

Sinai Journey Report August 18

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



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407 wells now restored! We've just passed the 400 milestone!!

News! - Rain or lack of it

The last newsletter started with news of rain, rain everyone had been waiting for over a year, but the few showers that came did nothing to soak the ground and much less to top up the water table. The Bedouin say there has been no significant rain for two years now and it shows. The trees in many gardens look tragic and wells have dried up. The water table is always low in summer due to higher water use but this year is has sunk very low. The mountain herbs on which the bees depend have not grown and flowered and the bees are dying because there is not enough nectar. Even Wadi Itlah, one of the lowest wadis and with the greatest runoff feed, is dry too. Many wells that usually have good water at this time are dry. Everyone is talking about the need for rain and praying for it to come soon.

On a more positive note, there has been a relaxation of the previous high level of security. On my last trip there were army vehicles and soldiers everywhere, travelling was restricted, and goods from Cairo unobtainable due to embargo, all consequences of the military offensive in North Sinai. It seems that the offensive has been very successful and the military are confident that they have dealt with all the potential trouble makers, so they have largely packed up and gone somewhere else. The police checkpoints are still there but there are less police and more of them are out of uniform (and flak jackets) again, so presumably they aren't worried about imminent threats. It is difficult to tell what the truth behind all this is. St K is less tense and more welcoming without the soldiers, yet it has never been anything other than peaceful. The bedouin did not think there was a great threat here before and would love to see more European visitors. At the moment there are quite a number of Israeli groups coming to trek in the mountains which is good but not enough work for everyone.

The cost of living continues to rise and, as always it is hitting the poorest people the hardest. Higher food and fuel prices coupled with lack of water is making life particularly difficult. Hardly anyone is growing vegetables this summer due to the lack of water so they are not even getting the benefit of home grown healthy food. Where there is water many people are growing Bedouin

tobacco (not the wacky-backy sort but a legal herbal type of tobacco). It is fetching a good price now and so it makes sense to grow it so they can have an income. The gardens with good wells are holding up fine but where the water levels are down or the well out of action due to floods, the trees look really parched. Crops will be meagre this year. We have however, been offered grapes at almost every visit as they do get some water, and they are delicious.

Well stories

The Big News is that we have just passed the milestone of 400 wells restored!

The summer trip is usually rather quiet as funding can be in short supply during the holiday time. However, extra funding appeared just when it was needed and so we were able to start 8 wells which is very gratifying. A great many people came to check where their names were on our list and we had more requests for new site visits than usual. The lack of rain and low water levels are making people desperate for our help. One of the new site visits was to a garden just outside St Katherine's and another in the mountains:



Ataway's garden is one of the first gardens you pass on the outskirts of St Katherine's. His request for a site visit had been made with a pleading look of despair. When we arrived, we could see that his trees were dying. His well had been flooded two years ago and he had managed to keep things going with a little water from his neighbour, but it wasn't enough. Many trees take years to become productive and bring in a small income. If he loses the trees this year it will be around 10 years or more to get back to this point. We decided Ataway's well should go on our list for the next trip at the end of September. Ataway has 9

people in his family and his mother, father and grown up brothers and sisters with their families, all of whom rely on proceeds from this garden.



On our last trip we went to see wells in Wadi Itlah, a beautiful valley in the mountains and home to the renowned herbal doctor, Dr Ahmed. On our way we were asked to make a site visit by a Bedouin lady called Salha but didn't have time. This time, she was in her garden with her children waiting for us again, under the shade of a large carob tree. Salha's husband is a tourist guide but there is little work for him. They have a few big trees with long roots that can find some water deep down but even the carob tree they were sitting under was looking dehydrated. They have 5 children to provide for and need the water for the trees

and to grow vegetables. We hope to have funds to start her well in the next 6 months.

Melez

The most satisfying day of the trip was the one out to the far desert to the wells of Melez and Rahaba. It is beautiful, though rugged desert here, stoney rather than sandy. Despite the fact that we rarely see any houses, there are hundreds of people living in small communities tucked away in small side wadis over a wide area. Wells here are few and far between, and many have been going dry for years. On this trip we went to visit 4 wells with work in progress. The last was a massive well around 34m deep by two other wells, all deep, and each receiving water from a different direction, in different dykes. We had already helped with the restoration of the first well and our visit was to No2 of 3. Owed, the well owner thinks that there are at least 200 families coming to these wells for water, a point proved when a number of people came to collect water in the late afternoon. The area was buzzing with activity as pickups converged from different directions laden with empty water containers. Owed and the well diggers hadn't finished No2 well yet but we hope to see it done by October, and then we can consider No3 well which is on our

waiting list and currently 43 m deep but with little water. Shallow pools for goats and camels to drink have been made which is why we saw quite a number of camels with babies roaming not far away. At another smaller well just completed, the Bedouin had found footprints of the illusive ibex which roam these deserts. They deliberately left part of the well accessible with a ramp so that ibex could continue to drink. The Bedouin way is to respect and revere most desert life.



Invisible man appears!



One of the big bug-bears of this work is trying to see the well owners to find out about the work they have done. Many of the places we go to don't have a phone signal and contacting people is difficult, often we have to rely on someone visiting the town to take a message back to a remote community. One man in particular has been playing 'least-in-sight' with us for about a year. We knew he hadn't completed the work on his well after 9 months but it was obvious that he had more water as his gardens (he has 3 small ones) were flourishing. We would arrive to find the soil damp from watering but no Owed. He was given an ultimatum on our last visit, by proxy, and this time we actually found him in his garden. When he took us to his well, we found that the work was completed after all, but it is galling to think of all the hours we have sat

around waiting for him to appear, or the many journeys made visiting his house, the mosque, other houses, as well as his garden to find him. It was very satisfying to close his contract!

Well Statistics for August 2018

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	209	14	34	200
Community Wells	198	18	50	177
Totals	407	32	84	377

We still have around 400 wells on our waiting list but we are slowly getting through the restorations.

The Herb Growing Project

This project was originally called the Orphan Herb Growing Project and was to support orphans. However, the children in need of support are not truly orphans but fatherless so the project should really be called the Herbal Education Project for Fatherless Children. It's far too much of a mouthful so we continue calling it the Orphan Herb Project. On this visit Selim told us about how

much he had been learning from the children and how being without a father caused even more difficulties than anyone realised.

At first Selim found it difficult to teach the students and they didn't learn very well, compared to children with two parents. Then he changed his way of teaching and their learning improved a lot. He said he had to give them a lot of space to be high-spirited but at the same time to support them strongly. They responded well to being out in the mountains as they could forget their troubles and there weren't memories about being with their father there.

Children from Bedouin tribes are thought to suffer more, if they lose their fathers than children in the West. In Bedouin society, the men provide all the material and visible security through work, money, food and a house. Bedouin women are said to be 'birds with a broken wing - they cannot fly'. They are very reliant on their husbands for material security, so when they become widows, they suffer like the children do and cannot 'step up' into a fatherly role. This is probably why male children of widows assume their fathers' roles even when very young rather than their mothers assuming both roles as often happens in the West. However the result of teenage boys taking this responsibility for their families can take an emotional toll, and they can find it difficult to cope when they are older. It is increasingly important to spread this knowledge of teaching and caring for fatherless children as there are an ever increasing number of men dying in their 40's leaving young families unsupported.



On our last visit, Selim intimated that the course had finished and all that had to be done was for the students to tend their herb gardens. In fact Slim has been continuing their education and doesn't seem to want to stop! The Trust is happy to support the continuation of this project, and we hope that Selim will take his skills to other needy children too.

Carpentry School Opening



Ahmed and his daughters make finishing touches to the Carpentry School



The prospective students visiting the school under construction

Ahmed he was in his new School/workshop when we arrived, making last minute additions to the building. He has more shelves to add to store the tools on and another big bench to bring in from outside but everything is now ready as Ahmed has collected all the tools purchased from Cairo in April. On Friday 10 August he will be welcoming the first 5 students, Mohamed Hamid Fatir aged 19, Hamid Mousa Mohamed aged 18, Mousa Mohamed Jebelley aged 17, Khaled Selem Jebelley aged 16, and Eid Mohamed who couldn't make the photo call.



Tools in the Makhad storeroom awaiting collection by Ahmed

Ahmed is a quiet man yet even he appeared to be excited about the prospect of the school actually opening. We are looking forward to seeing the school in action on our next visit in September. This project is still awaiting funds for the running costs, including money for wood, screws and nails, glue and other carpentry materials. We would love to hear from anyone who would like to support this project.

Beekeeping training continues with the collection of honey



The lack of rain has been having a dramatic effect on the bees. Although the bees feed on nectar from the trees in all the gardens in spring, they also rely on the wild herbs usually growing everywhere in summer and now there is little food for them. The bees are eating their own honey (which is what they would do naturally anyway, but not so much) and so there will be less honey this year. It is a challenging time for the ten beekeeper students. Selim, the teacher, has advised the beekeeper's to move their hives to where there are more flowers but some may not have the means to do so.

Some beekeepers have lost some of their swarms and so will have less honey. They can make up new swarms in the spring from the existing ones when new Queens are born. We will see how things are when we next visit which coincides with the end of the course. Selim has a long list of potential beekeepers for the next course, number 4, which we hope to start in the autumn.

Nuwamis Development Society

Our Egyptian sister NGO will soon be preparing to start more Literacy Classes in South Sinai with classes in St Katherine's and Nuweiba. The project aims to support adults, particularly Bedouin women, wanting to learn reading and writing and thereby to support their general education. We hope to have more news of this big project when we visit in September.

Bedouin Beaded Bags



We have a large stock of beautiful beaded bags made by Bedouin women in the St Katherine's area. The women make the bags to bring in a little income for their families and used to sell them to tourists. With so few tourists in South Sinai it is hard to sell their bags there and they need the income now more than ever. The bags make great ethical Christmas presents. The best way to buy them is to have a Bag Party at your home and invite friends to come and see the Collection. If you get in touch with us, we will arrange for the Collection to be sent to you, all priced up and with supporting literature. What you don't sell will be

collected and then ready for another Party.

Contact us about this or any other Makhad matters at enquires@makhad.org or call us on 01242 544546

All in a Day's Work

It's late afternoon and the sun is going down as shadows lengthen along the wadi. We are far out in the desert and Faraj's Jeep is being fixed, we hope. It broke down twice this morning. One of the wheels that holds the fan belt on came off. Mahmoud and Faraj's son Mohamed tried to fix it but didn't have the right materials and a disk cut from the bottom of an aluminium drinks can lasted about 2 minutes. It was a good try though. We were rescued by a passing Bedouin in his pick up who took us to our rendezvous. He had been on his way there anyway.

The morning had started with a visit to a newly completed well for the Namenna community, and we were en route to visit the well for Akill community, near Melez, about 6 miles further on plus some other nearby wells, when the jeep started misbehaving. Despite our remoteness and the summer heat Faraj and Mahmoud were not unduly concerned by our plight, knowing that help would arrive shortly, which it did. After our rescue we continued our work with our new, temporary chauffeurs, driving on to the well that had been our goal and found that it too had been completed, making it the third restored well for that community. All their wells had been wiped out by floods leaving 20 families without access to water nearby. Now they have good water and can start replanting their gardens which had died. Faraj had arranged a delicious lunch of BBQ chicken, Lebna fire bread and rice, cooked by some of our chauffeur/hosts who stayed behind. Afterwards, we walked to the site of another well just completed which serves nomadic people in the area, and ibex as mentioned above, and then on to our final well of the day, the well for Melez. After documenting the well and watching the mass refilling of water containers, we were given a lift back to the jeep.



Now on our return, all the Bedouin from the well have come to help fix Faraj's jeep. It remains to be seen if they will succeed but there are enough tool kits here to stock a garage. They don't go anywhere without lots of spares, tools and miscellaneous tat that might be useful, thankfully. If it doesn't work we will be given a lift back to St Katherine's.... but it did work.

Contact Us

If you are interested in buying/selling Bedouin beaded bags or future journeys or helping with funding, or any questions or feedback, we would be delighted to hear from you.

enquiries@makhad.org or phone on 01242 544546

The next project trip to Sinai will be at the end of September to mid October and a newsletter will be sent out after that. Past newsletters can be found on our website

<https://www.makhad.org/news-events/newsletters/>