

Sinai Journey Report and Newsletter June 2025

Makhad
People Spirit Environment



The community of Arbreen, a remote valley and little water



Helen Cranston & Katharine Defrance, Project Manager

**News from Sinai,
Wells Project,
Seedbank, ERIK,
and Weaving &
Textiles Project**

The News

The Makhad Trust has a new Project Manager! After a lengthy and somewhat challenging recruitment process we have finally found someone who can provide the safe pair of hands to look after the projects in Sinai. We had a very large number of extremely well qualified and experienced people applying for the role of Project Manager, and some people really desperate to do the job, but we are delighted to have found Katharine, who has what it takes to keep the work happening.

Helen is not leaving the Trust but will be taking a more supervisory role, mostly in the UK, while also organising more trips for Sinai Journeys Ltd, the trading arm of the Trust. Ideally she will run two to three journeys each year, open to anyone who wishes to experience the magic of the mountains, while on an active retreat, contributing to the wellbeing of Sinai Bedouin through the building of a small dam - for when it next rains - every drop saved is valuable.

Introducing Katharine: *I am so happy to have joined the Makhad Trust. I have had a warm welcome from the Chair of Trustees, the Trustees and, of course, Helen. The journey that Makhad Trust has taken has been built upon their dedication and enthusiasm for the work and for the people of South Sinai.*

We have just returned from a trip to St Katherine's. I was awed by the beauty of the mountains and so enjoyed getting to know the Bedouin in the area. We would hike up a mountain pass of pink and orange rock to a meeting with a well owner. Looking along a valley floor there would be one green garden after another containing apricot, olive, pomegranate and almond trees, vegetables and herbs held with an ancient wall, alive thanks to life giving well water and the endeavour of the garden owners. Showing us around their gardens they would explain how the well improvement had gone and the impact on their lives, the lives of their family and community. The care, pride and effort that was taken in their gardens was self-evident.

What was less evident to new eyes, but became a consistent theme, was the extent to which each person, family and community supported one another, regularly sharing precious water, a lifeline, until their well could be restored. This is a community that cherishes and understands the importance of collective welfare. Nowhere was this more evident than the custodians of two community wells we met. They were aware of the importance of their well in providing for others. A duty in which they shoulder the costs but also the considerable weight of the responsibility. The experience was humbling and inspiring and, fortunately, we were able to offer support to both. I would like to thank Helen for her care, patience and effort in bringing me on board. Her commitment and passion for the region and its people and the work of the Makhad Trust is so evident in her work.

Water!! It seems that in every newsletter since I started this role in 2015, I have written about the scarcity of water, always hoping that good rains would come and all the Bedouin of South Sinai would have access to plentiful water. However, it has now been around 5 years since there were proper rains. While there was some rain in April 2023, (when I led a trip to build a small dam and we had to have a last minute change of plan because it did rain and there was too much water to build the dam!), there has not been sufficient precipitation to replenish the water table. Most old wells were between three and six meters deep, giving access to water sitting on the granite rock below, now all the well owners are having to dig around three to four meters into the granite and many much more than this. Wells that used to give three cubes of water a day are now giving half a cube a week or less. There is not enough water for people to grow vegetables this summer and any available water is needed to keep the orchard trees alive during the hot summer. We had an interesting meeting with Dr Ahmed, herbal healer and wise elder, who told us that Sinai has a long drought every hundred years. The last one was in 1924 and so they are now in the midst of the one in the earth's cycle of weather. Apparently they last about 10 years, and by my reckoning they are about 5 years into this one. With climate change, though, who knows and everyone is hoping that it will be a shorter drought. In the meantime, we do what we can to keep the water flowing.

Well Stories

In order to illustrate the severity of the water situation we had discussions with two highly respected well owners whose wells have been supported by the trust already. Both wells are huge and provide drinking water to anyone in the community regardless of where they come from but both wells are running dry. Together the wells used to provide around **eight cubes of water a day** to around 400 families. Now they only produce **two cubes every eight days!** We usually only fund a well once, in order to help as many people as possible, but clearly these wells are too important to the whole St Katherine's population for us to stick to a rule that has become irrelevant. By funding the digging of these two wells, both in excellent condition, we are ensuring that all funds will be used in digging without the need to spend money on repairs as we would with other wells. We decided to give contracts to Salem Ramadan and Sayeid Mousa straight away rather than putting them on the waiting list. Salem Ramdan had already had to buy a solar pump for his well because the water level had dropped so far the hoses no longer work with gravity. Sayeid Mousa has plans to dig down and along, in an L-shape to find the water.



Sayeid had an accident with a chainsaw two months ago and is still recovering from gashes to his legs. We wish him all the best for a speedy recovery.

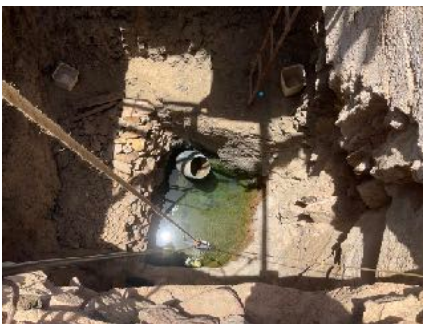
In Wadi Itlah there are over a hundred gardens running like a necklace of emerald beads along the bottom of the wadi. During this trip and previous one, we have had a large number of well owners pleading for help to deepen their wells to get down to the water table three meters below where it used to be. They are all desperate for water for their trees, which represent 20 or even 50 years of constant tending and a good annual income from the produce. In the past, wells in the bottom of the wadi have been full to the lid several months after a decent rain, but now the water level has dropped by 3 or 4m. Water levels used to be good, just 2m down to the water, but now the water is at 4m down and not much of it.



Not all wells are easily accessible A previous newsletter featured the valley of Abu Jerrus (Father Bell in English), a hidden valley high in the mountains at 2000m, where there were 5 wells needing our help. This trip saw the completion of the last two wells there but also the completion of a well just below Abu Jerrus, situated precariously on the steep



mountainside. The well owner, Ibrahim, was unable to bring a drill up the mountainside due to the climb and the well diggers had to dig by hand. The well was just above in the second photo, under massive boulder with only a small access hold. Despite the difficulties of getting into the well, they managed to deepen the well by 1.5m in the granite. Ibrahim is standing next to a small pool he built below the well to store water before it goes by hose to his garden below.



Some of the wells we saw on this trip count as monster wells. Mahmoud Monsur, a long time ally who has worked with the trust on many projects, has a well below the town of Abu Sila. It was very old and used to be a 'normal' circular well around 6m deep. Mahmoud has been working on it and it is huge! It is now four times as wide and around 15m deep but he has got good water.

Well Statistics

38	Completed	Underway	Waiting Sponsor	Waiting List
Garden Wells	341	7	37	99 + 168 = 267
Community Wells	345	15	33	118 + 139 = 257
Totals	686	22	70	524

Seed Bank

More seeds were given to Mahmoud Monsur during this trip. He expects to plant some of them in his polytunnel, particularly the tomatoes, growing them to make new seeds and starter seedlings to give to garden owners. The rest of the seeds will be available to whoever needs them for a small fee. Unfortunately, this is not likely to be many people this summer because of the lack of water and trees and people have priority. However, bringing seeds regularly helps to build up the seed bank. Mahmoud works with a government botanist Dr Kharlet who lives nearby, and who gives advice about using the seeds.



ERIK (Emergencies Repairs and Incidentals Kitty)

Our newest ERIK project is to support a Bedouin woman called Zainab, and her mother. Zainab is not married and she and her mother are supported by produce from two old and productive gardens just outside the town. Zainab usually stores water from her well in a small open water tank in the garden, using it to water the garden in one pass. However, her water tank had become cracked and needed extensive repairs so she asked for our support. The ERIK fund was able to finance a large part of the costs of rebuilding the water tank and the work should be completed by September and the next visit. This work will support the gardens and enable her and her mother to have the income needed to survive.



The ERIK fund has also been able to provide more well diggers with climbing harnesses for getting in and out of wells safely. So far the fund has provided three men with harnesses and there is a request from another well digger for a harness. The harnesses come from a climbing shop in Bristol called

Dick's Climbing. Well digging is such dangerous work that it is good to be able to help make at least one aspect of it safe. Apparently, the well diggers also like the strong loops on the belt which enable them to carry tools down the wells quite safely without the risk of them falling onto a colleague below.

Weaving and Textiles Project



This (relatively) new project has got off to a good start. Sheikh Mousa of the 12,000 strong Mouzaina tribe requested our help to revive an old EU project that enabled the women of the tribe to make a living from the sale of woven carpets. The project starts with the shearing of goats, sheep and camels belonging to members of the tribe but goats and sheep are the preserve of the women. Shearing them helps the animals to withstand the summer heat so is beneficial for them.

Once the wool has been collected it is cleaned and then spun and finally woven into carpets or made into bags. There is a market for this produce in the tourist resorts on the coast such as Sharm El Sheikh and Dahab. Sheikh Mousa needs help with an initial investment to get the wool and then to build rooms for the women to work, and to store the equipment and products prior to sale. Sheikh Mousa has also invested in handicraft materials to make bags, jewellery, and clay ceramics. The plan is also to buy cloth to make clothes. This is going to be a very big project, involving all the Mouzaina tribe and bringing much needed income to everyone. Already Sheikh Mousa has a large order of twenty carpets for a hotel in Sharm. Faraj Fox has offered to sell the carpets and handicrafts in his shop in Fox Camp, and there should be opportunities in new shops built in St Katherine's.

Woman's Projects

In the last newsletter there was news of projects to support the Bedouin women of Sinai, led by Sue Plaistow, a new member of our team. Unfortunately, the projects are on hold just at the moment, until Sue is able to resume travelling to Sinai. In the meantime the Bedouin ladies are carrying on with the initiatives to grow more food at home and to start teaching literacy to other women.

Sinai Journeys Ltd

There are three journeys scheduled for the Autumn. Rachel Devas and Dick Stainer (Trustees of the Makhad Trust) will be leading a small group to build a dam or to help restore a garden from Tuesday 30 September to Tuesday 7 October.

If you are interested in joining Rachel and Dick please contact Rachel racheldevas@icloud.com



Helen will be organising journeys on the following dates, this year:

7 to 18 October and 1 to 11 November 2025

And next year from 11 to 21 April and 25 April to 5 May 2026

These journeys are adventurous retreats, combining exploration of the mountains and deserts of Sinai with the opportunity to rest in complete silence, switching off from the hustle of the modern world and dropping into the timeless space of being. During this time we will become familiar with the landscape by building a small dam to benefit our hosts, the Bedouin people. Listening and reading poems and spiritual texts helps us connect with the wisdom of ancient Desert Fathers and Mothers who retreated to these lands to find themselves and their spiritual connection. Some people say that the Sinai is the birthplace of the world's three major religions as all the prophets spent time wandering in the Sinai wilderness.

'A man in a desert can hold absence in his cupped hands knowing it is something that feeds him more than water'

You can contact Helen on helen@sinaijourneys.org

For more information about all journeys please see the website <https://sinaijourneys.org/>

Makhad Trust Gathering

Makhad Trust Gathering takes place annually in February near Stroud in Gloucestershire. If you are interested in joining us you will find more information in future newsletters and on our website.

Through the Eyes of a Newcomer - Katharine

I have learnt no two wells are the same. We have seen wells constructed around improbably large boulders. Wells in the town, wells on outcrops of mountainsides that astounded me that they knew to dig there. Wells with large openings and others with a small mouth through which the well diggers had to slide to do their work. Ancient wells that have served people for centuries, new wells full of promise and hope. Square wells lined with cement, circular wells built from rounded riverbed rocks. Wells with walls and defences and wells with lids. Wells that are fed from springs, the delightfully named 'dripping wells'. Wells that bring water via pulleys, or a tripod and one with a wheel made from recycled building material. Wells that made me say out loud 'wow' as I leaned over the side spotting ladders and levels leading down. Many wells have small pools built next to them for birds and animals to replenish themselves. Each well a custodian that looks after it, and each a story - a family, a community, in the town or in the high mountains, a well for a herb garden, an orchard, for a passersby or wildlife. Each well the provider of hope, welfare, sustenance – each life giving. And what I wondered is the collective noun for a group of wells as we near our 700th restoration, a hope of wells? A humanity of wells? An affirmation of wells? I'd be very interested in any suggestions!



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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