

Sinai Journey Report November 2022

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



*Helen Cranston
Project Manager*

***News from Sinai,
Wells Restoration
Project, Seed Project,
ERIK Project.***

The News

It is not unreasonable to assume that anywhere in Egypt will be warm and sunny all the year round - Sharm is a winter seaside resort after all - but at an elevation of 1700m St Katherine's is cold at this time of year, and its getting colder. Snow is not an unusual feature on Mt Sinai and Mt St Katherine's in winter where temperatures often fall below zero especially at night. This has a huge effect on water use and the water table in general. Water levels are usually around a meter higher in winter, even if there has been no rain. The Bedouin gardens do not need very much watering and water use decreases greatly. This is the time of year for planting trees.

The reconstruction of St Katherine's continues but now the big construction work has mostly been completed and they are at the fitting out stage, plus making the new roads and paths around the town. The most notable feature are the huge numbers of trees that have been planted. Apparently, and I am willing to be corrected here, the Koran says that Sinai is a land of olives and figs, so thousands of them are being planted all around the new buildings, along the sides of the new roads, and in public spaces. They started this in October but now they are planting small shrubs and flowers too. It seems that the idea is that St Katherine's will be a green and pleasant land. There was a worry that the trees would not get watered or cared for properly by the construction company but apparently there is a specialist company doing the planting and their contract says that on completion of the whole project, every tree planted must still be living. If one dies it must be replaced immediately. No-one knows what will happen to the plants once the work is finished but at least they will have a year or so to bed in.



There still hasn't been any significant rain in the mountains for over a year. The snow-fall last winter helped but they really need rain and plenty of it. A few short showers have helped clean the dust from trees and buildings but it is not enough to top up wells.

It is only a few weeks since the end of the COP 27 conference in Sharm El Sheikh and it has had a wide impact

on Egypt. Suddenly, there is more evidence of solar panels and some of the plastic cups and straws have been replaced with paper ones. However, the most visible effect was that Cairo had been cleaned up. Unsurprisingly for such a massive city, in a country without a proper waste handling system, Cairo was a really filthy city but this time the roads had been cleared of rubbish and a recent shower of rain had made all the trees look sparkly. It was a vast improvement on how it usually looks. Hopefully, this clear-up operation has employed a great many people and is the start of a responsible environmental approach to waste.

Well Stories

One of the effects of the re-construction work is that water is in short supply. A couple of wells for an area of St Katherine's called El Rasis were filled in when they built the flood canal but there was little water here anyway. In addition, there are over 3,000 construction workers in the town, all of whom need water. We went to see a well in a nearby valley called El Farrar, which is high up beside Mount Sinai. The water from here is highly valued as it is sweet water that has passed through the granite mountains. The well had just been restored to give water to the community of



El Rasis. We also found another well in the valley that the St Katherine's community had started to dig themselves from scratch. They had dug down to the water level and ground to a halt due to the tough granite. This happens sometimes, where the people take matters into their own hands to do as much as they can but there comes a time when they don't have the expertise or the funds to complete the work, and



that is where the Trust is needed. We decided to give the funding as soon as possible so that water will be available soon, and then there will be two good wells.

There was another good well in this valley that provides water to another community in St Katherine's called El Shamia, and this one was deepened recently. So soon there will be three good wells providing water for the people on one side of the town.



Sabaha Saba Mousa has a very old garden at the far end of the town, where the path leads up into the mountains. I have seen this garden every time we go up into the mountains and it is noticeable for a very nice balcony/areesha overlooking the valley. Sabaha is a widow and her well was not giving enough water to keep her trees healthy in summer. Funding for this well has enabled them to deepen it and get down below the water table again. She has five grown up children who all have children of their own, and her recently widowed sister and her family too, all rely on an income from the garden.

There are over 70 trees here but now she can plant even more and next summer she can grow vegetables which will help feed all eight families.

We had a request to visit an area for new site visits where we have already facilitated restoration of a number of wells and we found that many of the wells in Wadi Esbaia are going dry which is partly due to the lack of rain, but also due to the falling water table. Bedouin men are having to drive a long way to get to good wells for water and this means that there is less water for household tasks and makes life more difficult for the women. One man had started to dig a new well up the mountainside opposite his community and it must have taken him months as he had a false start with digging lower down where



there was no water. But now that he has found a little water we were able to put him on our short waiting list so the well can be deepened through the granite and it will pay for materials to stabilise the well and to repair the community water tank. We expect to have many other wells to help in this area, and on the next trip we hope to get to the more remote areas beyond like Rahaba, where there are people waiting for help.

Well Statistics - as at 4 December 2022

	28	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells		282	6	19	64 + 172 = 236
Community Wells		296	12	25	82 + 149 = 231
Totals		578	18	44	467

Hopefully, by summer next year we will be passed 600 completed wells.

Projects on Hold

The construction work continues to affect two of our projects. Teenagers are continuing to take full advantage of unskilled work such as driving and caretaking sites, which is good for them at the moment but they are not gaining skills for the future. We will resume once the construction company no longer offer employment.

ERIK - Emergencies, Repairs and Incidentals Kitty

Earlier this year we visited the community of Igreyradt where we had restored quite a number of wells for the community and they asked us if we could help with funds for a sturdy water tank. We did have some ERIK funds available so we were able to fund them. During this trip we saw the completed water tank which they were very proud of. Big water tanks in the communities are expensive things to build. They need to have very strong walls to withstand the weight of the water, and sometimes this means that steel bars need to be added in to the walls as well which makes them expensive. Instead they use plastic cubes which are not ideal as the water heats up in summer, plastics can leach out, and algae can grow, all leading to health hazards. This one is about 6 meters up beside the community and hoses take the water directly to the houses. Water on tap inside houses is a real luxury in Sinai.



Our latest ERIK project is going to be in the provision of hoses bringing water down from new wells in the high mountains to the town, as described above. Three km of hoses is a considerable expense and so only the cheapest ones are affordable generally. As there are two wells close to each other supplying water, the same hose could be used alternatively, and with funds from ERIK,



quality hoses can be purchased which are made specifically for drinking water. The photos below show the route down to the town which is hidden behind the mountainside to the left of the last photo. This project should have been completed by the time of the next newsletter.

Animal Life

On our trip up to wells in the high mountains, we encountered several different animals. Firstly three wild dogs decided to accompany us from the town right up to the gardens, shadowing us all the way. At the top of the pass, we saw two small puppies waiting for their mother to come back and feed them, then a Bedouin woman with two goats and six sheep, a cat belonging to one of the gardens and finally a donkey ridden by two small boys. The most unusual thing was seeing one of the goats having a cuddle from its mistress. The following day we saw five ibex in a valley beside Mt Sinai, once as we were going out and again on our return. The valley is narrow and when we came along they raced up an almost vertical cliff which was amazing to see.



Join us on a Dam Building Trip to Sinai!



Now that normal life is mostly resumed, the Trust is offering the opportunity to go to Sinai on one of two trips, each with the aim of building a dam in the high mountains. Helen's Journey will be 11 to 22 March and besides the dam build it will include a night at a resort on the reef at Sharm El Sheikh, a hike up Mt Sinai and a stay in the desert. The cost is £750. Contact Helen at helencranston@makhad.org for information. Rachel's Journey will be 26 April to 3 May TBC and will in be a similar itinerary but without the hike and desert. The cost is £650. Contact Rachel at rachel.devas@icloud.com for information.

Winter Social

The winter social will take place on Sunday 5th February in Stroud. We will meet for Sunday lunch at the Amberley Inn on Minchinhampton common, and then take a walk on the common in the afternoon. During the lunch there will be updates and news on the projects and an opportunity to find out more from Trustees and Supporters. If you would like to come, please contact Helen at helencranston@makhad.org to book your place at the table. Pre-bookings only.

And Finally...

A great marketing campaign by an Egyptian company, Heart Attack, for their new snack product, with the slogan "A Taste it's Worth Dying For"!!

Maybe it's tasty but obviously not good for us! Many of these ads are to be seen alongside the elevated motorways through Cairo.





Can anyone identify this?

We saw what appears to be a fungus when we were up in the mountain gardens. Mahmoud had never seen anything like this before because there is not usually enough moisture to support fungus. It looks like a bracket fungus but was quite big at a foot across and must have taken some time to grow. There is a water tank nearby and a stream bed that flows whenever there is water so maybe the area is moist enough. The tree it is growing on was a dead stump. We would be interested to know more.

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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