

Makhad Trust Newsletter

Egypt - October 2024

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



View of Saint Katherine's from Al Ghopsha – the Bedouin houses very much blend in with the mountains.



*Gabrielle Bassett
Project Manager*

The Well Restoration Project, The Seed Bank, ERIK, Weaving For Women, Sinai Journeys & The UK Winter Gathering.

Hi, my name is Gabrielle Bassett and I'm taking over from Helen as the new Project Manager for The Well Restoration Project. The Makhad Trust have been working out in Sinai for nearly 20 years and have had a significant positive impact on Bedouin life helping their gardens to flourish and enabling better access to drinking water. By spending less time and money on sourcing valuable water they are able to focus energy and resources on important matters such as access to education and healthcare. I'm very pleased to be part of this endeavor and look forward to many happy and productive years working out in the mountainous desert.

I've now done 2 'handover' trips to Sinai with Helen and will be going out on my own for the first time in December. Saint Katherine's town is undergoing a major upgrade but was fairly quiet during my first trip in July. However, it has sprung back to life in October with construction work going on mostly after dark. The days are so hot that work is instead done throughout the night – I could hear huge vehicles reversing and tooting their horns to each other throughout the nights in the valley below my hostel. A huge visitors centre has been built in the last 2-3 years along with hotels, shops, accommodation, a hospital, a mosque, council buildings etc. The new town is vast but almost all new buildings are still closed and uninhabited and the area looks like a bit of a bomb site! A sewer at the top of town was damaged as part of the building process and has been running open for a couple of years – not pleasant to see or smell but things move slowly out here so it's just a case of waiting until the local government decides to fix it – priorities clearly lie elsewhere at present.

The Cost of Living

The expected inflation rate in Egypt for 2024 is 33% and that continues to push the price of everything up. To give you an idea, we were talking to one well owner who needed a new electric pump to pump the water out his well. These pumps cost around \$500 USD. In 2021 this equated to around 9500 EGP whereas today it is around 25000 EGP. Wages have not increased at such a rapid rate so essential things like new pumps sadly become unobtainable. A well cannot be used to its maximum capacity if a pump doesn't work – much less water can be drawn by hand or syphoned via plastic piping. At one well I saw a huge well-made English pump that dated from the 1970s! The Bedouin had fixed it when necessary over many decades but finally the replacement part it needed could no longer be sourced so it has become redundant – see photo below.



The Makhad Trust don't usually pay for new pumps but by funding the well restorations and paying for well diggers it means the Bedouin are more likely to have some money spare for a pump.

Local Characters

I meet many interesting people on my trips to Sinai. Whilst sat in the dining area of Fox Camp a large and strong man came over

and introduced himself. He was part of a successful well-digging team that I'd heard of and been wanting to meet. He told me that he'd been digging wells since he was 5 and he was now 53. Below is a photo of his calloused hands! You don't see hands like that in the UK and they really do give an insight into just what hard work well digging is and the effect it has physically.



Another hard-working man I met is Eid Mohamed Sala from El Milga. He had requested help from us to dig a well where a spring had been many years ago but had since dried up. Often people will make a start on a well themselves and then hit a brick-wall, or should I say a granite wall! Eid had started digging in his garden to prove he was serious about having a well. He had dug 3 metres down already by hand using only a hammer and chisel. Once you get below the surface sand in Sinai you hit granite. The granite nearer the surface tends to be 'softer' (and I use that word very loosely) as it has been more exposed to the elements. Eventually the granite can no longer be dug by hand and this is where The Makhad Trust comes in. We will provide the funds for professional Bedouin well-diggers to come in with electric tools that make digging deeper possible. The cost of these professionals is beyond the financial reach of most Bedouin. Eid is now on our 'waiting for sponsor' list so when we have money in and have matched him with a funder work can proceed.



1 – The hand digging done so far.

2 – The tools used

3 – The pile of granite chiseled out!



Its always good to see the younger generation getting interested in wells. As is so often the case all over the world youngsters are living very different lives to their parents and having different priorities. In Sinai this can mean that family wells are lost forever.

I was approached in Fox Camp by a young lad called Sayeid Hussain Ahmed who had taken an interest in his grandfather's garden well in Wadi Ziri. He told me he had already made some progress with the trees and plants but that the well wasn't yielding enough water. I've put him on my Waiting List to hopefully visit and asses within the next couple of trips.

Making A Difference - Completed Wells

Khalif Oda Ibrahim – Om Loos

Some wells really are very inaccessible but have a good potential for income. 'Om Loos' means 'Mother Almond' because this area was once filled with almond trees. There are still some remaining and Khalif would like to plant more but as with so many wells in Sinai the water level has dropped in the last 20 years and the well now needs deepening. The Makhad Trust provided funding to deepen 2 wells in this valley. Because the area is so steep and remote it was inaccessible by camel or donkey. Camels and donkeys are working animals used to carry machinery and materials to well locations. This time it all had to be carried by people! This made it more difficult to find workers as a bag of cement weighs 50kg and carrying it a mile or more up a steep valley in the hot sun isn't fun for anyone. Five bags were needed for each well, plus sand to mix. But the Bedouin are strong and workers were found to do the carrying. The diggers had dug 3.5 meters deeper and builders had built a flood protection wall. The well had also been lined with cement for structural integrity. The wall around the well is very important as when it does rain once or twice a year the water really comes down and a torrent can quickly infill a well with rocks

and gravel. Wells where the torrent is strong will also be given a lid for extra protection. It's now producing 1 cubic meter of water per day which will help to bring the almond trees back to life and enable planting of new trees in the winter season (Dec-Feb).



1 – The valley with almond trees.



2 – Improved well with wall.



3 – View down well.

Abdullah Eid Salama – El Quiz

Abdullah is a good and energetic man who runs a small local restaurant and inherited his well from his grandfather. Fifteen households used to draw water from this well - it is part of a big community situated on the outskirts of Saint Katherine. Around 10 years ago the well was flooded with gravel and rocks after heavy rain, so it hasn't been used for a long time. The families now have to travel farther distances to use other wells. They started digging out the well to 3 metres deep and there was good water but half way through the work the rains came unexpectedly and partially filled it back in. It has now been dug to 6 metres. They have built a strong flood protection wall around it and put a decent cover over it. This well will now withstand torrential rain for many years and is providing 4 cubic metres of water every day for the local community which has a big impact on the amount of time and effort they have to spend collecting water from elsewhere.



1 – Before digging started.



2 – The well & flood protection wall.



3 – After unexpected rain washed gravel in.



4 – The completed well with cover/lid.

Well Statistics as at 1 Oct 2024

2	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	321	12	22	238
Community Wells	340	5	21	231
Totals	661	17	43	469

I'll hand over to Helen now for the rest of the newsletter...

ERIK – Emergencies, Repairs and Incidentals Kitty

The latest Water Tank project for the community of Nabi Salah was found to be complete and the water is being used by many people in the area about 10km outside St Katherines. The large school at Nabi Salah did not have any drinking water piped to it, only contaminated washing water delivered by lorry. Now the pupils and staff have access to good clean water all the time. Several of the teachers live at the school during the week so it is really important for them to have local access to water instead of having to rely on local families driving to collect water for them.



On a previous trip, one of the well diggers, Farhan Ramadan, asked if we could provide him with a climbing harness for ascent and decent from 30m deep wells. He had seen tourists climbing in the mountains and realised that their harnesses would enable him to go safely in and out of deep wells. He tried to make one himself from old rope but he was not confident about its safety - see photo. A local climbing shop in Bristol, Dick's Climbing, suggested a basic climbing harness is strong and easy to use. We have left the harness with Farhan to try it out, and if it proves successful, we could consider providing other harnesses to well diggers who tackle deeper wells.

Seed Bank

Another consignment of two large envelopes of vegetable seeds were delivered to Mahmoud Hassan for the Seed Bank during the September trip. This time there were lots of onions and leeks and seeds for vegetables that can over-winter. Mahmoud's neighbour and friend Dr Kharlet, who is a botanist, will be helping Mahmoud with labels and seed information to ensure they have the right planting and growing conditions. Meanwhile, Mahmoud will be growing some of the seeds himself in order to produce more seeds for next year. The seeds are always in demand by Bedouin with gardens and go a considerable way to improving the diet of many families as food is expensive and very short of variety.

New Project – Weaving Business for Mouzaina Women

This new project has the potential to bring in a small, but very welcome income, to families in the Mouzaina tribe who live in the deserts surrounding the high mountains. Their main income at present is from the sale of goats and camels, so many families are following the traditional nomadic way of life, living in tents and following the rains for grazing their animals. If tourism is strong, then many of the men work as guides and camel men for desert expeditions, but this way of life does not give a regular or reliable income and so weaving goat hair and camel fur into carpets and bags would help families a great deal. Many years ago the EU funded a project and supported it for around 5 years, until the funding ran out. Now the Bedouin want to get a similar project going again, one that

could be self-sustaining and they need our help. Goat and camel owners can collect the wool and then sell it to women who can spin and weave, with finished products being sold to tourists. This benefits the animals who need to lose their excess fur in summer to keep cool. Many Bedouin women have spare time and would like to increase the income to their family, especially as there is so little work for the men. They are hoping to have a small shop built near the main checkpoint for St Katherine's where tourists coming on

coach trips would see the crafts. They need tools, materials and some start-up funding for buying goat hair and camel fur. They also need a sewing room with a tiled floor for protecting two sewing machines from dust for finishing the bags. In addition there are transport and fuel costs for collecting the women living in different communities throughout the area to come together and weave and then getting the finished goods to the tourist shops. We hope to have some funds ready to get the first stage of the project going in December.



Sinai Journeys Ltd

Two more dams built in the high mountains.

Sinai Journeys Ltd is the business arm of the Makhad Trust, and continues to encourage mutually beneficial cultural and practical exchange opportunities with the Bedouin people by taking people from the UK to Sinai, Egypt. On 21st of September, our trustees Rachel and Dick took a small party to Sinai to build a dam in Wadi Buleia in the High Mountains. By the end of the trip, they had built a medium sized dam plus a small one behind which will trap silt to stop the main one silting up. Together these dams will greatly increase water availability to many gardens to the north of the high mountains.

Two weeks later, another group led by Helen Cranston and composed of individuals and members of CCP (County Community Projects), a sister charity, went to build a dam above Wadi Zuweitin. In fact the build was a large extension to the first dam here, Amria's Dam built in 2009 by a group that included Helen. Amria's dam has been very successful in holding back a large volume of water which creates a small lake after rains - see article below - and encourages wildlife into the area. Water from this dam flows south and supports at least 150 gardens down Wadi



Itlah. During this trip the group added a whole metre in height but extended the length of the dam too. The water catchment area is expected to be double what it was before, therefore increasing the higher water levels after rain. Once the group had completed the dam, they walked over the mountains to stay a night in Ramadan's garden at the foot of Mount Sinai. The next day they climbed up the mountain, partly by camel and then up the last 750 steps to the top. The view from there is fabulous, and they had the summit to themselves. After descending the mountain and a night in Fox Camp, the group travelled out to the desert where they spent two nights and days, exploring the desert environment. It was a successful journey with many challenges for the participants but all came through with a sense of personal and group achievement.

Forthcoming Journeys with Sinai Journeys Limited



The next adventure journey to Sinai will take place in Spring 2025 with Helen's dam build Mountain and Desert Journey from Saturday 5 to Tuesday 15 April. More information will be posted on the sinaijourneys.org website in due course.

This photograph shows Amria's dam built by journey participants in 2009, but full of water in March last year. Dams like this one help to increase the water levels in wells below the dam providing extra water for hundreds of Bedouin gardens.



Winter Gathering

Our next social event will be our Winter Gathering, linking Makhad Trust with our sister organisation Sinai Journeys Ltd. Supporters of the Trust and Journey participants alike, are welcome to join us. We will meet on Sunday 2nd February at 12.00 noon at The Bear of Rodborough Hotel on Minchinhampton Common, near Stroud. We will have a delicious Sunday lunch together, a brief talk about our work and then go for a short walk on the

common nearby. There will be opportunities to hear about forthcoming adventure journeys to Sinai and meet the journey leaders.

If you are interested in attending please get in touch with Helen Cranston to book a place at the table. helencranston@makhad.org

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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