

Hike Your Homeland, Hike Freely



By Amaal Abu Ghoush
and Anwar Hamam

"Who in their right mind would torture themselves on their vacation day and wake up this early (4:00 or 5:00 a.m.) to torture themselves even more by walking in the heat and dust, rain, or wind!" I said this to myself the first time I went hiking, and I've heard it many times from friends and acquaintances. Well, actually, WE do; and not only that, we can hardly wait until the details of the next hike are announced to let us know where, what time, and how hard it's going to be.

I, Amaal, am actually a new hiker. I started in mid-September of last year, but from the first time I went, I got addicted. Now I cannot think of a week without hiking. Ne'meh, a friend of mine who has been hiking for a while, had told me what

A hike by the village of Battir. Photo by Mohammad Abu Laila.



a great experience it is to hike, but it took me a while to join. And I am so glad that I eventually did!

I, Anwar, am in fact a member of the hiking group's founding team and one of its administrators now.

At the beginning of each hike, and especially when there is a new hiker in the group, one of the group members, usually Anwar, introduces us once again to the rules, the list of principles that our hiking group is committed to.

The most important rule is twofold: respect the environment and all its plants, animals, insects, birds, rocks, etc., since these are all essential elements in the environmental balance, and maintain cleanliness and prevent pollution in all its forms. Therefore, cleaning the springs and the natural reserves is part of our team culture. One of our members, Mohammed, is an artist. He creates pieces of art from some of the garbage we find. We always wait for his new recycled pieces of art and furniture.

The second rule: contribute to the conservation and storage of water through building natural barriers to prevent soil erosion and reducing the flow of rainwater, and through the cultivation of Palestinian wild plants to prevent their extinction.

The Hike and Explore Your Homeland group, or Emshi! (literally: walk!) as we call it, is a Palestinian voluntary group that was formed in the summer of 2012 by a number of young Palestinian women and men. Through organizing and exploring hiking trails every week, the group attempts to overcome the racist impediments imposed on our land by the occupation.

By now, all those who walk with us know the third rule: remain with the group and stay on the trails specified by the group. In other words, the ants track: walk in single file just like the ants. In general, the participants need to be able to navigate off-the-road and hard trails, and commit to the times of departure and return.

Lastly, the most important rule: boycott Israeli products and support Palestinian products; encourage small enterprises, especially those of women, the poor, the disabled, the elderly in rural areas, camps, and marginalized areas, and thus strengthen the culture of supporting local products through the direct purchase of these products.

And this is what actually happens, we all stick to these rules, willingly and lovingly!

In the places we visit, we usually make contact with someone from the village or local council and ask them to talk to us about their village and share some stories about the area. They will

frequently join us or even lead our hike through the village lands, a bonus for us and especially for the kids who hike with us.

Hiking is actually contagious. After I started to hike with the group, some of my family and friends joined us. I was most happy when my nieces joined, since children, in general, are a beautiful addition to the group. Some of them are leaders in protecting the environment and will often collect garbage that is strewn around the springs we visit. These young people – along with others in the group – carry the bags of collected garbage all the way back! These hikes have become a wonderful alternative to the constant fare of technology, mobile phones, and the Internet!

Our group, or *our tribe* as we call ourselves, brings together all sorts of people, and everybody is welcome to join. To be an official member of the group, you must have hiked with us at least twice, but anyone can accompany us on our walks. We range in age from 5 to 70-something, and we come from all over Palestine. We always leave from Ramallah city center, but we go to places all over the West Bank. The group has explored more than 130 trails since 2012! Here are some of them.

Walking near Im Ballouta caves, Deir Nizam. Photo by Karim Mizel.



In the Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate

- Al-Tira – Ain Qiniya – Ain Arik
- Birzeit – Ain Siniya
- Deir Ghassana – Wadi Sarida – Aboud
- Kafr Rumman – Ottoman tunnel (Kharij Bila'a)
- Kafr Ein Mountains
- Surda – Jifna – Ain Siniya
- Beit Ikasa
- Ain Arik – Saffa
- Kobar – Jibia Forest
- Deir Dibwan – Rammun – Taybeh
- Saffa – Beitunia

- Al-Mughayyir al-Foqa – Jalbun – Deir Ghazaleh
- Deir Dibwan and surroundings
- Kafr Ni'ma – Ras Karkar – Ain Qiniya
- Burham – Kobar – Abu Shukhaydam – Birzeit
- 'Arura and surroundings
- Deir as-Sudan – Umm Safa
- Mazare' al-Nubani – Al-Hadiqa al-Insaniyya (Humanity Park)
- Yabroud – Silwad
- Beitillu – Ain az-Zarqa
- Kafr al-Deek (Ramallah) – Khirbet Susia – Mount Ar'ara - Rafat

Kirbet A'ai, Deir Dibwan. Photo by Mahmoud Mo'tan.



- Ras Karkar – Ain Ayub – Ain Al-Jawz – Al-Fawara
- Sinjil – Ain Maghrabeh
- Ard Tarfidia – Ramallah
- Beit Duku – Ain and Khirbet Jifna
- Deir Abu Mesh'a'al – Wad Ratba
- Obwain and surroundings
- Beit Ur al-Fauqa and surroundings
- Taybeh and surroundings
- Ni'lin – Qal'at al-Khawaja – Wadi al-Ain – Al-Sawaneh
- Ain Arik – Khirbet Shayan – Ain Bubin – Deir Ebze'a

Around Jericho

- Ain Samia – Al-Auja
- Ain Fara – Ain al-Fawwar – Ain al-Qelt
- Tayasir – Aqabah
- Al-Sawahra – Ain al-Fashkh (Dead Sea)
- Al-Wad al-Ahmar – Fasayil
- Nabi Musa – Khirbet Qumran – Dead Sea
- Tulul Abu al-Alayek – Ain al-Duyuk

Around Nablus

- Asira ash-Shamaliya – Wadi Al-Badan
- Asira ash-Shamaliya – Ijnisinya – Nisf Jubeil – Sebastiya
- Al-Lubbanash Sharqiya – Az-Zawiya
- Wad Marash – Al-Fara'a
- Tal Balata – Old Town – Samaritan Community
- Beit Furik – Tana
- Naqoura – Asira ash-Shamaliya

Around Salfit

- Burqin – Khirbet Karkash
- Khirbat Qeis and surroundings
- Deir Istiya – Wadi Qana
- Deir Ballut – Kafr ad-Dik
- Sahl Baqa'a – Tubas

Around Tubas

- The northern Jordan Valley – Farisiyeh – Ain al-Beida – Ain as-Sakout
- Te'nnak – Burqin
- Bardala – Tubas

Around Tulkarem

- Kafr al-Labad – Beit Lid – Kur

Around Jenin

- Barta'a and surroundings
- Kafr Qoud – Kafreet – Arraba

Around Jerusalem

- Hizma – Ain al-Fawwar
- Katana – Wad Kharfeesh – Al-Kfeira

Around Bethlehem

- The mountains of Beit Jala – Cremisan – Ain Mansour – Walaja
- Wadi Fukin – Husan – Battir – Beit Jala

Around Hebron

- Halhul Mountains
- Beit Ummar and surroundings
- Masafer Bani Na'im
- Surif and surroundings

These are the water springs we have visited.ⁱⁱ

Ramallah Area

- Ain Samia
- Ain Ayyob
- Ain Boubin
- Ain Nabi Anir
- Ain al-Joz,
- Ain al-Fawara (in Ras Karkar)
- Ain Sinya
- Ain Qiniya
- Ain Arik
- Ain al-Jadida/Ain al-Qaras (near Kafr Ain)
- Ain al-Qasab
- Al-Ain al-Fawqa,
- Ain Dalklah
- Ain al-Kawabish (in Deir al-Sudan)
- Ain Maghrabeh and Bir Yousuf (near Sinjil)
- Ain Jifna (in Beit Duku)
- Wadi al-Ain (in Ni'lin)
- Wadi al-Habis in Taybeh;

Jerusalem Area

- Ain Qoton,
- Ain al-Balad,
- Wad Kharfeesh (in Qatana)

Jericho Area

- Ain al-Qelt
- Ain al-Fawwar
- Ain al-Fawara
- Ain Fasayel
- Ain al-Doyouk
- Ain al-Sakout

Salfit Area

- Ain az-Zarqa in Sorayda



Nablus Area

- Ain al-Fara'a
- Ain/Wadi al-Badan
- Ain Haroun (in Naqoura)

Qalqilya Area

- Wadi Qana

Bethlehem Area

- Ain Mansour

Beit Jala Area

- Ain Mousa (in Al-Walaja)
- Ain al-Hawyah
- Ain Battir

Group members think of each other as family, and we see hiking as a relief from everyday stresses. We have come to know the many benefits of walking and hiking, and we see the changes in ourselves and others both physically and psychologically. On these hikes we can either walk alone and listen to nature or music, or we can choose to have serious or light conversations with one of the over 500 members of the group.



▲ Wadi Qelt. Photo by Amjad Shujahea.

► Wadi Qelt. Photo by Amjad Shujahea.

◄ A traditional meal on a hiking day. Photo by Nuha Jaradat.

▼ The flag bearer, Al Oja, Jericho. Photo by Mahmoud Moran.

The number of participants for each hike varies between 20 and 100 people, depending on the weather and the location. But every week, every Friday, there is a hike!

We walk for a number of reasons: good exercise, cultural and social benefits, being part of the Palestinian resistance movement against the occupation, the settlements, and the Judaization of the land, as well as in protest against the obscuring of the Palestinian presence, history, identity, and symbols. We believe in strengthening the Palestinian sense of belonging to the land and in supporting the steadfastness of our people as they struggle for justice and basic human rights, especially the right to freedom of movement.

Hiking through various areas revitalizes our national memory since we walk the paths of our Palestinian ancestors, listen to old folk tales, and buy traditional products from traditional markets. This also deepens the existential connection between us and our natural environment; and in the





Sinjil-Jiljilia, Ramallah. Photo by Anwar Hamam.

mountains, plains, and valleys we reactivate these relationships with every step we take.

Through walking we affirm our possession of the land and everything on it, therefore we insist on carrying the Palestinian flag with us on every hike. Alaa', the flag-bearer, walks at the front or at the back of the group. We affirm the unity of Palestinian land and denounce the fragmentation and barriers. Through walking – and documenting these walks through photographs and words – we introduce another face of Palestine. Through the media, social networks, and exhibitions, we share what we see in the places we visit, shedding light on the complexities, problems, needs, and suffering.

We WALK against intolerance, ignorance, and closure – a move

towards freedom, culture, awareness, openness, and rationality. We WALK freely! The walks are financed through the members themselves, a real expression of self-reliance. Come join us!

Article photos by Mahmoud Moutan, Mohammad Abu Laila, Ibtisam Suleiman, and Anwar Hamam.

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ⁱ The names of these places cannot always be found on a map, and in some cases, an official English transliteration of the names has not been established. Some of these places are connected by trails, others can only be reached with an experienced guide, walking across fields and hills. This list by no means includes all possible hikes and trails.

ⁱⁱ This is not a comprehensive list of all the springs that exist in the West Bank. Some of the other springs are not accessible to Palestinians, others we have not yet visited.



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