



Central Arava
Regional Council



The Central Arava Regional Council Journal
Arvot Newsmagazine

..... Issue 1 | April 2009

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The change in approach of the Head of the Council, Ezra Ravins, since taking office a year and a half ago is especially evident when reading the local newspaper.

The Council newspaper, whose main purpose was to give current reports on what was taking place in the Council offices and agencies, has developed into a community newspaper with a unique character; a newspaper that reflects the community spirit and a voice that covers what is happening throughout the region. The newspaper, distributed to the residents once every other month, combines information and articles about municipal matters together with numerous articles and sections on community life. To our great pleasure, the wonderful residents have accepted the challenge and gradually an active, talented editorial staff has formed, full of new ideas.

In keeping with the strong desire to share with you community news, we decided to translate certain articles from the newspaper into English especially for our overseas supporters.

In the future the newspaper will be produced twice a year at around Passover and around Rosh Hashanah. Thereafter, as needed and in light of your feedback, we will consider producing and translating issues more frequently.

We are pleased and proud to present to you the first edition and we invite you to give us your ideas and feedback and also an indication of the subjects that interest you so that future publications will be better focused.

Wishing you enjoyable reading.

Ossi Nir- Council Spokeswoman
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50 year anniversary of settlement in the Central Arava

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of settlement in the Arava. During the year we will hold various events to mark the anniversary reaching a climax with the exciting celebration which will take place at the Council Square on the 27th May 2009.

We see the events as a significant springboard to the advancement of the Arava and the marketing of the region so as to attract new population and to promote the settlement of the Central Arava.

Our intention is to provide a stage for displaying achievements of the region such as technological breakthroughs and our advanced agriculture and achievements in research and development.

We want to project our message that "The future beckons us" in creating lively, mixed and involved community, as well as development of tourism.

In spite of slow progress and the global economical situation, we cannot allow ourselves to miss opportunities for developing the region. Particularly now mobilizing of resources is more important than ever.

Partnership 2000

Recently we marked the 13th anniversary of the establishment of Partnership 2000 with a

festive and emotional evening to celebrate the strong bond which was formed with the Australian Jewish community.

President Peres in the Arava

25 years since his last visit to the Arava, President Shimon Peres arrived for an historical visit to the Central Arava to launch the Open Day exhibition and start the celebrations commemorating 50 years of settlement of the Arava.

On his arrival by helicopter at the Sapir landing field, President Peres was received

by the local Shittim School first grade students.

President Peres then attended a meeting with the Regional Council's assembly, executive personnel and the seven coordinators from each of the region's communities.

Ezra Ravins, the Head of the Council greeted the president and served some of the finest local products.

Later on there was a ceremony, held at Shittim School, with the participation of all the students and teachers, when President

Peres imprinted his palm with the writing: "there is nothing like the magic of the Central Arava".

During the moving ceremony Ezra Ravins presented President Peres with a picture of him and David Ben-Gurion taken in the 1960's during a momentous visit to the area.

The next stop was a tour of local tomato and pepper greenhouses in Ein Yahav. Then we had the great honor of having the president initiate the Open Day Exhibition at Yair R&D Station (page 12).



President Peres and Ezra Ravins, Head of the Council



President Peres imprinting his palm



President Shimon Peres with the Shittim School Headmaster and students.



President Peres in a greenhouse in Ein-Yahav



Peres with Prime Minister then David Ben-Gurion during a visit to the Arava in the 1960's. on the far most right is Shai Ben-Eliyahu, one of the founders of Ein-Yahav.

Residents getting involved

A few months ago, on December 7 2008, the first in a series of meetings on sustainability and sustainable development took place. This event, organized by the Environmental Unit of the Council, was designed as the first step on the long path to providing the Council and residents of the region a clear operational plan for the environment and for the betterment of our lives in the next decade and beyond. This is a process that will hold meaning only if it is carried out with the cooperation of the consumers - that is the residents.

In my previous position as the manager of the Arava R&D, within the framework of the project "A Clean Arava", I dealt extensively with agriculture from the point of view of its effect on our lives. I constantly faced the question of how to preserve the wondrous nature around us while also living and developing at the same time. In my current position as the Head of the Council I have to face another conflict between the residents and the environment. We are concerned with protecting the environment from the damage of 4x4 vehicles and ATVs (all terrain vehicles) which scar the landscape everywhere.

Sincerely Yours

Ezra Ravins, Head of the Council



Pioneering

The late staff sergeant Tamir Nevuani, of Julis village in the Galilee, was on his way to becoming the first Druze soldier in the Israel Defense Forces Special Forces Unit ("Sayeret Matkal"). Tamir died a year ago at the age of 19 in a training accident during the course of a navigation exercise in the Nahal Ashosh area.

I did not know Tamir personally and I am sorry that I did not, because I admire, esteem and respect people who have pioneering spirits. Tamir was one of them. I hope he has opened the door for many more to come. As a resident of the Arava for the past 30 years, I have been exposed to the special operations of the IDF elite units, which train in the unique and wild landscapes of the Central Arava.

A memorial service was held for Tamir a year after his death at the Zuqim refreshment stop on the Arava Hi-way, which was established two years ago as a cooperative project by the JNF, Agrexco, the Public Works Authority and the Regional Council

A moment of history Amnon Navon's column



Photo courtesy of Amnon Navon and the Ein Yahav Archive

Naomi's Father

In 1965 the Barak Group arrived at Ein Yahav. One of the group members was Naomi Rosenberg of Moshav Beit She'arim. Naomi's father, Peretz, owned a farm in Beit She'arim. He was a Hagana activist of the late 1930s, who specialized in wireless connections and served as the commander of the wireless operators' course.

In the Second World War Peretz had volunteered for and joined the Jewish Paratroopers who parachuted behind the Nazi lines (Hanna Senesh' group). He was the first of this group to parachute into Europe.

A member of Tito's partisans, he was Tito's right hand man. Peretz returned safely from these missions and thereafter served in many positions in Israeli national security.

Peretz was also an inventor. He was full of ideas and was successful in implementing many of them. Many of his patents were in the water and irrigation fields and he established the Ein Tal

Company which specializes in irrigation products.

In the 1960s Peretz worked on a new innovation - a tap that turned itself off. Today this seems trivial but at the time the idea was revolutionary, since irrigation had always required turning the tap on and off manually and no one thought that there was any other way to do it.

Peretz created an aluminum valve with a simple mechanical alarm clock installed on it. At the intended time, the clock moved a small lever that transferred water pressure through a thin tube and this closed the valve.

During the years when Ein Yahav was temporarily located at the site which is now an army base, the fields were located three kilometers northeast of the settlement, near the Wadi Nekarot and the Arava flood plains, seven kilometers to the north. The irrigation was controlled manually, mainly at night. The irrigators were required to drive to the fields in

the middle of the night and turn off the tap.

At the time, terrorist organizations started to carry out attacks, disturbing the pastoral calm that the area had enjoyed for many years. I personally was injured in an ambush in a date orchard. Bombs were placed beneath main taps twice in the coastal plain and a bomb was activated beneath the pump engine in Be'er Tzofar. Cars were attacked on the Arava road and it became dangerous to travel in the area.

A creative solution for turning off the tap at night was desperately needed. That is where Peretz Rosenberg, Naomi's father, came into the picture. He wanted to try out his invention under real conditions in the field. He had heard of our difficulties from his daughter and so brought us a prototype to experiment with.

At first there were all sorts of problems but eventually the valve worked. There was no longer any need to travel at night to turn off the tap. Over time, more advanced automatic valves were developed yet I still have the original prototype designed by Peretz in my possession.

When this article was completed, at the end of 2008, we were sadly informed that Peretz Rosenberg passed away at the age of 89. We will always remember him.

Adopting the Acacia Tree

The "Adopt the Acacia" project is being launched in cooperation with the Hatzeva Field School, the Dead Sea Arava Science Center - the Central Arava Branch, the Council's Environmental Unit, Arava Drainage Authority and Resource Development Department and KKL. The mapping of the acacia planting areas will soon begin and at the same time an ongoing community educational plan will be established to accompany the project.

Anyone driving to Eilat cannot forget the magical desert landscape. The brown and dry desert is full of large acacia trees, with wide treetops, providing shade from the burning sun. In recent years the prairie like landscape has been disappearing. As a result of the conversion of more land for agricultural use, the number of acacia trees has declined dramatically and as a result of excessive pumping of the ground water, the remaining trees are failing to reach the underground water and they are drying up.

Residents of the Central Arava region, who care about the desert landscape and the delicate ecological system, have decided to plant acacia trees near the agricultural areas where they will benefit from surplus water from the fields.

The most common trees in the Arava are *Acacia raddiana* and *Acacia tortilis*. These trees create a unique desert savanna like landscape and serve as the foundation for the rich ecological system that can only be found in the Arava. In the last few decades there has been a process of the death of a significant number of acacia trees, combined with the fact that they do not naturally reproduce. Studies carried out in the area found the main source for the decrease in acacia trees to be the expansion of agricultural areas in the Arava.

Agriculture is the main source of income in the Arava and in recent years there has been an increase in the number of farms as well as an increase in the size of the farms. There has also been an increase in the amount of crops that require large amounts of water. This has led to the uprooting of acacia trees to prepare land for new fields and also to the drying out of others as a result of the overuse of underground water.

The decline in the number of trees has also had a negative effect on many animals that need the acacia trees in order to survive. For example, the *Trachypteryx acanthotecta*, a moth whose larva builds a web that looks like a thorn in the tree, the *Sylvia leucomelaena* (Arabian warbler) a beautiful small bird that feeds from insects on the tree and uses the tree for shelter

and nesting and the Negev turtle who feeds on the acacia leaves and receives the water supply it needs from them.

Out of understanding that the delicate ecological system of the Arava has no replacement anywhere else in the country and out of love for the desert and its amazing animals and flora, the municipality with its many branches is leading this special educational, research and ecological project. The project is led by the Environmental Unit and in cooperation with the Arava Drainage Authority, Resource Development Department, the Hatzeva Field School, and the Central Arava Branch of the Dead Sea Arava Science Center, KKL, The Parks Authority and The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel. In an attempt to reduce the damage that is being done

to nature, the project will plant acacia trees around agricultural plots and encourage sprouting acacia trees by residents and planting them in designated areas where they can grow.

The project will be carried out in cooperation with the community, and with the school children who will plant and grow the acacia seedlings and study about them as well as by local farmers who will adopt acacia trees and plant and care for them.

Farmers who wish to add some green to their greenhouses and return some of the desert landscape to the margins of their land, can easily plant a tree or two. If every farmer adopts a tree or two, we will be able to return some of the Arava's unique landscape, and contribute to the conservation of the ecological system.

If we all contribute something to the success of this project, we will return some of the Arava's unique landscape and strengthen our children's connection with the environment we live in.

Orit Dunsky- Director of the Environmental Unit

Oded Keinan- Hatzeva Field School Central Arava Regional Council

Tourism

Short updates from the Tourism Department

"The Incense Route" Bike Path

The event launching the newly marked bike paths in the area took place in late December 2008. The activity was wonderful and everyone who participated had a good time! Those that came will no doubt come again next year and those that missed it- don't miss it again!

A Tourism Booklet in English

A complete tourism booklet has been published including places of accommodation, restaurants, attractions and additional tourist services as well as a category on historic sites in the Arava. The booklet will be distributed to all tourism operators.

New logo

After 7 years, the Tourism Department is launching a new logo and slogan. Our original slogan "Lev Arava (The Heart of the Arava) - a desert wonderland" and logo:



will be replaced by: "Lev Arava (The Heart of the Arava) - a place to fall in love with" and the new logo design is:



We are opening 2009 with a new look and with the hope that we will succeed in promoting tourism in the Arava to more varied populations. We hope that tourism will grow in the area and help regional development by expanding the base of available means of employment and thus attracting new residents to work in the tourist field.

Rinat Rosenberg- Tourism Coordinator www.arava.co.il/tourism

Conserving the Environment and Environmental Education in the Arava

Written by: Adi and Oded Keinan of Sapir

In the past months the Arava community has become a national leader of community and educational activities for conserving nature and the environment. Activities related to nature preservation are held almost every week in schools, community projects are supported by big sponsors and this is only the beginning. This article will present the nature preservation and environmental education news in the Arava.

The Shittim (Acacia tree) High School takes responsibility for the environment a step forward

The Shittim High School joined the Green Shachak Program (Green Communal Educational partnership) this year. The program sets out to enhance the awareness and activity for the environment. The program is spread over the school year and offers environmental and nature preservation studies and activity.

On 25/1/08 a day on waste and recycling was held at the Junior High, informing students of the amount of waste we create and different ways to handle the garbage and encouraging recycling.

On 3/12/08 the 9th grade spent a day in the field conserving nature with Harel Ben Shachar, an Inspector of the Nature

and National Parks Protection Authority, in the Nahal Gidron area in the Shizaf reserve. The students learned that this area is a national reserve and that they must behave accordingly. During the day the students were enriched by a short activity to learn about the environment, marking paths for cars with rocks and for this they deserve thanks and appreciation. We would like to thank the parents that joined the trip- Dudu Dadon and Eliyahu Shkutay from Tzofar and Hila Elbaz from Hatzeva.

On 5/1/09 the Junior High classes took part in a treasure hunt "Survivor- Invasion Islands", while playing they learned about nature preservation in Israel and the species invasion problem.



Photo courtesy of Oded Keinan

We face the rising sun (Eagle)

On 25/12/08 farmers from Hatzeva contacted Harel Ben Shachar (the Inspector of the Nature and National Parks Protection Authority in the northern Arava) and us, to inform us that a large exhausted bird of prey landed near one of the farms. When we arrived on site we were surprised to see that it was a young imperial eagle- a rare bird that is an endangered species worldwide. The imperial eagle is a large and impressive eagle that feeds mainly off large rodents, rabbits and hyraxes. As a result of the destruction of the eagle's natural habitat in their nesting areas by poisoning, hunting and electrocution from high voltage power lines, the eagle population has reached near extinction and

is estimated at 1000 nesting couples throughout the world.

Approximately 100 imperial eagles arrive in Israel every winter and stay through the spring, when they return to their nesting areas in Europe and northern Asia. The exhausted eagle was caught and treated in the Nature and National Parks Authority's animal hospital in Rosh Haayin. After the bird was treated and rested for two weeks we received the good news that the eagle was ready to return to nature.

In a short and beautiful event, before 100 students from the local Shittim school, the eagle was released back into nature, with the hope that he will continue his journey and continue to glorify the Arava skies.

The Hatzeva Field School received the Israeli Bird Watching Center's Prize

The annual bird watching conference, taking place this year for the 29th time, has become a well known event throughout Israel. 1,200 bird lovers of all ages and from all over the country came to the Tel Aviv University to listen and learn about the new studies and projects of the last year in the field of bird watching. Every year, in the morning session, prizes and awards are given out to individuals and institutions that have promoted the field.



The Hatzeva Field School's Bird Watching Center won a special prize this year for the bird watching classes and the nature preservation activity that takes place in the field school.

Over the past years the Hatzeva Field School has become part of the educational scene in several cities and municipalities in the Negev, led by the Central Arava municipality.

Over the past four years, bird watching classes and activities for students from elementary schools in the Central Arava have been held and in the summer the children are invited to a five day camp at the Hatzeva Field School.

In the coming year field school activities will be expanded to include additional municipalities and cities in the Negev, in order to reach the maximum number of children, who in time will become the next generation nature conservationists in the Negev.

Embraced with Love

Hospitality in the Arava, delivery of agricultural and bakery products, acceptance in educational institutions, gift parcels for soldiers, accommodation for sports groups: this is how the Central Arava offered comfort to the residents of the communities surrounding Gaza.

While the country was in the midst of fighting in Gaza and the communities surrounding Gaza stood in the front line, the Central Arava residents extended their help during those difficult times. In response to the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Thai workers from the Gaza surrounding communities stayed in the Arava for a period of quiet and relaxation until they could return to their work places. In these ways the Central Arava and its residents showed their best side, with many welcome initiatives and ideas for helping

and supporting the population of the south west of the country.

Upon the outbreak of hostilities we held a meeting for the purpose of assessing the situation. Regional Council officials were joined by Ronit Tenne of Ein Yahav, who took upon herself the work of organizing and liaising between families who were willing to offer hospitality and the communities surrounding Gaza who sought relief from the war.

Acting to implement some of the lessons learned from the Second Lebanon War, a protocol had been accepted by the regional councils concerning which communities would host and which communities would be adopted by them. In accordance with this agreement we were supposed to absorb the evacuees of the Eshkol Regional Council, but in practice we took in not only the Eshkol residents, but also other regional councils as well.

The Council tackled the situation in an orderly, structured fashion, with a long term approach covering not only accommodation for the families, but also enabling the absorbed families to pursue their normal day to day life, including regular organized schooling in our educational institutions.

The communities appointed persons responsible for the absorption requirements, and for the organization of the school pupils and of the families. These people functioned in coordination with Naomi Becker, the general manager of the Arava Community Center (Matnas Arava), who was appointed by the Council to take charge of the absorption process on behalf of the Council.

An exceptional initiative of Ronit Tenne of Ein Yahav, Yehudit Brin and Yael Alon of Hatzeva led to a bus being sent from the Council of course, laden with an abundance of produce from the Arava,

including vegetables and fruit, baked products, and handiwork made by the women of the Central Arava, to be delivered to Kibbutz Dorrot, Kibbutz Mifflasim, Kibbutz Ruhama and finally also to Sderot.

You may read here the thank you letters we received and look at the very moving pictures accompanying them. We were very happy and stirred by the success of the operation and sent out a second consignment with 250 gift parcels that we had collected from the residents of the Central Arava for soldiers of the Golani and Givati brigades who were serving in Gaza.

In addition, **Celia Yitzhak** and **Roman Mordochovitz**, of the Arava Community Center, traveled to take part in entertainment activities in Ashkelon and in the communities along the Ashkelon coast. The entertainment included musical performances and an exhibition of drawings done during the Second Lebanon War by children of the north of the country. The production drew much success.

A group of boys studying at the football academy of Hapoel Ashkelon stayed for the period in the Central Arava with the families of young basketball players of "Katsal Hapoel Arava" This initiative was organized by the family of an employee of

the sports department of the community center, managed by Yossi Linn and Segev Dagan and of the primary school. A mini-sport day was held and basketball games were organized.

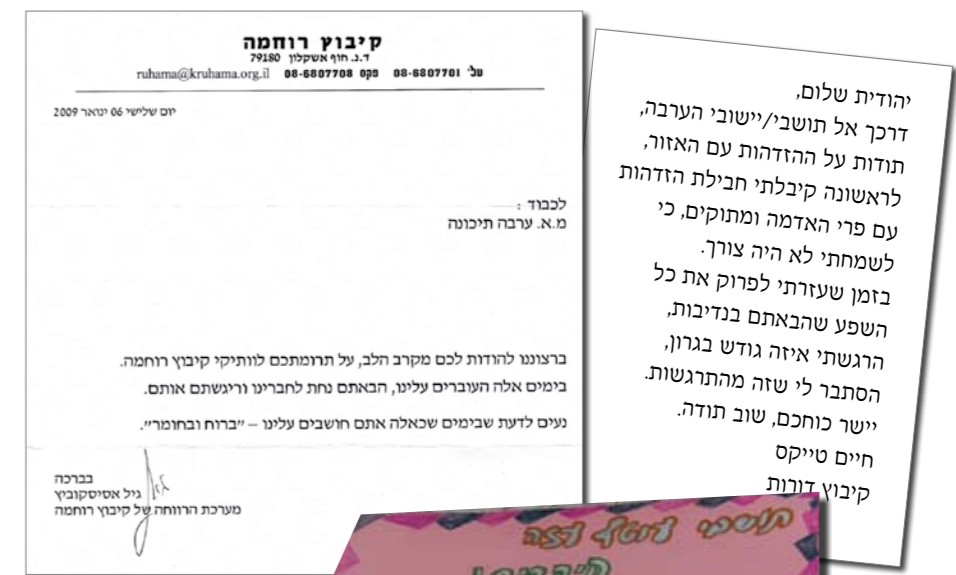
In addition to being warm hosts, our players are also excellent in sport and in the words of the trainer **Segev Dagan** "Arava gained the upper hand in the games.

Hopefully we will continue this tradition of friendly meetings and sports games in times of peace also." Hear, hear!

Our thanks go out to the people mentioned and to all the residents involved that participated in this supportive endeavor.

All the information is available in Regional Council website:

www.arava.co.il





The Arava Celebrates 50 years - a Dream becomes Reality

Yair Open Day Agricultural Exhibition

In the beginning of February this year the Arava R&D Open Day exhibition took place marking 50 years of settlement in the Arava. At the Yair R&D station we celebrated with our children, schools, the Community Center, artists, a farmer's market and more.

We are currently going through a difficult year with the worldwide financial crisis, the recession and the war in Gaza.

Despite all of this we considered it extremely important to hold the exhibition as planned, to display our agricultural achievements, especially over the 50 years of settlement in the Arava, and to express our strength of conviction and hope for better years. Our quality of life depends on our faith, ability and unity.

The Open Day events began with a conference on Wednesday

4/2/09 and professional tours of the Yair Research station. Later that day the agricultural exhibition at the Yair station was officially opened with President Shimon Peres and other honorary guests.

On Thursday the 5/2/09 from 10:00 to 16:00 displays and booths were open to thousands of visitors, making our Open Day the largest agricultural conference in Israel.

Eylon Gadiel
Manager Arava R&D

Dudu Elkayam
Projects Manager Arava R&D

