

# WATER OF GUSH ETZION

## A hike along the aqueducts in the "Pirim" (Shafts) River Bed

**Start:** Dagan Hill  
**Finish:** Ein Bizar  
**Hike Length:** 31/2 Km  
**Hike duration:** 21/2 hours (does not include entry into the aqueduct)  
**Level of difficulty:** Moderate  
**Recommended season:** All year  
**Israel trail maps:** Map #9  
**Trail marker:** Black #9  
**Nearby rest stops:** Biyar Aqueduct



### The Pirim River Bed

For this hike follow the route of the aqueducts which date back to the Second Temple period. These aqueducts, which still exist today, provided water for the growing metropolis city of Jerusalem. Some sections of the aqueduct carry water even today, and visitors can go underground and follow the water path. In addition to the aqueducts, we walk through lush vineyards and can enjoy scenic views of Solomon's Pools and the picturesque village of Artas.

# THE PATH OF THE PATRIARCHS

**Start:** The Lone Oak  
**Finish:** Neve Daniel  
**Hike length:** 2.5 km  
**Hike duration:** Two (2) hours  
**Level of difficulty:** Easy walking route  
**Recommended season:** All year  
**Israel Trail maps:** Map #9  
**Trail marker:** Red  
**Nearby rest stops:** Gush Etzion intersection, entrance to Neve Daniel

## The Path of the Patriarchs (Derech HaAvot)

We will follow the road taken by the Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – through the mountains south of Jerusalem. Along the way, we can see the site of the battle between the Hasmonaeans and the Greeks, and a Roman milestone marking an off-traveled road. We'll hear the heroic stories of the individuals who became one of the symbols of the War of Independence – the Saga of Gush Etzion. This road travels through a mountain range with breathtaking views and sites where some of history's most fascinating events took place and home to a rich and fertile agricultural enterprise from ancient times.

## How to get there?

Traveling on Road 60, we turn west at the Gush Etzion intersection (towards Kfar Etzion and Alon Shvut). After traveling two (2) kilometers we turn right following the signs pointing to Alon Shvut. Continue straight at the traffic circle and travel some 100 meters. Park the vehicle at the curb side on the left hand side of the road.

## The Trail

Our starting point is at the Lone Oak tree, the symbol of Gush Etzion.

**The Lone Oak:** This ancient tree has been witness to Mamelukes, Ottomans and British, and stubborn Jews who refused to give up their land, and fought heroically though greatly outnumbered and outgunned in their battle against the Arab armies.

This oak has also witnessed the return of the children of these very same fighters who rebuilt on the land that their parents had built, confirming and breathing new life into the words of the prophet: "and thy children shall return to their borders". No wonder then that the distant oak tree they would longingly view for 19 years became the symbol of a restored Gush Etzion. The memorial stones placed around the oak briefly recount the saga of heroism that transpired here more than 60 years ago.

From the oak tree we continue north on the road some 200 meters, until we come upon a dirt road which bends right and takes us directly to the Path of the Patriarchs. We follow this road, marked by a red trail marker, to the end of the trail. In the beginning we keep close to the fence which encircles the Alon Shvut community, one of the earliest communities established in Gush Etzion, its name indicating the special place that the oak occupied in the founders' hearts (Alon – Hebrew for "oak").

Continuing, as we look westward to our left, we can see a deep stream known as the Na'manim stream. This is one of the tributaries of the Etzion stream which travels down to the Elah Valley. The banks of the stream are dotted with fruit trees from the orchards of nearby Kibbutz Rosh Tzurim. At the entrance to the dirt road, 100 meters to the north, is Kibbutz Zichria, preserving the Hebrew name of the place which is known as Beit Zacharia, where a great battle took place between the Hasmonaeans and the Greeks. Indeed, in ancient times, as in modern times, the area of Gush Etzion served as an advance outpost for Jerusalem. Led by Judah the Macabee, the Hasmonaeans battled the Greeks on eight different occasions in Gush Etzion. In the famous battle of Beit Zacharia, Judah the Macabee's army was deployed around the hilly terrain ready to do battle against the numerous Greek warriors with elephants serving as tanks. When Judah's brother, Elazar, left defeat upon them, he decided to kill an elephant from below in the hope of injuring Lysias, the Seleucid commander. Unfortunately, the elephant fell on him, crushing him to death. In his memory, the adjacent community of Elazar, is named after him. Judah retreated to Jerusalem. Eventually, the Greeks abandoned the area, leaving the capital in Jewish hands. Following the dirt road another 400 meters, we reach the milestone next to the road.

**The Roman Road:** Here is the Roman road which was paved in the 2nd century CE. Alongside it lay stones, evidence of ancient quarrying and small bastions protecting the road. These stones carry inscriptions noting during which emperor's reign the road was built, as well as the distance to the destination. While it is true that during this period the Land of Israel was crisscrossed by a road network built by the Roman conquerors, the roots of this road date back to the First and Second Temple eras, and many pilgrims used it to travel to and from Jerusalem. The great advantage of this road was the ease of travel it provided, with no steep or treacherous ascents on descents. Continue another 100 meters and we arrive at an intersection of paths. Look to your right and one can see the Biyar Aqueduct (look at section: water of Gush Etzion). We turn left and travel some 100 meters, turn eastward to our right towards the ritual bath (mikveh) with its descending stone steps. The mikveh is recognized by the adjacent lean-to. Turning away from the view of the town of Efrat to the east and the HaChish hill to the south, we journey northwards. But, two (2) kilometers separate us from the community of Neve Daniel. Beneath us the stream deepens, and gazing from above we can relish the sight combining the natural woodland with orchards that have been planted by man. To our west is Kibbutz Rosh Tzurim and its many orchards. At one of the bends we pass the remnants of a lime furnace, which was used for making whitewash. A short while later we see beneath "Derech HaAvot" (The Path of the Patriarchs) and in the western neighborhood of the community of Elazar. The view unfolds. To the north and west lie the houses of Neve Daniel, rising almost 1000 meters above sea level, downstream is the village of Nahlin. We can also see the populous city of Beit Illit, and even more distant communities in the Jerusalem Hills and the coastal plain. Upon the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel there were only four small settlements here, remotely dispersed among the hills. Today the bloc of communities known as Gush Etzion is more robust, and the mere hundreds of pioneers have been replaced by many thousands of current residents. Beneath the path, the chalk cliff face creates a harsh and wild vista, replete with scrubland and densely dotted with plants. Previously, this Mediterranean woodland had almost disappeared as a result of overgrazing and the felling of trees for firewood. Today, the woodland is slowly reviving to grace us with its beauty. Tearing ourselves away from this fantastic world of ancient vistas and mountain agriculture back to modern reality, we reach the road going up to Neve Daniel, where we turn right and return to Road 60.

From there we can continue north and turn left into Neve Daniel. We pass by the community's houses and reach the water tower, located in the northern section. Adjacent to the water tower is the 1000 Lookout, the highest lookout point in Gush Etzion, offering a panoramic view in every direction.

## What are Aqueducts?

From the very beginning, Jerusalem's existence hinged on its ability to provide water for its residents. Indeed, during the Middle Canaanite period (17th century BCE), when Jerusalem first became a city, its rulers had to contend with this problem. The complex waterworks systems that developed around the Gihon Spring remained in use during both Temple periods. During these periods, continued use was made of the springs near the city and reservoirs inside the city's boundaries, but these were insufficient. Jerusalem – the capital city and the site of the Temple – grew into a metropolis, with a steady stream of pilgrims and visitors throughout the year, particularly during the three pilgrimage festivals. The city desperately needed new water sources, but most efforts were invested in drawing water from outside the city. Already during Hasmonean rule, and especially in the days of Herod, engineering and hydrological knowledge acquired in Rome was utilized for the construction of long, winding aqueducts that brought water from the springs of Mt. Hebron to the city. This large and sophisticated system integrated springs, constructed and excavated aqueducts, shaft tunnels, dams and enormous pools. The system developed gradually, from Hasmonean times (second half of the 2nd century BCE) – when an aqueduct was built from Ein Etam (Arabic: Ein Atan), north of Dagan Hill (D'har Bak Ridge) in the municipal jurisdiction of the modern city of Efrat, to the Temple – and until it peaked at the end of the Temple period, in the days of the Roman Governors (middle 1st century CE). By this time, there was a system comprising no less than five aqueducts with Solomon's pools at the hub. Two of the five aqueducts carried water from springs located in what is today Gush Etzion, and brought it to Solomon's pools. The first is the Arub aqueduct, and the second is the Biyar aqueduct, which is mostly an underground tunnel following the bed of the Pirim Stream (Wadi al Biyar) west of Efrat. This tunnel carried the waters of the Aqueduct Spring (Ein Wadi al Biyar) at its source, as well as ground water which it collected along the way. Rain water, which flowed to the valley from the surrounding mountains and stopped at the dam installed in the valley bed was added to the spring and ground waters. These three sources carried a substantial amount of water to the uppermost part of Solomon's pools, via an overground aqueduct. The aqueduct crossed the topographical obstacle posed

by the Dagan Hill through a shaft tunnel some 400 meters long. In addition to the two aqueducts coming from the south, Solomon's pools received rainwater that had been gathered in the nearby valley as well as the water from four springs running at the sides of the pool. From the pools, water flowed on three aqueducts to three major locations: the lower aqueduct – the one beginning in Ein Etam – led to the Temple Mount and the Temple; the upper aqueduct carried water to the fortress and Herod's Palace in the upper city of Jerusalem, and the third aqueduct departed from Solomon's pools in the east, crossed the village of Artas, and transported the water to the great pool at the foot of the desert fortress of Herodion, in the heart of the lower city King Herod built. This sophisticated system of aqueducts carrying water into Jerusalem was so effective that later generations continued to use it. Indeed, since the Second Temple until the British conquest of Jerusalem in the early 20th century, the city of Jerusalem remained greatly dependent on this ancient system developed in the second half of the 2nd century BCE.

## Where do we start?

Follow road 60 (Jerusalem-Gush Etzion). At the Etzion Convoys intersection (Efrat-North) turn towards the city of Efrat. Near the gate of the northern neighborhood on Dagan Hill park your vehicle. Those interested in parking their vehicles at the end of the trail should go back to the intersection and turn left. At the sign pointing towards the junction heading towards The Path of the Patriarchs, turn right and park at the side of the road.

## The Trail

Climb on foot to the outlook post at the top of the Dagan Hill. From here we can see the area known as Solomon's pools, today situated in Palestinian Authority territory. We can also see the biblical barrow Etam (H' al H'uh) as well as the village of Artas with the impressive monastery to its south. Dense construction in the Al Ha'ader valley and Dahisha ridge rings the sites adjacent to the Pools, while the Beit Jala and Har Gilio ridges can be seen in the distance. Return in the direction of the parking lot near the gate to Dagan Hill to locate one of the shafts of the Biyar Aqueduct's short tunnel, crossing the ridge towards Solomon's pools. The trail marked along the shafts will lead us to the aqueduct built atop high supporting walls. We follow the aqueduct, going "against the flow" (southwards), enjoying views of the cliffs and streams. On the opposite ridge we

can see parts of the "Arub Aqueduct", the ancient monastery of Dir al Banat (Daughters' Monastery) located near the altered streambed, and reach the ancient dam at the foot of the British dam. On top of the British dam is a road climbing from the valley eastwards and southwards reaching the very heart of Efrat. From the dam we continue on the broad, easy trail alongside the Pirim stream, above the long shafts tunnel after which it is named (Shafts – Hebrew: pirim). It stretches from here southwards for some 2.8 km, reaching its starting point at Aqueduct Spring. Several meters later, we leave the trail and travel eastward (turn left) to the underground Roman dome, a puzzling structure, which has been perfectly preserved above the tunnel. Continue onwards to view the vineyards and the trellising methods employed in their cultivation. Try to locate the remnants of the openings of the dozen shafts which in the past could be seen in equal distances near the streambed. After 1.5 km from the main trail on a side-trail to the west (right of the trail) to reach the Cave Spring (Ein Me'ara) – a tiny spring issuing forth from a natural cave whose walls, integrated with the traditional dirt ditches, are using modern plastic tubes to irrigate plots of beans, pumpkins and other vegetables. Returning to the main trail, we reach the Aqueduct Spring. Enter the underground waterway and discover its secrets. The ancient stairway (which gives the spring its second name of Ein alDreij) will lead us to a central room, from which we can walk and even crawl in the natural spring to the wellspring. From there, from a tunnel to the main room and enter the beginning of the long shaft tunnel. After 80 meters of walking hunched over, and at times on all fours, you reach the first shaft. The rest of the tunnel continuing northwards from here is a number of meters lower, on a layer of ground water supplementing the waters from the spring. This section is impassable for hikers. So, climb the iron ladder of the shaft and you are now outside. If your vehicle is at the end of the road, 200 meters of walking south will lead you to a bridge. Below it, there should be your vehicle.

There is an entrance fee for Aqueduct Spring. Please arrange visits in advance by calling the Gush Etzion Field School: 02-993-5133.



# THE SPRINGS OF GUSH ETZION

**Start:** Bat Ayin  
**End:** Kfar Etzion  
**Hike length:** 13 km  
**Hike duration:** Two (2) hours  
**Level of Difficulty:** Moderate  
**Recommended season:** All year  
**Trail marker:** Blue

**Israel Trail maps:** Map #9  
**Nearby rest stops:** Gush Etzion intersection, Kfar Etzion Field School  
**Special equipment:** Appropriate clothes and flashlights are recommended for entering the spring.



## Spring Route

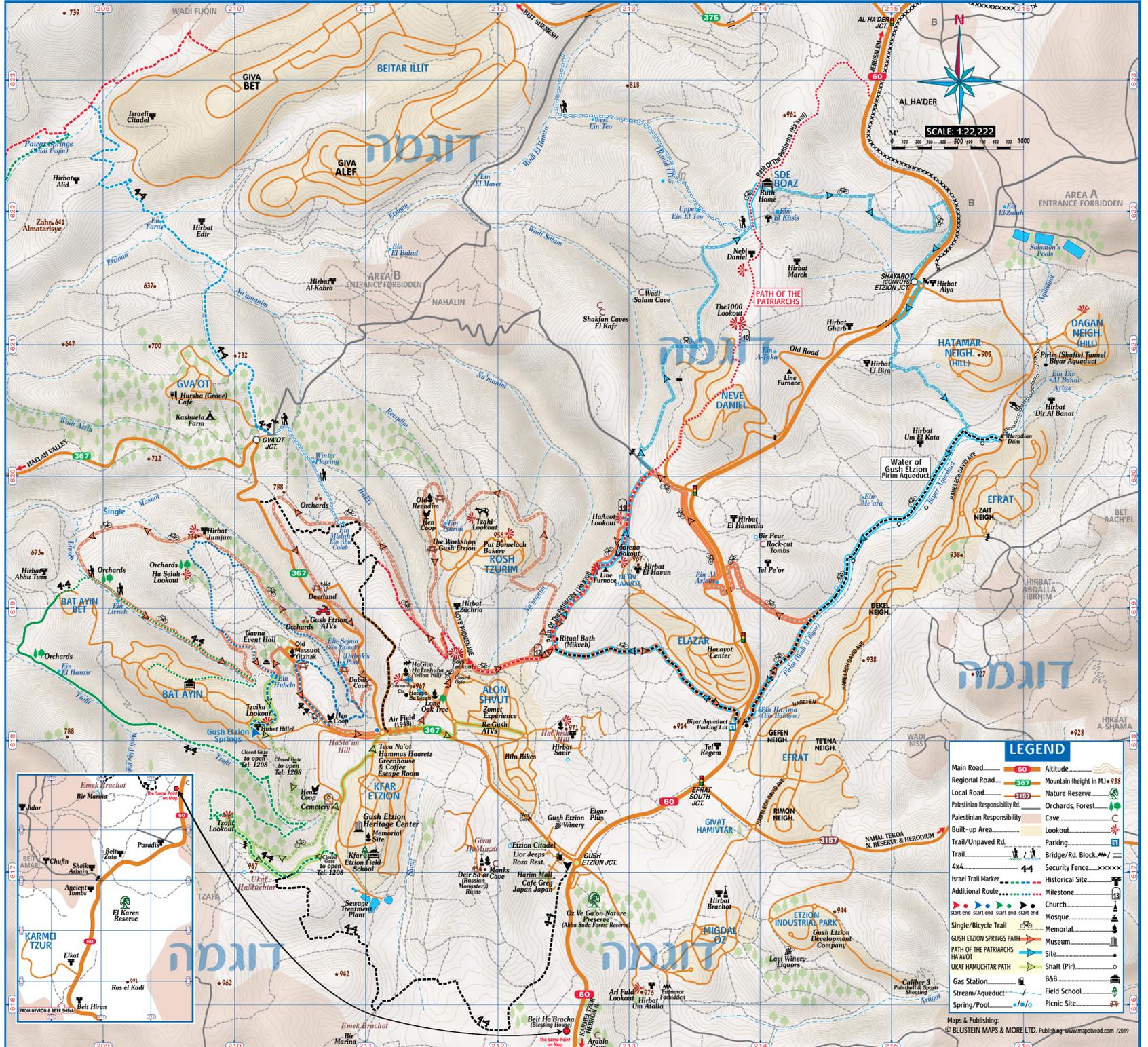
On this hike, you will see the remains of an ancient Jewish settlement from the Second Temple period, dip into the cold water of Gush Etzion's springs, and crawl through an underground spring tunnel. We also pass by the remains of a settlement of Gush Etzion, where the Kibbutz of Masuot Yitzhak stood at the eve of Israel's establishment.

## How to Get There?

At the Gush Etzion intersection turn west towards the communities of Alon Shvut and Kfar Etzion. Proceed straight at the traffic circle near the entrance to Kibbutz Kfar Etzion. Turn left and immediately turn right to reach Bat Ayin. At the first intersection in the community turn right park your vehicle.

## Hirbat Hilel

Upon entering the community you will notice a Jewish settlement from the second Temple period. While preparing for paving the road to Bat Ayin, this archaeological site was excavated in 1990 in a rescue dig by the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Kfar Etzion Field School. The most obvious Jewish remnant unearthed in the dig is the impressive, easily-recognizable mikveh. On top of the stairs leading to and from the mikveh, we can see the remains of a partition for those entering and/or exiting. The partition was put there during hours of peak use to prevent those considered impure (before immersing in the ritual bath) from touching those who emerged from the mikveh. While digging a layer of charred debris was discovered, evidence that the ancient



settlement was destroyed during the Bar Kochba revolt. The large winepress tells of settlement here during Byzantine times. After visiting Hirbat Hilel, continue on the path from which you turned right, and a few meters later turn right again, leading to the perimeter road around the community of Bat Ayin. Some 200 meters ahead is the Ein Huhela spring.

## Ein Huhela

The waters of this spring emerge through a tunnel carved into the rock and gather in a rectangular reservoir. Here are remnants of ancient terraces, a sheikh's tomb and a burial cave from the Second Temple period. In the period leading to the establishment of the State of Israel, the spring served residents of Kibbutz Masuot Yitzhak. It is possible to enter, by crawling, the spring's tunnel (entry and exit by the same entrance). The tunnel is a bit narrow in the beginning, but entry is generally possible). Use flashlights. Before continuing onwards towards westwards, towards the Judean and coastal plains, where one can see the Mediterranean on days of good visibility. From the spring continue straight (northeast) towards the building which houses the sheikh's tomb. Notice, just right of the path, is a burial tunnel which dates from the Second Temple period when families were customarily interred in burial tunnels of this kind – further evidence of ancient settlement of this area.

## Old Masuot Yitzhak Named for Rav Yitzhak Herzog

After a short walk you'll reach the forest named after Kibbutz Masuot Yitzhak. Walk through the forest, then turn right on the path until you see on your left a partially destroyed building of cement. This structure is a remnant from Kibbutz Masuot Yitzhak, which was founded by the Religious Kibbutz movement in 1945. The Kibbutz fell during the War of Independence; its members were captured by the Jordanians. Upon returning to Israel as part of a prisoner exchange with Jordan, they rebuilt their community in the Sha'ar region, where the community exists today. From old Masuot Yitzhak ascends some 30 meters eastwards, until reaching a dirt road. Turn left and walk 70 meters until you reach a sign pointing to the spring. Descend a narrow path which takes you to Ein Sejma.

## Ein Sejma/ Ein Yitzhak

Descend by the steps and reach an enchanting water spring and pool. The spring gushes forth on the slope of Sejma stream, also known as "Paradise Wadi". The water is clean all year long, and the pool waters reach depth of 1.5 meters. Shaded tables are scattered

# NATURE RESERVE NACHAL TEKOA

**Start:** Entrance to Nature Reserve  
**Finish:** Tekoa Gimel Hike Length: 2 Km  
**Hike duration:** 2 hours (on trail only) until 4 hours (including entrance into cave)  
**Level of difficulty:** Walking trail easy to moderate. Trail in cave moderate to difficult.  
**Recommended season:** All year  
**Israel trail maps:** Map #8  
**Trail marker:** Blue #8 (additional options for red or blue)  
**Nearby rest stops:** Herodian National Park  
**Comment:** Entrance to Haritoun Cave is permitted only with certified guide.



## Nahal Tekoa and the Haritoun Cave Trail – "On One Foot"

Nahal (stream) Tekoa, the primary carrier for Nahal Darga, which flows into the Dead Sea at Kibbutz Mizra Shalom, is one of the longest and most impressive of the Judean Desert streams. Walking along the stream one can easily be awed by the uniqueness of the area as described in Book of Deuteronomy – a geographic blend of the Hebron hills and the Judean desert. Let's walk in the footsteps of the prophet Amos and visit the remains of the Haritoun Monastery, one of the first Byzantine Monasteries erected in the Judean desert. In spring time one can enjoy the amazing burst of brownish irises blossoming all over, and in the fall easily enjoy the sunflowers and rare flowers filling the landscape. We'll enjoy a challenging walk in the Haritoun Cave, one of the longest karstified caves in Israel.

## Historical Background

**Haritoun:** The monk also known as "Haritoun the Holy One", was one of the founders of the Desert Nazirite Movement in Israel. Haritoun arrived in Jerusalem from his birthplace in South Turkey, with the express goal of following in the footsteps of Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist. His arrival in Israel coincided with the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire. Haritoun, who was not in favor of this process, due to the accompanying arbitrary religious appointments, called for abstinence. He established his first monastery in Wadi Kelt - The Firan Monastery. Here he built the third and largest monastery which is named after him as is the cave. The region has a large concentration of pre-historic caves where numerous pre-historic remains have been found. The community of Tekoa is mentioned in the Jewish sources in connection with the prophet Amos: "The words of Amos who was in Nokdim from Tekoa" (Amos 1:1) Amos serves a classic prophecy, a prophecy that calls for justice among men and not necessarily between man and Gd. At the end of his days, Amos spoke of consolation, "And they planted on their lands, and will not abandon these lands that I have given them."

## How do you get there?

For those traveling from Jerusalem, drive to the neighborhood of Har Homa. Continue straight at the traffic circle (east) in the direction of Tekoa. Continue on route #356, pass the checkpoint and after a few minutes you will notice on the left side the road Herodian. Pass the intersection to the community of Nokdim and continue straight until the left hand turn to Tekoa.

For travelers from Gush Etzion, drive on route #60 until the intersection known as South Efrat. Turn east as per the signage in the direction of the community of Tekoa and Herodian. Continue straight for about 5 minutes. At the intersection turn left and continue straight, passing a local village until you reach a right hand turn into the community of Tekoa. At the entrance to Tekoa, turn right. Turn right again at the second turn, and then immediately left. Continue straight until you reach a left-hand turn leading to a dirt path. Follow the signs to "Horse Ranch". When you arrive at the Horse Ranch turn left. Pass the ranch and cautiously continue driving on the winding, descending road until you reach the parking lot and the entrance to the Nahal Tekoa Nature Reserve. From this point you have a choice of several hiking paths. You can leave your car at the end of the Black trail (Tekoa Gimel) and begin there.

**How do you walk?**  
 Let's choose the path indicated in black. Walk down for about 10 minutes until reaching the transparent sign where the road splits. Turn and climb on this road, advancing cautiously. Climb the steps and the small steel bridge until you reach the entrance to the cave.

**Warning!** The cave is slippery and branched. It is not recommended, in fact it is dangerous to enter the cave without an experienced guide. You'll need a detailed map, which can be obtained at the Kfar Etzion Field School.

**Haritoun Cave:** In Arabic it is known as the "Cave El Matza" or the "Unknown Cave". This cave is a "Kars't Cave" (a cave that is characterized by subterranean limestone caverns carved by groundwater). One of the longest such caves in Israel, it was carved out of

around. The spring was renovated in memory of Yitzhak Weinstock, a resident of Alon Shvut, murdered on the eve of his induction into the IDF in 1992. After visiting Ein Sejma, descend to the path below and turn left until reaching Dubak's pool. Built in memory of Dov (Dubak) Weinstock (Yitzhak's father) Dubak was one of the first residents of Gush Etzion. He actively worked to develop the area around the springs and the natural beauty spots throughout Gush Etzion. Gush Etzion teenagers who worked with Dubak built this pool in his memory. Return southwards on a dirt path (turn left on the road to Dubak's cave) until you reach an asphalt road. Follow the road a few meters as it turns into the bend. Look to your left to find the steep ascent leading back to the main road entrance to Kfar Etzion.

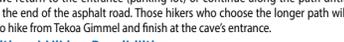
## Additional options for the route:

**Descent to Ein Livneh Spring:** [1-1/2 hour walk] (Continue walking to Ein Huhela. As you approach Ein Huhela, look for a pedestrian path leading down to the channel of the Livneh stream below. Follow the channel on the dirt path marked in green, until reaching the Ein Livneh Spring. This spring originates in the channel of the Livneh stream which descends towards the Judean plain. The spring is ringed with trees; its clear waters reach a depth of two and a half (2-1/2) meters. Continue down along the stream some 200 meters until the houses of the community of Bat Ayin. Be come into view (on your left).

**Hirbat Jumjum:** Two (2) hour walk) At the traffic circle near Kfar Etzion turn towards Bat Ayin. Continue straight until the turn-off right towards old Masuot Yitzhak. Go down by the middle dirt path, pass by old Masuot Yitzhak until reaching a bend to the right. At the bend pass an agricultural gate, walk through the orchards, reach an intersection with another agricultural gate, which you pass through (there should be an abandoned on your left). Follow the blue trail markers, turn right on the path and left until reaching Hirbat Jumjum. During this walk you'll spot a small, yet prominent hill at the bottom of the slope, which is called Hirbat Jumjum. Recently, the Kfar Etzion Field School started an archeological dig here. Ascend to the top of the hill from where you can search the site for the mikvehs, water cisterns and remains of the large walls. A large amount of pottery shards were found here and one theory is that the site was a kind of "factory" for the pottery industry. After descending from Hirbat Jumjum, return to the blue trail markers, climb the eastern extension, along the pine forest, traveling approximately one-and-a-half (1-1/2) kilometers until reaching Ein Sejma.

# NATURE RESERVE NACHAL TEKOA

**Start:** Entrance to Nature Reserve  
**Finish:** Tekoa Gimel Hike Length: 2 Km  
**Hike duration:** 2 hours (on trail only) until 4 hours (including entrance into cave)  
**Level of difficulty:** Walking trail easy to moderate. Trail in cave moderate to difficult.  
**Recommended season:** All year  
**Israel trail maps:** Map #8  
**Trail marker:** Blue #8 (additional options for red or blue)  
**Nearby rest stops:** Herodian National Park  
**Comment:** Entrance to Haritoun Cave is permitted only with certified guide.



## Nahal Tekoa and the Haritoun Cave Trail – "On One Foot"

Nahal (stream) Tekoa, the primary carrier for Nahal Darga, which flows into the Dead Sea at Kibbutz Mizra Shalom, is one of the longest and most impressive of the Judean Desert streams. Walking along the stream one can easily be awed by the uniqueness of the area as described in Book of Deuteronomy – a geographic blend of the Hebron hills and the Judean desert. Let's walk in the footsteps of the prophet Amos and visit the remains of the Haritoun Monastery, one of the first Byzantine Monasteries erected in the Judean desert. In spring time one can enjoy the amazing burst of brownish irises blossoming all over, and in the fall easily enjoy the sunflowers and rare flowers filling the landscape. We'll enjoy a challenging walk in the Haritoun Cave, one of the longest karstified caves in Israel.

## Historical Background

**Haritoun:** The monk also known as "Haritoun the Holy One", was one of the founders of the Desert Nazirite Movement in Israel. Haritoun arrived in Jerusalem from his birthplace in South Turkey, with the express goal of following in the footsteps of Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist. His arrival in Israel coincided with the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire. Haritoun, who was not in favor of this process, due to the accompanying arbitrary religious appointments, called for abstinence. He established his first monastery in Wadi Kelt - The Firan Monastery. Here he built the third and largest monastery which is named after him as is the cave. The region has a large concentration of pre-historic caves where numerous pre-historic remains have been found. The community of Tekoa is mentioned in the Jewish sources in connection with the prophet Amos: "The words of Amos who was in Nokdim from Tekoa" (Amos 1:1) Amos serves a classic prophecy, a prophecy that calls for justice among men and not necessarily between man and Gd. At the end of his days, Amos spoke of consolation, "And they planted on their lands, and will not abandon these lands that I have given them."

## How do you get there?

For those traveling from Jerusalem, drive to the neighborhood of Har Homa. Continue straight at the traffic circle (east) in the direction of Tekoa. Continue on route #356, pass the checkpoint and after a few minutes you will notice on the left side the road Herodian. Pass the intersection to the community of Nokdim and continue straight until the left hand turn to Tekoa.

For travelers from Gush Etzion, drive on route #60 until the intersection known as South Efrat. Turn east as per the signage in the direction of the community of Tekoa and Herodian. Continue straight for about 5 minutes. At the intersection turn left and continue straight, passing a local village until you reach a right hand turn into the community of Tekoa. At the entrance to Tekoa, turn right. Turn right again at the second turn, and then immediately left. Continue straight until you reach a left-hand turn leading to a dirt path. Follow the signs to "Horse Ranch". When you arrive at the Horse Ranch turn left. Pass the ranch and cautiously continue driving on the winding, descending road until you reach the parking lot and the entrance to the Nahal Tekoa Nature Reserve. From this point you have a choice of several hiking paths. You can leave your car at the end of the Black trail (Tekoa Gimel) and begin there.

## How do you walk?

Let's choose the path indicated in black. Walk down for about 10 minutes until reaching the transparent sign where the road splits. Turn and climb on this road, advancing cautiously. Climb the steps and the small steel bridge until you reach the entrance to the cave.

**Warning!** The cave is slippery and branched. It is not recommended, in fact it is dangerous to enter the cave without an experienced guide. You'll need a detailed map, which can be obtained at the Kfar Etzion Field School.

**Haritoun Cave:** In Arabic it is known as the "Cave El Matza" or the "Unknown Cave". This cave is a "Kars't Cave" (a cave that is characterized by subterranean limestone caverns carved by groundwater). One of the longest such caves in Israel, it was carved out of



## Mukhtar Ridge - continuation of Gush Etzion Springs (green route)

Continue from Hovila spring in the direction of Bat Ayin. Pass Hurvat Hallel at the entrance to Bat Ayin and follow a dirt path between pine trees, ascending to the Kfar Etzion vineyard below the regional cemetery. After riding through the vineyard, follow the path leading to the Zofit lookout point. Return east through the gate of the Kfar Etzion orchards until you reach the kibbutz. Enter the kibbutz through the rear orchard gate, ride through the kibbutz, and at the kibbutz entrance you will link up with the red route.  
**Length of route:** 6 km

## Path of the Patriarchs (blue route)

We set out from the Biyar Aqueduct in the direction of the Path of the Patriarchs and turn north at the mikve, in the direction of Neve Daniel. After passing Neve Daniel on the west, riding in single file, we continue east towards Sde Boaz, descending towards road 60. We'll follow route 60, going east until we reach the Shayarov Etzion junction, where we turn left (east) towards Efrat and then immediately turn right (south) towards Givat Hatmar. We descend southwards from Givat Hatmar to Nahal Hovila, following a dirt path through a landscape of vineyards and orchards until we arrive at the Biyar Aqueduct, where our journey ends.  
**Level of difficulty:** Medium  
**Length of route:** 14 km

For more details and updates about bicycle routes see: [www.etziontour.org.il](http://www.etziontour.org.il)