

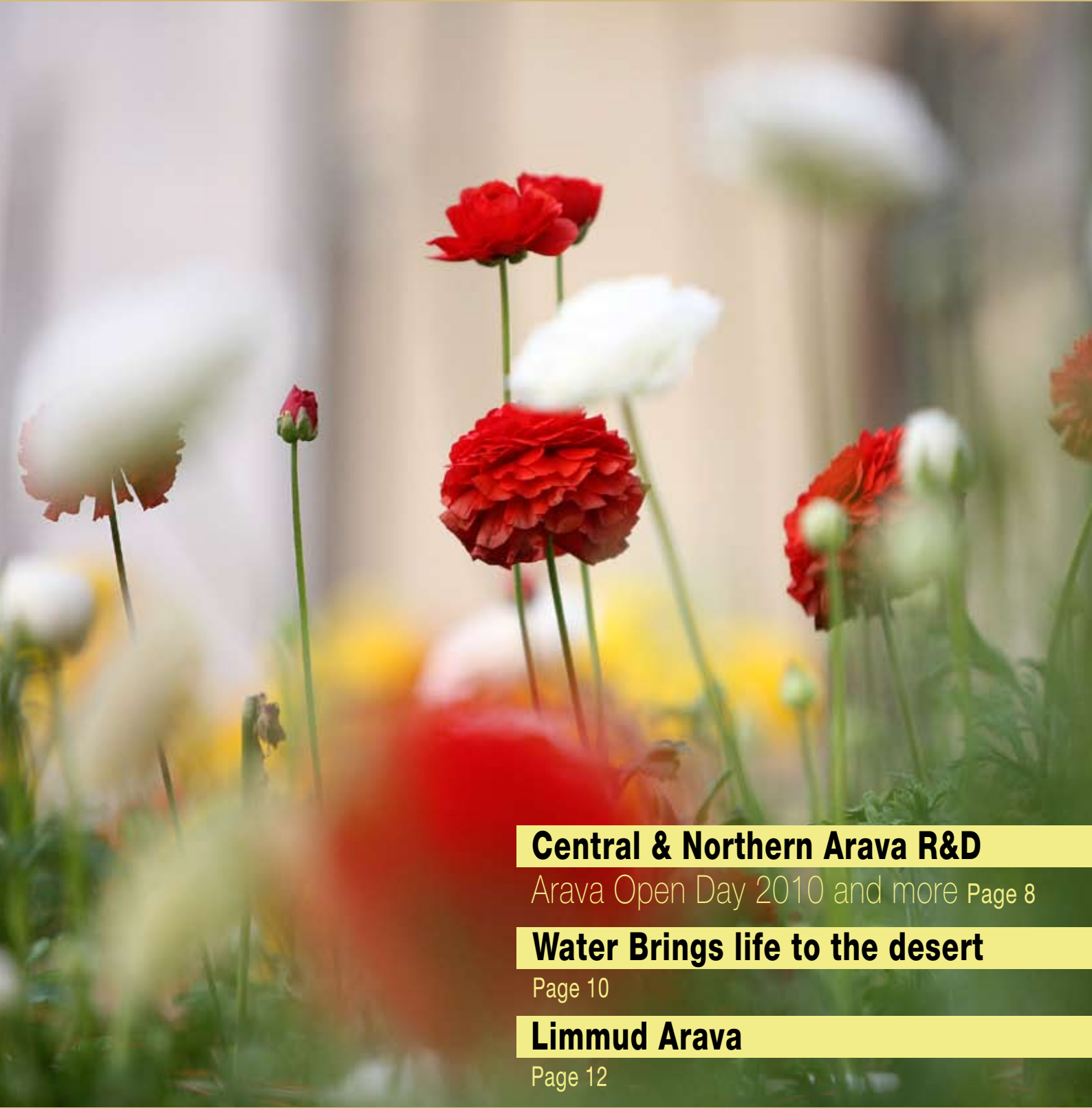


Central Arava
Regional Council



The Central Arava Regional Council Journal **Arvot Newsmagazine**

Issue 2 | December 2009



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Editor's Column

Six months have passed from our first issue and I would like to thank all the readers who sent feedback. It was great to receive such constructive comments about the articles in general and, in particular, the decision to publish a newspaper in English.

A lot has happened during the last 6 months in the Central Arava. This magnificent area that was established decades ago by some "crazy" young pioneers is on the verge of a breaking point of development in all areas. As you will read in the articles, the Council is developing major projects in Education, Culture, Water and Sustainable Environment, Health and Senior Citizens etc. We are also promoting the establishment of projects that will assist the local economy and community life which among other will help attract

new residents to the area - a fact that is critical. While the Central Arava comprises 6% of the area of the land of Israel, it has only 0.06% of the population - 3,000 residents, and is known as the most peripheral area from urban centers in Israel.

I hope the articles will be of interest and should you wish any further information or have any comments please feel free to contact me directly.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our supporters who have made our programs in the Arava possible. Without them we wouldn't be able to initiate and execute such important endeavors.

**Keren Rotem, Resource
Development Coordinator and
Editor**



We especially would like to thank:

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From the Head of the Regional Council

I wish you a Happy, Prosperous and Successful New Year

It is our custom every New Year to look back and to sum up the events of the past year, and also to look forward with anticipation to the new year that is just beginning.

I would like to wish us all peace and quiet along our borders, and that all our sons and daughters return home safely. I wish that the processes of economic recovery, of restoration and growth, will accelerate and flourish in the Arava, in Israel and also the world over, that it will no longer be questionable whether agriculture will thrive in the future, and that the Arava agricultural settlements will again be a source of pride for our country.

I wish you a Happy New Year!

program. Other multi-year master plans deal with tourism, the environment and senior citizens. In a similar vein we are in the process of promoting projects for water preservation, and for agriculture. I recently convened a meeting with all the planners in which they presented their programs in order to establish connections and integration between the diverse plans. In a region such as ours it is especially important to combine forces and to think creatively and innovatively so that we can continue to develop the region we love so much.

The Education Master Plan

After eighteen months of tireless effort on the part of many active community members, with the guidance of the Institute for Democratic

Education, we as a community have gained an understanding that the educational environment in which our children grow up is vital for their proper development, so that each child may succeed in fulfilling his own aspirations and personal needs. The practical expression of this educational vision is the gradual creation of an educational campus – a formal institutional framework that includes all aspects of education in the community, creating an educational atmosphere in the spirit of the community's common values. The activity of the education desk over the past year is testimony of the desire and ability of the community to work together and to create a basis of trust that will constitute the foundation for processes of change and improvement

News from the Council

We are continuing our regular activities with vigor and are also actively promoting many new projects. In the field of education we are beginning to put the Education Master Plan into practice. This is a multi-year program involving the participation of the community, parents and educators. The key word is cooperation and I am pleased with the willingness displayed by parents showing their commitment to the



The first cadets of the pre-army school in Hatzeva

within the education system. The forum decided to run a pilot program for this year, 2009 / 2010 (5770) that will reflect the change in educational thinking, including concepts such as empowerment of students in the system in which they operate. This entails establishment of **enrichment centers which support learning** in all of the educational frameworks operating in our region.

Pre-army school In the Arava - Arava Leadership Institute

Following a series of intensive discussions and meetings, we opened a pre-army school for the first time in the Arava. The course consists of 10 months of training for high school graduates from all over the country, prior to enlistment

into the Israel Defense Forces. The very moving opening ceremony at Moshav Hatzeva, which took place on September 8th, 2009, in old renovated buildings and in a tent that serves as the dining room, afforded me nostalgic reminiscences of 1978 when I was discharged from the army and came to Moshav Hatzeva to pick tomatoes and peppers in the open fields. Today, of course, the technology is different and more advanced. I am proud and moved to see that the values of love for country, of giving, of volunteering and of activism are the guiding lights for the second and third generations in the Arava. These are values that have remained constant even after 50 years of settlement.

A Knowledge Center as an Engine for Growth and Development of the Region

Over a year ago plans were set afoot to promote the region, with emphasis on providing additional jobs, as this is the key to attracting new inhabitants to the region. Good educational and health systems, community life and proper arrangements for senior citizens, as well as a high quality of life and a healthy environment are highly important. Yet it is clear to us that additional sources of livelihood, apart from agriculture and tourism, will promise development and expansions of the region

There is enormous potential in nurturing in the region a knowledge center that combines research work in agriculture, ecology, conservation and preservation of nature, and also integrates programs in advanced agricultural studies. Thus the knowledge center should become a campus for desert agriculture that can integrate all advanced agricultural studies in Israel. Emphasis should also be placed on studies for students from Arab countries. We also envision converting the current agricultural exhibition, the Arava Open Day



Rabbi Blau and Ezra Ravins during the opening ceremony of the pre-army school

that is held at the Yair Station, into an international exhibition (Agritech in the Arava).

In parallel, we are negotiating with entrepreneurs regarding upgrading of the Hatzeva Field School campus with the intention of establishing a hotel and convention center. This will provide both lodging for visitors and dormitory accommodations for students of the advanced tourism courses, who need more extensive facilities than the existing bed & breakfast establishments which cannot cope with the numbers of guests.

We are convinced that this knowledge center will provide employment opportunities in research, training, catering and hotel services, translating into over a hundred new jobs in the region. Additionally it will contribute to the strengthening and upgrading of agricultural research and development to the benefit of agriculture and settlement in the region.

Jubilee festivities of Settlement in the Arava

This year we celebrate the 50 year anniversary of settlement in the Arava. Moshav Ein Yahav was established under the leadership of Shay Ben Eliyahu, the visionary, and



Local girls dancing during the Jubilee event

the late Hagai Porat, who shared his dream. Together they enthused and motivated a handful of their friends and imbued them with a passion to act and to rejoice in establishing a settlement in an area that was considered unsuitable for human habitation. These pioneers made the desert bloom and lit the first light leading the way in the Arava valley on the Jordanian border - a light that is shining to this very day.

The story of the establishment of Ein Yahav inspires us even today when we face challenges and difficult tasks. Thanks

to the first settlers, there are today 7 communities with a total of 3,000 residents. The second, third and even fourth generations have the desire to continue settling the area. Without the first settlers, this would not have happened. On May 27th 2009 we celebrated the 50 year anniversary of settlement in the Arava with a widely attended event at which many VIPs honored us with their presence. In page 20 you can read the speech I made at the event.

Sincerely yours

Ezra Ravins, Head of the Council



President Peres recorded blessing during the event

A moment of history Amnon Navon's column

Dov's Drivel

The time: the early 60's

The place: Ein Yahav (then a cooperative farming settlement).

The Jewish Agency, which funded establishment of the settlement, was usually not very successful in imposing its way on us young settlers. One day, the Agency assigned us a big mission: to absorb a research worker and give him a plot in the vegetable field on which he would conduct agricultural experiments. The idea was not happily received. We asked what a young graduate from the faculty of agriculture could do that we, who were veterans of the Arava, could not. Moreover he was to be allocated one of the houses from the small reserve of houses coveted by the newly weds of the settlement. The research worker, Dov, and his young family arrived. They were not exactly given a warm welcome and they were isolated socially. Dov was given a small plot in the vegetable field where he planted his tomatoes.

At that time tomatoes were Ein Yahav's primary crop and were grown, of course, in open fields. The varieties grown were Marmond and Moneymaker (with the taste of

"the good old days") and they were irrigated with sprinklers. Every two weeks during the season we would pass between the rows of tomato plants, with the help of our faithful horse Gypsy, and pick the tomatoes. We achieved a yield of 5 tons per dunam. The price of tomatoes was sky high as the entire winter supply of tomatoes was very small and

The accepted methods of irrigation were either by sprinkler or flooding, but Dov laid narrow plastic pipes throughout his tomato patch to provide drip irrigation. Strange looking stick-like things called "drippers" were attached to these pipes. These drippers were the invention of Simcha Blass, who was the chief engineer of Mekorot (Israel's



Gypsy in the course of action

came from a small number of settlements in the Arava. The total quantity of tomatoes grown by each of the Arava settlements in those days in the winter was smaller than the quantity grown today by a single farmer. In winter salads were usually made of lettuce, carrots and onions and only the select few could afford to buy tomatoes.

water company) at the time of the construction of the "Yarkon-Negev" plant. He also designed the Israel National Water Carrier (which transports water from the Sea of Galilee to the Negev) and was responsible for the start of construction on the project.

Simcha Blass developed these drippers and claimed that they would revolutionize agriculture.

The experts laughed at him and he had difficulty in raising funds for experiments that would prove the efficiency of his invention. Simcha and his son rented a small basement in Tel Aviv where they made the first drippers. There were no buyers.

The method would have remained in limbo for a long

method, and who succeeded in persuading the Settlement Department Manager of the Jewish Agency to carry out an experiment in Ein Yahav and to send an agronomist to perform the experiment.

Dov's tomato plot was irrigated using this strange and expensive method called

worth their weight in gold and each one was hand picked. The first crop of tomatoes picked from Dov's plot was three times as much as that obtained from regular fields, and by the end of the season his plot had yielded 20 tons per dunam, an astounding quantity by any measure at that time!

In the light of the results of the experiment, this revolutionary irrigation system spread throughout the country and the world. Drip irrigation continues to contribute greatly to increasing crop yields per unit of land and it also saves water and enables brackish water to be used in areas where sweet water is in short supply.

At the conclusion of the experiment Dov left the settlement, hurt but a winner. By the way, Dov's surname is Pasternak and today he is a professor at the Ben Gurion University, and is renowned worldwide as an expert on salt water irrigation in arid regions ... using drippers, of course.



Sorting tomatoes during the 1960's

time had it not been for a young agronomist, Yehuda Zohar, who believed in the



Advanced sorting using machinery

"Drip Irrigation". We caused him many problems, and did not even take the trouble to go and see what he was wasting his time on, yet Dov continued to cultivate his plot.

One day Dov approached the late Hagai Porat, at the time the settlement's coordinator, and said that the tomatoes on his plot needed to be picked. Tomatoes at that time were

Photos courtesy of **Amnon Navon** and the **Ein Yahav Archive**

Central & Northern Arava R&D Yair Station

Come join in our success

Central & Northern Arava R&D is a division of the network

60% of Israel's fresh produce export and 10% of Israel's cut flower export comes from the Central & Northern Arava regions.

of us believed that by the following year the vision of a permanent structure for the Center for Agricultural Tourism would become reality. During this last year thousands of visitors from Israel and abroad toured the Station. Visitors always expressed their impression of the achievements and the results of research and development in the Arava. The new center for Agricultural Tourism at the "Yair" Station is being built and will be completed in the near future, becoming a regional attraction and a key point of interest in the Arava.



of Agricultural Research and Development Stations in Israel's peripheral regions. The R&D Stations are sponsored by Keren Kayemet Le'Israel (KKL- JNF) as well as the Israeli government and other organizations. Our goal is to serve growers and their development needs while utilizing the region's unique attributes. We aim to increase agricultural sustainability, profitability and to support the growing population in the Arava.

Arava growers produce vegetables, cut flowers, fruits, fresh herbs and ornamental fish.

"A Window to agriculture" The Center for Agro-Tourism

When the tourist department at "Yair Station" was established, about a year ago, not many

During the tours at "Yair" Station, visitors are exposed to High-Tec farming methods, mostly environmentally friendly, of the region's farmers. The Central & Northern Arava growers succeed in maintaining successful, world renowned agriculture despite the harsh desert conditions such as saline water and high



Yair Station

temperatures. During the tour the guests are exposed to the wide variety of vegetables & colorful flowers as well as aquatic farming of clown fish and more – yes, fish can grow in the desert. Basically, we see Ben Gurion's (Israel's first Prime Minister) vision taking shape.

Ornamental Fish

A few years ago Central & Northern Arava R&D started a new project: breeding ornamental marine fish called "Clown Fish". Today it is possible to grow this fish and other species on a commercial basis. This new enterprise enables second generation sons and daughters of veteran Arava farmers to return to the Arava and start their own business. Due to the limitations in the Arava with respect to water and land, the fish breeding industry is a viable alternative.



Clown fish (Nemo) born and raised in the Arava

Gradual Fogging System

Arava R&D experts together with Dr Avi Arbel from the Volcani Institute are developing a green house cooling system. One of the problems growing vegetables in the desert is excessive heat. In order to get better results there is need to cool the greenhouses in the



Gradual fogging system

beginning and at the end of the season.

The gradual fogging system for greenhouse cooling is a new technique that is being developed at the "Yair Station". The system is being developed

with the assistance of JCA Charitable Foundation. The first prototype will be ready in the up-coming 2010 season.

Arava Open Day event

Every year around "Tu Bishvat" Central & Northern Arava R&D holds an Open Day Event. This event has become the largest agricultural event in Israel. In 2009 this two day event had over 150 exhibitors as well as over 20,000 visitors and guests. The 2010 Arava Open Day Event will take place on the 27th and the 28th of January and it will be the climax of this year's celebrations honoring the 50th anniversary of settlement and agriculture in the Arava. In light of this very special occasion, we are hoping that the JNF Missions will participate and share in this gala event.

Aylon Gadiel, Manager Arava R&D
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Arava Open Day 2009



Water - brings life and enables the land to be settled and developed

The Central Arava was first settled in July 1959, 50 years ago. The lack of water, isolation and distance from established settlements and cities as well as the harsh weather conditions posed the greatest impediments to settling and developing this barren and arid area. At the beginning the source of water was local wells. Later, in the 1950's, drilling for water began in an attempt to find potable water and water for agriculture of satisfactory quantity. In addition, experiments were carried out to discover what could be grown with brackish water.

The potential supply was based on the idea of using ground water directly replenished by floods. Over the years, with the increase in the knowledge of desert hydrology and the discovery of deep aquifers, the potential has grown enabling the pumping today of about



Sheizaf Reservoir covered with a Polypropylene floating cover

35 million cubic meters a year. The water system in the Central Arava, between Idan and Paran is inter-connected with drilling operations, transport systems, pumping stations and installations for using water from reservoirs. There is a mixture of different qualities of water.

With the signing of the peace accord with Jordan in 1994, 12 drilling sites out of the 52 wells that supply water to the region continued operation from within the territory of Jordan. The water on the Jordanian side is of a higher quality and is mixed with the salty water from the Israeli side at dilution junctions, thus improving the overall water quality used for local agriculture.

The Arava Drainage Authority, with the assistance of Mekorot, The Israel National Water

Company, supervises the local water system by monitoring the consumption data. These data are received online, in real time, through a computerized telecommunication system enabling the allocation of water by quantity, quality, and pressure requirements, according to regional control standards. Water usage is supervised, including enforcing quotas, and cutting off the water supply for short periods during the summer at the beginning of the season when the demand is very high.

The Central Arava has an agreement signed by all of the settlements in the region by which they undertake to make every effort to distribute the water equally. The Central Arava is not yet connected to any other national water



Eshet Reservoir near Paran



Sheizaf Reservoir near Ein Yahav

sources and due to the small amount of waste water, it is our commitment and also that of the State to find additional sources of water to enable continued development of the region and the absorption of the Arava's second generation of residents. Five reservoirs were built in the Arava for collecting flood waters to be used directly for irrigation and for enriching the ground water. In addition, the master plan should provide solutions for additional water of high quality, mainly from sources outside the Arava including desalinated water from Eilat and water from drilling sites in the Dead Sea area.

This is our great challenge. Conquering the wilderness and enabling man to settle the desert.

Ami Shacham, Director
Arava Drainage Authority
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Hatzeva Reservoir

Visitor's Center - Desert Water

Water is a significant issue on the agenda in many places around the world. The amazing story of the water in the Arava is unique in all the world. The Regional Council has recently started planning a Visitor's Center on the hill above the Sheizaf reservoir overlooking Ein Yahav and Jordan.

This is an educational project for both youth and adults which will be carried out with the collaboration of the region, the Mekorot Company and with the support of donations, concerning water in the Arava which will deal with a wide range of fascinating aspects such as:

- ❖ The search for water in the Arava.
- ❖ Hydrology.
- ❖ Deep Aquifers: treating water, cooling, removing iron, H₂S.
- ❖ Development work- water transport systems.
- ❖ Flood water reservoirs and the occurrence of floods.
- ❖ Drinking water, desalination systems.
- ❖ Operative reservoirs.
- ❖ The Peace Accord provisions concerning water, and the performance of the parties over the years since 1994.
- ❖ Films accompanying the projects, such as how a water drilling operation is carried out from the initial groundbreaking until full capacity pumping.
- ❖ Unique systems characterizing the Arava: dilution junctions, optimization, distribution of water to consumers, remote control and supervision etc.
- ❖ Operation and maintenance- sealing drillings, chemical and mechanical treatments, the use of explosives, etc.
- ❖ Irrigation methods over the years.

This Visitor's Center will serve to attract and educate school pupils, visitors and tourists at an excellent location in the Arava. We hope it will also promote collaboration with other countries, foreign companies and businesses in the fields of water and agriculture.



Hatzeva Reservoir



Limmud Arava

The international Limmud program is designed to deepen the awareness of Jewish identity and to facilitate an in-depth study of Jewish sources and texts dealing with Jewish culture, as well as to consider world philosophical thought. This is achieved while creating community contacts through volunteer activities.

The connection with Partnership 2000

The objective and mission of Partnership 2000 is to develop and promote ties between the Diaspora Jewry and Israeli society through community, organizational and personal connections. Partnership 2000 commenced operations with the help of the Jewish Agency in 1994, in coordination with the United Jewish Communities of North America (UJC) and Keren Hayesod (the United Jewish Appeal). The program was developed to strengthen the ties between Jewish communities worldwide and the communities in Israel, and is involved in promotion of joint causes and common interest issues forming part of the development agenda of the regions in Israel, and engaging the active participation of the Diaspora communities. Over the years Partnership 2000 has developed into

a widespread system of reciprocal activities, and has established an innovative model of Israel-Diaspora relations, the main purpose of which has been the transformation of the previously philanthropic relationship (where one party was the giver and the other the receiver) into a mutually beneficial relationship between equal partners. It was also exemplified by the move away from collective involvement and towards direct and personal involvement. The Central Arava – Australia partnership was established about 14 years ago and it is a mutual relationship with full partnership between the communities. The main focal points of the partnership are: reciprocal relations between the communities, community development in the fields of education, art and society and the economic development

and growth of the Arava.

Limmud Arava

The Limmud project was brought to the Central Arava Region by a group of active members of the Arava - Australia partnership who had attended Limmud meetings in Australia, and become enthusiastic about the Limmud concept, and impressed with the study contents and especially with the energy and involvement engendered by them. This group proposed the establishment of Limmud Arava, with the option of inviting the neighboring regions of Tamar, Eilat and Eilat to join the project. They suggested using Limmud Galil, which has been in operation for several years already, as a model.

The Central Arava is Israel's most remote and peripheral region, with the nearest urban



Yair Tzaban's opening session of the October 2009 Convention

centers being Beer Sheba and Eilat which are both about 130 km away. It is 100 km distant from the Eilat Regional Council located in the Southern Arava Valley and 120 km away from the Tamar Regional Council in the Northern Arava. Our isolation and distance from other regions in the country amplifies our need and desire to create a vibrant community life for ourselves that covers both intellectual pursuits and especially discussions on a very relevant and real subject – realizing our Jewish identity.

International Involvement

In order to gain a more informed impression of the global Limmud organization and to learn more about it, we sent representatives to the Limmud Galil convention over Chanukah of 2008, as well as to the annual Limmud Britain convention which was also held in December of that year. Favorable impressions were drawn from these two conventions. Ties were forged with the Limmud Australia and Limmud Galil people and we received from them significant and helpful inputs for the establishment of operations in the Arava. We learned a great deal from the impressive manner in which the Warwick convention in England was produced. We also benefited

from the training we received at the meetings of Limmud International.

The principle objective of Limmud Arava is to hold conventions in the Central Arava and to set into operation activities for a large number of participants drawn from residents of the region as well as from residents of other regions. The organizers of Limmud Arava are taking steps to receive membership and sponsorship from the worldwide Limmud organization



Registration to the October 2009 Limmud Convention

which is centered in London. This project was initiated and financed by **Partnership 2000**, the **Jewish Agency** and with the assistance of the **Arava Community Center**.

Meetings have been held since January 2009 with the intention of creating public awareness and exposure for the Limmud project and also of creating interest in the Limmud project among the residents of the Central Arava. The meetings were

organized and held with the guidance of people from Beit Hamidrash BaMidbar (house of study in the desert) from Yeruham. Our first task was to establish a group of committed volunteers. The Limmud project is based on voluntary activity, and it was therefore important for us to hold the Limmud meetings in the form of a dialogue between friends. We organized six exposure meetings which were held “in house” at all the Central Arava communities. Together we studied texts from the original Jewish writings: the bible, the Talmud, the Mishnah (oral Jewish laws) and folk legends, as well as literary and philosophical works from the cultures of the world. Each of these meetings was attended by around 90 people, some of whom returned again and again to attend almost all of the meetings. The participants reported great interest in the activity.

The schedule of activities for the coming year

For the coming year we are planning 18 Limmud meetings, beginning from August 30th, 2009 and taking place thereafter once every two weeks. The meetings will be held within a social framework and will deal with topics that have been divided into three

categories.

1. New Beginnings: For example, the Tishrei holidays, Slichot (forgiveness) – a window into the world of poetry, “the flood” – the creator whose creation was spoilt, first women in the Bible, etc.

2. First Families: For example: first brothers – Cain and Abel – the story of the first murder, the first Hebrew family, mothers and daughters in the book of Genesis.

3. Traditions Continued and Created: for example: telling your son – creating ethos, morals, and tradition; wife and family relations – Sara and Hagar, comparing the Declaration of Independence to Jewish sources on the subject of Kibbutz Galuyot (the ingathering of the Diaspora); Jerusalem the Light of the World – is this so? On the selection of holy places, the status of father – son – the people of Israel – Jacob’s blessings to his sons, and

other matters.

In order to create pluralism and variety in the meetings, and to have a variety of Jewish perceptions, approaches and styles, we have contacted discussion leaders from both within and outside of the region to moderate a number of meetings, and have received affirmative responses from **Rabbi Blau, Rabbi Shaish, Carmela Riati and Hanan Porat** – some of them residents of the Central Arava communities. They, in addition to the regular lecturers from Beit HaMidrash in Yeroham, will lead the discussions

Dates for two conventions

The first, a one day convention, that was held immediately after Succoth, on October 15th, 2009. **The second convention, scheduled for February 18-19, 2010**, is a two day convention. Invitations will be extended,



in addition to the residents of the region, also to members of the Australian community who have immigrated to Israel, as well as Australians visiting Israel, and to all the residents of Israel. The lecturers invited will be attending voluntarily, in the spirit and approach of Limmud Worldwide. The Arava residents, who will organize the project, will also do so voluntarily as a service to the community. We are currently working on obtaining as widespread advertising as possible of the Arava convention in order to reach all of these communities.

Since the Limmud project is a community event in the Arava, we have great expectations that it will snowball, generating positive energy for our community and will contribute both to the learning experience and the widening of horizons of the entire community, and also to stimulating discussion of our Jewish-Zionist identity.



Lea Shackdiel during a session

Cochy Avny, Director Partnership
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Tourism in the Arava relies on three main assets:

- ❖ **Tranquility**
- ❖ **Breathtaking views**
- ❖ **Excursions in unspoiled nature reserves**

Tourist facilities in the Central Arava started to develop in the late 1990's and from the outset managed to meet the existing demand. In the early years of 2000, a department was established in the Regional Council to assist entrepreneurs and promote tourism through development, marketing, advertising and public relations.

The department is active to this day and the Arava tour operators are "members" paying a fee that is used to support the operation of the Visitor's Center.

The tourist office operations include advertising, courses, training, organizing regional events, operating information centers, publishing and distributing marketing material, maintaining the website,

promoting regional projects, etc. The main funding comes from the Jewish Agency Partnership 2000 project, which was a very significant factor in founding and marketing of tourism in the area.

There are currently 230 guest units and cabins that are active in the Central Arava and several hundred more are being planned. Most new B&B units will be in Zuqim, the new community whose residents rely on eco-tourism for their livelihood and offer a variety of fascinating tourist experiences. In addition to accommodations, many tourist attractions and restaurants have opened and there is room for many more to come.

In 2005, UNESCO declared the Spice Route a World Heritage Site. This route is 2000, km long, starting in Yemen, it passes through Saudi Arabia and Jordan (Petra) and then through the Arava and ends at the Gaza

Port. Along this ancient route expensive goods (spices and perfumes) were brought from Asia to Europe.

The Arava was lucky enough to be a significant part of this impressive route. UNESCO's recognition of the route as a Heritage Site has clear and obvious advantages:

- ❖ International prestige
- ❖ International aid
- ❖ Conservation of the Route and its sites
- ❖ Integrating the Route in the map of the first rate tourist sites of the world

Tourism in the Arava has evolved remarkably over the last 15 years. The Region is considered to have achieved one of the most impressive developments of rural tourism in Israel. The potential is great and there are many more projects in the pipeline. A vacation in the Arava is like no other. You, of course, are welcome to visit and fall in love.



Rinat Rosenberg, Tourism Department Coordinator rinat@arava.co.il

The Central Arava Knowledge Center Man and Desert Learning Center

Background

The Israeli settlement of the Central Arava Region took hold against all odds and in spite of the pessimistic predictions of government experts in the 1950's. The story of the Region should be viewed as a miracle - those who know the harsh conditions in this Region on the one hand and on the other hand see the flourishing and successful agriculture, the excellent education system and the rich community life, know very well that this was achieved through hard work, determination and deep belief in the goal.

It is in our hands now to keep the miracle alive for future generations.

Presently, there are three separate regional units that play an important role in shaping the future of life in the Arava: (1) the agricultural R&D that represents the expansion and development of agriculture (2) the Hatzeva Field School that represents nature conservation and education and (3) the Science center that focuses on academic relations between the Region and research institutes and universities.

The Central Arava Regional Council wishes to develop the Region into one that enables young generations of people

to settle in the desert. The first generation of settlers in the area was successfully based on agriculture, mostly vegetable crops. Success of the coming generations will depend on the availability of new means of livelihood. We believe that science and education are the future areas.

The Council wishes to establish a Center based on the three existing elements that will bridge the inherited gaps for future agro-environmental and technological developments. It will be an academic/scientific platform for students, researchers and entrepreneurs, local and from outside the Region.

We propose to initiate the knowledge center with five interactive foundations.

The mission and rationale for the Knowledge Center

- To establish a research center that will broaden the scope of activities in the Central Arava and expand the available occupational opportunities for the local resident and people who wish to live here but have no other means of livelihood in the Region.
- To absorb students and scientists that will become new residents in the Arava and will be able to fulfill their high qualities in research and

education.

- To coordinate scientific activities comprised of the following components: Basic Science, Applied Science, Exposing the Community to science, Environmental issues, tourism in the desert and more.
- To upgrade the quality of the local school, broadening the options for our children and to enable and enrich after school activities.

The concepts of the Knowledge Center

- The center will be composed of several modules/ units.
- A scholar/scientist will be the head and the leader of each unit.
- The system of funding can be as follow: each unit and every head of unit will be related to a donor.
- The topics and the characters of the research units will be:
 - 1) Environment, desertification and sustainability.
 - 2) Environmental education (aimed at both the Israeli population and students from abroad).
 - 3) The potential of desert plants as source of leads for drugs, fungicides and herbicides.
 - 4) New agricultural crops.
 - 5) Biotechnology (molecular genetics) of algae and plants for the benefit of creating immunization against diseases, for production of healthy compounds and more.

- 6) Zebra-fish as a system model for studying human diseases: unveiling mechanisms of human diseases and screening for drugs against human diseases.
- 7) Plant tissue culture as source for improved kinds of plants, bushes and trees.

Promoting and upgrading of existing units

- Agricultural R&D (Yair Station) – Yair station has developed an enormous amount of knowledge on how to make food in the desert. The aim is to enable Yair station to become an international center for knowledge in agriculture, agro-tourism and preservation of the environment, natural landscape and water in the desert.
- Hatzeva Field School- the Hatzeva field school is unique in its mode of actions: young instructors, as part of the army, are promoting environmental education to children and adults. It is required to upgrade accommodation facilities in this location including lecturing halls and also a “small” congress center. The best way to achieve these goals is through an investor rebuilding the facilities. Such reorganization would enable the facility to serve as a center to host delegations from all over the world that come to study desert agricultural courses.

• AICAT – Arava International Center for Agricultural Trainees - the school for agricultural trainees from Thailand, Nepal, Vietnam and Myanmar has been running for ten years now, with great success, employing a staff of senior lecturers, made up of residents of the Arava. As of today, all the foreign trainees, from all over the world, who arrive to Israel; have lodging in the center of Israel, in two main locations. We have already received the consent and blessing of the Agriculture and Foreign departments to transfer all the trainees' hospitality and teaching from the center of Israel to the Arava. Transfer of all agricultural trainees to the region will accelerate the economic development of the Area.

- The classrooms and lecture halls in the Field School will additionally serve for the environmental activities with youth and adults.
- The Scientific R&D - It is proposed to upgrade the science R&D with a laboratory serving three **research groups**

• Environmental Research and Education (ER&E)

- Territorial behavior of desert birds (e.g. Arabian Babbler, Southern Grey Shrike, Arabian Warbler, Desert Lark, Blackstart, etc)
- Bird migration over the Dead Sea rift valley

- Educational activities
- **Agro-sciences**
- Biotechnology and nutrition of fish
- Plant Genetics engineering
- Plant diseases R&D
- **Biotechnology and therapeutics**
- Laboratory of Natural Medicinal Compounds
- Laboratory of Zebra-fish as a model for human diseases

Summary

The complex of Man and Desert is based on our knowledge of how to live in and with the desert. Combining and upgrading of existing units and activities will be an act of synergism that will uplift the achievements in the Arava. Such an initiative will contribute greatly to our main goal of attracting new young citizens with various professions to live in the Arava. Man and Desert may make a big difference for the people in the Arava.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
- Margaret Mead

Rivka Ofir, PhD Senior Research Fellow Ben Gurion University and Head of The Central Arava Branch of the Dead Sea-Arava Science Center
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Bringing Science to the Periphery

A Community Educational Program for Children of the Central Arava

Roughly 130 km separates the Central Arava from the nearest urban center, which is why it is considered the most peripheral and remote area in the country. We recognize that the few informal educational and enrichment frameworks available and the difficulty in bringing high quality, professional teachers to the region denies our children the opportunities to advance themselves compared to their peers in the more central parts of Israel. As our children are our tomorrow and hold in their hands the key to the future evolvement of the Central Arava, we must give them the tools to widen their horizons and fulfill their potential.

On the other hand of the spectrum, the Central Arava is rich in unique nature preserves that are found in this region alone. These have a great value in advancing scientific and technological development and serve as a platform for original and pioneer ideas. A leading Scientific R&D Center also serves as a source for multidisciplinary research in the Arava region in the fields of geology, ecology, hydrology, climatology and more, and

works towards integrating the community, including school children, in its endeavors.

Widening Horizons for the Central Arava Children

A new master program engineered by Regional Council in collaboration with the Institute for Democratic Education in Israel, the Ministry of Education, the Jewish Agency Partnership 2000 program and representatives from the community seeks to promote a new educational and social narrative for the Central Arava. This initiative has identified the region's potent and unique qualities (Ecology and Environment; High-Tech Agriculture; Tourism; Humanities, Therapy Treatments and Arts) and has formed 6 regional reinforcement centers for all ages that each focus on a specific region's core advantages. These supportive learning and enrichment centers will complement the studies in each of the local formal educational facilities and will enable 700 students to choose a field that is of most interest to them and to excel in it. It will enable the younger generation to identify with the strengths of a particular region and promote their affinity and sense of obligation to it and to other residents who share

their common interest.

The idea behind the program is to make maximum use of all the available resources that the region has to offer (people, professionals, initiatives, institutions and natural resources) instead of importing educational or enrichment frameworks from outside the Arava and to incorporate students, parents and teachers in a stimulating process of growth and development.

The only way to increase the number of Council residents, to offer multi faceted employment opportunities and to maintain a leading position in the country's technological and agricultural frontier is to create a local educational and social program that consolidates resources, promotes active community partnership, seeks innovation and maximizes opportunities for learning. Positioning quality education as a focal point of the region is the notion that lies at the heart of this initiative.

The initiative will first run as a pilot program during the current school year and I will keep you updated about the evolution and progress of the plan in the next issue.

Roy Patrick, Head of the Education Department roy@arava.co.il

Honeymoon among the Acacias

Newlyweds Zoe Spiegel & Darren Smorgon of Sydney Australia decided to take an unusual honeymoon vacation. While most young couples choose to indulge on a vacation getaway and to think only of themselves, Darren and Zoë decided to donate their wedding money to the "Adopt an Acacia" project and to visit the Arava. Along the way they got to know local residents, heard interesting stories, were informed about the Arava, and even came face to face with a poisonous snake.



Zoe Spiegel & Darren Smorgon

The "Adopt an Acacia" project is the environmental flagship of the Central Arava Community and of the KKL. During the course of the project Arava farmers will plant Acacia trees along the borders of their agricultural plots and this will go some way to helping to rehabilitate the delicate ecological system that has been severely damaged by the agricultural activities in

the Region. The stage of raising funds for the project is coming to a conclusion and soon scores of Acacia shoots, collected in the Arava, will be supplied for planting here in the Arava. The seeds of the trees had been taken to the KKL nurseries in Gilat for germination. Rumors of this original and pioneering project reached various people and places around the world, including Zoe Spiegel & Darren Smorgon of Sydney, Australia, who were at the time contemplating how they could involve the people of Israel in the happiness and celebration of their wedding. The young couple approached Robert Schneider, the Chief Executive of JNF Australia, and he directed them to the Adopt an Acacia in the Arava project. Darren and Zoë were enthusiastic about the project and decided to donate the money they received as wedding gifts to it.

On July 19th, 2009 the couple arrived in the Arava to make acquaintance with the area and the project. They visited the plaque posted by the JNF at Moa acknowledging their donation (see the photograph) and from there they visited the agricultural R&D Yair Station, the private nursery for desert plants and trees, run by Hilla Elbaz of Moshav Hatzeva, who was chosen to coordinate the project on behalf of the Council, a short view of the Sheizaf reserve and also the Peace Road. During

their tour the couple was given descriptions and information about the community in the Region, the agriculture, nature and the environment of the Central Arava. They even had a close encounter with a poisonous Saw Scaled Viper that was captured in the Hatzeva Field School by Oded Keynan, a researcher from the field school, who released him under an Acacia tree.



We hope that more couples will discover the Arava and the Acacia trees indigenous to the Region and will regard this as a preferred destination for their honeymoon vacations.

Approval has recently been received for the donation to activate the program for three years in cooperation with KKL, JNF Australia, the Arava Drainage Authority, KKL Nurseries in Gilat, Israel Nature and Parks Authority and the Council's Environmental Unit.

Your honor, the Minister of Agriculture, Shalom Simchon

MK Yisrael Hason

MK Shay Chermesh

Heads of neighboring regional councils - Dov Litvinoff, Udi Gat and Shmulik Rifman

Shay Ben Eliyahu

Honored guests and dear residents

Good evening,

Here, at the heart of the Arava, we are celebrating the 50 year anniversary of settlement in the Central Arava. Just a few hundred meters from here, by the "Hidden Pond" and the Ein Yahav settlement, is where it all began.

I tried to think what characterizes us, the residents of the Arava, and what we all have in common and was reminded of the words of Ben Gurion on his way down to Sde Boker in the 1950's. "To start over from the beginning".

That is what Abraham, the first oleh (immigrant) to this land, did. He settled in the desert and started from the beginning- finding water and planting trees.

There are two sentences etched on my mind:

"It is in the Negev that the nation will be tested and in Israel and in the homeland" as stated by Ben Gurion.

And "There is nothing like the magic of the Arava", a sentence written by his student, President Shimon Peres, on his visit to the Shitim School this past February.

This magic is a result of the faith, decisiveness, stubbornness and unremitting persistence of the first settlers of Ein Yahav in the face of isolation, the awesome forces of nature, disease and the pests that destroyed their crops. Nothing is can be taken for granted. Despite almost impossible circumstances, the first settlers succeeded in creating the platform for all of us in all fields of life.

Ben Gurion, in his vision of the 1950's, speaks of the economical and military call of the state of Israel to go south.

I quote him- "to cause the water of the land of Israel and its rains to flow southward, to direct the youth of the new pioneering young immigrants to the south to settle in the south. To allocate development funds mainly to the south, to establish research and science institutions, to focus Israeli scientists and researchers on studying both the latent as well as the known processes through which we will be able to make the Negev desert bloom".

We are just at the beginning of the way and the challenges are immense. To develop, expand and strengthen the settlements and to absorb the next generation and also families from around the country. Research and development, education, culture, senior citizens, medical services, agriculture, tourism and endless creative ideas...

I say it's within our grasp. Only with the same faith, determination and persistence and also working together, will we succeed in realizing our common vision of continuing the development of the area.

On behalf of all of us, I would like to thank the settling parties. The Jewish Agency, the Moshavim Movement, JNF, The Settlement Division, The Ministry of Agriculture, The Ministry for the Development of the Negev and the Galilee and other government offices, JCA Fund, donors and companies.

There is much still to be done.

Last but not least, a huge thank you to the great production team led by Naomi Becker, the Director of the Community Center and of course the volunteers, for organizing this evening.

"The Negev will bloom and the old man will smile".

We all have a lot to be proud of.