

Sinai Journey Report March 2023

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

Rain at last! On the day our dam building group was about to start building, we were all woken at 5am by the feel of raindrops on our faces (sleeping under the stars is magical - and in Sinai it is practical too, usually). It was a quick scramble to get everything under cover and then we, the cooks, and the builders, all took refuge in the small kitchen room and watched the rain fall and the rivers rise from a trickle to a raging torrent. This photograph shows one we made 15 years ago, now full of water. We called it Amria's dam after the lady whose garden is closest. The rain fell on the whole of Sinai so every one of the dams, all 22, are now full of water. This is a lot of water to be storing up and will help the garden wells have good levels of water right through to the summer. All the Bedouin were so pleased and there were big smiles all round. Before the rain came, many people were really worried about how they would keep their orchard gardens alive during the approaching hot summer as water levels had declined so much in the last two years. Now everyone can feel a sense of hope for the forthcoming year.



The reconstruction of St Katherine's continues with some phases of the building work having reached the fitting out phase. Now it is possible to see what the finished project will look like and what the aims might be for the town. Along with new hotels, the airport is being upgraded from a landing strip to full facilities for domestic flights and possibly for international ones too. The new hotels and apartment buildings have the feel of an upmarket resort, such as you might find in the alps. There will be expensive looking shops, probably selling expensive items for the upmarket

tourists. Bedouin homes built of cement blocks are being clad in local stone provided by the construction companies in order to blend in (though it might have the possible benefit of some insulation against summer heat and winter cold). My opinion is that St Katherine's will be a religious tourist resort for the rich and it will be interesting to see if this guess is accurate.



The Egyptian Plan It is not just St Katherine's that is undergoing reconstruction but the whole country. Everywhere there is new infrastructure being built including new roads and public buildings. The project to modernise the country is a huge and expensive one and probably involves international finance. The Egyptian economy is changing as a result with the Egyptian Pound deflating against international currencies, so that two years ago one USD was worth 17 EGP, now it is worth 30 EGP; it used to be that £1 gave us 20 EGP but now we get 38 EGP, so the Egyptian currency has almost halved in value in two years. This has had a huge effect on the population which relies on food and fuel imports. Six months ago, rice was just 18 EGP for a kg and now it is 30 EGP. A chicken used to cost 80 EGP and now costs 240 EGP, and a sack of flour used to cost 300 EGP but now costs 800 EGP, which is around 200 to 300% inflation. These increases are really hard for Bedouin especially when there may be ten people relying on one wage earner, and very few Bedouin are in secure employment. They have increased the cost of camel rides to tourists, and well diggers and builders now charge more too, but their income has not doubled like prices. Many families are struggling to feed themselves and to afford the essentials of life. Hopefully, in the future, the country will be more attractive to tourists which will increase State income and stabilise the economy.

Well Stories

The almond trees were all in blossom and looking very pretty. There has been no frost during the blossom time and it is hoped that the heavy rain in the mountains did not wash off the flowers before they had been set. This should mean it will be a good year for not just the almond harvest but also for apricots, and they will both fetch good prices.



Mohamed Ramadan's well

One of the wells we visited had been completed by Mohamed Ramadan who lives in Wadi Esbaia most of the time with several hundred other Bedouin families. We had helped a lot of wells in this large area but the lack of rain meant that water levels had fallen so much that there was less than a quarter of the amount of water available in many wells. The houses where Mohamed lives had no nearby water available and they had been driving their very old pickups 8km along tracks to get water from

the town. The people settled in this area because most of the men work with camels at the monastery which is a half hour walk over the ridge. The well is an old one that had gone dry. Before we came to do our first site visit, Mohamed had dug out the old well, which turned out not to be very promising, and had started a new well shaft beside it. This one was promising with water at the bottom. The funds we gave him enabled him to employ professional well diggers to dig out the well into the granite rock to secure a good supply and to finish it properly. They built flood protection inside the well with lining stones to stop it caving in, flood protection around the top and then they laid a hose from the well down to the water tank beside the houses. The women are very happy to have water that they can collect themselves rather than having to wait for the men to go for it.



Ramadan’s well

While we were staying in Ramadan’s garden which lies at the foot of Mt Sinai, Ramadan asked me to come and see his well. Ramadan is also father of Mohamed Ramadan (above) and Selem Ramadan (below), an enterprising family! Ramadan’s garden is also the base camp for most assents of Mt St Katherine’s, the tallest peak in Egypt at 2,600m. He has quite a lot of groups coming to stay and they bring in an income. However, when the last rains came two years ago, the water level was raised up in the well and the sides started to cave in by the water line. His big well is now even larger but shallower and holds less water. He needs experienced well diggers to help dig and to line the sides to protect it from any more caving in. This would be classed as a Well Repair but it will be on our waiting list like other new wells. Ramadan has a large family and garden all of whom rely on water from this well.



Well Statistics

	28	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells		285	8	9	64 + 172 = 236
Community Wells		301	12	17	82 + 149 = 231
Totals		586	20	26	467

There are many wells still on our waiting list so our work is still vital to this large community.

Carpentry School

Ahmed Oda, the carpentry school teacher, hopes to start another course of basic skills once the schools have finished for the summer which will be next month, in May. We will bring news when we have it.

Seedbank

Mahmoud Hassan was very happy to be given a large packet of quality heritage variety seeds. He will plant some of the seeds in his garden in order to grow seeds for next summer, and he will also be selling seeds to Bedouin for a nominal amount. He has a steady stream of people coming to collect seeds, and we send garden owners to him when we meet him. We buy the seeds from Seed Parade, and were very happy to see that they had added quite a lot more seeds to the pack, with more varieties of vegetables, which was very kind of them to do. The most popular seeds are the large salad tomatoes, and cucumbers.



ERIK

Two projects came up for visits during this trip. The first one was to check and see how the funds to buy three kilometres of hoses had made a difference to the town.

El Shamia is a suburb of St Katherine's and has very little water but a large population, swelled recently by the influx of around 3,000 construction workers. We had helped first with the restoration of two wells high up in the mountains above the town, but where the water is good quality and reasonably abundant. Three kilometres of hoses were required to connect the wells with the water tank in the town and this would have been a great deal of money, even with buying cheap hoses. It was proposed that the ERIK fund could contribute to the purchase of quality hoses that would last for many years and would be better for drinking water. Discussions with the two well owners,



Selem Ramadan and Bassim Salem, and the community confirmed that this would be the best way forward and the hoses were bought and installed over the winter. One hose can serve both the wells as they will alternate the connections. At the town end, they have put taps on the water tank and made a small pool for animals to drink. There is a water filter machine beside it if water needs to be filtered. Now there are more than 200 families using this water for drinking and many people come by car to collect the water.

The second visit was to Wadi Gharba community to investigate their request for help building a water tank or birka. We have restored around seven wells for this community and they all feed from high up across the valley into small water tanks beside the houses. The plan is to make one big water tank, on the side of the highest hill near the houses, which will collect the water from high up on the opposite side of the valley and then shorter hoses will deliver water to points beside groups of houses, This will mean that women no longer have to carry heavy containers from the



small tanks to their houses. Also the new large birka will have a solid roof which will keep the water clean, cool and free from algae. Salama, the local handyman, will take charge of the build

and his house is closest to where the tank will be built. Salama has prepared the ground in the first photo and you can see many of the houses in the community below.



Sinai Journey - March Dam Build

Helen's group of seven participants arrived in Sinai from UK on the 11th March, to build a dam and trek in the mountains and desert. We spent the first night at a small resort on the coast, north of Sharm El Sheikh. In the morning we swam in the sea with the fish, and after lunch, we made the two and a half hour trip to St Katherine's to stay in Fox Camp for the night. Supper

was at a Bedouin house, where Eid, the owner has turned his rooms into a home restaurant. The food was delicious, and there was an opportunity to buy Bedouin artefacts made by the local women. The next morning we went to visit the monastery including the museum and then left the town to trek up the mountains to the dam site and our garden base. The rains arrived on the first day of the dam build and the water levels were too high to construct a dam across wadi Shagg, so we had to abandon the mission. After a morning of rain, we had a short walk in the afternoon, but clouds were gathering, and a new base was needed so we moved to Hussein's garden about a mile away where there was a water tight room. We arrived just as the rain restarted and had a great view of thunder and lightening over Mt St Katherine's.



The following day was bright and sunny so we trekked up to the summit of Mt Abas Pasha, which has stunning views over the whole mountain range and the town of St Katherine's. We walked up to see Amria's Dam, completed in 2009 and one of the bigger dams. It was full of water. The next day we walked over a high ridge and down to a new base at the foot of Mt Sinai. A fleet of camels made the

ascent easier, and we were pleased to have the summit all to ourselves. We sang rounds including a favourite, Dona Nobis Parchem, and then walked back down for a night at Fox Camp. The next morning, there was time for some shopping for Bedouin bags then out to the desert for four days exploration and quiet at beautiful Mattamir. Twelve days after arrival we finally arrived back in the UK, tired but happy.

There is another group coming out at the end of April so we hope they will carry on with the same dam as preparations have been made. If they build a different one, then Helen's next group will be taking this one



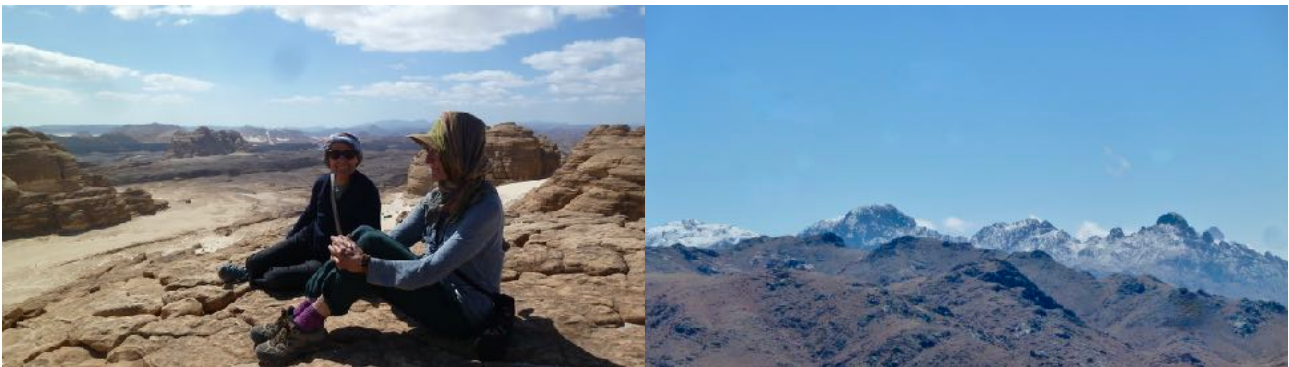
forward. It didn't feel like too much of a let-down because the Bedouin were so happy to have so much rain. This picture shows Mahmoud and Ahmed Oda, who lives nearby, standing at the site of the proposed dam. Rachel's group will be arriving in a few weeks time.

Our trips are now taking place under the name of Sinai Journeys Ltd. If you are interested in joining one of our Journey's, please get in touch and your name will be added to our mailing list for future trips with Sinai Journeys Ltd.

The Future

The next trip to Sinai will be by two of our Trustees, Rachel and Dick, with a party to build a dam in late April. Then in late June, I will be going to facilitate the projects as usual. The Makhad Trust AGM is scheduled for Thursday 18 May in Cheltenham.

We plan to continue with the existing projects, particularly the wells restoration project until the Makhad Trust is no longer needed but realistically for another three to five years.



Sue and Gail on the top of Mt Mattamir in the desert

Snow covered peaks of Mt St Katherine's and beyond

Contact the Makhad Trust

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

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