

Jordan: A Hard Life but a Good Life

Edited by Joe Roche and Lisa Roche

At the Jordan River border control in Israel, newly opened since the peace with Jordan was signed in October 1994, we request the exit stamp separate from our passports. Any evidence of being in Israel jeopardizes entry into Iraq and other Arab countries. Although this is a common practice, the Israeli official refuses categorically. There is no dissuading him, not even with copies of the friendly press we received in Israel about our interfaith prayers for peace and commemoration of the *Sho'ah*.

“What kind of peace is this (that Iraq denies our existence)?” he rages. While he thwarts one of my most urgent purposes in making these travels, to see for myself the consequences of the Gulf War on Iraqi people, this is a glimmer of the pathos of the Middle East. With that stamp in my passport, I will not be able to continue on to Iraq with the pilgrimage.

I pray for guidance. A number of the other walkers with the incriminating stamp tour Jordan instead. I long to escape the agitation of the Middle East. I try to get on



Photo: Joe Roche

On the road
through Jordan

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an earlier flight to India where the pilgrimage is to continue. I'm the first on the waiting list, but there's an Indian man returning home after twenty two months working in Iraq. His desperation is greater than mine. I give up my seat for him.

—*Martha Penzer*

Over thirty of us pilgrims did get through to Jordan, because we entered at a different border crossing. Our first day there, Davora met some Bedouins out in the fields that surrounded the farm where we were staying. One of them spoke English. She invited Davora to stay at their home that night and said she could bring some friends. When Davora told me this, I jumped at the chance to meet some of the local people in an intimate setting. I came to find out that these Bedouins were a nomadic folk that had been living in the Middle East for many centuries and most of them still live a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle.

The family we went to visit were shepherders who lived in a tent: the man of the tent, his two wives and many of their numerous children. The ground was bare except for some cushions to sit on, and all the family members were barefoot. They were very pleased to have us as guests, and fortunately one of the daughters had been going to school and knew enough English to speak with us. After a couple of hours of very basic, but powerful and revealing, conversation, it was time to sleep. We guests slept in the "living room" on the cushions where we had been reclining, and I can honestly say that it was my best night's sleep of the whole Pilgrimage. I really felt like I was being cradled in the

hands of Mother Earth herself. It was evident that the daughter who spoke English knew what she was talking about when she said that they had a hard life, but a good life.

—*Joe Roche*

February 23, 1995, 21:45, Salt City, Jordan. Today we walked 30 km steadily uphill, crossing sea level about halfway up. We didn't have lunch out of respect for Ramadhan, and tried to be discreet about snacking and even drinking. Moslems are fasting all day every day for a month, with no food or drink until dusk.

—*Greg Mott*

From Salt we walked to Amman where we were boarded in the New English School. Some of us met with the high school students and discussed the Pilgrimage and the Arab-Israeli situation. Their views ranged from strong anti-Israeli sentiments to hopes for reconciliation—a microcosm of the adult views we experienced in Israel.

After four days in Jordan, we boarded a bus that carried us across the great desert that flows between Jordan and Iraq. For nearly twenty-four hours we coursed through this vastness: spotting an oasis occasionally, twice seeing in the distance a group of Bedouin watering their camels, wondering did Abraham and his kin pass this way?

—*Dan Turner*