

Sinai Journey Report June 2019

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



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

The News - it's the beginning of the fruit harvest

This is one of the most important times for garden owners, as the fruit season is just beginning. However, before I arrived I saw dramatic messages via Facebook and from Mahmoud, saying that the apricot harvest had been devastated by a plague of a sort of fruit fly. Photographs showed flies swarming all over ripe apricots. The apricot harvest is one of the most important fruit crop harvests they have here in Sinai. Dried apricots fetch a good price and help bring in a significant income to the Bedouin garden owners - and they are a great favourite with everyone. The problem has indeed, been just as awful as publicised. Mahmoud said how the insects came in great clouds, covering the trees and getting everywhere. This was followed shortly by a plague of beetles, in such numbers that one could not avoid walking on them in the street. In places there were so many that they formed a black carpet. Fortunately both events were short-lived though their effects carry on with damaged fruit. However, we found that when we went up to the mountain gardens where their seasons are around 2 weeks later than lower in the town, their apricots were only just ripening and so they had missed the plagues. Selem in Wadi Jebel had a heavily laden tree that was dripping apricots and he insisted we take a large carrier-bag full away with us. Another garden owner insisted we have plums from his garden which were perfect and deliciously succulent. Most of the rest ripens in July and looks as if it will make a bountiful harvest this year, barring more insect plagues. The winter rains have given everything a spurt of growth and water levels in wells in the mountains and the town are looking good despite the summer heat. The mountainsides are covered in lush green herbs and everywhere is looking green - relatively speaking.



Sharm's latest conference - The African Anti-Corruption Forum - starts in a couple of weeks. It's by-lines are 'Zero Corruption, 100% Development' and 'Development with Integrity'. It's good to know there is a recognition of the problems of corruption in development and a willingness to tackle this huge challenge. At the Makhad Trust we have been leading the way for years, avoiding corruption by paying recipients directly and by having a permanent, on-the-ground, presence.



Well Stories

The rain during the late winter has made a huge difference to all the gardens and both garden and community wells in the St Katherine area. Gardens were looking green and there were herbs growing everywhere. Farsh Rumana, where two of our recent dam build trips have taken place, was looking particularly green. They missed out on previous rains. However it was a different story in the areas further out of the mountains. Wadi Gharba and Tarfa had no rain and the gardens there are desperate, and the wells are very low. We hope they will get good rain soon.

El Ramthy Wells



We have continued supporting communities living out in the desert, some many hours drive away from the towns. Previous newsletters have had news of wells in El Ramthy and with Far Desert wells in Melez. Bedouin have been coming to stay with their goats in areas all around these remote areas for the summer grazing. So many of the wells in these areas have gone dry, and these poor communities would find it difficult to fund the restorations themselves. Without help from the Trust, they would have to give up their traditional lifestyle but would struggle to find any alternative income to grazing goats. They would also be loath to give up their camels, which roam freely in this area, and they

need water too.

When we visited the well for Wadi Knussib, Faraj explained that though the community was small, with only 9 families they have over 100 goats and each goat needs to drink 3 litres of water a day. So in addition to human needs another 3000 litres a day needs to be found. The quantity of water they have access to determines the number of goats that can support a community which then determines their potential income.

Fatma's Well in El Kabasha



Not all wells go smoothly according to plan. We have been visiting Fatma's well for about a year, watching their very slow progress. This community well is in a small, wide wadi off the Tarfa road but feels miles from anywhere. It was filled in by floods years ago but the people really need the water for it. Fatma's family has even less resources than most. They have been doing a lot of the work themselves because it is a difficult well and our standard payments are not enough to cover all the work. However, whenever there has been a chance of work with tourists, the men have had to go and do that leaving the well for weeks or months before they could resume work. Also there are two well shafts here. They tried to dig the flooded one but found huge boulders in it that they couldn't shift, so they moved to an old dry well close by. They have dug out several metres of tough granite and reached

wet rock but they still need to dig out another one and a half metres to have sufficient water. We really hope they will have finished by the end of September as the community needs this water.

Hussein's Well - Omdecease

We had hoped that Hussein's well in Omdecease would be finished on this visit. They had done a good job on excavating this community well for families in Wadi Esbaia and just needed to dig out the last metre of rock to get good water. They had not been able to do this because they found that the granite at this lower level was really tough so they needed more expert help and the services of Farhan from Wadi Gharba. Farhan is something of a phenomena. He is a man who exudes energy, is very strong but also very experienced so he is called in to help with the most difficult wells. The problem for Omdecease is that Farhan already has 4 wells on his list, most of them wells the Trust is funding. Ramadan during May and into June, meant that little work could be done as it wouldn't be sensible to be working without food or water in such a dangerous job when you need your wits about you. Consequently there is a bit of a backlog of work for him. We hope that Farhan will manage to get all the wells finished soon.



Atarwey's garden



We first met Atarwey last August, when he flagged down the jeep as we were passing not far from his garden. He had been waiting by the side of the road for us nearly all day, as he was desperate for help with his garden. His well had been filled in by floods and all the trees in his garden were dying. The situation with his trees was so dire that we decided to fast track him up the waiting list. There are 9 people in Atarwey's family and they need this garden for an income. They have olive, almond and apricot trees which

should all have a good crop this year. It would have taken twenty or more years for new replacement trees to grow to this size so we are glad we could help to save them. The second photo of the garden was taken last week and shows the difference that the water has made. He has enough water that he has been able to run a hosepipe from the well along the valley to a few houses so they have fresh water available right by their homes.



Well Statistics

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	226	8	29	176 + 38 = 205
Community Wells	219	18	49	144 + 41 = 187
Totals	445	26	78	392

Total Number of Wells Completed to date = 445

Beekeeping



The course continues with all the new bees settled with the students in their gardens. We visited some of them and found that all was going well. They had had a few problems with ants and bee eater birds as usual but no damage was done and precautions were taken. The insect plague that affected the apricots also affected the bees. The

flies and beetles scared the bees into staying in their hives so they stopped foraging for honey and ate their own honey supplies for a week or so. It was a short setback and the honey harvest is expected to be a good one this year. The new beekeepers are based in mountain gardens and around the town. It will be good to see how they have fared when we visit at the end of September and hopefully get to taste some honey.



Carpentry School

The students have completed their theory phase of working with hand tools and are now in the practical phase working with Ahmed when he is on jobs. The students will finish basic training in a couple of weeks and the plan is to present each student with a set of hand tools so that they can start working on their own. Thanks to a generous donation from one of our supporters the costs of these tools are covered. In October Ahmed plans to start the Advanced course, training the students in the use of machine tools. We will be making applications for funding for this but any private donations towards the purchase of machine tools for the school would be very welcome.

Herb Growing Project

The first class of students are doing well, tending their herb gardens and will produce herbs for sale later. The oregano they produced last year had an amazing flavour and the quality was wonderful too. They should be producing more this summer. Now Slim is proposing to start another course with children from around St Katherine's town in mid July. The details have yet to be worked out but we hope to see it in progress in September. The children he has selected have all lost a parent and so come from struggling families. His challenge this time will be having to start at a more basic level getting the children to engage with the natural world first as most of them will not have spent much time outside the town.

The Seed Bank

We had a large donation of seeds by a supporter of the Trust in March and Mahmoud Hassan, our seed man said he was very happy with the quality of them. He is growing many different types of seed for seed stock to build up the Bank and feels confident that he has enough seeds now to last until next year. His polytunnel of tomato plants was most impressive. People have been coming from all over the town of St Katherine's to collect seeds for a nominal sum, ready to plant in the gardens. However, due to the lack of rain for three years in Wadi Gharba



and Tarfa, he has had few customers from these areas. All their water is needed for drinking and nothing extra for growing. He did have a request for seeds from the monks at the monastery too, but told them that the seeds were for the Bedouin. He also thought that they should be able to obtain seeds themselves through their contacts in Greece.

Watermelons



In the recent very hot weather, watermelon has great appeal and is the perfect food - cooling and hydrating. It was one of the provisions we bought for our long trip to the far desert. All day long, Mahmoud and I were thinking how delicious the watermelon was going to be but Faraj, who was in charge of organising the food, had forgotten the watermelon until late afternoon. We were on our way back to St Katherine's when we reminded him. He stopped the jeep but then we

realised we didn't have a knife but there was another jeep following us so we appealed to them. For the loan of a knife they were more than willing to help us demolish the huge watermelon!



Contact the Makhad Trust



Our next project trip to Sinai will be in September. Next year we will be offering places on our dam building trip as usual once a date has been decided. 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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