

Some Travel Sites in the Region of Dahab in Eastern Sinai

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Abstract

Dahab is located on the coast of eastern Sinai in Egypt. The Gulf of Dahab includes some of the most beautiful diving sites in the whole world. Some mountains in the region of Dahab reach heights of between 1500 m - 1700 m ASL, while their distances from the seashore in that region are about 20 km. Since those height differences are large, some of the wadis that drain those mountains also include deep steep canyons. The most famous wadi of those canyons is Wadi Abu Khsheib, which was considered during the 1980s, as the most challenging hiking route in the Sinai Peninsula. The region of Dahab also includes much easier travel routes, such as the canyon of Wadi Kuni El Rayan. In Wadi Kuni El Rayan, some interesting geological formations, and rare desert plants can also be seen.

Keywords

Dahab, Deserts, Granite, Hiking Tourism, Mountains, Sinai

1. Introduction

The shore of Dahab is a famous area in the coast of eastern Sinai ([1], pp. 127-131). The Gulf of Dahab includes some of the most beautiful diving sites in the world ([2], pp. 189-192). The shore of Dahab is located in the alluvial fan of the large Wadi Dahab, which is one of the three main large wadies that drain the mountains of eastern Sinai. The other two main large wadis are the following. Wadi Watir, which is located north of Wadi Dahab, and also its opening, is on the shore of Nuweiba ([1], pp. 113-115; [2], pp. 196-200). Wadi Cid, which is located south of Wadi Dahab, and also its opening is on the shore of Nabeq, where the mangrove nature reserve is also located ([1], pp. 132-133; [2], pp. 192-193, 208, 226).

Wadi Dahab is a large wadi, which is also composed of several tributaries. The main tributaries of Wadi Dahab are, from north to south: Wadi Natseb-

Wadi Zrara, Wadi Um Shweiki, and Wadi Abu Khsheib. Wadi Natseb-Wadi Zrara is called that way, because the main tributary of Wadi Natseb is Wadi Zrara. Wadi Natseb-Wadi Zrara drains a large area in the eastern part of the high mountain region of southern Sinai ([1], pp. 131-133; [2], pp. 203-205, 211-213). The riverbed of Wadi Natseb-Wadi Zrara also included the main unpaved road to the high mountain region of southern Sinai during the 1970s. Paved roads to Santa Katarina in the high mountain region of southern Sinai were built from the 1980s.

South and adjacent to the riverbed of Wadi Natseb-Wadi Zrara, is also located Wadi Um Shweiki, which begins from the northern slopes of Jebel Firani, in a mountain valley which is also called Farsh Abu Khsheib. South and adjacent to Wadi Um Shweiki, is also located Wadi Abu Khsheib, whose northern tributaries begin in Farsh Abu Khsheib, and whose southern tributaries also begin in Jebel Firani.

The hiking route of Wadi Abu Khsheib was discovered by some Israeli tour guides at the beginning of the 1980s. That hiking route was considered then as the most challenging hiking route in the Sinai desert. This is also because Wadi Abu Khsheib contains many dry waterfalls, the highest of which is about 80 meters in height. A tour to Wadi Abu Khsheib in the 1980s included hiking for 2 - 3 days, and this tour also required rappelling. The route of the tour to Wadi Abu Khsheib began in Dahab, then a climb in the ascent of Wadi Um Shweiki to Farsh Abu Khsheib, and afterwards a descent of Wadi Abu Khsheib during a two day hike, which included rappelling.

In the year 1985, I received from one of the guides who toured the region of Wadi Abu Khsheib a detailed description of that region, which I present hereby. The goal of the research, which I present hereby, is to summarize the geographical information about the region of Dahab, which was also gathered during the 1980s, especially for the coming generations.

2. Methods

During the year 1985, I also summarized a detailed description of the region of Wadi Abu Khsheib from one of the tour guides who was also familiar with that route. That description included several sites, whose locations were marked on some maps with different coordinate systems. In the years 2024-2025, I located those sites according to some global coordinates from Google Maps. I also used an updated version of the Google Maps system for that purpose.

Additionally, I would like to provide hereby, a description of Wadi Kuni El Rayan, which is located about 6 km SW of Dahab, and also south of Wadi Abu Khsheib. I toured to Wadi Kuni El Rayan in 1979. The aerial photo of the region of Wadi Kuni El Rayan presented hereby (**Figure 1**), was taken by me from an airplane when I flew from Nairobi, Kenya, to Tel-Aviv airport in August 1983. Some geographical details were added to that photo in March 2025-April 2025.

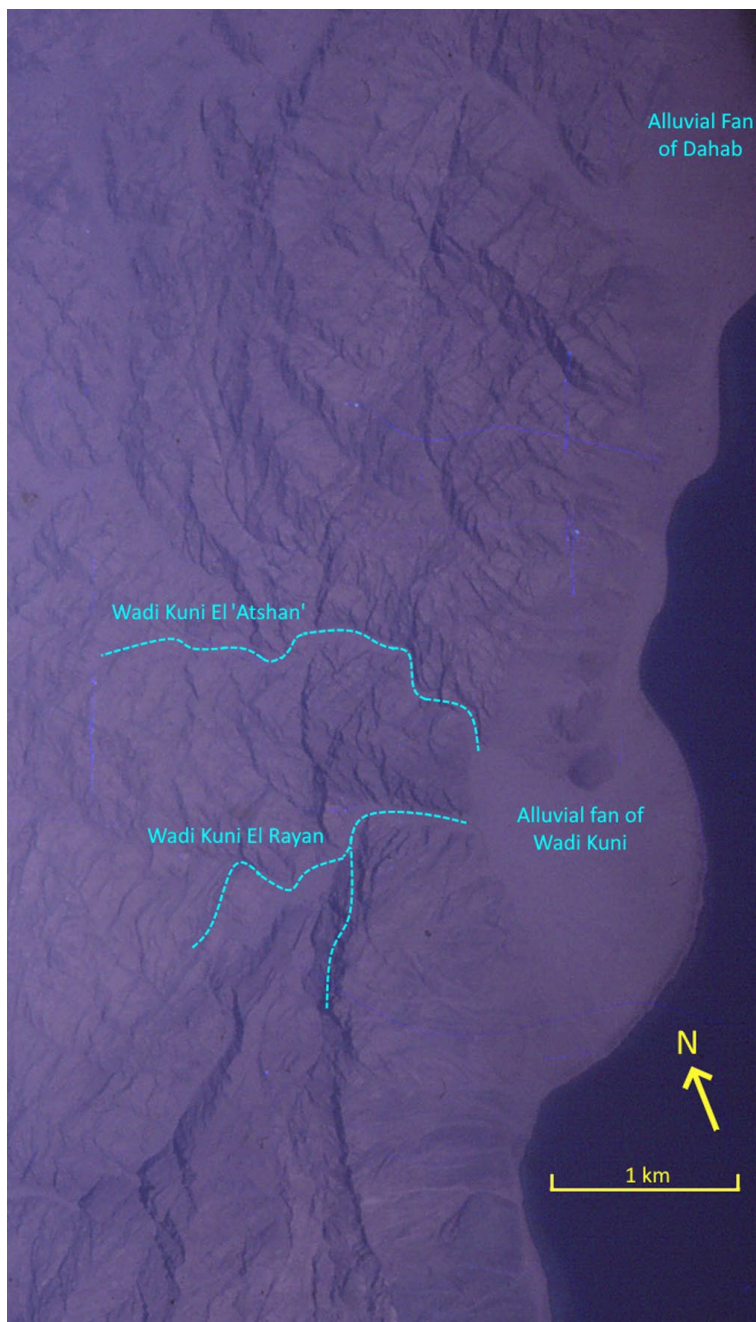


Figure 1. An aerial photograph of part of the region of Dahab. Photographed in August 1983. Drawings on that photo were done by Itamar Givon in March 2025-April 2025.

3. Results & Discussion

3.1. Wadi Um Shweiki

From Dahab we can go to a bend in the road 5 km west of the Dahab junction, at coordinates: 28.522°N ; 34.420°E . At the coordinates: 28.549°N ; 34.396°E —a saddle divides the drainage basin of the southern Wadi Um Shweiki from its northern side, and also the drainage basin of Wadi Abu Khsheib from its southern side. We then descend from that saddle towards the north, to the southern Wadi Um

Shweiki.

At coordinates: 28.563°N; 34.396°E—there is a wadi fork in the southern Wadi Um Shweiki. To the north side of that point is a stone escalator in a fault line. That stone escalator is not passable. To the west side of that point, the canyon of the southern Wadi Um Shweiki opens, which bends towards the north. At coordinates: 28.566°N; 34.393°E—there is a natural pool with the first waterfall in the southern Wadi Um Shweiki. The height of that waterfall is about 8 meters. A detour of that waterfall is a little way backward, on a small stone escalator from the southern side. We can then climb up on a granite rock some dozens of meters upwards. At coordinates: 28.568°N; 34.390°E—a wadi fork. A wadi that comes from the SW direction meets the southern Wadi Um Shweiki at that point. That side wadi is a very deep groove, which is full of large rocks (boulders). The following section of the southern Wadi Um Shweiki is also full of natural pools and waterfalls. Some of those waterfalls can be detoured from their northern sides. The direction of that wadi in that section is east-west.

A wadies' fork is located at coordinates: 28.572°N; 34.380°E. At that point, there is also a large grove of Acacia trees. A side wadi originates at that point from the NNW direction. That wadi comes from the topographic saddle between the northern Wadi Um Shweiki and the southern Wadi Um Shweiki, which is at coordinates: 28.582°N; 34.374°E. That saddle, is a good observation point from which we can climb to Farsh Abu Khsheib, towards the SW direction. At coordinates: 28.571°N; 34.373°E, is a section in the southern Wadi Um Shweiki. That section of the wadi, is a canyon full of natural pools and also of waterfalls. In the winter, and also in the spring, that section of the wadi is full of water. Therefore, a tour in that section of the wadi includes swimming.

About 5 km north of the northern Wadi Um Shweiki is also located another wadi that descends from west to east, which is called: Wadi Um Harjil. Wadi Um Harjil descends from Farsh El Hamra to the main river bed of Wadi Natseb at coordinates: 28.629°N; 34.393°E. Wadi Um Harjil is named, after a bush that also grows in that area, which is *Gomphocarpus sinaicus*—מסמור סיני. *G. sinaicus* is called in Arabic: Harjil.

At coordinates of: 28.564°N; 34.350°E—a water source, possibly a water cistern, is located in a small wadi that ascends from the northern Wadi Um Shweiki towards the south, to the northern part of the Farsh Abu Khsheib mountain valley. From that point, there is also a good view of Farsh Abu Khsheib.

3.2. Jebel Firani & Farsh Abu Khsheib

Jebel Firani is the highest mountain in the region of Dahab. Its peak is at Elevation Point (E.P.) 1695 meters ASL, at coordinates: 28.515°N; 34.315°E. Jebel Firani is built geologically of volcanic rocks, as well as of metamorphic rocks ([2], p. 213). The southern slopes of that mountain are full of cliffs or of stone escalators. After the name of Jebel Firani, geologists defined the so-called Firani Group, which is a group of formations of volcanic rocks, that is also found in some areas in southern

Sinai ([3], p. 951).

Farsh Abu Khsheib is a mountain valley located about 5 km - 6 km NE of Jebel Firani. Farsh Abu Khsheib is built geologically of granite rocks, combined with crests of positive dykes. The rest of that valley is made up of metamorphic rocks. The mountain peaks that surround Farsh Abu Khsheib include that of E.P. 1485, at coordinates 28.561°N; 34.361°E, from which there is also a good view to the Gulf of Eilat. From Farsh Abu Khsheib, starts from north to south, are the northern Wadi Um Shweiki, the southern Wadi Um Shweiki, and also Wadi Abu Khsheib. The southern Wadi Um Shweiki is the more beautiful of those wadis. This wadi is recommended as an ascent route from the Dahab region to Farsh Abu Khsheib. Farsh Abu Khsheib is also drained from its southern side by Wadi Abu Khsheib.

3.3. Wadi Abu Khsheib

The black gorge is located around the coordinates: 28.536°N; 34.351°E. That section of the Wadi Abu Khsheib is a narrow canyon composed of black rocks. The water in that section is very deep and also freezing water. That wadies section, also includes waterfalls with heights of about 40 m. Those waterfalls can be detoured, by a pathway that goes along the southern bank, closer to the ridge. It is not clear if that pathway is a detour of that section of the black gorge, or if it is the continuation of the way after the section of the black gorge. At coordinates: 28.543°N; 34.361°E—a wadi fork occurs. A wadi that comes from the north intersects at that point with Wadi Abu Khsheib. At that point, there is also a large pool with Common Reed plants: *Phragmites australis*—קנה מצוי (Figure 2). About 300 m SW of that point, there is also a large stone escalator which ascends from Wadi Abu Khsheib to the SE. That ascent is south of the saddle, which is located between E.P. 1361 and also E.P. 1340. Below that point, there are also large waterfalls combined with water pools.

A point at coordinates: 28.550°N; 34.369°E. Between the beginning of Wadi Abu Ksheib and that point, the wadi is passable. From that point further, in the descent of Wadi Abu Khsheib, there are also quite high waterfalls, and we cannot see, at that point, the continuation of the wadi. From that point, that section of high waterfalls can be detoured by returning to the saddle between E.P. 1361 and also E.P. 1340. From that saddle, there are very nice views of the Gulf of Eilat and also towards Dahab. A steep, continuous stone escalator goes from the saddle between E.P. 1361 and also E.P. 1340, at an angle of about 45°, to the riverbed of the small Wadi Abu Khsheib.

At coordinates: 28.534°N; 34.372°E—the first water pool in the small Wadi Abu Khsheib. That point is located about 200 meters WNW of the peak of Jebel Abu Khsheib—E.P. 917. At coordinates: 28.537°N; 34.377°E—waterfalls are also combined with water pools in the small Wadi Abu Khsheib. That point is a dangerous climbing point. A very big waterfall, with a height of about 80 meters, is at coordinates: 28.545°N; 34.382°E. A boulder is stuck in that waterfall. The route of



Figure 2. Stems of *Phragmites australis*, at the Zmorot pool. Photographed by Noam Givon, in April 2023.

Wadi Abu Khsheib at that point climbs back from that point, along the ascent of that wadi. Afterwards, that route reaches a pool which is also not passable. A detour of that water pool climbs on the left bank of that pool, to a height of about 10 m above that wadi's bed, and then reaches a point which is above that water pool. To pass that pool requires, at that point, a rope of about 10 m length, with which that pool can also be passed. The route of Wadi Abu Khsheib then reaches a waterfall with a height of about 10 m. A detour of that waterfall is from its northern side, also with a steep descent. A Bedouin ladder is located at that point. That water pool is used by the Bedouins of that region as a water source for people, and also for their goats.

A tour to Wadi Abu Khsheib, requires qualifications, such as proficiency in rappelling. Therefore, such a tour, is not for common travelers. The way to do such a tour is, to join an organized tour, led by guides, who are also qualified as rappelling guides. Such a tour requires also good hiking capabilities. A detailed description of technical aspects in the route of Wadi Abu Khsheib can also be

found in the: Climbing Encyclopedia [4].

3.4. Wadi Kuni El Rayan

Wadi Kuni El Rayan is located about 5 - 6 km SW of Dahab (**Figure 1**). Wadi Kuni El Rayan is called that way, because that wadi also contains water sources. The word Rayan in Arabic means: with water. According to [1], p. 128, Wadi Kuni El Rayan is also a nice canyon, with a lot of dykes that cross the mountains that surround it, water pools, and also some dry waterfalls (**Figure 3**). In some locations in Wadi Kuni El Rayan, large boulders of red granite rocks can also be seen (**Figure 4**). In that wadi, groups of palm trees can also be seen, which are accompanied



Figure 3. In Wadi Kuni El Rayan. Photographed in January 1979.

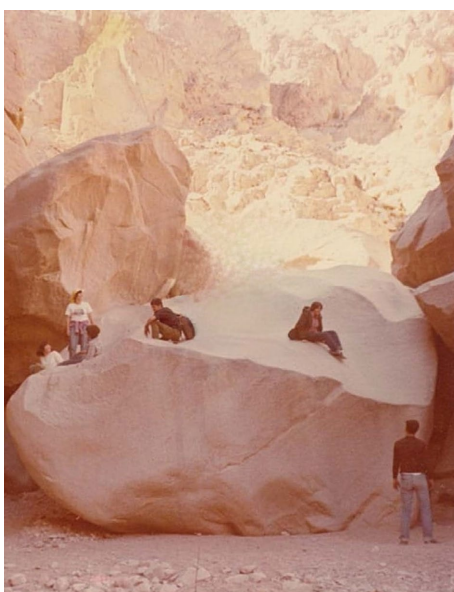


Figure 4. In the area of the red granite boulders in Wadi Kuni El Rayan. Photographed in January 1979.

in some locations by *Juncus*—סמר plants (**Figure 5**). It seems that those *Juncus* plants are of the species: *Juncus arabicus*—סמר ערבי, which is a perennial herb that grows in hot deserts in the Middle East and also North Africa, including the Arava valley [5]. Together with some of those *Juncus* plants also grows the Afro-Tropical orchid called: *Epipactis veratrifolia*—בן חורש גדול ([5] [6], p. 27 lines 39-42, p. 28, [7]), which is also known from the Ein Gedi nature reserve in Israel, as well as from several canyons in the Moav mountains and also the Edom mountains in Jordan [5]. The orchid *E. veratrifolia* is considered as rare and also endangered plant species ([5]).



Figure 5. A plant of: *Juncus arabicus*. Photographed near the botanical gardens of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in September 2025.

According to [2], pp. 217-218, at coordinates: 28.448°N; 34.441°E, there is also an oasis with many palm trees. At that point, a dark dyke crosses Wadi Kuni El Rayan, upon which some subsurface water is also accumulated. From that point, an aqueduct goes down along that wadi, to a distance of about 300 meters, to a pool. That aqueduct was built by some Bedouins of that region at the beginning of the 1960s. Below that water pool, there is also, an orchard of palm trees together with also *Ziziphus spina-christi*—שיזף מצוי trees (**Figure 6**). Fruits of *Ziziphus spina-christi* trees are also used by Bedouins in the Sinai desert as a food source for people and also for goats.



Figure 6. A *Ziziphus spina-christi* tree, in the Birdwatching park in Eilat. Photographed by Noam Givon, in November 2021.

In the northern side of the upper part of Wadi Kuni El Rayan, there are also located 2 relatively small desert oases. Each of those oases is located in a small side tributary. The upper of those oases is called: Ein Muarid. At Ein Muarid, many *Juncus* plants also grow ([2], pp. 217-218). The lower of those oases, which is also located east of Ein Muarid, is called: Ein E Deisa. According to [2], pp. 217-218, Ein E Deisa is located at the top of a side wadi, where a fault line crosses that wadi. At that point, there are also some granite rocks. At Ein E Deisa, many plants of *Juncus*, and also of *E. veratrifolia*, also grow. Ein E Deisa means: The *Juncus* oasis. In Wadi Kuni El Rayan, also grow some desert plants, such as: *Iphiona scabra*—אפיונה מחוספסת, *Hyoscyamus boveanus*—שיכרון סיני (Figure 7), and also: *Cleome droserifolia*—באשן עגול עלים ([2], pp. 217-218, [5]). In the alluvial fan of Wadi Kuni El Rayan, where that wadi opens to the Gulf of Eilat (Figure 8), also grow *Salvadora persica*—סלודורה פרסית ([2], p. 218).

4. Conclusion

The mountains in the region of Dahab are composed geologically mainly of granite or of metamorphic rocks. The highest peak in that region is Jebel Firani. From



Figure 7. Plants of *Hyoscyamus boveanus*, in Wadi Kuni El Rayan. Photographed in January 1979.



Figure 8. A view from the opening of Wadi Kuni El Rayan towards the southern shore of Dahab. Photographed in January 1979.

Jebel Firani descends some deep canyons, which are beautiful sites for challenging tourism. South of those canyons is also located Wadi Kuni El Rayan, which is a recommended site for geo-tourism, and which also includes some rare desert plants.

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Conflicts of Interest

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

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