



# Baka Jat

## Background

Baka Al-Gharbiya (“a bouquet of flowers”) is located on the foothills of the Shomron Mountains, east of the city of Hadera. It is surrounded by agricultural lands to the north, the Separation Barrier to the east and the Trans-Israel Highway and additional agricultural lands to the west. Road No. 574 runs through Baka Al-Gharbia, connecting it to Wadi Ara and the center of the country. In 2003 Baka and the village of Jat, situated to its south, were united into one municipality, Baka-Jat. The city has a population of approximately 33,000 Muslim-Arabs, and a total area of 15,000 dunams. Most of the residents of Baka-Jat earn their living from agriculture, trade, via the education system or work outside the city.

Baka-Jat is located on the northwestern section of the Mountain Aquifer, an area considered extremely vulnerable to ground water pollution. The Mountain Aquifer is a major water source for much of Israel and for the entire Palestinian Authority. However, the area suffers from serious pollution caused mainly by illegal dumpsites throughout the city, coupled with the lack of a proper waste water treatment system. The Hadera Stream (Wadi Abu Nar) that runs through the city from east to west is a shared source of water for Baka-Jat and its Palestinian neighbor, Baka Al Sharkia.

This trail is one of 17 paths or trails that deal with the issue of water and peace building between Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian communities that share a common water source. The routes were planned during 2007 in the framework of the “Good Water Neighbors” project in cooperation with community representatives as well as the municipalities

### The goals of the trails are to:

- Raise public awareness of shared water and environment concerns of the communities
- Promote cross border cooperation for solving environmental problems
- Develop the potential for local eco-tourism

The “Good Water Neighbors” project was established in 2001 by “EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East” in order to promote local cooperation efforts to protect the shared water and environment between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

“EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East” is a regional environmental organization that works out of 3 offices, Tel Aviv, Amman and Bethlehem to promote cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage.

• For more information, please visit our website: [www.foeme.org](http://www.foeme.org)

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• Specific information on the neighbors trails: <http://www.foeme.org/publications>

Guided tours on the Neighbors Trails take place once every three weeks. To sign up, please write to: [info@foeme.org](mailto:info@foeme.org)



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## Neighbors Path



# Baka Jat



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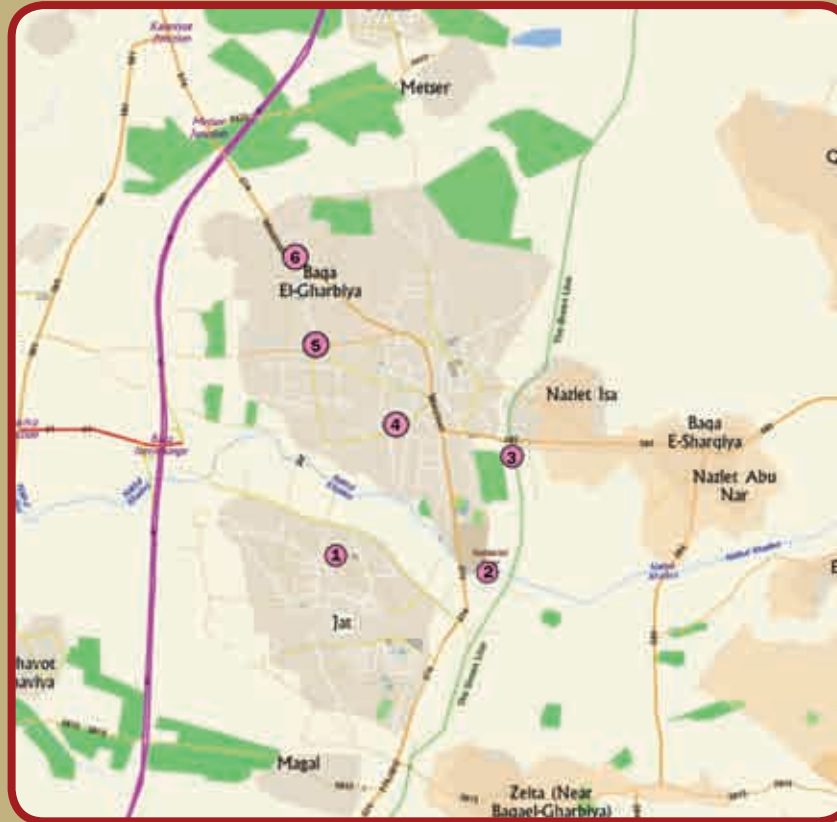
**1 The View from Beit Ra'ad (House of Ra'ad)** Beit Ra'ad is located at 150 meters above sea level on the northern slopes of Jat. From the roof of the house, one can view this unique rural area, with a panoramic view of the northern Shomron Mountains, the Menashe Hills, all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. This view also demonstrates the new geographic reality of the area that was caused by the Separation Barrier in the east and the Trans Israeli Highway in the west.

**2 Wadi Abu-Nar - The Hadera Stream** Nahal Hadera, or Wadi Abu Nar, is a seasonal stream that flows for 51 kilometers, from the Shomron Mountains in the East to the Mediterranean Sea, near the Hadera power station. The section of the stream that flows between the agricultural fields of Baka and Jat is extremely polluted; raw sewage, agricultural waste and building debris are all dumped into the stream. The sources of pollution come from the Palestinian town of Baka Al Sharkia from the east as well as from Baka-Jat itself. Each winter, large floods wash through the Wadi, bringing with them even more trash and causing agricultural damage on its way to the Sea. The stream, once a source of life for its surroundings is today an environmental hazard for the people of Baka and Jat. Today, a sewage treatment facility is in its first stages of construction; but a plan to clean up the Wadi and develop a promenade in the area has been delayed due to lack of funding.

**3 The Separation Barrier** In 2002, the Separation Barrier was erected east of Baka, on the Green Line. The barrier runs parallel to the city for 5 kilometers, a third of which is a concrete wall, separating the houses of Baka from the adjacent Palestinian village of Nizlat Isa. The social and economic effects of the Barrier on the people of Baka-Jat have been severe. It separated family members and affected daily familial routines; a drive that used to take 2 minutes, turned into an expensive and time consuming trip. Economic ties in the area were damaged as well; the large market that stood for years between Baka Al-Gharbia and Baka Al-Sharkia was demolished. The market once included 350 shops, a major source of income for 100's of local residents and small businesses. In addition, 5 private houses were demolished and an apartment building is being used to house the army to this day.

**4 The Baka Well** The Baka Well, 37 meters deep and 2 meters wide, is located at the centre of the city, at the

## The Path's Stations



intersection of Route 574 and Abu Hasin Street. The well dates to the Canaanite period but was used mostly during the Byzantine and Ottoman times. Together with a number of regional springs, the well provided the main drinking water needs of Baka until the village was connected to the Israeli water system in 1952. The Baka Well was since deserted and neglected, and turned into a neighborhood dumpsite. In 2006, "The Water Society of Baka" initiated a rehabilitation and restoration project. Today the well serves as an historical and educational site, aiming to teach environmental values to the next generation.

**5 The Burin Well** This well is located approximately a kilometer from the city center, in the western part of the Bir Burin neighborhood, appropriately named after the well. It is 7 meters deep and 5 meters wide and, similar to the Baka well, dates back to the Canaanite period. The Burin Well was used from the beginning of the Ottoman period but never as a drinking source; rather, its water was used for watering Baka's herds, for cleaning and swimming. Since the connection of Baka to the water system the well was greatly neglected, littered and polluted, until in 2003, Baka's Community Centre, together with "Friends of the Middle East" and residents of the city, initiated its restoration. The well was cleaned, a small plaza made of local stone was built around it and olive trees were planted. As an example of the local water heritage in the area, the restored well is now a source of pride for its residents and an important educational project for promoting environmental education and "green" activities throughout the city.

**6 Abu-Haldoun Elementary School** With approximately 1,100 students, this is the largest school in Baka. The school has been recognized as a "green school" because of its ecological garden and environmentally friendly creative compound. A number of solar energy stations were built in the school that supply solar energy for lighting, as well as a system for collecting rain and excess water from drinking fountains, re-using them in the school's gardens and toilets. In addition, an ecological garden was built including a sitting area made out of recycled materials. The school serves as an example of the transition in recent years in the educational system of Baka regarding environmental awareness and the sense of personal empowerment among the students. These projects are also effective in cutting down the school's expenses.