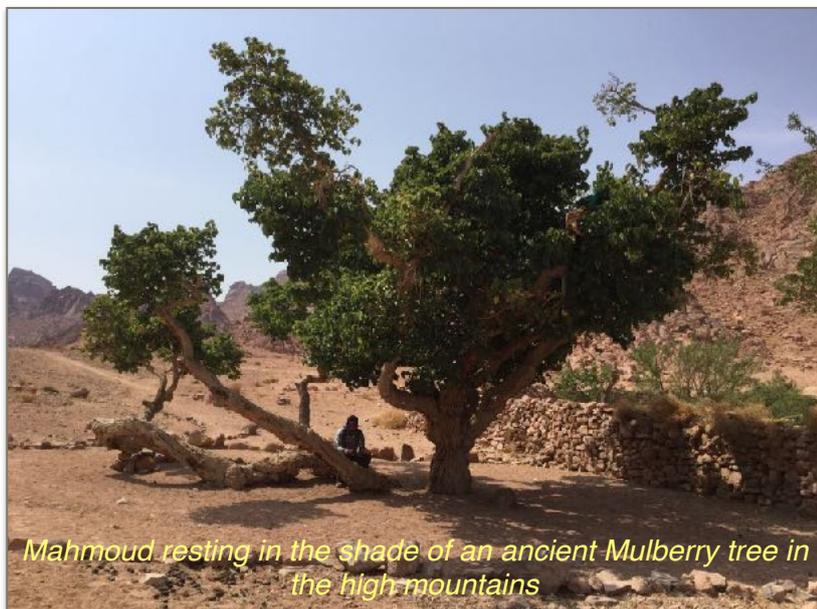


Sinai Journey Report October 2018

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



Mahmoud resting in the shade of an ancient Mulberry tree in the high mountains



*Helen Cranston
Project Manager*

***News from Sinai,
Wells Project,
Beekeeping Training
Project, Orphan Herb
Project, & The New
Carpentry School***

Sinai News

We arrived in St Katherine's in late September, to rather sultry weather, with thin cloud making it very hot. Everyone was hoping that the thickening clouds over the next few days would bring the much needed rain, but the weather gods teased us with a couple of light showers that did not even wet the ground. The desperately hoped for rain did not materialise for St Catherine's though some areas out in the desert did get good rain, but it won't affect the water table in the mountains. The prolonged lack of rain is beginning to be felt in all things. The trees looked parched, well levels are way down, there were hardly any vegetables grown anywhere and the bees have had a tough time with so few flowers for pollen. It is now over 2 years since the last significant rain fell and people are desperate. As I departed St Catherine's, Faraj Fox was off to a Bedouin council meeting and top of the agenda was water and how to conserve it.

On a positive note, Sinai has been deemed safe by the Israeli government and there were a lot of trekkers holidaying in the mountains. The work this creates for the Bedouin is very welcome and important for family finances. Maybe it is this upswing in tourist guests has helped fuel Faraj Fox's building mania! He has numerous builders in to update Fox Camp, where many of you have stayed. The terrace areesha has been pulled down and a brick room built instead, while the old simple bedrooms are having a facelift with new brick domed ceilings and maybe even en suite bathrooms! There were builders, tilers, and cement mixers everywhere and the tables we sit at were constantly moved around the work. There is more demolition to follow, with a new office and new terrace to come. The end result should be much more comfortable and luxurious.

As well as Israeli tourists, there are more people coming for the Sinai Trail too. This enterprise has taken off very well, partly due to awards the Trail has won and from excellent publicity by travel writers. It is now acknowledged to be on of the greatest long distance footpaths in the world. As you read this they are preparing for the first group to walk the second stage of the trail on a 42 day hike, from the desert on the east of St Katherine's, up to the north west corner of South Sinai. The trail is uniting all the Bedouin tribes in South Sinai as well as preserving bedouin traditions of desert living. The Trail is highly recommended! See www.sinaitrail.org

Another significant event this month is the opening of a medical centre in Wadi Gharba, about 10 miles from St Catherine's, where there is a large community and many of them cannot get to medical services. The new clinic is staffed by volunteer medics and dentists from an organisation called St Catherine Exists! from Cairo who will attend some weekends during the month. We hope this will help to support the health of the population here.

On this trip, Mahmoud and I were accompanied by Chair of Trustees Michael Ratcliffe, and our colleagues from the Nuwamis Development Society, Sherif and Candace. We all worked together to further the projects.

The Opening of the New Carpentry School!

We were all very pleased indeed, to see the new Carpentry School in action with its first students! They have been in training at the school for the last 4 weeks, attending for 2 days a week. Ahmed, the teacher seemed very happy with his students and showed us work they had completed so far, including a bench and a table. They were learning about tenon joints when we arrived. The four students are Eid, Mousa, Faraj and Kharlid. All the boys left school early as they could not see any point to furthering their education, but they can all read and write. They currently scratch a living selling stones to tourists at St Catharine's monastery but it really isn't much of a job and certainly not a career. The training they are getting from Ahmed will enable them to provide for their families in the future. Carpentry skills are much sought after in Sinai. Thank you very much to all the people who donated money to help build and equip the school. We are applying for funds to help with running costs, such as buying wood, but we welcome any donations to help with this project.



Wells



Solar Pumps Back In Action

In August, we went to visit some wells under restoration at El Ramthy which is about 7 miles from St Catharine's. The story of these wells has been told in past newsletters because they are a bit unusual. There are around 20 wells in an area of wadi about half a mile long and about 200m wide. Each well is accessing water from a different dyke so not in competition for water, and before huge floods in 2015, they were providing water for a large community of around 150 families spread out in the surrounding desert. Nearly all the wells were damaged by the floods but we have gradually been restoring them and seven are finished. Many of these wells have solar panels as a result

of an EU funded project about 10 years ago but most of the pumps had stopped working shortly

after installation. We had been wondering how we could get these solar installations up and working again but found it difficult to get information about appropriate pumps.

The Bedouin are very resourceful and with fuel prices for their generators continuing to rise, they decided to sort the problem out themselves. They hired an engineer from Suez to come and check the panel and install a solar powered pump so they can pump water with the sun's energy for free. The first installation was a success and so they have installed pumps at two other newly restored wells. There are also EU solar panels with broken pumps in Wadi Gharba, and one well owner has followed their advice to install a solar pump too. It is wonderful to see the solar installations working again, instead of standing useless.

In the last report, the huge, deep wells in the desert at Melez were featured. Around 200 families come to collect water from this central point where there are three wells. One well is restored, one is under restoration and one is awaiting our help. The wells are within 10 m of each other but accessing different water sources as there are dykes separating them. At present they have a very old and large diesel generator pump but it is messy and someone has to come to this remote place to maintain and refuel it. With fuel prices rocketing the best solution would be a solar panel and three pumps. Hamid, who has assumed responsibility for the work on all the wells in this area, has asked about possible funding for an installation. This will need some careful consideration and technical information before we can go ahead but we are hopeful it will happen.



Cooperation

Most of our visits are to individual, isolated wells where it is clear who is the owner. However our ongoing support for wells in the desert has shown just how important cooperation is. Each well in a cluster or area may be owned by a different individual, but the work is usually overseen by the same man and he gives us the report on progress. In addition, the community oversees its water resources in a collective capacity, telling us which of their wells would be most useful to restore next. When Faraj's jeep broke down, he said that in the desert everyone helps each other because they have to do so or they could not survive. Co-operation is in everyones interests, including that of the Trust. One benefit is that contracts with these desert communities are easier to administer.

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	211	10	39	209
Community Wells	207	10	56	186
Totals	418	20	95	395

Well Digging



While visiting wells, a well digger came to see us and asked if it might be possible to fund a large caliber drill. Due to the declining water table, digging the wells has become more difficult as they now have to dig through several meters of hard granite, underneath the compacted sand. They normally use hand tools to chisel out the granite if there is only half a meter but now, with greater depth required, they need mechanical help. The other thing they really need is safety equipment. Some of the wells are 40 m deep and they use a home made sling to winch them out. They

often work without shoes and never wear helmets. There is a need to change the culture as well as providing appropriate equipment. Farhan is modelling his homemade harness and showed us the drill he would like.



Beekeeping

October is the time of harvest, the ending of one beekeeping course, and the beginning of a new one. Last October, 10 new trainees started the training to and now their course is completed. It has been a very difficult year for the bees due to the lack of rain for such a long period, particularly as it affects appearance of wild plants. In the spring the bees can collect pollen from all the orchard



tree blossom, but in summer there were very few wild herbs growing in the wadis and mountains so little pollen for the bees to feed on and make honey. It was particularly difficult for beekeepers in the mountain wadis but the beekeepers in the town were less affected as people grow flowering creepers over their terraces which provides the bees with some food. The trainees also had to learn about the usual problems of attacks from bee-eater birds, lizards, ants and hornets. A couple of trainees with mountain gardens lost most of their swarms, especially if they were not able to visit them on a daily basis. The trainees who lived close to their hives had more success due to constant vigilance. Obviously, this was not a good year for honey production. Salem, their teacher, was not unduly concerned about the problems as he expects each beekeeper to expand their swarms in the spring when the new queens are born, and they have had good experience at looking after bees.



Next month, a new course will be starting with 6 more trainees. Salem said he already had 40 people on his waiting list and there were some Bedouin women asking also, so the training is still very popular. We will look forward to meeting the new trainees in November.

Orphan Herb Project - Herb Growing for Fatherless Children



All is going well for the children as they tend to their new herb gardens. They reached the last stage of the project in September when they learned how to harvest, dry and pack the herbs for sale. These packs for Oregano are ready for sale now and smell delicious. Selim, their teacher will continue to supervise the children

through the next year and we hope that by next summer they will have lots of different herbs to sell to bring in an income for their families.

One of the children, called Esmare, has a garden where she and 3 other children are growing herbs but the well for it had very little water, so we put it on our waiting list. We were very pleased to be able to start the restoration of her well during this trip. Esmare's brother will be overseeing the work for her. We hope that this will give good water to the garden and that they will be able to grow many more herbs in future.



Seed Bank Project

Mahmoud Hassan has been looking after our seed bank for a year now. He has grown lots of the imported seeds to maturity and then collected the seeds which he sells for a minimal fee. So far all the UK vegetable seeds have grown well except for white beans and a variety of cucumber. It was a risk to bring the seeds from UK and we did not know if they would

be suitable but so far most of them are fine. As mentioned in the introduction, most people did not grow vegetables this year because of such low water supplies. If they get good rain over the winter, then people should be able to grow more next spring. We hope to bring more vegetable seeds from UK next year. Overall this should increase the productivity and quality of the vegetables grown, both the imported ones as well as local ones.

The Nawamis Development Society Plans

The Nawamis Development Society was set up to look after the more local projects and has assumed responsibility for the Library and the Literacy Project. Earlier this year they received a large grant from the Australian Embassy to roll out the literacy project that had started with a prototype course over last winter. Everything is in place now to run lots of literacy courses for the Bedouin men and especially for the women of St Katherine's and wider afield.

The library continues to provide a service and the City Council has made arrangements for a separate door to give direct access to the library from outside the building, encouraging more women to attend.

NDS is fortunate to have the assistance of Candace, a young lady from the US who has settled in Cairo and has lots of great ideas for projects. One project is to set up a self-help network amongst the women, where they support each other with their own projects. Preliminary conversations have shown that the women want to set up projects to learn more about nutrition, child and maternal health, cooking, craft work including sewing projects and many others. While the Bedouin women lead on these projects we hope to be able to support them with the assistance they need. More news on this next time! Apologies for the lack of photo of the Bedouin ladies, they do not like their photograph to be seen by the general public.



Harvest Time

This massive date palm is in Wadi Itlah, a fertile valley just below St Catherine's. It is in a garden belonging to Faraj Fox and is weighed down by the dates. When we visited most of them were not quite ripe but a few early ones were. They were deliciously succulent and Faraj's family will have plenty of dates to see them through the winter.

Other fruits we got to sample were lemons, pomegranates, and grapes. Anything grown in this climate has a wonderful intense flavour.

One of the perks of these trips, is a visit to Dr Ahmed in his house in Wadi Itlah. He never fails to provide us with a delicious lunch when we drop in on him unannounced and there is usually fruit or dates or olives from his garden.



Join us in Spring 2019 on the Next Makhad Journey



Rachel Devas and Dick Stainer, two of our trustees will be heading up a group to build a dam in Wadi Itlah next spring. Wadi Itlah is a beautiful, verdant valley only a two hours walk from the town of St Catherines, with many date palms such as the one above. The gardens here need the support of a dam to hold back rain water making more water available to the gardens below it. This working journey aims to complete a small dam, with help from our UK friends in conjunction with experienced Bedouin builders, in just under one week. The group will stay in one of the beautiful gardens, sleeping under the

stars , and there will be a Bedouin team to do all the catering and baggage handling. Once the dam is complete the group will walk back to St Catherine's and visit the monastery before heading back for home.

The journey is scheduled for 30 March to 8 April 2019. Dates, costs and flight details to be confirmed.

If you would like to know more about the journey, please get in touch by emailing enquiries@makhad.org or call 0117 942 1120.

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 November and a newsletter will be sent out after that. Past newsletters can be found on our website

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