

Rosh Hashanah feature stories: Israel

Neot Kedumim - bringing the Bible to life

625-acre Biblical Landscape Reserve located in Judean Hills is a vision of an Israeli couple

By RUTH HEIGES

Imagine a site of such complex beauty and diversity that National Geographic has just finished filming a special there ("The Lost World of the Bible"), yet so accessible and literally down to earth that children are fascinated by it for hours. Such is the nature of Neot Kedumim, the 625-acre Biblical

Landscape Reserve located in the Judean Hills, between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

This broad appeal is easily explained at Sukkot, when Neot Kedumim mounts an exhibit of 30 unusual forms of the temporary huts which commemorate the desert wanderings of the Children of Israel. An element of zaniness - such

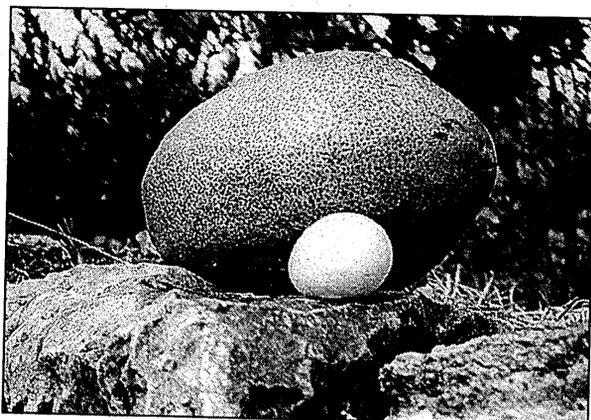
as constructing a sukka on a camel's back, on a boat, or using a cow as one of the "walls" - belies the authentic and serious nature of the exercise, as the designs of the huts are based on references in the Mishna, the third-century codification of Jewish Law.

It is only natural, then, to be drawn to the Sukkot Trail through the reserve, encountering animals mentioned in the Bible, ancient agricultural installations, and the four species of vegetation associated with celebration of this harvest festival: date palms, willows, myrtle and the "fruit of a goodly tree." The latter was established by the rabbinic sages to be the exceptionally fragrant etrog (citron). And, not only have these special trees been cultivated at Neot Kedumim, but, two years ago, a visitor noticed an exceptionally large fruit growing on one of the trees in the etrog

grove. Weighing in at 3.9 kg (8.6 lbs.) and measuring 27 cm (10.5 inches), this etrog was found to be worthy of an entry in the Guinness Book of World Records!

Hands-on themed experiences are also offered at Chanuka, Tu b'Shevat and Passover, but these are simply enjoyable extras in a place which brings the ancient to life. Starting with a totally barren landscape in 1968, Dr. Noga Hareuveni worked literally "with a Bible in one hand and a spade in the other" to establish the flora, fauna and agricultural systems of the biblical and Talmudic eras.

The reserve is a manifestation of the vision of Hareuveni's parents, Ephraim and Chana, educators and scientists who loved the historic biblical background of the country and its indigenous flora and fauna in equal measure, and who established the systematic research of these areas on the university level. This love and their mission to share it with others became Hareuveni's dream, who first completed degrees in botany, zoology and Judaic studies at Hebrew University before



A huge etrog weighing 3.9 kg (8.6 lbs.), found at Neot Kedumim's "Ascent of the Four Species of Sukkot" section in October 1999, with an egg as a means of comparison. The etrog, 27 cm. long and 20 cm. wide (about 10.5 x 8 inches), will be listed in the forthcoming edition of the Israel Guinness Book of World Records and will be submitted for the next edition of the international edition. A normal etrog is about the size of a large, somewhat elongated orange. WZPS photo courtesy of Neot Kedumim.

setting out to achieve it.

Thanks to another visionary, David Ben-Gurion, Hareuveni was able to lease the tract of land from the Israel Lands Administration. When he started establishing the roots for Neot Kedumim in 1968, the site was totally barren and eroded.

SOIL TRUCKED IN
Every meter of soil had to be trucked in. Every rock had to be moved by hand. Every plant had to be brought in and carefully tended. Reservoirs were dug to catch runoff rainwater and the ancient terraces restored.

Over the years, hundreds of thousands of trees and shrubs referred to in the Bible and Talmud have been planted, wild and domesticated animals brought in, and various features created, including ancient and reconstructed olive and wine presses, threshing floors, cisterns and even ritual baths. Through signs and pamphlets giving text and context, trails are marked out for both guided and independent touring, including three major segments which are wheelchair accessible, thanks to 12 kilometers of paved trails. In recent years, routes for Christian tours have been mapped out, complete with scriptural references to the New Testament.

Hareuveni, at age 76, is still restless, however. "My head is in the clouds and both feet are on the ground, but there is still much to be done," he states. Currently under development is a Tribes of Israel area illustrating

the ecological differences between the sections of land allocated to each tribe, and Hareuveni aches to create a biblical village in which people will actually live and work, along with a new path to be called the Grove of the Biblical Sages.

"If Israel is a microcosm of diversity in nature," notes Allan Rabinowitz, a licensed tour guide, "then Neot Kedumim is a microcosm of a microcosm." Rabinowitz often visits the reserve on his own, just to enjoy how different it is at the various times of year.

Neot Kedumim offers theme tours and hands-on activities for all ages, from pre-school groups to retirees. Seasonal hands-on activities include threshing wheat, making spice sachets, preparing wool, weaving and baking pita bread. Spring through autumn, there is an active archaeological site at which visitors can join in. Throughout the year, a resident scribe prepares parchments with the biblical verse of one's choice and also teaches how to write with a reed pen.

Guided tours of one to three hours are offered in Hebrew, English, Russian, German, Spanish and French, with trail booklets for self-guided tours available in Hebrew, English and Russian. Along with special events for tourist groups, including biblical meals, the venue is also the site of many a bat/bar mitzvah ceremony and wedding.

Neot Kedumim is located about a 10-minute drive from Ben-Gurion Airport, near the growing city of Modi'in (roughly equidistant from both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv). It offers two 54-seat "tour trains," enabling access for large groups to the more far-flung reaches of the reserve. Special tours (two to four hours) for study groups are available on such diverse topics as prominent women in scriptures, problems of water in the land of the Bible, nature in the Song of Songs and medicinal plants in the ancient world and today.

After decades of countless hours of intensive and loving labor, Neot Kedumim has come to be hailed internationally as "a model of restoration ecology," its achievements recognized through the award, in 1994, of the prestigious Israel Prize, the highest awarded by the State of Israel. The prize committee noted: "Neot Kedumim brings to life the nature and agriculture of the land of Israel as they are woven into our heritage: in the Bible, the Mishna, the Talmud, the Midrash and the entire tradition. Bridging between the days of the Bible and Mishna to the present, Neot Kedumim brings a deepened understanding of the land and its flora to both Israelis and visitors from around the world."

N.B. For a "virtual tour" of Neot Kedumim, visit its excellent website at <<http://www.neotkedumim.org.il>>. - WZPS.

Rosh Hashanah feature stories: Travel



Kosher food shop is located in the Rue des Rosiers, the Street of the Roses, which is the most famous street of the Jewish quarter of Paris. Lewis Lachter photo.

Paris: Everything you dreamed of... and more

French capital has Jewish population of nearly 400,000

By LEWIS ERIC LACHTER

City of Lights... "City of Romance." "Gay Paree." Paris has lots of names, lots of beauty, lots of Jewish history (good and bad) going way back and continuing to today.

This fantastic French capital has a Jewish population of almost 400,000, a little over half the 700,000 Jews who live in the entire country. There are over 200 synagogues in France, several hundred Jewish organizations, about 50 kosher restaurants, 25 day schools and several magazines and newspapers.

Jewish French leaders include three former prime ministers. On the long list of world-famous Jewish artists are Chagall, Pissaro, Modigliani and Lipschitz. Other Jewish greats are Nobel Prize winners, musicians and

financial savants. Paris is where Theodore Herzl wrote *The Jewish State*, the book that changed the future of the Jewish people.

But why did he write the famous book? The stimulus was the infamous Dreyfus Affair. The story of the affair goes back to 1894, when a Jewish captain in the French army, Alfred Dreyfus, was falsely accused of selling military secrets to Germany.

Anti-Semitism was blatant in France at the time. Dreyfus was found guilty of high treason, and served 12 years in a miserable Devil's Island prison before being freed "with an apology."

Anti-Semitism raised its ugly head a number of times in France, but today the Jewish communities in Paris, Rouen, Lyon, Provence and Marseille are flourishing. Paris is the major Jew-

ish centre, and the jewel of France. Jews live and work in many parts of the grand old/new city, but the primary Jewish section is called "The Platzel." Take the clean, fast, inexpensive Metro (subway) to the St. Paul stop. Exit and find the Rue des Rosiers, "the street of the roses," also once known as the "street of the Jews."

On this street and neighboring ones, you will find lovely shops selling Judaica, books and religious objects. A very important site to visit is Jo Goldenberg's kosher-style deli and restaurant. You'll find good food, and Yiddish and Israeli music. The famous Jewish landmark is open from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. the next morning.

Not far from the Platzel, in a garden behind Notre Dame Cathedral (a must-see in Paris), is the Memorial to the Deported. The memorial is dedicated to the 200,000 French people, Jews and non-Jews, who died in the Nazi death camps.

A Jewish site is the four-story Memorial of the Unknown Jewish Martyr at 17 Rue Geoffroy-l'Asnier. This memorial is a tribute to the six million of our people who perished in the Holocaust. The powerful site is open daily, except Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, and 2 to 5:30 p.m.

Other places to visit are the fine Jewish Art Museum (42 Rue des Saules), and the Library of the

Alliance Israelite Universelle (45 Rue la Bruyere) with its wonderful collection of over 100,000 books of Judaic interest.

The controversial, but very interesting Pompidou Art Museum (also known as the Beaubourg) has paintings by Chagall, Soutine and Modigliani. The large museum also has many books of Jewish history and a fine collection of Judaica.

The massive Louvre Museum has many Jewish archeological items and antiques from Israel. While searching for the ancient artifacts, be sure to see the original Mona Lisa (which is quite small), and the Winged Victory sculpture (which is quite large). (Cont. on page B32. See "Paris".)

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