

Sinai Journey Report March 2024



Namenna, South Sinai, Egypt



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***News from Sinai,
Wells Project, The
Carpentry School
and ERIK
(miscellaneous
small projects)***

The News

Despite Egypt being adjacent to the war zone of Gaza, life here continues as normal for the most part. In Cairo there are some people from Gaza who have been able to get out, usually via other neutral countries. President Cisi remains strong in controlling the border and only allowing aid in and has not succumbed to international pressure to allow the Palestinian population to cross the border. He fears that Hamas fighters would come over too and set up a headquarters in North Sinai, bringing terrorism over his doorstep.

It feels as if the reconstruction of St Katherine's has been going on for at least four or five years but it is only 2 years. It looks as if most of the buildings have been completed, at least from the outside, though no doubt there is lots of activity inside doing all the fittings. However, there are still major infrastructure projects in progress such as the drainage for the inevitable flood water that courses through the town. Since the whole project started there has not been heavy rain so the engineers haven't had chance to see where the flood water comes from and goes to. Many of the Bedouin are sceptical about the capacity of the drainage pipes to take away the water. A light rain fell a couple of weeks ago and there was consternation that the area outside the expensive looking new empty shops filled with water and didn't drain away. The area is like a shallow bowl and no drains. At the end of the week there will be a visit from the Prime Minister to see how the project is coming along. With Egypt's debts continuing to mount, despite selling off a portion of the North East of the country to the Emirates, the government will be keen to sell off the completed apartments, fill the hotels with tourists and start recouping the construction costs. Apparently the PM is an engineer, so hopefully he will spot where the problems are and provide some direction. One of the main drainage ditches running through the new buildings is being filled with huge pipes of about 2m diameter to take flood water but the job has been progressing very slowly, and now with the imminent arrival of the important visitor, the workers are filling in the ditch and smoothing the top to make it look complete, but after the visit they will have to dig them out and carry on connecting the pipes. Obviously a face saving exercise. There is a lot of tidying up being done too.

St Katherine's is quiet still. There are occasional tourists, some Egyptians, some expats living on the coast, but also a few Israelis. They come here to escape the mayhem and war and have a break. The Bedouin are philosophical about them coming. They blame the Israeli government and the Israeli army for the carnage in Gaza, and Hamas for what happened in Israel, not the whole country or all the citizens.

The weather here has been almost unseasonably warm, or spring has come early. It's the time of the almond blossom with apricot blossom to follow. The sky is bright bright blue, the air is clear, there is a slight breeze and the temperature is perfect. Saint Katherine's in the spring is beautiful.

Life is not so easy for the Bedouin people, or for ordinary citizens in Egypt. Inflation is still very high and food prices have risen so much that people can't buy meat, and are mostly relying on bread and rice for nourishment, even vegetables are getting too expensive to buy. With onions at 40 EGP for a kilo many people are opting to grow their own and we have seen onions being grown in most gardens in great quantities. What a family doesn't eat they can sell. Mahmoud thinks that many people will not buy meat for the forthcoming feast at the end of Ramadan, and this is a big deal for them. The warm weather is a boon because they don't need heating as electricity prices are so high. The work we are providing is extremely welcome as it is putting food in people's mouths, but not enough needy people are benefiting.

As I was leaving the Egyptian government devalued the Egyptian pound almost halving its value from 39 EGP to 63 EGP to the GBP. This will make imports twice as expensive and drive another round of inflation which will be devastating for the whole population. We hope that people will be able to survive and that the currency will increase in value again.

Well Stories

Mohamed Sulieman - The Camel Man



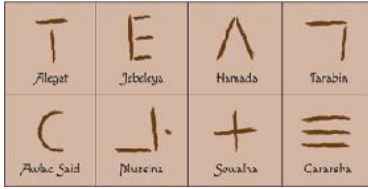
We had Mohamed's well on our waiting list for a new site visit for quite a while but he is difficult to contact where he lives in a remote area called Namenna, with no phone signal and he doesn't come to town much either. Mohamed lives out in this desert area for a good reason.

Mohamed lives with his two wives and eight children, a herd of goats plus a circulating population of camels, mostly new mothers with babies. Mohamed has a very important role in the Jebeliya tribe, caring for and being guardian of around a thousand camels living in this vast area of mountainous desert. These camels represent a significant amount of wealth for the families of the Jebeliya tribe as the owners can sell them or use them for transport and they fetch a good price. When they are not needed the camels are let loose to roam and graze. In the spring, when it is the mating and birthing season, he brings the females in near to his house to mate them, looks after heavily pregnant females, and watches over newborns. He keeps the mothers and babies by his house for three months before letting them go because there are wolves and hyenas who will take a newborn camel and he has lost a few in the past, mostly at night, so now he and his sons keep watch at night.

Mohamed doesn't have a car (the cars in the photo above belong to other Bedouin). Instead he rides a camel everywhere and this is an advantage as camels will run from a car but not a man on a camel, so he can get closer to the grazing camels when he wants to catch them or examine

them. Mohamed monitors the health of the camels and medicates with herbs where necessary. He is much respected by all the Bedouin.

When we arrived there was a hive of activity and a lot of noise from some rather unhappy camels. Several men had ridden their male camels over to mate with the local females. The males were keen to mate but the females needed to be encouraged by being tied down, despite being in season and the male appeared to need the help of several Bedouin to encourage him and prevent



him from falling off before he had finished. The males and females are specially selected for mating to produce strong progeny. All the camels in Sinai are branded so that everyone knows who they belong to and there are 8 symbols, one for each tribe. Mohamed was also taking the opportunity to brand the unbranded young camels - the E shape is used by the Jebelya.

There were several camels with new babies in a pen behind the house where Mohamed keeps them until the young ones are able to outrun a wolf and we were shown them by his son who was helping. He told us that a camel had given birth the day before and he had moved her some distance from the house and other camels, not just for the quiet but because artificial smells such as perfumes on people seem to upset the vulnerable baby and can make it ill.



Mohamed's well had been filled in by floods several years ago so he has to collect water from wells about 3 miles away, or people bring it to him by car. The well is high up in a ravine about 2km from his house. When it is restored the water can be piped down to a tank beside his house and he will have enough water for all his family and for the camels and goats. He is going to build a small pool so that wild camels can come to drink too. We hope it will not be long before we can help him.

Omnia Mousa Hassan, Abu Sila

Omnia inherited the garden with its well from her mother but the well had gone dry a years ago and all the trees had died and the garden looked barren. Omnia and her husband are a young family with two young children and times are hard now. Omnia's husband Mousa, started digging out the well himself but the granite was too tough for him to make much impression on it.



With the well funding we gave them, Mousa employed well diggers to dig deeper by 4m and now there is one and a half meters of water. They also lined the sides of the well and built a wall around the top to protect it from floods. But Mousa wanted to make the garden one that could support them so he has improved it by adding steps and some terracing and a wall at the bottom of the garden to trap silt from rain water. They have planted 9 olive trees, 4 almond trees, 1 fig tree, a grape vine and some other trees. They have also made a vegetable patch and were growing onions and rocket and shard. They plan to grow a lot more vegetables through the spring and summer which will help the family a great deal now that vegetables cost so much to buy. The water is also used for drinking. You can see their house in the photos and how the garden has

been transformed already. The new trees hardly show yet but in a few years this garden will be green all over. This young family now has some financial and food security for the future.

Salah Mohamed Mohamed - St Katherine's, The Bulldozer well!



Salah had inherited this community drinking well from his grandfather but it had been filled in by floods and not much was left of it. He knew that the well required a lot of digging out and would be very expensive to do even with our help, so he found a different way of doing it. Salah hired construction vehicles from the St Katherine's project to help. The drivers will do extra work for cash-in-hand after their shift has finished. First he hired a bulldozer to make a track from the road to the well through a shallow ravine. Then he hired a hammer drill machine to come and drill into the rock and this enabled them to dig a huge hole about 4m in diameter and 4m deep where the water starts. The next phase is for the well diggers to come and dig out another 2m into the bedrock to get the water. We hope that the project will be finished when we visit next in September. All the Bedouin have suffered to some degree, by the reconstruction of the town, so it seems only fair that they take advantage of the project's resources when they can.

Well Statistics

	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	310	7	24	227
Community Wells	324	11	16	225
Totals	634	18	40	452

Carpentry School

We are still awaiting the next group of boys to start training, perhaps when the reconstruction project has finished and there are no jobs. At the moment there are still jobs to be had as nightwatchman and cleaners. Meanwhile Ahmed looks after the school and the tools.

ERIK (Emergencies, Repairs and Incidentals Kitty)

This kitty is helping many people with miscellaneous projects, usually linked to water use, that it would be difficult to find funding for.

A new water tank for the Community at Nabi Salah

When we went to see a community well beyond St Katherine's, not far off the main road, we found that they had laid the foundations for a water tank to make collecting water for the surrounding communities easier. The well is in a ravine in the side of the valley and there are several other wells here on our list for help. The wells have all been flooded and filled in with boulders but when they had water, they provided drinking water for 3 nearby communities or





about 60 families (though not their only source of water). In the old days, water from the ravine was also used for a huge garden growing lots of trees and vegetables but as the wells dried up and were filled in, the trees died and the garden was abandoned with just the wall remaining. Now they have water again they are going to start restoring the garden, and have already planted olive and almond trees, with plans for vegetables this summer. They are starting with a small area they have fenced off and will expand this as they have more water. The produce will go to the people of the communities.

The Seedbank

Thanks to the ERIK fund, we were able to provide a large bag of vegetable seeds for our Seedbank man, Mahmoud Hassan. He is still growing quite a few seeds himself and saving the new seeds in the vegetables to sell on to the Bedouin for a very small fee along with the new ones. Tomatoes are a great favourite especially the giant heritage ones that come in variegated colours. They are particularly tasty. The photo shows Mahmoud with a lemon tree in his garden.



Sinai Journeys



We had hoped to run two working trips to Sinai in April but we just couldn't find enough people who could make the dates. There is some concern that the war in Gaza and possible repercussions may be putting people off wanting to travel to Egypt. However, some of the joys of travelling to Sinai regularly, is that I feel very safe and untroubled in the mountains with the Bedouin. It is remote enough that one can be relaxed while getting away from all the hassle and bad news we are

constantly bombarded with, and as far as we can see, the country is still a safe place for tourists.

Instead, we are postponing the trips to the Autumn, and they will be the same two trips but running at separate times; Helen's Desert and Mountain Journey, and Rachel's Dam Build.

We don't have dates yet, but you will find more information on the Sinai Journeys Ltd website as soon as we have them. <https://sinaijourneys.org/>
Please get in touch if you are interested in joining us.

Winter Social

In early February we held our annual winter gathering for the friends of the Trust at The Bear of Rodborough hotel near Stroud. Twenty four people came to share a lunch and talk about the activities of the Trust and the Journeys we run. Everyone had been on a journey or planned to go on one and it was also an opportunity to meet up with friends old and new. We had a delicious lunch in The Terrace room, and then an amble across the common. These events are important as they enable everyone interested in our work to meet and help keep the impetus going, as well as drumming up support for the work trips with Sinai Journeys.



Mahmoud - our unsung hero



None of the work we do would be possible without Mahmoud, our Sinai Manager. He is our lynch pin in Sinai, acting as translator and mine of information about everyone and everywhere. He visits as many of the completed wells as he can get to every year, to check on whether they are being looked after and used as they should, and that the gardens are in good condition. He has appeared in many photographs in the newsletters but rarely has a mention and yet, without him, all the work we do could not happen. Mahmoud also organises builders for the dams. He is constantly harassed by phone calls from people wanting to have their well restored and

asking for a New Site visit but he remains impartial and refers all requests to me. Many thanks from me and the Makhad Team for all the work you do, Mahmoud.

Bedouin Beaded Bags

If you are visiting Cheltenham, then there is an opportunity to support the Makhad Trust by buying one, or even several, of the beautiful Beaded Bags made by the Bedouin women and on sale with our sister charity The Isbourne, at their centre in the town. A small profit from the sale of each bag goes towards our ERIK fund. For more information about The Isbourne see their website <https://www.isbourne.org/> and discover the wonderful work they are doing to support people in the Gloucestershire and wider area.



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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