

Some Travel Sites in the High Mountain Region of Southern Sinai

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Abstract

During some tours to the high mountain region of southern Sinai, that I did in different occasions between 1979-1984, I received from different Bedouin guides some information, about geographical sites in that region. Part of that information does not appear in the updated maps of southern Sinai. Therefore, I would like to bring here that geographical information. The areas to which that geographical information refers are: the mountain massif of Santa Katarina, and also the mountain massif of Jebel Bab, which is located about 8 km - 10 km WSW of the Santa Katarina village or town.

Keywords

Desert, Granite, Jebel Musa, Mountain Valleys, Nature Tours, Sinai Peninsula

1. Introduction

During the period between 1976-1984, I traveled many times to the Sinai Peninsula, including some tours to the high mountain region of southern Sinai. In some of those tours between 1979-1984, we were guided by some Bedouin guides (In Arabic such a guide is called: "Dalil"), who showed us several sites in that region. Some of those guides told us, how they call according to their traditions, some of those sites. In those tours, I also wrote several names of sites, which are unknown or unfamiliar to most of the travelers in that region. The Bedouins of the high mountain region of southern Sinai, began to settle in that region in the Byzantine era, about 1500 years ago, around the time when the monastery of Santa Katarina was established. Recently, in the year of 2024, I realized that those records include sites' names, which are not mentioned in the trail maps of the high mountain region of southern Sinai. Therefore, I would like to record those names of those sites

hereby, also for the coming generations. By preserving those names, this paper contributes to the understanding of the cultural geography of the Sinai Peninsula, providing a resource for researchers, travelers, and also the nearby communities.

2. Methods

Some of the tours to the Sinai Peninsula, that I did between 1980-1984 were part of the work, that I did in the Society for Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) during that period, as a tour guide, mainly of nature tours. In August 1984, I participated in 2 consecutive tours to the high mountain region of southern Sinai, which were organized at that time by the SPNI, where I guided the second of those tours. Most of the photos, that are presented here were taken in August 1984 in those tours. Informal interviews with the guides were conducted to document some of the traditional names and their cultural significance. Notes were taken on-site, and names were cross-referenced with maps if available. For reference of the common used names of places in the high mountain region of southern Sinai, I used or also use, an updated map of that region [1].

3. Results & Discussion

3.1. Sites in the Region of Santa Katarina

An ancient trail which goes from the Santa Katarina monastery to the summit of Jebel Musa, which is recognized as Mount Sinai (**Figure 1**), is called: “Sicat Sidna Musa”,



Figure 1. A view from Jebel Safsafa towards Jebel Musa, photographed in August 1984.

on the name of the prophet Moses. The Bedouins of the Sinai region, distinguish between the 2 following types of ascents. 1) An ascent, which is a regular walking trail, or a goats' trail, which is called: “Naqeb”. 2) An ascent which is built with stones, or which is carved in the natural rocks where it goes, which is called: “Sica”. The ascent from the St. Katarina monastery to Jebel Musa, is a built ascent, or a carved ascent which is combined with about 800 steps, which were built by the monks of that monastery during the history, since the Byzantine era.

The center of the Santa Katarina region is the E Raba valley (**Figure 2**), where

the Malaga village was established, which at that time is the Santa Katarina village or town. The Abu Jifa ascent goes from the Santa Katarina village or town, towards the SW direction (**Figure 3**). That ascent leads to most of the travel routes in the high mountain region of southern Sinai. The highest point of that ascent, is a topographic saddle (28.547°N; 33.936°E). In that point, an ancient Leopards trap is located.



Figure 2. A view towards the E Raba valley from the SW direction, photographed in August 1984.



Figure 3. A view from the Abu-Jifa ascent towards north, to the E Raba Valley, photographed in August 1984.

The wadi which is located about 300 meters west of that topographic saddle, which descends towards the north direction, is called: The small Wadi Talaa' (**Figure 4**). That name of that wadi, is also according to the travel map of the high mountain region of southern Sinai, that was published by the: Tsukei David field school in 1977 (see: [2], page 7). That is also, to distinguish between that wadi, and also the big Wadi Talaa', which is located about 5 km - 6 km west of the small Wadi Talaa', and which also descends towards the north direction. The small Wadi Talaa' is the continuation of Wadi Tubug, and it starts at coordinates of: 28.546°N; 33.933°E. In the map of the high mountain region of southern Sinai published by Orgad [1], that wadi is called: Wadi Tlah. However, Wadi Tlah is the

continuation of the small Wadi 'Talaa', after about 5 km from the point where the small Wadi Talaa' starts, towards north. That is also according to: [2], p. 7.



Figure 4. In the small Wadi Talaa, photographed in August 1984.

Ein Tufah, means: the apple spring, is probably the spring which is located in the middle of the Abu Jifa ascent, at coordinates of: 28.550°N; 33.941°E. In some maps of that region, Ein Tufah is marked in the river bed of the small Wadi Talaa', at coordinates of: 28.569°N; 33.933°E, about 3.5 km in the descent of that river bed, north of the point where that wadi starts.

The wadi which intersects with the Abu Jifa ascent in the location of Ein Tufah, according to that identification (28.550°N; 33.941°E), which comes from the south direction, is called: Wadi Um Saradi. That wadi is located between Jebel Ahmar and also Wadi Tubug, and also it descends from south towards the north direction. The spring in Wadi Tubug, at coordinates of: 28.542°N; 33.933°E, is located about 0.5 km south of the intersection between the Abu Jifa ascent and also Wadi Tubug.

The mountain which is located SE of Wadi Tubug near that wadi, between Wadi Tubug and also Jebel Musa, is called: Jebel Ahmar. Jebel Ahmar is called so, because that mountain is combined with red granite rocks. "Ahmar" in Arabic means red. Those granite rocks are very hard rocks of the "Ikna" formation, which also appear in that region in huge rock surfaces. The mountain, which is located south of Jebel Ahmar and also near that mountain, between Jebel Ahmar and also Jebel Katarina, is called: Jebel Abu Rumeil, (**Figure 5**).

The main wadi which is located SE of Jebel Ahmar, east of Jebel Abu Rumeil, and also directly south of Jebel Musa, is Wadi Jarjaniya (**Figure 6**). In Wadi Jarjaniya, is also the main ascent trail to Jebel Katarina. Near the top of Wadi Jarjaniya, is the spring called: Ein Kalabiya, at coordinates of: 28.507°N; 33.965°E, which is also the highest spring in the Sinai Peninsula.



Figure 5. A view, from the ascent to Jebel Ahmar towards Jebel Abu Rumeil, photographed in August 1984.



Figure 6. In the Wadi Jarjaniya, photographed in August 1976.

The saddle in the southern side of Jabel Katarina, that is between Jebel Katarina and also Jebel Zebir, is called: “Farsh Zebir”, at central coordinates of: 28.502°N; 33.954°E (see also: [3]). “Farsh” means: a valley which is located in the high areas of a mountain between some of its summits, and also which is a close valley, which is usually encircled by those summits.

3.2. Sites in the Region of Jebel Bab

In the ascent from Wadi Jibal to Jebel Bab, from the western side of Jebel Bab, we can see two large granite rocks, that stick upward, and also look like 2 big horns of Ibex. That place is called by the Bedouins of the high mountain region of southern Sinai: “Masba Burgun”, which means: The cliff of the Ibex horns (**Figure 7**). That place is located about 1.2 km - 1.3 km SE of Elevation Point (E.P.) 2205, which is the peak of Jebel Abu Gasba, and also about 2.5 km SSW of the “Farsh Rumane” mountain valley. The location of “Masba Burgun” cliff, is therefore near

the coordinates of: 28.523°N; 33.861°E.



Figure 7. Near the “Masba Burgun” cliff, photographed in August 1984.

The massif of Jebel Bab is combined of the 4 following peaks. The NE of those peaks is Jebel Abu Gasba, which is called in some maps: Jebel Um Gasba (E.P. 2205). About 1km Southern of that peak is the peak of Jebel Abu Alada (E.P. 2165), at coordinates of about: 28.520°N; 33.865°E. About 800 meters NW of Jebel Abu Alada, and also 1 km WSW of Jebel Abu Gasba, is the peak of Jebel Abu Musawara (E.P. 2085). That peak was called by some of the Bedouin guides in 1979, as: Jebel Um Sicat Berber. It is also possible, that the so called: Jebel Um Sicat Berber, is actually the mountain that is mentioned in the maps of that region as: Jebel Um Sica (E.P. 2138), which is located about 1.5 km - 2 km ESE of Jebel Abu Gasba. In some maps that mountain is called: Jebel Um Siha. Probably that mountain is called: Jebel Um Sica, from the term: Sica, which means in the Sinai desert, a built ascent, or a carved ascent.

About 1.2 km NNW of Jebel Abu Musawara, is located at the famous peak of Jebel Bab E Dunia (**Figure 8**). Jebel Bab E Dunia means in Arabic: The gate of the world. The name of that mountain came or comes from the spectacular view, that can be seen from its peak towards the west or the north-west directions. From the peak of Jebel Bab E Dunia, we can see right below us the valley of Wadi Baba', which drains the western slopes of the Jebel Bab massif to the west direction, towards the Gulf of Suez. Above the dry river bed of Wadi Baba' from its western side, we can see 2 black prominent mountains: the southern of them is Jebel Mad-sus, while the northern of them is Jebel Tarbush. Those mountains are the south-western edge of the so-called: Black Ring. The Black Ring, is a circular geological dyke of black pluton rocks, which encircles the central part of the high mountain region of southern Sinai, from almost all of its sides (see illustration in: [4], **Figure 1**, p. 256).



Figure 8. In the ascent to Jebel Bab E Dunia, photographed in August 1984.

About 1 km north of the peak of Jebel Abu Gasba (E.P. 2205), is the mountain valley which is called: “Farsh Nagila” (**Figure 9**). About 600 m - 800 m WSW of “Farsh Nagila” is the spring which is called: Ein Nagila.



Figure 9. Some goats, feed on *Crataegus sinaica* trees in the “Farsh Nahgila” mountain valley, photographed in August 1984.

The topographic saddle which is located about 1 km ESE of the peak of Jebel Abu Gasba is called: “Farsh Arnab”, which means: The Rabbit mountain valley.

From the Jebel Bab massif, a famous wadi drains that massif towards the NNE direction. That wadi is called: Wadi Zueitar, which includes also a narrow gorge called: The Raspberry Gorge, at coordinates of: 28.561°N; 33.873°E (**Figure 10**).

The mountain valley of “Farsh Um Sila”, at central coordinates of: 28.574°N; 33.888°E, is located in the northern part of the mountain ridge, which divides between the big Wadi Talaa from its western side, and also Wadi Abu Tweitta’ from its eastern side. In that mountain valley, is located a rock which is called by the

Bedouins: “Hajar E Nimer”, which means: The Leopard rock. That rock is located about 600 m west of the intersection between Naqeb Um Sila (the Um Sila ascent), and also Wadi Abu Tweitta.



Figure 10. In the Raspberry Gorge, photographed in August 1984.

4. Conclusion

The high mountain region of southern Sinai is unique in the whole world because of the special combination of its geography, its geological formations—several kinds of Granite rocks, its hydrological conditions—between 150 mm - 250 mm of annual precipitation in that high mountain region, surrounded by vast areas of deserts; and also its biogeographical characteristics. The information on geographical sites in that region can increase our knowledge about the high mountain region of southern Sinai.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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