not kept just for tourist rides but are also the main form of transport to inaccessible areas. They can carry cement (just 2 sacks of 50cwt) supplies, and food up into the mountains, and then bring down fruit, nuts and olives to sell for an income. Many families still live a traditional nomadic life in the desert with grazing goats for an income and food, and with their camels for transport of goods and water. They are part of everyday life here.

The 6 camels in the photo above came to drink from a water tank (birka) next to a newly restored well we were visiting.



This report is a bit longer than usual as there are more projects to report on!

The Wells Project

This visit was the busiest so far since taking over from Susie (who had set up the project in 2007) two and a half years ago. We have started off 15 wells, made site visits to 20 new wells, and progress visits to 24 wells. The wells were spread out over a wide area and we made three trips up different mountain areas, and three trips into wide far off deserts, as well as several trips to visit many wells in the St Katherine's environs. Here are some of the well stories:



Salama's well is by a large community on the main road from St Katherine's to El Tur and Cairo. The well is very deep and provides water for a mosque and a school as well as the local community. It used to have good water but about a year ago the water level dropped dramatically. Now the well has been deepened by 6 m to 59 m and is giving good water again. The well is so deep it is difficult to see the water level, which appears as a tiny dot in the distance. There is enough water for the community now so they have started to restore a

nearby garden and have planted trees including figs, almonds, nabug (a very small, very sweet apple type fruit that is as popular as sweets in UK), and 3 palm trees. They are also growing corn, courgette, okra, tomatoes, mullaheir (a strong tasting, green-leafed vegetable), and cucumbers. Over the winter they will plant more trees and then next spring they will plant lots more vegetables. Salama wants this to be a model garden to encourage other people in the community to start growing food in gardens of their own. This well is also an important watering place for roaming camels, (see photo on page 1). This well gives drinking water to around 40 families, plus the mosque, the school, and the animals on which people depend and the garden.



Iggreyradt update



The remote community of Iggreyradt has featured in previous journey reports, partly because we can see the impact of the wells project here so vividly. The visit this September was to see the final completion of the third well for this community. Before we started the first well here, they only had a little water from one well and had to go by donkey 7km to collect water and then 7km back again. Now they have plenty of water for the people, goats and to grow food. Previously they could only eat fresh vegetables after the once in three weeks trip to the shops, a difficult 1½ hour drive away. Now

their gardens are thriving with a huge variety of vegetables and in the winter they can plant apple, olive, almond, pistachio and many other trees.

Wadi Slav



The Iggreyradt community is not the only one that is remote. Wadi Slav has a large community, almost a small town, with a large mosque and a school, but it is a long drive on tracks, and miles from big towns. We had been asked to do a site visit on several occasions but had not been able to find the garden owner or his community because mobile phones don't work in Wadi Slav. At long last we managed a visit in February this year. We found that the well belonging to Salem Huuda, had caved in when floods filled a huge new dam several kilometres up the wadi which raised the water level de-stabilising the sides of the well. It

was too dangerous to dig it out again so he dug a new well about 4 m away and found water at a depth of 35 m. However he didn't have the money to buy the steel bars and cement necessary to protect the well from future flooding. With our help he has been able to dig down another 6m to 41m and put in bricks and steel bars to strengthen the sides of the well. He has a large garden

which he shares with his 4 brothers as their only source of food and income. The garden is quite a lot lower than St Katherine's and they can grow lemons, limes, oranges and guavas as well as goat food and vegetables. They were very grateful for the help from the Makhad Trust.



El Exhorea

Mahana's well is in the small village of El Exhorrea, just under the shoulder of Mt Sinai. The people here used to make their living from taking tourists up Mt Sinai on camels but there is very little work now. There are few gardens in the village and this one provides food for many families. The well has been drying up despite rains last year and they were finding it difficult to keep the trees alive. They tried to dig out the well themselves but it is in very strong granite requiring specialist help of experienced well diggers and so asked for our assistance. The diggers made the well one and a half meters deeper and now it refills quickly. There is enough water now to grow lots more trees and vegetables plus water for people to collect for drinking. This community is about half hour drive from the nearest tarmac road so they can't easily buy fresh food.



They are growing olives, almonds, pomegranates, grapes and mulberry trees, as well as potatoes, courgettes, aubergines, onions, and cucumbers. Mahana has some pistachio and olive plants in his house waiting to be planted in a newly extended part of the garden outside the wall but with a barbed wire fence. He says the almonds and pistachio trees have strong roots and can stand the floods in the wadi. Mahana is in green in the photo, with one of his sons and a few of his grandchildren.

Our new Herbal Horticulture Course for Fatherless Children is based at Mahana's house as the teacher, Selim is his son. They are growing herbs in a small part of the garden.

Melez

Another remote community we visited was over 2½ hours drive by Jeep and was the furthestest site visit to date. The community of Melez is way out in the desert and has three wells all of which had been flooded in the last year. They had dug out one well and found good water but it is over 40 m deep and they don't have money to build good flood protection. We decided that this well should be classed as an emergency well as the Autumn rains are due any time soon and all their hard work could be wasted if it does rain, plus they wouldn't have any water. We were able to find the funds to start this well at the end of the trip. We did site visits to their two other wells, and were treated to a Bedouin feast for our efforts to get there. While we were looking at the wells, they showed us an excellent site for a dam to increase the water to the community, and to illustrate everyone stood in the line of the dam. Michael, Hassan, Faraj Fox, Faraj Awad, and Mahmoud all posed for the photo. Perhaps one of our future dam build journeys will come here to build this dam.



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Well Restoration Progress as of 5 October

2017

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	187	9	34	193
Community Wells	172	15	44	169
Totals	359	24	78	362

Beekeeping Training Project

September is a time of transition for this project. The current class of 6 has completed their year-long training, made their honey and are 'flying the hive', making room for the new class to start.



Salem the teacher, bottom right, with 5 newly graduated beekeepers. Hosnee was not able to come

The outgoing beekeepers were visited and interviewed to monitor progress. They all reported that they had very much enjoyed the course and they had made good amounts of honey due to the (relatively) wet winter which had led to a profusion of herbs on the mountain sides. They had had a few problems with wasps, though only for around 20 days, and also bee-eater birds which frighten the bees into staying in the hives with their loud whistling, so they can't get out to collect honey.

All the swarms were healthy and intact except for two of Hosnee's hives. His hives are in a garden at the top of wadi Itlah which he and his sister look after, but like most people they cannot be there all the time. Two boys, aged 8 and 13, decided to help themselves to some honey from the hives. They built a small fire next to the two of the hives to smoke the bees and then opened the hives. However, the bees stung the boys badly before flying away to make a new nest elsewhere and the hives were badly damaged. It was very obvious who the culprits were, from the red lumps on their faces. A 'Firm and Frank' discussion took place with the family of the boys and it is unlikely this incident will be repeated. Hosnee's hives are being repaired and next spring he hopes to make two new swarms from two new queen bees.

Each of the beekeepers had taken on a young student to help them with the honey making process and so they could learn about beekeeping too. The students were mostly young boys, keen to learn and from fatherless families. They were rewarded with a jar of honey each.

Many of the beekeepers had involved their wives in the care of the bees, so that if they were called away, their wives would be able to watch over the bees. The ladies were not able to attend the training sessions because of local customs forbidding women to attend a mixed group where men other than close relatives are present, but they have learned from their husbands and take an active role in beekeeping. Hosnee, who only got married the week before, plans to teach his wife and his sister.

All the beekeepers praised Salem, their teacher, and said he had taught them well, visited their gardens regularly and offered them plenty of support.

Due to the generosity of funders, we have been able to expand the training course for the next and third year of the project, with 10 new students. The Eva Crane Trust has given us funding for another two years and Didymus CIO also gave us funds for this year. As the price of bee swarms and equipment has risen a great deal over the last year, we are very grateful for this support. Nine of the new beekeepers were able to come to meet us, while the tenth student, Nassr, was working in the mountains as a guide on the day of the meeting. They were all very excited and looking forward to the forthcoming year. All the new students have gardens, some in the mountains and one in wadi Tarfa, about 6 miles away. Many of them have gardens that have been restored by the Makhad Trust.



The new students with Salem, the teacher on the bottom left

Our sister charity ITSA (IT Schools for Africa) which refurbishes old computers to send to labs in African schools, very kindly donated a refurbished laptop for Salem so he can print out notes for the students and do more research on line.

Herbal Horticulture Project for Fatherless Children

(It's a bit of a mouthful but it is what it says!)



This project started last year with a pilot course in St Katherine's run by a Bedouin called Atir. The course went well so we wanted to run another one but Atir had started a new job for the National Park so we turned to Atir's helper, Selim, to run this course. Selim had worked for the EU Herbal Horticulture Project and had a very good rapport with the children last time. He was delighted to design a comprehensive training course for a new class of children.

For a long time, Selim had a dream to teach herbal horticulture, and is very excited to see his dream coming to fruition. He has a great deal of enthusiasm and lots of excellent ideas about how to teach this subject. The project is now based in Wadi Esbaia in the community of El Exhorea (about half way along the valley) and right under Mt Sinai. The course is broad-based and comprehensive, teaching about the flora and fauna of the mountains, the specialities of the climate and geography, with Bedouin herbal traditions and culture to give the course a relevant context. The 9 students are learning how to recognise all the herbs, the Bedouin names and the latin names, where the different herbs grow, how to propagate them, how and when to pick and their uses. They have also learnt about avoiding the poisonous herbs.

The first part of this course started in July and continued until the children went back to school at the end of September. They met for 3 days each week, splitting their time between the classroom, trips to the mountains to find the different herbs, and working in the garden to propagate seeds and cuttings. The second part of the course will resume in March at the beginning of the growing season and will go through the summer. The students are: 3 older boys of 20, 18 and 18 years, with 6 children ranging between 11 to 15 years old, The students will be split into 3 teams for the next term, each headed by one of the older students, to make and plant up 3 herb gardens. The gardens will be their test beds to grow and learn about preparing herbs for sale.

When we visited the children we found they were all in a state of happy anticipation and excitement, eager to show us what they had been learning. Each student got up and told us about the properties of a chosen herb. On the white board were diagrams of distillation techniques and in future they will learn to do this in practise. We saw their notebooks filled with beautiful drawings of the herbs and notes about them. Everyone was so happy and positive that it was a joy to visit. We will report on further progress next spring, and hope we can realise more of Selim's dream to keep alive bedouin herbal traditions in a modern world, by expanding the course to more students.



Horticulture Project - Our new seed bank

The horticulture project started as a support to the garden owners, the idea being to encourage more people to grow vegetables, supporting families with little income as well as to promote health. Last year some Bedouin asked if we could get them quality seeds, because the seeds they can buy, tend to revert to type after a few sowings, producing only a few poor quality plants. Research

found a heritage and organic seed company in UK that could supply new strong seeds. In order to distribute the seeds we have appointed a Seed Man, Mahmoud Hassan, who has a garden in the town and is starting the Seed Bank. Gardeners wanting seeds can purchase some from him for a token price, then, when the plant is grown, they will give some of the seeds back to Mahmoud for the bank, so increasing its investments for the whole community. Mahmoud started in July but already he has started to plant some of the late season vegetables with the intention of saving the seeds to add to the bank. It will take some years before it is fully functioning but this should help improve the overall seed stock and quality of the diet for everyone. The alternative to growing their own vegetables, is to buy expensive, farmed vegetables, trucked in from Cairo, which have little taste, a sure sign of poor nutrient content. Poor health is a big issue in this community so quality vegetables could make a significant difference, especially as medicine is private and expensive here. Many people can't afford doctors or medical help and so suffer terribly from preventable and treatable diseases. Diabetes, heart disease and cancer are high. We hope to do a little to change that.



The Carpentry Training Project - another new project!

A very encouraging aspect of running a successful aid programme is that people start to see that their dreams for the future have the potential to be fulfilled by asking for our help. Ahmed Oda is a skilled carpenter who has been working at the monastery of St Katherine's all his working life. He has seen and heard of our projects to teach children about Bedouin herbal traditions and about beekeeping, so he came to us with his dream to set up a carpentry school for boys to learn this trade. His plan is to teach around 10 boys, aged 10 years old (the best time to start learning a skill) in after school lessons several times a week. To do this he needs a building, tools and financial support. We think this project may cost around £1000 a year plus the initial set up costs, and so we will be looking for funds from our supporters and Trust funds to get it up and running. The inspiring point about this potential project is that it illustrates what we see here; a large community of impoverished people who have the skills and capacity to run projects themselves but just need a financial push to get started.

The Festival of Heavenly Religions - Together We Pray



For the third year running, St Katherine's played host to an international meeting of religious groups from around the world, to promote peace and understanding between different faiths. The September event culminated in an evening of religious music from

groups representing all the delegates. We saw performances from Coptic Christians from Greece, Indian sufis, Christian choirs from Ethiopia, Nigeria and Georgia and Islamic singers from Egypt, Algeria, Indonesia, Pakistan, Syria, Tartarstan, and Jordan. The event was set on the plain below the Wadi Rahah Hotel, with Mt Sinai illuminated as the backdrop. The music was heavenly, and the performers were extremely accomplished. They were also dressed very beautifully in their national costumes.

The event was also attended by the Governor, General Khaled Fouda, ministers and ambassadors from participating countries. It was a treat to be there this time. They plan to hold another festival next year.

BBC Egypt

We were excited to have a BBC Egypt film crew join us for a day to make several 5 mins reports on our work. They hope to distribute these to the African networks, and the World Service, maybe even to the UK! The day started with



a visit to a newly completed well in the small community of El Mada, just 5 miles north of St Katherine's. The well had gone dry when they asked for our help, but then floods had filled it in. The well, which belongs to Awad, has been dug out and made three meters deeper so it has good water for this community of twenty-two families.

The BBC crew filmed the well with extra help from the children and a camel. At the end even a small bird came to drink from the little pool beside the well. The Bedouin are very conscious that it is not only people who need water. They often say Water is Life, and this means for the birds and animals too.



Maybe we will see ourselves, the project and the people of El Mada on TV one day. Inshallah!

The Nawamis Development Society



Our sister organisation, registered in Sinai and headed by Sherif Samra, has been busy with overseeing the running of the Library in St Katherine's and the pilot program of a big new literacy project called the CLE Project (Concentrated Learning Experience). The rate of literacy is generally quite low amongst the Bedouin population due to a number of factors, not least being the fact that most work open to Bedouin does not require a high standard of

education. The CLE Project first trained women who could read and write to become literacy teachers. Then four of the teachers ran classes for Bedouin women who have now been through the program and passed successfully. The next hurdle is to find funding to roll out a program of teaching literacy to as many Bedouin as possible so that more work and education possibilities are open to them. The photograph shows the new teachers and Dr Gassab, the consultant on this project.



We welcome Sherif's new assistant Raghada Bahy Elessawi, and Candace Hetchler who is fundraising in Egypt for the project.

Grateful Thanks

The work in Sinai could not happen without the support and help of a great many people. In Sinai, our manager, Mahmoud, works tirelessly to check on wells and gardens, and keep things running throughout the year. We rely on Faraj Fox for good will, knowledge of the people of the whole area, his jeep for transport and his talent for being able to fix any problem. In UK we have the backing of our trustees, particularly our chair of Trustees, Michael Ratcliffe who came to Sinai to see the projects this September, and Sherif Samra from Cairo who handles the official side of Egyptian bureaucracy. The projects would not happen if it was not for the generosity of very many charitable trusts and private sponsors over the last 20 years. To everyone who has helped, the Bedouin send a huge thank you. They say often 'the God has sent you to help us and we thank you and the God for this'.

The Next Sinai Visit

This will be in November and we will be checking on progress of all 15 of the new wells we started during September. The next journey report will follow shortly afterwards.

We should have news of our next dam build journey to Sinai by then, scheduled for next spring. If you are interested in coming to help with our dam building project, then visit our website for information or email me at helencranston@makhad.org

