

# Sinai Journey Report October 2023

**Makhad**  
People Spirit Environment



*Helen Cranston  
Project Manager*

***News from Sinai,  
Wells Project, ERIK  
Projects Orphan  
Herb Project, and The  
Carpentry School***

## The News

Like most of the Northern Hemisphere Sinai experienced extremely hot summer temperatures - much hotter than usual. This has been a factor in causing a general decline in water levels in all wells and lower water than usual for the time of the year. As the winter cold comes, there will be less water used and levels will rise again but they really need lots of rain here. The low water levels have not been helped in St Katherine's, by the 3,000 construction workers using drinking water from all wells including many that we have restored. We have been trying to increase availability of water by deepening some key wells up in the mountains, away from construction work, and running long hoses down to water tanks in the village and will continue to do this. There are often queues of pickup trucks waiting to take water to far communities. Some areas to the east of the town, Gharba, Blue Mountains and El Ramthy, have not had significant rain for two to three years and so their well water levels are very low and most trees look dead or stressed.

The total reconstruction of St Katherine's continues. There are rumours that celebrities and film stars have bought some of the new apartments that we can see from Fox Camp. Now that some areas are nearly finished it is clear to see that the town is being designed to attract wealthy visitors and people who will invest in it. Recently there was a visit from President Cisi's wife accompanied by the wife of the ruler of UAE. The visit caused all activity in the town to stop for the duration, not just construction work but also no one was allowed out of their houses or on the streets for several hours until they had left. A vast number of trees have now been planted, mostly olives but also almonds and others and now they are planting flowers and shrubs. It should look beautiful when it is finished, in the manner of a public park but the amount of water required to keep them all alive is unimaginable. It feels out of place and profligate in this harsh desert landscape though there are many schemes to 'green' the desert in the Middle East and in China, most of which have been successful in attracting more rainfall as the trees grow. If this does happen in Sinai, it would be really wonderful.

The weeks of my visit coincided with one of the key Jewish feasts and this brought Israeli visitors to the mountains in their droves. I have never seen so many camels or visitors up in the mountains. All the Bedouin who work as guides, cooks and camel men were busy with groups, and all the visitor gardens were constantly hosting. Even the builders had been drafted in as extra guides. The Bedouin were very happy with the situation, and looking forward to the Israeli tourists being a more permanent feature in their lives again. It is highly likely that those dreams will not now come to fruition with war declared between Israel and Gaza.

It was announced in September that Egypt is holding a General Election in December. President Cisi will be expecting and hoping for a return to power, especially as the opposition is rather weak.

---

## Well Stories

### **Wadi Arbaeen - Phase 2**

Last year we restored eight wells in the mountain area Arbaeen which sits at the foot of Mount Sinai and Mount St Katherine's. There are many Bedouin families whose ancestors lived in houses here and who would like to live here but there is no school and water is an issue. Just elderly Ramadan and his wife stay here all the time and Ramadan's garden is the staging post for the ascent of Mount St Katherine's so many walking groups come to stay. His deep well had suffered in strong rains about three years ago, with one side caving in, depositing large boulders into the well and making it unstable. The cost of putting it right was too much so he asked for help. Funding allowed him to employ well diggers to come and removed the boulders, put steel bars round the damaged side with cement



to strengthen the wall of the well. He was very pleased that his well now had more water and was safe.



Around seven families stayed in their summer houses in the valley this year and life is much better since we restored the wells, enabling water to be piped to a tank near the houses and to grow vegetables nearby. The houses are about 80 minutes walk from the town and there is no road so being able to have freshly grown vegetables is essential. The eight wells were

only just providing enough water for drinking, animals, gardens and washing for the resident families. This time we found representatives of three more families asking for help with their wells to enable them to come back to their houses next summer and so we made three more site visits and hope to have their wells restored in time for summer next year.

### **Wadi Esbaia**

The valley of Esbaia is another big broad valley but on the other side of Mount Sinai, and we have helped a large number of wells here in the past. However, the communities are all growing and there are twice as many houses now so the need for water is increasing. There are still old wells that were not restored in the earlier



*Mohamed Kharlat showing us his well with Mount Sinai in the background*

years of this project and well owners are now asking for help with them too. In Esbaia Up there is a large and ancient garden with nothing growing at all. When we visited this time we saw that they had planted a lot of olive and almond trees and they were growing vegetables too. We hope we will



see more gardens coming back to life as more wells in this area are restored and the value of a garden is appreciated once more.

Nearby, Mohamed Eid Ibrahim showed us his well which he and his family have been very slowly digging out over 5 years, just with hand tools. It is too deep now to complete without specialist help and tools so he has asked for sponsorship. There is such a desperate need for water here that we hope that we will be able to help him next year.

### Well Statistics

	28	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells		299	5	13	74 + 172 = 246
Community Wells		313	10	22	88 + 139 = 227
Totals		612	15	35	473

## ERIK

There are two ERIK projects to report on this time. Salem Faraj has finally completed his amazing huge water tank, the Laundry Project has been completed, and the Mulberry Tree has been saved.

### The Water Tank



Salem Faraj is an older Bedouin who lives most of the year in his garden high up in the mountains. He had decided to build a huge birka water tank beside his garden as a legacy for his family, and because he was doing it because he loves his family, he decided to build it in the shape of a heart. It has taken him months working on it a bit at a time. It had to have deep foundations and for the ground to support the walls from the outside because of the weight of the water inside. It is very solidly made and it is also the biggest birka in the whole area. One could actually swim in a circle round it. It's very beautiful and impressive. The new birka has also made

Salem's garden the No 1 garden tourist destination, especially with groups that have children as they are allowed to swim and splash about in it. He charges a bit for its use so he is getting his money back.

### The mulberry Tree



In the last newsletter, there was a story about the mulberry trees in the mountains. They are old trees and all are recorded in the Monastery records. One of the trees had had all the top soil washed from around its roots in a flash rain storm and it had started to die. The Bedouin were very concerned and a large deputation visited the Monastery to request assistance. The monks listened and consulted their records but there was no money to pay for the necessary work so they told the Bedouin to come and ask the Makhad Trust. In the past we would never have been able to consider a project such as this because all funding comes for specific purposes. Now that we have the ERIK fund we

can help small projects like this one. We saw the tree on our visit to the high mountains. It now

has a small retaining wall around its root area built with stones and cement, and the gravel soil has been replaced. The work was done in July and now the tree is looking healthy with shiny green leaves.

---

## Carpentry School

This project is still on hold at the moment but we hope to hear from Ahmed Oda that he has gathered a new group of students in the very near future.

---

## Laundry Project

The new laundry project was completed quite a few months ago and it was really good to see what had been achieved. This project was initiated by a Bedouin called Eid a year ago who had just completed the contract for his well reconstruction in the town of St Katherine's. Quite a few of the local women started to come to the garden to do their washing because there was good water here but the conditions were not great. There were around 6 tub washing machines and they were bare wired onto electricity cables. Eid thought it would be good to make the space in his garden work better for washing. He consulted with the women to see what they would like to do and we had a sponsor who was very keen to support the Bedouin women. A plan was made and Eid received funds to buy the necessary tools and materials. It was built so it faces the sun to catch the warmth during winter washing but with a frame above for shade to be added in summer. As well as having



a hard surface for the machines and safe sockets for plugging them in they needed washing facilities for the large blankets every person uses for bedding. The low sinks are particularly good for washing heavy blankets, always a difficult heavy job. Large low sinks are good for soaking blankets and easy to access. The paved area stops dirt getting on washing and it doesn't matter if anything is dropped. Taps bring water from the white cube, heated by the sun, direct to the sinks. Washing lines for drying clothes. Electricity fixed in with switches not bare wires (covers still to be added), frame for shade to be added in summer.

Eighteen women use the Laundry now, coming in twos and threes about twice a week so it is a very social meeting place. They bring their breakfast and drink tea together. They help each other with the heavy washing. Unfortunately, there were no photos of the laundry in action. There ladies came to tell me about using it but no-one wanted their photo taken which is usual for Bedouin women.

---

## Seed Bank

Mahmoud Hassan was very happy to receive the latest batch of seeds for growing and distribution. An increasing number of Bedouin come to him for seeds, particularly for onions, leeks, beans, cabbage and broccoli at this time of year, though there was also some year round lettuce and leaves. The more remote communities are particularly keen to grow vegetables as they usually don't have any refrigeration and are too far from the shops to make regular trips.



---

## Winter Social - date for your diaries

We will be meeting on Sunday 4 Feb for Sunday lunch and a walk on Rodborough Common, near Stroud in Gloucestershire. All friends of the Makhad Trust are very welcome to join us for this social event. There will be opportunities to meet the team, to hear about our work and to find out about the Spring Journeys. More details to follow in the next newsletter in December. Please get in touch if you want to know more sooner.

---

## Sinai Journeys Ltd

We have changed the name of our trading arm which handles journey bookings from Makhad Journeys Ltd to Sinai Journeys Ltd, to avoid confusion with our charitable work while we are in Sinai. We have a new website with all the journey information and a Facebook page too.

The Trust first started supporting the Bedouin by bringing groups from the UK to work on projects like restoring gardens or building compost toilets that enabled garden owners to host tourist groups for an income. The well and garden restoration project grew out of this and is now the main project for the Makhad Trust.



The origins of the Trust have always been about building a bridge between East and West, facilitating cultural exchange and enabling people from the West to have amazing experiences, so it is good to finally have a separate platform for organising journeys. Many past participants have said that coming on our journeys has been a life changing experience and we want more people to have the opportunity to experience that. There is a magic to the mountains and desert that you don't find anywhere else.

There will be two journeys next spring:

### **Rachel's Dam Build Journey**

13 to 20 April - a 7 day trip encompassing a beach stay with snorkelling, low level mountain trekking, visiting St Katherine's monastery, building a dam with the Bedouin to provide water for the orchard gardens.

Cost £750 (to be confirmed)

### **Helen's Mountain Dam and Desert Journey**

24 April to 6 May - a 13 day trip encompassing snorkelling a coral reef in the Red Sea, mountain trekking including ascent of Mt Sinai, desert contemplation and working with Bedouin on a dam to provide water for the orchard gardens.

Cost £925 (to be confirmed) Donation contributions to the dam build expected.

See **Sinai Journeys Ltd** <https://sinaijourneys.org/>

If you have been on a journey with us already, please do post your photographs to our Facebook page - we would love to see them.

---

## 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.

The Makhad Trust, Wolseley House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, GL50 1TH [www.makhad.org](http://www.makhad.org)

Contact [enquiries@makhad.org](mailto:enquiries@makhad.org) or [helencranston@makhad.org](mailto:helencranston@makhad.org)

*The Makhad Trust is a not for profit organisation managed by a Board of Trustees and is a registered charity No 1100377*