

Sinai Journey Report November 2018

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



Faraj greets his camel in the desert



***News from Sinai,
Wells Project,
Beekeeping Training
Project, Carpentry
School and Orphan
Herb Project,***

News



For the third time in a row, I arrived at Sharm El Sheikh airport to see it festooned with banners welcoming participants to the latest international conference. This time is a UN sponsored conference on Biodiversity - COP14. Last time there were banners announcing a welcome to the Pan African Youth conference.

In order to boost the Sharm El Sheikh economy and make use of the numerous massive hotels, the Egyptian government is becoming a major player on the international conference circuit. Apparently it is part of an initiative supported by President Cisi,

and he likes to attend parts of the conferences too, particularly the youth ones, as he sees the importance of young people in shaping the world. Now that most European countries have direct flights to Sharm hosting international conferences makes a great deal of sense, and there are lots of international flights from there now. However, UK delegates still have to travel via Cairo or Istanbul to get here.

For much of the first weekend of the trip, storm clouds loomed over South Sinai. There was rain in many places but not much and other places are still waiting. There has been a series of wet weather fronts over the last 6 weeks and even St Catherine's has had a little rain, but there has not been enough yet to fill the water table for wells or the dams. Well levels are still very low, and even a little rain won't help the wild mountainside plants that the bees rely on. We are hoping that this is just the beginning of a wet winter with either huge rains or a



continuation of frequent showers. It is at least more promising than last winter. Ironically, one of the places that has seen the most rain is the desert area around Nuwamis. This is not an area with many gardens, or people, but next summer the grazing should be good for goats and camels and nomadic Bedouin will be here in large numbers. When the clouds thickened the temperature dropped like a stone and it has been very cold, even with frost one morning!

More tourists are coming to Sinai and so Fox Camp was very busy during my first week. There were quite a number of parties going up Mt Sinai as well as some going to the mountains. This bodes well for all the Bedouin who depend on tourists for income.

Well stories

Ahmed's well in Wadi Tinya



Some of our well contracts require quite an effort to see them. Ahmed's well high up in Wadi Tinya is a two and a half hour swift walk from the town, up a very steep canyon and along tricky paths. Camels cannot get to the gardens this way but have to go a much longer route via Abu Giffa, the main route into the mountains.

Ahmed is part of a small but growing community of people who live up in the mountains for all but the coldest times of year. They tend their gardens and live in much the same way as their ancestors did.

Ahmed's garden well had dried up and when he tried to dig it out he found huge boulders. He tried another spot two meters away, with the same result. Then he remembered his grandfather's old flooded well which is 400m up the valley and started work on it. He dug down 10m, to get to the water and then enlarged the space at the bottom of the well and lined the sides with cement. He completed work with a strong cover to protect it against floods. He now has an astonishing 6 cubes of water every 2 days. The water flows by gravity to his garden below. This is more than enough for his garden and so it will also provide drinking water directly by pipe to the cluster of

houses. This will make life easier for the women who traditionally are the ones to fetch water from the valley below, and easy access may encourage more families to return to their gardens. At least half the gardens in Tinya look abandoned so it would be good to have them lived in again.

Camels at Melez wells

The wells at Melez in the far desert are getting to be quite a feature in these reports. Mahmoud, Faraj and I always look forward to a day out in this area and this time our arrival coincided with camels approaching the 3 adjacent wells, and a huge flock of goats with their Bedouin herder just leaving. All of the camels but one were making a bee-line for the low water pools to drink but one camel headed straight towards Faraj's jeep, moaning and calling. She had recognised the jeep and wanted to be made a huge fuss of because she is one of Faraj's camels. See the photo on the front page. Readers of previous newsletters may remember that in 2016, a young camel called Asfar was found in the desert and when they discovered it belonged to Faraj, they brought it to Fox Camp. Despite huge amounts of care lavished on the young camel, he refused to stand up and a camel that won't stand soon loses the will to live. After every known cure and technique had been tried, Faraj asked for Asfar's mother to be brought from the desert where she was grazing.



As soon as Asfar saw her, he stood up and made a full recovery. The camel that came to say hello to Faraj is the mother of Asfar and is clearly very attached to him. These pools are a very important watering place in this vast desert plain.

Hussein's well in Gharba



While most wells are relatively straightforward, it is actually the difficult ones that are the most interesting and rewarding. We started Hussein's well in Wadi Gharba in April this year. Each time we visited we found them digging deeper and deeper into a very large hole. Hussein kept saying he knew there would be water there, but no-one expected that it would be so deep down. We would walk away from the well with heavy hearts and Faraj did not think they would ever find water there. However Hussein's persistence did not falter even if his money did and this time we found that they had reached the water after 16 m of digging and plenty of it. This was a triumph of determination against the odds. As the well was proving to be so expensive to dig, every man in the community came to contribute an hour in rotation to assist the well diggers with hauling out the spoil, so they could dig for longer. All that is left to do is to line the well with bricks to stabilise it and we hope to find it complete on our next visit. Hussein is a determined man and is sure to succeed.

After a wonderful flurry of sponsorship in the summer, when we started 11 new wells in the Autumn, things have gone rather quiet on the funding front, for a what we hope will be a short, temporary period. The number of completed wells now stands at 426. However the number of people waiting continues to rise.

Well Stats

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	215	10	36	253
Community Wells	211	11	53	239
Totals	426	21	89	492

Beekeeping - New Course Underway



December sees the start of Beekeeping Training course no 4. Since this project began the Makhad Trust has trained up and equipped 21 new beekeepers. Many of these men have been passing their newly acquired skills on to their wives, brothers, children and neighbours as it is very useful to have more than one minder for each set of hives in case the beekeeper has to go away. Now another 6 men are starting their training and we hope they will have a good year and wish them success. All the previous trainees have said how good their teacher Selim is, both with training and giving support when they have needed it.

This project is fully funded thanks to the generosity of the Eva Crane Trust and to Didymus CIO.

Carpentry School - In Full Flow!

The apprentices have their training on two days a week and when we arrived we found Khalid, Faraj, Eid, Mousa and Mohamed very busy. Ahmed, their teacher, has given the apprentices various projects to work on including building a wardrobe, a TV stand and cupboard, a shopkeepers display stand, doors and door frames, and a sofa bench.

We have made a number of applications for funding to a number of trusts and are still waiting for sponsorship. This project is giving hope to the young men of St Catherine's who have little to inspire them in the way of work or a career. Selling rocks to tourists at St Catherine's monastery is a soul-destroying job and we would like to be able to provide more craftsmen apprenticeships in future. The carpentry project needs funds to cover the running costs, especially to buy wood which is relatively expensive in Egypt, and fees for Ahmed to run it. If you would like to become a supporter of this project, either with a one-off donation or a small monthly donation we would be extremely grateful - please get in touch.



Nuwamis Society for Development

We all hoped to be able to give some news on the progress of the literacy project but a few bureaucratic hitches (standard practice for Egypt) have led to a some delays getting started. We hope to have more to report in the next newsletter in the spring. Meanwhile the library continues to provide a learning space for many of St Catherine's children.

Short excursion to Mattamir

Those of you who have visited Mattamir out in the desert while on a journey, will understand the longing to return there again. My descriptions of the place encouraged Sinai Trail organiser Cristina, to accompany me on a day trip to explore the area. The Sinai Trail passes by but they don't stop to visit. I thought it would be a good idea for Cristina to see the wonders of the hidden canyons - rooms as we used to say, the soft white sand, and the spectacular views. Faraj Fox organised a local guide but the young man had never walked the routes that Danny used to take us on in the old days, and so I had to lead the way. At the campsite we found the 'bedrooms', kitchen and toilet all still in working order, just filled with drifted sand. It doesn't look as if anyone has stayed there for years. Cristina was excited and very happy to be introduced to such a wonderful place, so much so that we have decided to have an overnight trip there during my next visit. The photograph shows Cristina on top of Gebel Mattamir for the first time.

Meanwhile the Sinai Trail is growing from strength to strength with more publicity and backing from the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism. Check it out at <http://sinaitrail.org>



Winter Social

The Makhad Trust annual social meeting is scheduled for Sunday 20th of January at The Bear of Rodborough, Minchinhampton. The Bear is a large hotel right on the common near Stroud and offers a fabulous Sunday Roast. If you would like to join us, contact Helen for a place at the table. We will meet around 12 noon,

have lunch together and then a walk on the common, January weather permitting. This is an opportunity for supporters, journey participants - past and present, and staff of Makhad Trust to meet and share news of the Trust. Please join us.

2019 Journeys - Rachel's Journey

Rachel Devas writes:

"For the last ten years I have gathered together a small group to travel to St Catherine's in South Sinai where we walk into the mountains surrounding the sixth century monastery and work with the Bedouin to build a small dam across a 'wadi' to retain water from the flash floods, helping to replenish the wells in the orchard gardens lower down. We are hosted by the Bedouin from the Jebeliyah tribe in one of the gardens near the dam site.



No great strength is required for building the dam, and the journey is much more than three days of moving rocks and filling rubber buckets with small stones. It is also the pleasure of walking in the high mountains along centuries old tracks with the smell of the mountain herbs in the invigorating air, living with our Bedouin hosts, sleeping under the stars in their garden, and waking each morning to a delicious breakfast with the smell of newly made bread on the open fire.

We have now finalised the details for the journey in March 2019 and I am attaching a flyer which gives an outline of the itinerary, flight dates etc. We fly from Heathrow with a one hour transfer stop in Cairo with an automatic luggage transfer (which means that we remain airside) and then continue to Sharm El Sheikh where we will stay in a Bedouin hotel at Shark's Bay called 'Umbi Diving'. The next day we can relax on the beach or snorkel and lunch is at the seafood restaurant before we head up into the mountains.

At the end of the journey some of us will be staying on an extra day at Umbi Diving, to relax in the sunshine and swim, snorkel or dive. The hotel is right on the beach and one can snorkel from a jetty where the sea drops down sharply and there are lots of beautiful fish. You can also dive from this point and see tuna and other big fish who live lower down the shelf. (<http://sharksbay.com/sharm-holiday-hotel-accommodation/>)

I do hope you would like to join us on this dam journey in March, and do contact me if you would like to have some further information."

Date: 30 March to 7 April

Cost: £525 plus flights

Contact: Racheldevas@me.com

Contact the Makhad Trust

If you would like more information about any of our projects or about the Trust in general, we would love to hear from you.

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