

Bedouin Paths Ltd

Bedouin Lives – Column 2: Saturday 19th January 2008

"how and why the Bedouin get fired up ..."

The Bedouin really enjoy playing with their fires. When bored during a rest break of a hike, they will gather a few twigs and dry bushes and happily burn them. The twigs are carefully laid, the larger ones on top of the smaller ones, lighters are brought to bear and soon a plume of smoke envelopes the smiling face of the Bedouin. He will then continue to amuse himself for a few minutes trying to keep the fire going for as long as possible. No tea is brewed, no bread is cooked and little warmth is to be had. But as with little boys all over the world, there is something inherently seductive about a fire.

When camp is made, they then use said fires for cooking, cleaning, baking, hot water for washing, keeping themselves warm; and for general amusement. And judicial enquiries.

We like to think in the west of the judicial due process being highly structured ; the case for the defence and the prosecution; a line of argument and rational debate, the display and analysis of evidence with perhaps the occasional expert witness thrown in; and a jury of 12 good men (and women).

The Bedouin use fire.

In the event that someone is suspected of being a wrong'un, they are asked whether they agree to the *Bisha'a*. The *Bisha'a* is the trial by fire. If they refuse then they are automatically deemed guilty and their tribe will take retribution from them in accordance with the severity of the crime.

If they agree to the *Bisha'a* then the *Bisha'a* council of three tribal elders is gathered and the proceedings start. The council is headed by the *Mubesha* who is an expert in the process and they are taught the skills from their fathers. The *Mubesha* is a family business.

A large fire is made with a long metal pole or ladle stuck into it and left there for several hours until the end of it is white hot. Once the metal pole is deemed hot enough, the accused is brought forward and the *Mubesha* takes the pole and applies the white hot end to the tip of the accused's tongue; three times. Yeah, three times.

The *Mubesha* will then study his tongue and make a judgement. If the tongue is deemed red and inflamed or just plain burnt then he is automatically found guilty. If the tongue is as shiny and pink as the day he was born then he is innocent. Simple.

The rationale behind this is that a guilty man will be nervous of being burnt and therefore will have a dry mouth and hence, inevitably, will be burnt. An innocent man on the other hand has nothing to feel guilty about and therefore will have a fully wet and moist tongue with which to lick the metal pole.

So if you fancy doing a bit of camel rustling next time you visit us in South Sinai, may I recommend you get arrested by the police first; before the Bedouin get hold of you.



Bedouin Paths runs ethical hiking tours in Sinai and is looking for a Sales & Marketing Manager to be based in Cairo. If you are a fluent Arabic speaker with Sales and Marketing experience, please send your details to jobs@bedouinpaths.com or mark@bedouinpaths.com or go to www.bedouinpaths.com for more information.