

Sinai Journey Report March 2019

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



Rabat Nada dam, one of our biggest dams, full of water after February rain.



*Helen Cranston
Project Manager*

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

The News

Water is always the top topic of news amongst Bedouin communities as it is the most difficult of resources to manage in this desert environment. Fortunately there were good rains in February on the high mountain area, which filled all our dams and raised the water levels in all the wells around St Katherine's. The gardens downhill of the dams are already feeling the benefit with high water levels. As well as plenty of drinking water there will be enough water for trees and to grow vegetables this year. However, not everywhere was so blessed. Very little rain has fallen on Wadi Gharba, Sheikh Awad and Tarfa to the north west of the town and they will be struggling again this summer unless there is rain for them too. We had quite a number of requests for help from this area.

The deserts to the east have had some rain and there is good grazing this year. Already there were many tents forming small communities out in the desert, all with their goats. At the moment, most of these semi nomads are the older people and older teenagers, while the young families wait until the end of school in May to come and join them for the summer. Completed restorations of dry and flooded desert wells by the Makhad Trust are enabling many people to return to their traditional desert dwelling ways, at least for the spring and summer.

There are more tourists about these days but often they are Israelis and only for their holiday periods. However, it was good to see some Americans, Germans, Austrians, and a few British people venturing to St Katherine's. It will take a long time before business is back to its pre-2011 days but there is hope that things will continue to improve.



Well Stories

During this trip we started 10 new well restorations thanks to our sponsors and found 11 wells completed. Some excellent work had been done and now many more people have drinking water and water for their gardens.

A year ago, the students from the Herb Growing project were planting up the herbs they had grown from seed in gardens they made near where they lived. Twelve year old Esmeer had inherited a garden from her father when he died but it had been abandoned many years ago and there was little water in the well. She was sharing the garden with 4 other children on the course. We put Esmeer's name on the waiting list and were able to start her well last autumn. When we went to visit this time, many of the children from the village came to see and we found the well had been completed. It is set back into the mountainside and there were large loose boulders above it that made working on it difficult. Esmeer's older brother had organised the well diggers to dig out the back of the well, to make a good wall to protect it and then to dig down. Finally, they made a strong wall around the well. Now there is good water. The children told us they helped the diggers by carrying stones to them for the building work. They were so proud of the excellent job they had done. This was a complex project and well executed. Now there is plenty of water for growing herbs and for the family to grow vegetables too.



Selma's well is in Abu Sila, the next town to St Katherine's. Her well is an old one, jammed in beside several houses. The wall around the well was not very substantial and two children had fallen in the well, on separate occasions during the last 2 years, though they were rescued promptly and little worse for it. Still the community were worried about safety. They didn't want to build a good wall around it until the well had been dug out because the tight space would make it too difficult. Now they have dug out 3.5m of tough granite and now have 2 cubes of water a day for around 15 families. They built a good wall around the well and just have to put up the wire mesh fencing to protect children from falling in.



Those of you who have been on our dam building journeys may remember Sayeed. He doesn't say a lot, and works diligently as a dam builder, but there is always a smile lurking in his eyes and he makes others laugh. He has a garden in St Katherine's right next to the police accommodation, and it had gone dry. Sayeed has had a big problem with rubbish thrown out of the windows of the police rooms straight into his garden and has spent many hours cleaning it up. When we went to see his completed well we found a clean garden, thriving trees, some winter vegetables and a very

good well. Sayeed has hurt his back so is not able to work as a builder any more and gardening will be much more suitable work for him to provide for his family. We look forward to seeing his garden bloom in future.



The community of Egreyradt has featured in past journey reports as restoration of their wells has revived this remote community and made a huge difference to them. Although they now have four working wells another one was needed, part for families coming for grazing in the summer. We initiated the contract for this well in November and found that they had got to the water but it was a complex well. The well is high up above the village on a hillside about a mile away. They dug out the well by 5m and found plenty of water. They call a well like this one ‘a promising well’ The water was seeping into it from all directions and they say it will never go dry. However, work was difficult because, like Esmeer’s well, there were large boulders above it making work difficult and dangerous. One huge boulder fell in so they got old wood from the mountain, made a big fire under the rock and heated it. Then when they poured cold water on it, to make it crack, they were able to get the pieces out. Although they have water now, the well needs to be widened and made safe from the other boulders. To complete this work, the well will need 3 times the amount of money as most other wells, so they will probably do the work slowly as and when there is money in the community to pay for the work.



Well Statistics

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	222	6	35	177 + 38 = 205
Community Wells	216	11	51	146 + 41 = 187
Totals	438	17	86	392

Beekeeping

The latest class of six trainees are approaching the end of their theory phase and are about to get their bees. On the day we met them, they were given their protective jackets with hoods, and their smoke machines. Next week, Salem, their teacher, will be going to Cairo to collect the bees he has bought and the hives. Last year there was a bit of a hiccup bringing them through the Suez tunnel. Many goods are prohibited from being brought into Sinai and though bees are allowed the queues at the tunnel for all goods vehicles to be checked can lead to many hours long waiting. Salem had to drive off to a place where he could protect the bee boxes from the heat and sun and give them water. He rejoined the queue a day later and got through with less of a wait. We hope that he won't have the same problem this year. Mahmoud will be on hand to photograph the arrival of the bees and hives. The Beekeeping trainees always seem a happy bunch!



Carpentry School



Ahmed's 5 students have been continuing their training and have now been learning for 6 months. In June they will be ready to leave the school and start working on their own in the town. Ahmed will still help them when they need it but the next phase of their training needs to be on the job. When we visited they were making a large casement for a shop sign. The sign has been printed on a heavy duty plastic roll and is the same length as the shop is wide. The shop owner had bought the wood and the students had made the casement to order. On my last evening I walked past the supermarket and saw the sign had been installed and it looked very smart.



Several of the students said they were looking forward to making doors and windows for new houses, while one of the others said he likes to repair things, and another wants to build furniture. When they have completed their course in June there will be a small party and we plan to give them each a set of basic carpentry tools. In August, Ahmed hopes to start with a new class of pupils.

Orphan Herb Growing Project

This project is slow to show results as many plant growing projects are. We saw Esmeer's herbs in her garden when we went to see her well, and they hadn't got any bigger than when we saw them last autumn. However, the strong spring and summer sun should ensure good growth and we hope they will be able to harvest plenty of leaves by the end of the summer. Some of the children on the project had been asked to help plant some borage seeds as part of an experiment to provide bees with late season flowers. The borage has grown well and once it has gone to seed, it can be harvested to give to beekeepers to plant in their gardens. We hope that Selim, the teacher, will be able to start a new class of children in the summer.



Nuwamis Society for Development

Candace and Sherif have been busy with a new project, part of an initiative by MitOst, a German NGO. This small scale project facilitates people within poor communities to start their own initiatives and hopefully, to realise their dreams. Candace has been working with the Bedouin women of St Katherines for around 6 months and during that time, four main projects have got to fruition. One project involves forming a business to make curtains, something not available to buy in the mountain area. Another project is to set up a mobile beauty parlour to visit communities outside the town. As well as help with make up and hair, they hope to be able to circulate various helpful information and could grow the project to include health and cooking information on an informal basis. All the projects show great promise and are allowing the women to do things for themselves independently. We hope to have more information by the next visit.

Solar Installations Investigations



A volunteer called Peter, came to help with technical expertise to assess all the redundant panels installed by the EU on a charitable project around 10 years ago. There are around 30 installations with wells in El Ramthy, near the Blue Mountains, and in Sheikh Awad. All the EU pumps stopped working after a relatively short time and the Bedouin had to revert to their petrol generators to pump water out of wells. In previous reports, we told how some enterprising well owners had paid for the services of an engineer from Suez to assess their panels and wells and then fitted a new solar powered pump. Peter found that all the panels tested were in good working order with more than enough capacity to run a pump. In fact

there is sufficient power in one set of panels to pump water from 2 or 3 wells on a rotation basis. With fuel prices rocketing, getting water out of wells can be a very expensive business. We hope to be able to help well owners with some funds to buy new solar powered pumps in future. We are grateful to Peter for his assistance with this project.

The photo shows Peter, and Mahmoud testing solar panels with Mohssen, a well owner with panels, helping out. Mahmoud has been learning how to test the panels so he can help assess them in future.

Winter Social

A rather select gathering of trustees, spouses and guests met at the Bear of Rodborough, Stroud, on a blustery day in January for a very delicious lunch and a walk. We would very much have liked to have welcomed a great many more Makhad Trust supporters to our gathering but perhaps it was too far to travel or at a busy time. We would welcome feedback on holding future events, particularly with suggested dates, times, and places to meet, and even the type of gathering. Maybe Bristol would be a better destination as many of our supporters live in the South West?



Mad Artist!

Many years ago, a Belgium artist called Jean Verame painted the outcrops of rock blue to celebrate Egypt's historic peace with Israel. The blue-painted rocks are dotted all over a very large plain and apparently it took 10 tons of paint to achieve. A lot of the paint is wearing off now but the rocks still look rather startling in this empty desert. We took a look at the blue rocks when we were visiting the El Ramthy wells not far away. Whether this open-air art installation is aesthetically good is a moot point!

Dam journey

Mahmoud is now busy preparing for Rachel's Journey to come and build another dam. The location for it is Wadi Itlah, just below our biggest dam - Two Carob Dam. Due to recent rains, there is actually water running down the wadi and through the dam area. At first Mahmoud was pleased because he will have no trouble trying to get water to the dam for mixing cement. In the past, he has had to make temporary pools and organise a pump to come on a camel or for camels to bring the water from the nearest well. This time Mahmoud has the problem of too much water! He will have to drain and divert the water coming down the wadi and maybe put hoses in the bottom of the dam to take away the water. The journey participants will have a comfortable stay in a garden nearby where they grow mostly herbs and have built facilities for visitors. It has two compost toilets, a shower, a kitchen, indoor sleeping areas if the weather is poor, and a terrace with fabulous views!



The next report will be in early July after my next trip to Sinai in June and there should be news of the completed dam then.

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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