

Sinai Journey Report Autumn 2016

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



St Katherine's in the late afternoon



*Helen Cranston
Project Manager*

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

The Autumn and Spring journeys are the major events in the Makhad calendar, as these are the times when new projects are dreamt into existence and existing projects are continued. It is a time of meetings and visits, working in conjunction with our Sinai partner the Nawamis Centre for Bedouin Development, headed up by Sherif and assisted by Nora, Mira and Nassif. Michael and Sherif started at the Cairo end while Helen got on with the wells project in South Sinai. This time the project work and visit was extended by a Dam building journey, initiated and organised by Rachel Devas, one of the trustees.

Life in St Katherine's continues as before. There is still very little tourism, and what there is, comes from Egypt itself. The Bedouin are still coming forward for help with their wells so that they can grow food for their families and to sell. They need our help as much as ever.

There is a new initiative now though, to tempt people to South Sinai. The Sinai Trail, a long distance walking path, starts in the north by Taba and winds its way through the most beautiful parts of the desert then into the mountains and ending in St Katherine's. The trail employs Bedouin guides and camels, using their traditional desert skills to host trekkers making the journey. The trail has been so well thought out that it has been nominated for an award at the British Guild of Travel Writers (BGOTW) in London. There are only two other projects in competition for the main prize. We wish the Sinai Trail organisation, and Ben Hoffler, its creator, the best of luck in the competition.

While we were in St Katherine's there was a big Peace Conference, held at the Wadi Raha Hotel and attended by heads of many religious faiths, government ministers and ambassadors from European, North African and Middle Eastern countries. The finale was a huge concert with musicians and singers representing all the faiths. There were some beautiful songs from Ethiopia, wonderful dances from the whirling dervishes of the Sufi faith, and rousing music from the Balkans. This is an annual event in the St Katherine's calendar and Michael, Sherif, Nasif, Mira and Helen were very pleased to attend the very enjoyable concert.

The Projects - Wells

The first week started with Helen, Mahmoud and Faraj starting new well contracts and visiting wells in progress. By the end of the visit, we found that 9 of the wells that were underway had been finished bringing the new total of all wells completed to 317. They also made 17 new site visits to wells on the long waiting lists and started 7 new contracts.

There were a number of highlights of the Autumn Wells visit. Early on we made a visit to the very remote community of Eggrayradt. It takes about 45 minutes by jeep and an extremely difficult road to reach this community so the people living here only go to the town of St Katherine's every three



or four weeks for essential supplies. The first time we visited, a year ago, we found they had very little water, and they had to collect water from other communities 10km away (along a slightly more navigable track). They need the water for growing food as well as for drinking so they can have fresh food for their families. Any fresh food bought from the village would only last a few days. This trip we were going to see how they were getting on with restoring a well we had sponsored. We arrived mid morning to find a group of Bedouin taking tea under a tamarind tree while a couple of others were tinkering around with bits of a Toyota pickup. The cab was suspended from a tripod and

attached to an empty chassis. After drinking tea and catching up with the local news Mahmoud and I set off to inspect the well. It was about a mile walk to get there and half way up a mountain so it took a while. The well restoration was going fine but they were having to dig through solid granite and it was taking a while so we need to visit again next time. We got back to the tamarind tree in time for a rice and lentil lunch. Then they told us about another well they had started to dig out themselves and that three men had dug for 20 days through granite to reach water but now they need our help to dig deeper, line the well and then put a new cover over to protect it from



floods. They don't have the money to do this so although they have a bit more water the well is very vulnerable to being filled in by the next floods. We had a 'spare' payment a delayed well so we able to start this new well. As well as needing the money because this well is vulnerable, it was also good to be able to reward the hard work and persistence they had already shown in doing so much work. The inspection over, we walked back to the tamarind tree to meet up with a rather bored Faraj. However we found that the pick up had now been reassembled and was ready to drive off. We weren't sure if the chassis had a new cab and engine, or if the cab and engine had a new chassis. It was definitely not all the same vehicle that it had started out as. And the chassis had been welded before as a 'cut and shut' repair from two vehicles. And all this happening miles from anywhere - it seemed very enterprising.

Another memorable visit was to the garden of Ramadan in El Marwa. We had been visiting a well nearby that had just been completed when Helen spotted some very green vegetables poking up above a garden wall nearby. We went to investigate and discovered the vegetables belonged to Ramadan who was one of our earlier beneficiaries, back in 2012. His community well is in his



garden but he has enough water to grow food too. Now he says they are growing enough food for his family so that they don't have to buy so much from the shops and there is more money for other things. Because the garden is so close to the house, they are constantly tending it. It has given them cool shady places to sit as well, under olive and almond trees that have grown. This was a real success story.



While visiting a well in another rather remote village called Sheikh Awad we found a wonderful old British diesel generator by Lister Dursley, in mostly full working order (a couple of spare parts are required). It's owner, Mohamed Salem Atish, said it was still a good pump despite its age.



Towards the end of the wells project time Micheal Ratcliffe came to visit some of the wells in the more remote locations. He saw how much difference the project has made to people like Ramadan, above, and how urgent the need is for more funding for communities like Elexorhea where they have no water for 15 families.

Wells statistics as at 1 October 2016

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	168	7	26	176
Community Wells	149	10	45	136
Totals	317	17	71	312

Beekeeping Training Project

Our first year of training new beekeepers has ended this September. The new beekeepers, taught by Mousa (son of Dr Ahmed) have seen a whole cycle of the year and how to care for the bees through the seasons, plus they have made two batches of honey very successfully. The Beekeeping Training now moves into its second year with another set of 6 novice beekeepers all excited about their new careers. This time the course is being run by Salem who has a garden in the high mountains, as do many of the novice beekeepers.



Orphan Herb Growing Project

This project was initiated during the last visit in July. After several years of waiting for the right trainer and teacher, we found Atir. He has worked with the Herb Growing School project funded by the EU in St Katherine's. He loves herbs and loves to teach too. He was very happy to run a course teaching how to grow herbs to 10 children from fatherless families who need to earn an income. There are many children in the position of having no father. Traffic accidents and heart disease are all too common and the bereaved families have no way of making in income, nor do relatives have spare income to support these families. The children said they felt forgotten until they started the course and this has given them a purpose in life. They are learning how to grow culinary herbs and herbs for home first aid use. They will then be able to grow the herbs near their houses and sell them for an income.



Library

The library continues to grow and is now an established feature in St Katherine's. Many of the local children come here after school and as well as borrowing books, they read, listen to stories, play games and learn more. During the summer, a young Bedouin woman called Mai, asked if she could teach English to the children at the library. Mai is a first year undergraduate studying teaching English at the University of Suez and wanted to practise her studies as well as help to earn some money to finance herself. The classes were very popular as many of the children wanted to learn English. We hope to expand the library service to other towns and communities in South Sinai in the foreseeable future.

Dam Build Wadi Rahabat



As you may remember, the Makhad Trust started out with practical projects undertaken by visitors from UK working with the Bedouin. Over the years we have built 17 small dams in the mountains as well as garden restoration projects. Rachel Devas, one of the Makhad Trust trustees, had gathered together a group of enthusiastic travellers to come and build the 18th dam. Johnny, Freddy, Amanda, Joe, Kirsty and Yasmin flew out with Rachel arriving on the 2nd October with plenty of energy and excitement to experience the magic of a Makhad journey. Helen joined the group too and they trekked up into the mountains along the

scenic Wadi Tala, where no-one was troubled by the scrambles and ascent up a 'chimney'! We based ourselves in a lovely garden belonging to Hussein in Wadi Buleia, just off Wadi Gibal. From here we had a short walk to the site of the dam. We hauled cement and stones to the dam for the Bedouin to do the building work over the next 3 ½ days, directed by Saeid, Salah, Shaban, Saeid's son Eid, and the three cement boys, Mohamed and Ahmed and Sulieman.

At the end we had built one and a half dams. The Bedouin were really pleased because the new dam will hold back a huge volume of water, supplying more water to the gardens of Wadi Gibal, Farsh Rumana, and possibly Wadi Zuweitin and all the wadis



below there too. Now all that is needed are some good rains, several times at least during the winter.

Projects in the pipeline

CLE- Concentrated Learning Experience.

This is a tried and tested way of teaching literacy through a program initiated by the Rotary Club in Cairo. Michael and Sherif met with Dr Gassab while in Cairo and then he travelled with them to St Katherines to give advice on how the program can be carried out with the Bedouin women and children. Dr Gassab met with around 8 Bedouin in the library



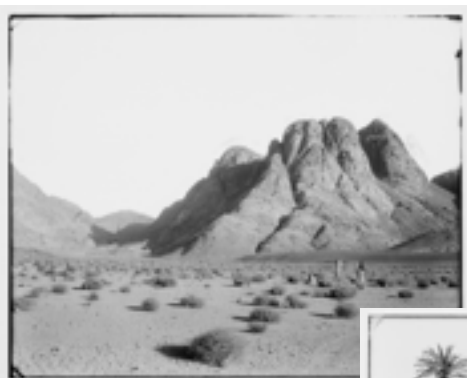
who are keen to be CLE teachers and they had a selection session. It is hoped to start the CLE classes in the next few weeks.

Solar installations for wells

At another Cairo meeting, Sherif and Michael explored the possibilities of funding and installing 25 solar pump installations for wells in the mountains. These wells would really benefit from swapping their petrol generators for solar powered ones as it would mean a great saving in fuel, less oil and petrol pollution of their gardens, and less noise pollution in the mountains making them a more peaceful place. As the solar pumps work automatically with cut out and cut in switches this type of installation would mean that garden owners would arrive at their gardens to find a full birka of water waiting for them to water their gardens. A prototype installation was made in Hussein's garden in Wadi Zuweitin about eighteen months ago and it is working brilliantly.

And Finally ...

Mahmoud came across these old black and white photos of Sinai, taken around 100 years ago. The first one is of Mt Sinai or Gebel Mousa as the Bedouin call it, from the plains of Raha. The photo must have been taken from the site of the Wadi Raha hotel as this view is the same as a photo I took a year ago, less hotels, roads, houses etc. The second black and white photo shows how verdant the Sinai was all those years ago! There was clearly much more rain then!



Helen's next journey to Sinai will be at the end of November.