

Sinai Journey Report & Newsletter July 2024

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



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***News from Sinai,
our Wells Restoration
Project, ERIK, the
Seed Bank and Sinai
Journeys***

The News

Greetings from a very hot and sunny St.Katherine's. We are at the end of our summer trip to facilitate projects for the Makhad Trust, mainly well restorations. For once, the town is very peaceful as construction work was halted for the Eid El Adhar celebrations and has yet to resume. Most of the major buildings have been constructed including the Visitor Centre, the Mountain Hotel, apartments and shops, and thousands of trees have been planted, mostly olives. However, there is still a lot of work to be done fitting out the buildings and finishing all the services like electricity cabling, telephone cabling, water and drainage, plus a massive tidy up. The cement factory that loomed large over the Plain of Raha has been taken down so we suppose that they do not need much more cement. However, the future of this new construction project, and many others around Egypt, are not certain due to an economic crisis. Around the time the last newsletter was written, the Egyptian pound had been devalued again and is currently worth 47EGP to the USDollar. This means all commodities have become even more expensive, particularly anything that is imported like petrol, wheat, and animal feed. The local people are finding it hard to maintain their simple lifestyle here. Meat, usually goat and chicken, has increased in price so much that most families struggled to pay for a goat for the traditional meal of Eid El Adhar celebrations. In the UK some people would find Christmas without a turkey an unimaginable disaster, and the same is true for the Bedouin people. We hope that a solution can be found to the economic crisis because all Egypt is suffering at the moment. The upside is that it is a good time to be visiting Egypt!

After 9 years as Project Manager, it is time to hand over the baton to my successor. Gabbi Bassett has accompanied me on this trip to learn about the role and we will handover during the next trip in September. I think we have both been surprised at just how much there is to know about the work and the people of Sinai, not to mention the language and culture, so she is happy to have a long handover. Gabbi will be a great asset to the Trust. Meanwhile, I will stay on in an advisory capacity with the Trust, and I plan to lead more trips with Sinai Journeys in the future. The Trust started here in Sinai by bringing people from the UK to experience a completely different landscape and culture. The people coming in October will be a mixed group including people from

our sister charity CCP (County Community Projects), who work with young people throughout the South West of England, plus other individuals some of whom have been before.



Changing the Guard - Out with the old



In with the new!

Well Stories and Water

This trip involved visits to many wells in the town as water availability cannot keep up with demand, especially in summer and as the water table continues to fall. Luckily there was a good rain 6 weeks before the trip and many of the wells had good water levels and should be enough to see people through the summer. (In winter water levels raise somewhat due to less demand). However, the whole mountain area of South Sinai really needs about 6 very heavy rains a year to start bringing water levels up significantly. Faraj Fox at Fox Camp was very saddened by the new construction project scheme to control the water flowing from the mountains through the town, because it is now channeled into a cement lined ditch which diverts water away from the houses and wells in the town. Previously the water found its own way down a channel strewn with boulders which broke up the flow and allowed the water to permeate the ground. Faraj told me how he watched the water race passed Fox Camp in the ditch without adding a single centimetre to his well water level.

The recent rain was quite widespread and many of the high desert valleys had good amounts of rain. As a result, everywhere there are small green herbs and shrubs growing, which provide good grazing for goats and camels. We were told that there were a great many Bedouin living in these areas for the summer, a large number of them from the South near Sharm El Sheikh and from the east coast. We have restored a good number of desert community wells over the years and they will be providing the water needed by these communities. Good grazing means good prices for goats and a good income for families for the next six months or so.



We visited one of these grazing wells that had just been completed and now gives one cube of water a day.

We were asked to make new site visits in September for the Rotuk area where there are wells needed for grazing. It is always good to see the Bedouin with their tents, living in the huge mountain wadis of the high desert, just as their forefathers did centuries ago.

We visited the towns and communities in St Katherine's, Abu Sila, Raha and Tarfa. Then we went out to the desert to visit wells in more remote areas and communities, and then up to the mountains to see many garden wells.

The worsening economic situation spurred many more Bedouin to come forward to put their names on the list waiting for a new site visit. The gardens continue to provide a fall back position for people with no other regular income. Our list of people waiting for their first site visit continues to grow, but this year we hope to start more wells than usual.

We set out up the mountains to visit wells in the areas only accessible by foot and with a quite a lot of requests for new site visits. The first one was a garden high up. It used to belong to Jameel Mansur but he got ill and died around three years ago leaving a wife and five children all under the age of 13. Jameel's brother Mohamed has taken on responsibility for his brother's family and for the garden. There is little water in the well now as the water levels have dropped and he can only water the few existing trees. With our help, he should have enough water for planting new trees and vegetables which will help provide both families with an income. In all 10 people stand to gain from this well restoration and will be able to rely on an income from it in future. Mohamed's plan is to plant almond and fig trees for the children for income when they grow up.



We made more new site visits to two men with adjacent abandoned gardens who have already done a lot of work to restore the gardens by building the walls and repairing a house and sharing the work together. They hope we can help them soon so that they have water before January and then they can start planting almond, olive and apricot trees. The tree planting season is in February just as it is in the UK.

Although all the community wells are the responsibility of different Bedouin, handed down the family lines, we sometimes find that the same person has been asked to do the work. Sayeid Mousa Mohamed, son of Amria (who lives alone up in the mountains with her goats), is an excellent builder and is often tasked with restoring wells for his community in El Milga. We know that the well will be completed to a high standard when we see him. This latest well was owned by a lady called Jemeela, and Sayeid had already installed protection against floods with walls and a roof and a 'window' for access, but it wasn't giving enough water so it



went on our list for help. As usual Sayeid did an excellent job and he deepened the well by four meters doubling the amount of water available.

While we were up in the mountains, we climbed up to see Amria's dam, one of 22 small dams build by the Trust's sister organisation, Sinai Journeys Ltd, with help from people in UK. The dams were holding a lot of water from the recent rains and increasing water availability for the gardens further down the valleys.



Well Statistics as at 10.07.24

	35	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells		316	6	27	240
Community Wells		330	12	14	239
Totals		646	18	41	479

The Seed Bank

We went to visit Mahmoud Hassan our seed man, who lives in St Katherine's and met with his neighbour and supporter, Dr Kharlet. The doctor is an Egyptian botanist living in St Katherine's, funded by the government, to research the plant life here, both endogenous and horticultural. Dr Kharlet has been helping Mahmoud by translating the information on the seed packets into Arabic, and then cross breeding different strains of some vegetables to produce stronger plants for the future. He has some wonderful healthy looking plants to show us but also some plants, particularly cucumbers and tomatoes, which are subject to attack from insects resulting in fruit infested with grubs. He would like us to enable Bedouin to grow some plants in net cages where they would be protected. Some types of plants have not grown well and others have thrived so he was able to give us useful information for when we bring seeds again in the future. We will be looking at ways to fund net cages for a growing number of Bedouin.



Bedouin women

The Trust has wanted to give more help to the Bedouin women for some time and we were very pleased with the laundry project. We had hoped that more laundries would be requested but this has not happened because there are no suitable gardens where the women feel they can gather away from the men. This is not really a safety issue but a cultural one as women are not supposed to have contact with any males other than very close family. This rule means that most women spend all their time in their houses. However, older women and young unmarried women spend their time looking after their goats and roam the mountainsides very happily. We spoke to two Bedouin women about possible projects that would support more women. They said that they

would like the library we set up in 2016 to be reopened (it was closed during the pandemic and then had no home in the City Council building), but they would prefer it to be in a house that the women run and not a public building. They also want to raise chicks to sell to other families to increase availability of quality meat which is so expensive and so poor in quality here. Most chickens in the supermarkets are battery reared and too expensive to buy. They also want to improve the goat stock by breeding with strong imported European goats. They have set us quite a few challenges here but we are hoping to find a way forward with these schemes.



ERIK (Emergencies, Repairs and Incidentals Kitty)

Since we started to fund water tanks about 2 years ago, to hold well water and provide easier access to people coming to collect water, we have had a small but steady stream of requests for help. We visited one water tank that is half constructed and will allow people who are coming from remote communities to fill up large jerry cans in their cars. A large number of people have to drive more than 10km to find water. Although there are many wells offering drinking water, the water can be used up in a couple of hours and the well will take a day or two to refill so they have to find another well with water in it. There was a new request for a water tank for the people of El Milga in St Katherine's where we have restored a good number of wells. The water tank will be below one of the big wells there, next to where cars can park, and the water can be pumped out of the well by electric pump each day. They could connect hoses from other wells nearby to the tank too, to ensure a continuous supply of water.



Sinai Journeys



For anyone who wants to experience the grandeur of the mountains and the peacefulness there, then we have two journeys heading to Sinai this Autumn. Rachel and Dick, two of our trustees will be taking a party of people to build a dam in a high mountain valley from 21 to 28 September. There are still a couple of places left on this trip. Contact rachel@sinaijourneys.org
Later, Helen will be leading a trip from 5 to 15 October, also to build a dam in the high mountains but also to climb Mount Sinai and to experience the silence of the desert.

If you are interested please contact: helen@sinaijourneys.org or rachel@sinaijourneys.org
There will be at least one journey next spring too, dates to be confirmed. See SinaiJourneys.org

Makhad Trust and Sinai Journeys Winter Gathering

Advance notice, we will be holding the annual Winter Gathering on Sunday 2nd February. We will meet at a Cotswold Hotel for Sunday lunch and a walk. It will be an opportunity for anyone who is interested in our work or in the Journeys, to come and meet with the Trustees, Project Manager and Journey leaders to find out more. See our October Newsletter for more information.

Welcome Shade

The summer trip to Sinai is often challenging due to the heat. For the first few days we were fortunate to have a warm breeze which kept the temperature down and was especially welcome for the long trek up into the mountains.

However, on the day we visited around 10 gardens down the length of a long but narrow valley called Wadi Itlah (pronounced Klarh), it was crispy hot and there was little shade. We did stop around 2pm when the temperature had got very high, and there was no wind, and we took shelter under this ancient carob tree. You can see the green pods, like broad bean pods hanging on the tree. As they ripen they will turn dark brown. This tree was growing in the wadi not in a garden and is not watered. It gets its water from very deep roots that go down several meters into the water table below, and was a little spot of respite on a very hot day. We have often been offered carob as a drink and when mixed with a little local honey it is a warming and delicious drink - something to look forward to in the cold days of winter.



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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