



Bedouin Paths
Bedouin Camp
St. Katherine
South Sinai
Egypt

Call Crusader Travel on +44(0)2087440474
Call Egypt on +20 189662010
Email: hello@bedouinpaths.com
Website: www.bedouinpaths.com

Sinai



The Sinai area

Sinai looks like nothing so much as the surface of the moon. So the theory says that the name Sinai derived from the lunar deity Sin. Early inhabitants, worshipping the Trinity: Sin (Moon), Shamash (Sun) and Ishtar (Venus) named the peninsular after the moon-god Sin. Taba

The Sinai Peninsula consists of an area of some 61,000 square kilometers. Geographical Sinai belongs to Egypt cut from its motherland by the Suez Canal. The natural barriers are the Gulf of Suez to the west, separating the African continent from Arab Asia and the Gulf of Aqaba to the east.

The north east boundary, a 200 kilometer stretch of Mediterranean coastline, is also known as the ancient Via Maris, a route used by conquerors, traders and travelers.

Some twenty million years ago Sinai was connected with Egypt and the Saudi Arabian Peninsula as part of the same land formation.

Thermal currents in the earth's mantle created huge cracks, which lifted and spread the land.

Sinai is part of the Great Rift Valley, the great fracture in the earth's crust, that begins in East Africa continues through the Red Sea into the Gulf of Aqaba through the Jordan Valley (Dead Sea, Sea of Galilee) widening each year about 5mm moving the Saudi Arabian Peninsula northwards.

Geologically Sinai can be roughly divided into three areas. The northern region consists of sand dunes and fossil beaches formed by the changing levels of the Mediterranean Sea during the glacial periods two million years ago.



The landscape is flat and uniform, interrupted only by some vast sand- and limestone hills.

The scarcely inhabited Al Tih Plateau is the central geological area with limestone dating from the Tertiary Period.

The highlands extend towards the south until it goes over into the third area consisting of granite and volcanic rock. Limestone and sandstone sediments are replaced by granite and basalt. Both rocks are produced by volcanic activity on the bottom of the ocean from the Precambrium.



History

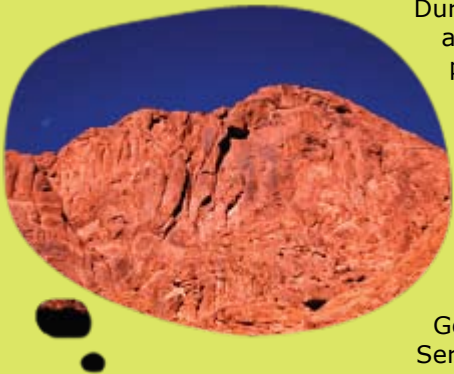
Archeological investigations of the prehistoric past the findings of bones and flint tools show evidence of the presence of human life in the desert as far as 200 000 years ago.

Strange prehistoric structures were found, the "Desert Kites". These odd configurations of stone walls built triangular with the tip leading downhill were presumably used to entrap gazelles.

The Nawamis, roofed rooms with an opening to the west are understood to be ancient burial chambers of the early Bronze Age. Nawamis, some of them in an excellent state, are found in different areas. Maybe this indicates that nomads were using these places for ceremonies or resting places during their journeys.

Tribal people mainly settled in the area around St. Catherine mining copper and turquoise. Among them were tribes mentioned in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic books known to us as Horites (mountain people), Rephaim (Giants), Edomites (descendants of Esau), Amalekites (nomadic people), Medianites (nomads from the Arabian Peninsula).

During the Timna Culture (3500 BC) the population increased as the mining and melting of copper and turquoise flourished.



During the first Dynasty of the Pharaohs the profitable trade of copper and turquoise already began. A bas-relief, discovered in Wadi Maghara, portraying Pharaoh Sekhemkhet (2600 BC) indicates the so far earliest presence of Egyptian Pharaohs in Sinai.

Labor camps were set up near the site of the mines. Copper and turquoise were brought down an ancient track to the port of Markha near Abu Zneima. From there the minerals were loaded onto ships and transported to Egypt.

In the 12th Dynasty the magnificent temple dedicated to the Goddess Hathor, the Lady of Turquoise, Love and Joy, was built in Serabit Al Khadem (the Heights of the Servants).

At some point of this period an extraordinary event took place. Laborers scribbled symbols on the walls translating the pictures of the hieroglyphic alphabet into consonantal sounds. It evolved into the Proto-Sinaitic alphabet from which the Semitic languages derived.

Many rocks with graffiti on are found out of Nabatean times during the 2nd and 3rd century AD and Roman and Byzantine inscriptions.

The Bible

Since the reign of Tuthmosis III Hebrews were living in Egypt. The exodus of the Hebrew people, known as Apirou, took probably place during the reign of Ramses II (1290 – 1224 BC). One can only speculate about the reasons of the exodus.

Most likely difficult economic circumstances in form of high taxes and compulsory labor were the reasons for an exodus into a land of milk and honey. Apart from biblical sources there is no historical evidence; ancient Egyptian papyri hardly mention the Hebrews (or other minorities living in Egypt).

However, in the 3rd century hermits who sought refuge and seclusion in the high mountain range of the St. Catherine region developed the idea of Mt. Sinai being the place where Moses had received the 10 Commandments. By the 19th century Sinai became popular among researchers and adventurous explorer, who began to trace the exact sites of the exodus based on documentary evidence and geographic characteristics.

According to a majority of researchers, somewhere between Suez and the Bitter Lakes the crossing could have taken place and the tribes then traveled towards Ayun Musa (Spring of Moses).



Other biblical sites were made out Elim (Wadi Garandel) with the sulfur springs of Hammam Faraon, the wilderness of Sin (Markha, the ancient port of Abu Zneima), Rephedim (Wadi Feiran, Pharan of the book of Exodus). Gebel Serbal in Wadi Feiran was recognized as the Mount of the Ten Commandments by the early Christian authorities.

Also Kadesh Barnea, today Ain Gedeirat, in the northeast is supposed to be Mt. Horeb according to its location. The oldest Bedouin settlements are found in this area known to them as Moses Valley.

Others favor the northern route as the possible way the Israelites could have taken. 'Yam Saf' -the sea of reeds- was in fact the lakes along the Mediterranean coast between Port Said and Al Arish. The numerous presences of reeds fit the biblical description.

The Tamarisk trees producing a gum known as manna are plenty in the north, while only few in the south. Quails are more common here than in southern Sinai. Names of places are found in their old names similar to biblical ones: Arish [Alush], Kadeish Barnea [Kades], Libnah [Libni].

The event of the exodus could have taken place in Sinai and it could have not. If it did, it is just one of many miracles of the mysterious and fascinating Sinai.

Chronology

- 2 Mil. Years** The land extension of Sinai, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia had been almost a single entity. Enormous ravages reformed this area soon after and left Sinai as a peninsular right between Egypt and the Arabian peninsular (The Gulf).
- 30.000 BC** Proof of probably the oldest settlement, found in the north of Sinai.
- 3100 BC** The Egyptian history of dynasties begins the way we know it today. From what we know of records handed down, this was the date of the first dynasty, where Menes unites the two kingdoms in Egypt.
- 2500 BC** A heterogeneous nomadic horde from western Asia (called Hyksos) crossed Sinai to invade Egypt. Throughout the Hyksos's occupation there was no Egyptian activity found in the mines and quarries of Sinai.
- 1400 BC** According to the Bible, Moses wandered for many decades in the region of Sinai. It is believed that (leading approx. half a million Israelites) at Mount Sinai God spoke to Moses. This is also the place that has drawn pilgrims for more than a thousand years.



- 332 BC** Troops of Alexander the Great marched through Sinai in order to conquer Egypt.
- ~0 AD** Virgin Mary with her child Jesus Christ crossed Sinai both escaping from and coming back to Palestine.
- ~550** St. Catherine's Monastery was constructed by order of the Emperor Justinian
- 1050** The Arabs invaded Egypt and penetrated Sinai, where most of the inhabitants were converted into Islam.

- 1182** Salah El Din marched with troops across Sinai, entering Transjordan by the route of Aqaba.
- 1517** The Turkish Sultan Selim invaded Egypt via the coast of Sinai. He built fortresses, filled them with Moorish soldiers whose role it was to protect the pilgrims. In Acaba today there are still descendants of this race.
- 1858** Saed Pasha established a quarantine area for pilgrims in Tour city.
- 1869** The Suez Canal, between the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Suez, was opened with a length of 195 km.
- 1910** Excavation and digging for oil started. In 1921, oil was finally discovered close to Abu Doria.
- 1948-49** First Arab-Israel War, including Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.
- 1956** As a reaction of the Suez crisis and in coordination with the British and French military, Israel occupied Sinai. In the same year (at the end of the war), the USSR and the USA forced Israel to return Sinai's territory to Egyptian control.
- 1967** Six-Day-War, an attack from Israel against Egypt on June 5th to June 11th. By the end of this war Sinai is under Israeli control.
- 1973** 6th October War (also Yom Kippur War), lead by Egypt and Syria against Israel. Disengagement agreements finally leaves Egypt with parts of the East Bank of the Suez Canal, a zone stretching only a couple of kilometres into Sinai.
- 1979** Peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, forcing Israel to withdraw military forces as well as disengaging settlements from Sinai until 1982.
- 1982** Israel finishes the Sinai withdrawal process. Multinational Force Observers are installed to secure protection from Israeli or Egyptian military activities.
- 1983** Ras Mohamed as the first and only Egyptian National Park was declared with an area of 97km². Since then it has been extended to 480km² and includes marine and terrestrial areas (also on Tiran Island).
- 1989** March 15th: the small town of Taba, next to the Israeli border, was handed over to Egypt.

