

# Sinai Journey Report October 2021

**Makhad**  
People Spirit Environment



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

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## The News - Big Changes Are Coming

St Katherine's is changing as the Egyptian government attempts to drag it into the 21st century with massive reconstruction projects. The entry point to St K no longer has a statue and a mosaic frieze; instead a large new visitor centre is being built. Hotels are being revamped, or built new, more shops, new roads, and a rebuild of the city council and a new bank premises are to come. A massive new hotel complex is being built at Zaituna a few kilometres before St Katherine's along with 800 new flats. There is not much to see at the moment as a lot of it is ground works, except for the visitor centre taking shape at the Monastery/ St K crossroads. However, there are now at least two cement making plants and vast numbers of lorries moving rocks, gravel, etc, plus other construction traffic. The roads around St Katherine's are being moved/ diverted which could involve the demolition of some houses. A new drainage channel is being built beside the main



road (soon to be rerouted) to channel flood water from the mountains down past Fox Camp to a huge dam a few kilometres away. An interesting observation from Sayeid Mousa, Amria's son, who has worked with us on several dams and is an excellent builder, is that the water channel is likely to cause more problems than it will solve. Apparently, the Head of the Ministry for Water told the planners that they must consult with the Bedouin as to how the water flows in the area before starting work, but they did not do this. Sayeid says the water has been flowing down the mountains for thousands of years and has its own path. Man cannot change this.

*The new visitor centre springing up  
opposite Fox Camp*

The new visitor centre is being built right in the path of the flow and he predicts it will be damaged - unless there is strong flood protection around it. It will be interesting to see what happens. It is highly likely that the next floods will come while all the work is half done, but I don't think the Bedouin would be upset by this! The whole valley reverberates with the noise of construction crews working 18 hours a day and the resultant dust clouds. The Bedouin feel great uncertainty, as they have not been consulted, and they fear for their homes. Many are talking about moving out to the desert or to the mountains, but what holds them back is that their children need to go to school in the towns. Whatever happens, it is likely that many more will be wanting to spend the long summers in the desert and mountains, so well restorations further afield continue to be important.

It was mentioned quite a while ago, that a pipeline was built to bring water from the Nile to St Katherine's. All the infrastructure was completed and the water flowed for a short time but Mahmoud said it was too salty to drink and there were problems with leaks and pumps (sea level to 1700m requires big pumps). Now there is a new pipeline being constructed along the same route to bring desalinated water here but after the last fiasco there is not much faith that it will work. Mahmoud said all the Bedouin were concerned about both power and water supplies to the town with hundreds of workers and the construction itself taking a lot of power. He worries about the winter when people need electricity to power their heaters as the electricity system was working at maximum output before the work started. Mahmoud also said that the internet was worse than it used to be, though new cable is being installed.

There was a power outage for around 24 hours when construction plant digging on the plain behind the wadi Raha hotel accidentally dug up the main power supply cable. The town had no power overnight and the phone signal went down too, and not for the first time. Luckily for me, Fox Camp is on the same circuit as the Monastery and there are emergency generators (the old diesel generators) to keep the power on. This is essential to run the very modern and sophisticated temperature and humidity systems to preserve all the ancient documents stored in the Monastery library and museum. It seemed that digging up the cable had shorted it out and sections had to be tested to bring them online again, which was a long process for the experts sent from El Tur.

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## Well Stories

The big news is that we have now surpassed a total of **500 restored wells!** In fact **520 well restorations** have been completed. We estimate that around 33,000 people have benefited from access to water, and probably many more as we don't know the numbers of people who use the desert wells in summer.

This trip to Sinai entailed a lot of work as we had started 26 new wells in March, all of which needed progress checks plus some final visits to do as well. Travel to Sinai had not been possible since then due to Egypt being on the Red List until early October. As the usual follow up visit in June was not possible, Mahmoud has been going to visit the wells and monitor progress, sending back photos and restoration details where he can. This was a vast help reducing the number of site visits. With so many wells to see, there was rather less emphasis on the projects this time, but Mahmoud will follow up with progress reports over the next few weeks.



### Visit to Iggreyradt

It is a long trip to visit this small community out in the desert as part of the journey has to be on foot. We were so pleased to see that there were four new houses in the village. Four years ago some of the old houses had been abandoned and most people had left the village because there was so little water. Now that five wells

have been restored with another three under reconstruction, there is enough water for growing vegetables so the community feels almost self sufficient. The well we had come to see was up above the village on a shoulder of the mountain. There were amazing views on 3 km trek up to well. After making two new site visits, we started the trek down to be told another well was waiting for our attention, with a pick-up to whisk us there quickly! This is not unusual and can feel like being hijacked! While we were visiting the wells a goat had been slaughtered and cooked ready for a celebration lunch. The day finished with a moonlight 7km walk up and over a mountain saddle to rendezvous with vehicle taking us back to St Katherine's..



**In the high mountains** we went to visit the community at El Mather where there was one newly restored well, and made several new site visits to wells needing help. There are now around four families living here full time with more coming for the long summer. There is peace tranquillity here, under the shadow of Mount St Katherine, the tallest mountain in Egypt. We made a new site visit to a family far up the wadi. Harbeya has the well from her grandfather but it is nearly dry and they cannot grow more in their large garden, only keep the trees alive. She and her husband have three boys and would like to live here all the year round.

**Wadi Gharba** is about 15 km from St Katherine's and we have restored quite a few of their wells, but there is never enough water because it rains so rarely here. A couple years ago we found that a group of children had decided to take matters into their own hands and decided to dig a well for drinking water. Every day, after school and during the weekends, around eight children would help with the digging. The youngest ones stayed at the top and looked after the spoil heap or got refreshments while the older ones kept digging. As the well is new and not proved to have water we could not offer any help. However, during this trip, we found that they had reached the water, proving that this well would be viable. Now they need funds to dig deeper into the granite, to line the well where it is sandy and to build a flood protection wall around the top. We made a site visit, put the well on our list, and have the funds to start it next month! The children have shown determination, team work and tenacity to keep digging until they were 5 m deep, and then they had help and supervision from their fathers and neighbours.



### **Wadi Raha Community**

Fadtheya's well is beside the community of Raha, and sits to the side of the plain in front of the Monastery. Many of these old wells, mostly situated on the side of the mountain, have dried up and there is not much water available for the community. We have helped with the restoration of one well here but more are needed. It is especially difficult for widows, most of whom do not drive, and so are reliant on family or neighbours to collect water in their pick-ups from wells in other parts of the town of St Katherine's. Fadtheya is not only a widow but she has to look after her grown up daughter with

learning disabilities too, and her neighbour is also a widow with children. We gave her funds for her well in March and now the well is completed with plenty of water. She is extremely grateful. Her neighbour asked us to do a new site visit for her well too which we did and we hope to be able to restore it soon.

## Well Statistics - as at 27 October 2021

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	259	7	17	67+174=238
Community Wells	261	21	27	65+143=208
Totals	520	28	44	446

**Future wells** - we hope to make new site visits to areas to the north of St Katherine's where more nomadic bedouin live full time. We don't know what the situation there is but Faraj knows the area and wants to do a recce before beforehand. If the wells there do need our assistance, it will be part of a move to expand outwards from St Katherine's.

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## ERIK

Due to the generosity of one of our funders (who came on a dam build journey ten years ago) we have been able to set up a new fund which is called ERIK and it stands for Emergencies, Repairs, Incidentals Kitty. Many times, over many trips, we have been approached by Bedouin asking for small funds to help build a water tank, replace hoses, or a lost generator, and we have not had any unallocated money to help. Often these people are in very desperate states as the equipment is vital to the functioning of their garden or their well and it is depressing to turn them down. So now we are really happy to have this new fund to support small projects where they are needed most.



Our first recipient of ERIK money is Sulieman who has a large garden with hundreds of trees in St Katherine's. He has a large family and around 30 people depend on the produce from the garden which includes at least a hundred olive trees. Around two years ago his garden wall was demolished by bulldozers from the city council on a road widening scheme. As the garden is extensive the wall was around 200m long, fronting the main road. When floods came last year, water was able to flow into his garden and filled his well with

stones and gravel and made the top unstable. We were able to help Sulieman with his well restoration and he is happy to have good access to his well again. However the garden is vulnerable to donkeys, goats and camels coming to eat the trees and so there is always Sulieman or a family member on guard 24 hours a day to chase off the animals, especially at night. Sulieman has not been able to leave St Katherine's and rarely leaves his garden as a result. He was woken three times in one night by donkeys and this is not unusual. They couldn't afford to rebuild the wall and other options were also too expensive. So we offered to help pay for a wire fence that could be moved depending on the construction work in the town. Sulieman does not just look after his garden, he is also who is also a camel doctor helping his brother look after all the camels ranging loose in Nasb, Rahaba, Iggreyradt desert areas. Sulieman was so relieved when we offered to help him with a fence. Once it is installed, he can go out to Namena and stay with his brother.



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## Laundry Project

When Eid's well in the town of St Katherine's was restored we did not realise the impact that it would have on the local community. The restoration produced plenty of water in this community well for drinking and for washing too. The women using the water, decided that taking water to their houses was too difficult but taking washing to the water was easier so they have been having wash days together in the garden and left their washing machines there. Eid was pleased at how well this was working for the women but wanted to help them with a shelter against the cold winter weather and asked for help. We looked at the garden to see what could be done but asked Eid to



talk to the women about what they would like. They came up with a plan to make a water tank with thick walls up to waist height, that they could put the washing bowls on and then they can tip the used water into the tank. It would drain away into the garden then. And also they needed a dedicated and safe electricity supply and sockets for their washing machines, plus some strong washing lines to hold wet rugs and blankets. The plan was costed and we put it to one of our supporters who agreed to help. We hope the new Laundry will be completed before the winter and it is very likely that we will have more requests for similar help.

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## Carpentry School



The second intake of students finished their training in basic woodwork in May and received a set of tools to get them started as carpenters. The third intake of students is about to start training with Ahmed Oda at the school. Interestingly, there are fewer candidates coming forward at the moment as there is some work available on the construction sites for night watchmen, though not well paid. However this temporary work will be over in a year or two and then people will need jobs or a craft to work, so we hope some people

will take a long term view.

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## Herbs Growing for Fatherless Children




This project continues with the children tending their gardens, taking cuttings and planting seeds. It continues to be successful for the students with emotional and practical support. Slim has taken the children to his garden in Wadi Esbaia where he has a protected netted garden for germination. The children took some cuttings from rosemary plants and grew them on in a water tank until they formed roots. Then they planted the rooted cuttings in pots to get bigger. Later they will be able to transfer the plants to their own gardens. This work and knowledge is

essential to the maintenance of their herb gardens. We expect each course to last for about two

years, and then the children can have supervision from Slim when they need it, as the previous courses have done.

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## Beekeeping Training

After a pause to reassess the impact of this project, we have decided to restart the Beekeeping  Programme, but with some modifications as recommended by bee charity, Bees for Development. This includes using bees from swarms currently living in St Katherine's, that have become adapted to this area. We are waiting on funding now.

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## Winter Social

After missing last year due to the pandemic, we are hoping we can to host a Winter Social in January next year. The date is 23rd January for a Sunday Lunch, probably at the Bear of Rodborough, near Stroud. Date and place will be confirmed nearer the time but if you are interested in joining us, then please email.

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## And Finally....

While we were out in the far desert, visiting wells near Iggreyradt, we passed a group of camels. Most of them ran away, but one of them waited for the jeep and kept looking at it. Faraj stopped beside it and got out as he recognised that this was his camel! And the camel had recognised the jeep and waited for Faraj. Faraj gave the camel some bread and we went on our way but Faraj was happy as he knew his camel was well, and even better, that her calf was well too.



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## Contact the Makhad Trust



*The Team - Faraj Fox, Helen Cranston and Mahmoud Ahmed*

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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