

Besor River

Background

Several streams flow into the Besor River, from both north and the south, among them the Boker, Hebron, Be'er-Sheva, Grarr, Patish streams and others. The Besor River ("Wadi Gaza") flows from the Be'er-Sheva Valley in the north, crosses the Gaza strip and exits into the Mediterranean Sea. The Besor basin is an area rich in springs, pools and wells as well as impressive archeological findings. Human history evolved in the basin from the beginning of the Prehistoric period. In this area one finds remains of underground buildings from the Chalcolithic period as well as remains of peoples and other empires; Phoenicians, Persians, Nabati and Egyptians. Here, on the banks of the stream, Middle Eastern cultures evolved. Here, Abraham our father and his sons shepherded their flocks; from here Ishmael was expelled and here, King David fought. In the past this area was a part of the central commercial axis through which commodities were transported from the east to the port of Gaza ("the Perfume Route" recognized today by UNESCO as a World Heritage site). Furthermore, significant agricultural settlements existed in this area. Huge fields of wheat served as a regional granary and the waters of the stream supplied the service needs of those passing on their way to the port of Gaza or to the Sea.

The shallow groundwater in the stream's channel appears alternately above the ground as a flow or in pools and creates special environments for flora and fauna. In the thickets of the Tamarisks and reeds, one finds pools of fish, crabs, water turtles and many species of birds. Wild pigs, hyenas, wolves, crocodiles and caracals can be found as well. The huge expanses, agricultural areas, water, the magnificent seasonal spring bloom and the archeological remains are all a source of attraction and huge potential for the development of ecological tourism and a source of income for the local inhabitants. Unfortunately, this unique nature preserve suffers today from neglect and serious damage caused to the stream and its basin from waste pollution, agricultural, industrial and urban. This path is designed to expose its visitors to the natural beauty that is hardly recognized today and to raise questions as regards the management of water resources in the area.

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:
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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



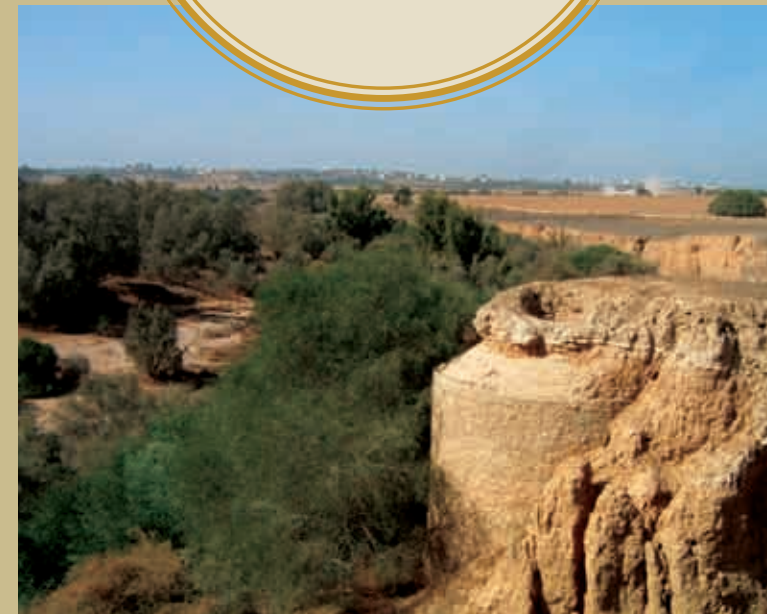
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Neighbors Path



Besor River



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The Path's Stations

1 Observation Point, Tel Gamma

An ancient Tel (hill) containing Prehistoric archeological remains, continuing through the Ottoman period to the time of the First World War. In the vicinity of this Tel there was an urban community settlement in the middle Bronze Age and in the Iron Age. This Tel has been identified as the ancient city of "Yarza", according to Egyptian text. It is possible to see in-situ remains of ancient ovens used for gold and other metals and lime structures that served as barns for agricultural produce in the Persian period. Let us climb on foot to the top of the Tel to look out onto the magnificent view of the span of the Besor stream, the Be'er Sheva Valley and the whole of the Gaza Strip.

2 The Bustan (small orchard) at Nitzra Stream

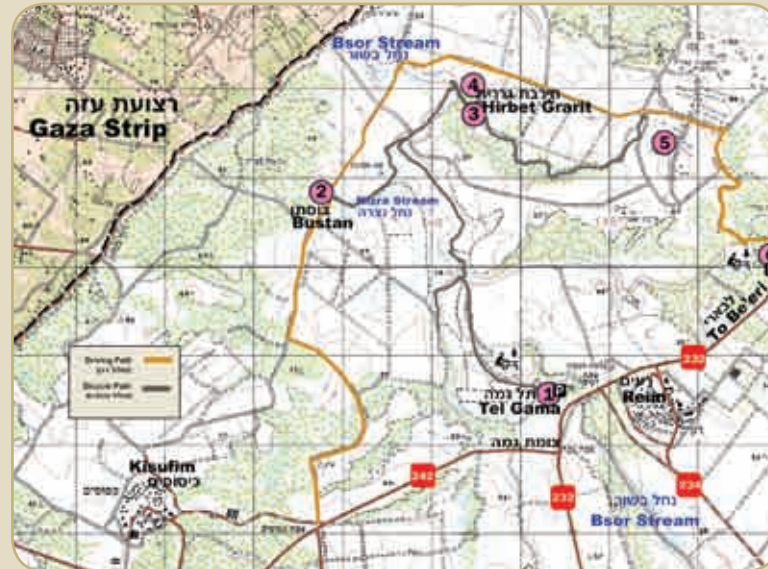
From Tel Gamma, drive south on Road 232 until the Gamma intersection. Turn right on Road 242 and drive 3 km. in the direction of Kissufim. Opposite the entrance to Ein Hashlosha, turn right towards the fields onto an asphalt road marked in red. Drive 4 km. (After 2.8 km. along this road, turn right at the 'T' intersection with the marked road)

A lovely bustan (small orchard) in the Nitzra Stream, with huge Sycamore trees, interlaced with vines, Muscat, strawberry trees and figs. A suggested area to stop and rest, especially during full bloom. The next stop is reachable by foot on a 2.5 km. (blue) marked trail, through the stream's riverbed. The trail is especially attractive in the end of the summer months, when fruit is abundant.

3 View from the Dam

Continue along the route marked in red. Before descending into the Besor streambed turn right along the bank of the stream for 500 meters. After rain, do not travel on this section of the route alongside the stream.

In the 1960's a concrete dam was erected to create a reservoir to store the rivers floodwaters. The stream did not "understand" the meaning of the dam, and the runoff waters cut into the banks of the stream causing it to widen, bringing about the collapse of the ruins of a Byzantine church exposing a well nearby. The building of the dam is an example of myopic development causing damage to assets of public domain (in this case, the natural stream and the archeological remains).



4 the Grarit Ruins

Returning to the route marked in red, cross the Besor on the open "Irish" bridge. Do not cross the stream on days when the stream is flowing!! Immediately after ascending from the streambed turn right on the asphalt route marked in green. After 1 km turn right on the blue marked path to the Grarit ruins.

A Byzantine church discovered in 1917. Magnificent sections of mosaic were uncovered but removed; only a simple mosaic remains on-site. One section can be seen in the archeological collection in nearby Kibbutz Be'eri. The banks of the stream were washed away, as previously stated, as a result of the building of the dam that caused the remains of the church to collapse into the stream. From the north, close



5 British Ammunition Repository

Continuing along the asphalt road marked in green, after approximately 700 meters the marking changes to black, and after an additional 1.2 km., the marking changes to green and the trail turns into an old concrete road. After 1 km on the concrete road we reach a road marked in red and turn right. Travel 1.2 km until you see the signpost designating the entrance to the water works. The trail here is clearly marked. This is a trail designed for hikers.

From this route one can see more than 170 piles of rubble in the shape of a horseshoe, built by the British and designed to store aerial bombs. With the fear of the approaching front of the Second World War, an air field was constructed for Israel in Gaza.

In the Garr stream, an attractive bicycle trail is marked, especially attractive during the winter months.

6 Water Works of the Garr Stream

Continue along the water works road to the Reim picnic and parking area.

Human efforts to store water in arid areas are illustrated in the variety of facilities found here from different periods; a water cistern from the Byzantine period and an Antilic well, recently restored. Sign posts have been erected explaining their functions.

Leave the picnic and parking area and turn right (south) onto Road 232, pass the entrance to Re'im and cross the Besor Stream. Immediately after the stream, turn right (north) and return to Tel Gamma.