

# Sinai Journey Report March 2018

**Makhad**  
People Spirit Environment



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***News from Sinai,  
Wells Project,  
Beekeeping Training  
Project, Orphan Herb  
Project, and more!***

*The remote Wadi Nasb leading to Wadi Rahab*

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## News!

There has been no significant rain for 18 months now and everything is looking dry. Well levels have dropped so previously good wells have low water levels now. There is concern that there will not be enough grazing for the goats and camels this year and summer will be especially difficult. However, the Bedouin are optimistic as usual and keep hoping for spring rain.

Security in Sinai remains tight as the Army have taken on the task of eradicating all terrorists in North Sinai in a massive operation. The resultant security measures are putting the pinch on normal people's lives with intimidating questioning at the many checkpoints. Pickups with no license (there are huge numbers of 'illegal' cut and shut vehicles) are not allowed past checkpoints which is curtailing movement. Food prices continue to rise and life can be difficult. All this fuels the desire to be back in the ancestral heartlands, once more masters of their own destinies, where they have little but need little, in far, remote places living the traditional nomadic way. Once they have water, they have the most precious thing they need to enjoy the peace of the far desert. It may seem extra-ordinary to us that people would choose what seems a much harder life but there is a freedom and richness to it, even in its sparseness. Some people live in concrete houses near their wells during the cold months but in summer, they take their traditional tents and move with their goats for grazing, as they have done for thousands of years. It is wonderful to see the nomadic and desert survival heritage is thriving.

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## The Dilema and Responsibility of Choice

There are times when we have difficult decisions to make, especially regarding which wells to select next for restoration. When selecting wells it might seem fair to just select the next name off the list as they have been waiting for longest. However, this doesn't address the needs of the wider communities. We have many wells on our list from highly populated areas where we have already facilitated the restoration of a large number wells, while the newly surveyed wells in remote

areas are near the bottom of the lists, but these people often have to travel long distances to get a little water, and so have greater need.

During the last trip we were in the fortunate position of having one unallocated well payment in hand. We had been to visit a remote community of 10 families tucked away in a long wadi in the far desert where they have just one cubic meter of water a week from their two, barely functioning wells. This is not enough for the people, never-mind their goats and camels on which they depend. This community had recently expanded too, as family members who had previously left to live in the town when tourism was in full flow, had come back to live off the land - as their ancestors had lived. They clearly needed our help to be able to do this. The dilemma of choosing where to allocate this last well payment, took me back to contemplating the objectives of the Trust, particularly our first objective of protecting the natural heritage and culture of nomadic regions. It became clear that we would be following the spirit of the Trust's objectives more by helping a remote community returning to its nomadic ways than by further support of the exodus of people to towns, areas we have helped many times already. The people of Namenna were delighted to have their urgent call for help responded to so promptly. Having a working well will make a huge difference to their viability.

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## The Wells Project

The latest trip in March saw another 13 wells started and 12 completed. We visited garden wells in the high mountains and remote communities in the far desert. Everywhere we went we were offered traditional Bedouin hospitality of tea and water. Some well restorations initiated in November had been completed in one go, in part temporarily subsidised by the local supermarkets who make a loan to well owners awaiting second payments. Such is the reputation of the Trust that receiving a first well payment is sufficient security to enable well owners to borrow the money against the second well payment, to complete the work in one hit. There are other wells where work has to proceed more slowly. Last spring, after huge rains in October 2016, the wells were too full of water to dig deep down and they had to wait until the summer. This spring all the well owners were saying how low the water levels are this year, after no winter rain.

Far out in the desert is a place called El Ramthy. Here, two wide flat wadis converge and the geology of the area means that water comes from many directions and becomes trapped behind



countless underground, criss-crossing dykes. There were over 20 working wells here, providing water to hundreds of people but in 2015 there were big floods and only one of them remained functional, and even this one had reduced water due to flood silt. We were asked to come and look at the wells and make an assessment which we did in 2016. However tackling the restoration of 20 wells at once was a non-starter financially and also from a resources stand point as there aren't enough experienced well diggers to work concurrently. Instead, the wells are gradually being restored. Last year two wells were successfully restored and on this trip we saw the third well restored and deepened, and were also able to initiate the restoration of a fourth well. The third well (pictured) belonging to Salem Mousa has good water at present, so there are many Bedouin coming to collect water here, particularly nomadic Bedouin. However good drinking water or maya helowa, as they say here, is hard to find in South Sinai and we were told that there are people coming from the town of Dahab on the coast 100km away. In the summer Bedouin from all over South Sinai come to these valleys with their goats for the grazing and rely on wells like the ones in El Ramthy. Over the next few years our aim is to

restore the rest of these wells to working order. They are some of the wells that are helping support Bedouin to live in a traditional way and preserve their culture.

March also saw the completion of the well belonging to Monsur. We visited his well in September and told his story in a previous report. Now that his well has been funded he has finished the restoration and planted lots of olive, almond, fig and apricot trees. In a few weeks he can start planting vegetables too. Mansur sold his camel to have enough money to buy this garden for his family. He is very happy to have the security that comes with growing food and cash crops but dreams of buying another camel one day.



We made a new site visit to a garden well that had been on our list for a long time. Mohamed Salah Atish has a lovely garden, completely dominated by a huge Nabug tree. There is no translation for this tree to English as far as I know and its fruits are not imported to UK. However, the small very sweet, hard fruits are very popular with Bedouin children and with our Sinai Manager

Mahmoud. The trees can produce vast quantities of the fruit. The garden also had several date palms as well as many other fruit trees. At the moment Mohamed is keeping his trees alive by 'borrowing' water from a neighbour. What really caught the eye though, was his unusual storage facility. Two of the palms were being used to keep lots of his kit safe. As much as possible is re-purposed and recycled by the Bedouin and they can teach us a lot about the wastefulness of unchecked consumerism. What looks like rubbish is often a future useful tool.



	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	196	14	26	205
Community Wells	186	11	50	178
Totals	382	25	76	383

## Herbal Horticulture Project

During the winter time the ten pupils of this project have been busy establishing their own herbal gardens, under the watchful eye of their teacher Selim. We were able to visit two of these gardens. The first belongs to Mohamed Mousa. When his father died Mousa inherited a very large garden with a large number of small olive, almond and apricot trees. We had passed this garden many times in the past and it looked abandoned but now it is blooming. He has planted 30 herb plants as his seed bank, by the wall in the shady part of the garden. They don't look much now as they are small but by the end of the summer he should have a good number of bushes. We visited another garden about 200m away, just outside a house. It belongs to brothers Abdul and Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed. They have planted 15 herbs so far and have more waiting to go into their holes.



Many of the smaller children in the village have become very interested in the project and Selim is keen to involve them, maybe as apprentices to the older children on the course. This would mean that the herbal students will learn teaching and supervision which are useful life skills.

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## Beekeeping Training Course

The new beekeepers on our third annual beekeeping course are about to collect their bees! They have spent the last 4 months learning the theory of beekeeping and are now about to put that into action with their own bees. The course is well established with Selim at the helm, supervising and guiding his pupils. The only concerns for this year are the lack of wild plants for the bees to feed on due to the lack of rain. Last spring the mountain sides were covered in herbs and spring flowers. This year there will be little growing that is not watered from a well, unless rains come soon. We look forward to seeing the new beekeepers with their bees in April.



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## The New Carpentry School

In Sinai one learns that things must proceed at their own pace. In November we gave the go-ahead to Ahmed Oda to start work on converting a small room by his house, into a classroom for his Carpentry School. Initial estimations were a bit on the low side and more work was needed than expected but the final result will be very good. They were about



to start putting the roof on when we visited and then they will do the fitting out. We hope that the building will be finished by the middle of next month and then we will have a photo shoot with some of the prospective pupils. The school will teach teenage boys carpentry as a trade. We are still looking for funding for the school, to buy tools and for running costs.

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## Our Seedman - Mahmoud Hassan

Mahmoud received another batch of seeds this week as part of our aim to establish quality and variety of vegetables in the gardens. Mahmoud will distribute the seeds to those who ask for them in return for a small donation. He is also planting many of the seeds in his large garden to propagate to produce more seeds. A number of garden owners had been asking for sugar beet seeds. This vegetable is grown in large quantities in the Nile delta to produce sugar, but it is really a northern vegetable and although it grows in Egypt it is too warm to produce seeds - except in the



high mountains. If the Bedouin can grow seed crops, they can sell the seeds to farmers in the Nile delta at a very good price, so this would be a much needed cash crop. Sugar beet seeds are rather more expensive than vegetable seeds so Mahmoud will grow the first crop over next winter, then distribute the seeds to the garden owners. Like many agricultural projects one has to think ahead several years!

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## News from our sister NGO - the Nuwamis Development Society

The NDS has been working very hard for many months, on a funding application to the Australian Embassy to fund a rollout of the successful pilot project to teach Literacy. This project teaches Bedouin to become teachers and then to teach literacy to other Bedouin using the Concentrated Learning Experience method - CLE. They were told a few weeks ago that their application had been successful and so now they are planning the new program. The need for this program became clear when we visited one of the wells on our restoration programme. The well restoration had been overseen by an energetic and intelligent young man who has organised at least 4 well repairs in his community but when it came to signing the contract, he used the thumb print method as he could not write his own name. This is not unusual amongst older men but there are quite a few of the younger ones who also cannot read and write. We wish the NDS every success with this literacy program.

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## Promoting Travel and Education - Dam Journeys and Eco-Lodges

The Trust is fulfilling another objective which is to promote through travel and education, the cultural and environmental heritage of nomadic people, by organising a working journey in April. Twelve eager people have signed up to come on a journey to build a small dam in the mountains. We hope that the participants will find the journey and the contact with their Bedouin hosts to be stimulating and exciting. There will be news of this journey in the next newsletter. Another way to see this wonderful country is to stay in one of three eco-lodges near St Katherine's. We were introduced to a brand new one on this trip. It is high up on the side of a big wadi called Wadi Gharba, with views to the far mountains. It's a beautiful and peaceful place and just the thing for a retreat. If you would like to know more about our Journeys or the Eco-Lodges, email [enquiries@makhad.org](mailto:enquiries@makhad.org) and we will put you in touch.



Do contact us if you would like to know more about our work.

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*The next newsletter will be in May after the April Project Journey*

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