

Al Ayoun Updates

New climbs in Al Ayoun

NB Some of these routes can be climbed with trad protection (cams and wires). As requested in the Al Ayoun guide, please use bolts only where necessary and never on routes that can be climbed using trad gear – how else will Jordanian climbers learn to place trad gear before they head for Rum's big walls. As always in Jordan, grades are French.

Araq Smeidah (pg 81 Al Ayoun guide)

Starting just right of Fun in the Sun:

Di's Evil Eye **15m** **6b**

Go easily up right and climb the overhanging wall using pockets and the right arete where necessary. *Top roped (no protection available), Amjad Shahrour, 2014*

10m right of 'Fun in the Sun' a vegetated corner rises up the cliff with a tree on its left half way up. The corner can be climbed with a couple of grassy grade 3 moves to finish. Immediately on its right is a nice pocketed grey wall with three routes. 'Too Hot to Trot' needs a bolt for protection in its lower half, as does Daddy Cool, but 'Sundance' could probably be done with trad pro. Scramble up from the path, to reach the wall:

Too Hot too Trot* **10m** **5+**

Move up the above-mentioned corner for 2m then make a rising hand traverse out into the centre of the face. Pull steeply up on pockets that increase in size and sharpness as you ascend. There are two thread belays well back and a bit left, or with a struggle, belay to the bushy tree just above.

Daddy Cool* **10m** **6a**

Start below and 1m right of the central line of Hot to Trot and climb on small but improving holds to a large basin and the top.

Sundance **10m** **4**

Vegetated but would improve with a bit of cleaning. From the foot of the wall go right, then stride out and up right. Keep up the right edge of the wall on good jugs. Belay as above, well to the left, or struggle into branches to reach the tree!

There is potential for more routes between here and the big cave. Tony Howard, Di Taylor, mark Khano, top roped April 2012.

Araq Shamasiiyat (pg 83 Al Ayoun guide)

This nice secluded cliff is less than 10mins along the Panoramic Trail (Climbers' Path R17 in the Ayoun guide) from Araq Shmeidah via a very pleasant natural terrace.

In the centre of the cliff behind the oak is an imposing, semi-concealed wall giving an excellent climb on surprising holds with a harder alternative finish:

Cruisin' the Jugs** **13m** **4**

Easily up to the tree ledge as for English Breakfast, then climb the tree until it is possible to step across onto the wall using good holds. Climb steeply up on jugs, first slightly right then left then back right again, following the jugs to the second horizontal break. At this point, move right and finish up the chimney or, for a short, sharp shock, continue directly via the:

Direct Finish 5+

Up the impending wall to the top on razor holds.

Good tree belays above. It's possible both these lines could be protected by slings and cams, though the direct finish would be bold. We top roped them not expecting the jugs!

down a little to the left first through a few trees to a broken wall. Go down this to the right side of olive groves. Continue down left of a wall then go right where it ends and down to meet the end of a track near GPS alt 920m N32 19.936 E35 43.492.

Go R on the track, then L on another track until it bends right. At that point, continue ahead soon meeting another track. Go L on this passing L of a house to reach a prominent pylon, GPS alt 915m N32 20.133 E35 43.324. Continue on for a short way before making your way down the steep hillside, often on shepherds' paths and avoiding low bushy trees where possible, heading approx NW in the general direction of a large white building obvious on the far opposite hillside (actually a chicken farm).

Eventually, looking down, you should see a cliff with an overhanging wave profile near the bottom of the opposite side of the valley. At this point, the path goes more directly down, becoming more obvious as the trees thicken, and trending towards the right to a point opposite the right end of the cliff before reaching the bed of Wadi en Nahla at GPS alt 760mN32 20.335 E35 42.993, about 1hr from the start.

Route finding is now simpler. Follow the valley up, sometimes in the (usually dry) streambed, sometimes on small paths on either side. Eventually the path emerges through the trees into meadows. Continue up the valley, keeping to the L side to avoid crops and meeting a track which rises up to meet a road at GPS alt 820m N32 20.510 E35 43.715, about 1 1/2hr from start.

Cross the road and go up another track on the L side of another valley, into which it soon descends near a pylon. Go up this valley, again keeping L all the way to avoid crops. A wall will eventually be met crossing the valley with more crops above it, 2 – 2 1/2 hrs from the start. Either go R here and up the hillside to quarries and a small road that will take you L to meet a main road

with the Mar Elyas road opposite (as in R6 Al Ayoun Guide), or keep L up the L side of the valley, passing L of another wall to reach the main road 50m R of the road to Mar Elyas, GPS alt 955m N32 21.291 E35 43.774. Follow the Mar Elyas road along for approx 1km then (if you wish to visit the site) follow it up L for a few 100m to the gates. Well worth a visit. 3 - 3 1/2 hrs.

Return to the lower road, which bends round the E side of the Tell, and on to Listib. At the site of the old mosque, turn R and head N out onto the hillside and down it on a good though steep path. Continue down for 1km or so, trending R and down to the upper reaches of Wadi Listib. Contour round the valley on a good track eventually reaching a road by a shepherds' path. Follow this road N for about 1km, crossing a main road before descending to Baoun (see R4 Al Ayoun Guide).

Footnote

We did this trek with Abu Ibrahim who showed us two alternate ways to descend the hillside from Mar Elyas to Wadi Listib. As we moved around from one to the other it was impossible to make any useful description of either, but both are E of R4 and mostly on old tracks. Worth checking properly.

Pella to Sharhabil Bin Hassneh Eco-park

The route progresses N, against the lay of the land, along ridges and plateaus bisected by steep sided valleys draining into the sub-sea level Jordan Rift Valley. The rock in the valleys is conglomerate whilst that on the tops is usually limestone. Consequently, in spring, most of the way is carpeted in a rich variety of flowers. We also saw numerous cranes riding the thermals to gain height on their migration north, as well as buzzards, and hawks. The scenery is ever- changing, with good views across to Palestine and the valleys and hills around Mt Tabor on a clear day.

Grade Moderate trek, 11.5km from Pella Hot Springs. Add another couple of km if walking from Pella Rest House, more from Pella Countryside Hotel, probably better to take a taxi. Fairly adventurous, take care with route finding, always looking ahead for the next objective.

Details The route goes generally N from Pella, initially climbing from 75m below sea level at the Pella Hot Springs to 155m above, generally rising and falling between 155 and minus 100 metres below sea level to before arriving at Wadi Ziglab below the Eco-park at minus 165m. Most of the

way is on good tracks and paths. Total ascent approx 690m, descent approx 770m. Like the Bedouin routes in the mountains of Rum it is simple in concept yet complex in detail.

Time 4-5hrs plus an extra hour or so if starting from the Rest House or Countryside Hotel.

NB The hillside above the Hot Spring near Pella is sometimes used as a military firing range. It may be closed for a couple of days once every three months or so. When planning to do this route it would be best to phone ahead to the Pella Country side Hotel or Pella Rest House to check that it's open.

The route From the Pella Countryside Hotel or Pella Rest House, follow the main road coming up from the Jordan Valley NW then W for 2km to the natural arch and hot spring. Purists may choose to walk. We took a taxi! 50m before the road ends a good track meets it, GPS minus 75m N32 27.938 E35 37.213. The track goes up Wadi Abu Salih (R9 & 14 in the Al Ayoun guide), but soon divides. Take the route to the left and follow the good track diagonally up the hillside, on which are large white circles used for a military firing range. Continue up the track, rising steadily, and probably passing Bedouin shepherds' camps, until it zig-zags right and back left. (This can be short-cut by a path). Either way you will reach scattered trees beyond which the track goes left to reach ruined Ottoman houses, which are now used as animal shelters. GPS alt 155m N32 28.621 E35 37.712 approx 1/2hr, 1 1/2km from the hot springs.

Continue heading N along the ridge with a steep sided, deepening valley on the right. The next objective is a small house just over 1km to the north, near a small rounded hill. To reach it, continue along and descend the steep nose of the ridge keeping close to the rim of the valley and reaching it where it meets Wadi elDaliya, which goes down SW towards the Jordan Valley. GPS alt 65m N32 28.873 E35 37.741, less than 1hr (2 3/4km) from the Hot Springs.

Go up that wadi a short way past small caves in the conglomerate cliffs, to reach a shepherds' path which crosses the rocks and slants back diagonally left up the hillside before fading out. Continue up before descending into and crossing a shallow valley with trees, above which a small, previously hidden, road is reached, coming down from the hilltop village of Juffein. Follow it down, soon arriving at the small house with olive groves below to the right. GPS alt 110m N32 29.194 E35 37.654 less than 2hrs from the start.

Leave the road and go left of the house before continuing along just W of N out along the next ridge, once again with a steep sided valley on the right. As before, at the end, head down the

nose of the ridge close to the rim of the valley, this time on a steep stony track. This meets a deeply cut track going left about halfway down the hillside. Walk along this a short way until, about 50m before its end, a steep and narrow path should be found (not obvious) descending into the valley bottom almost at the point where three wadis meet before the main valley heads down W to the Jordan Valley. GPS alt minus 20m N32 28.588 E35 37.492 1/2hr from the house, 5km from the start.

On the descent of the ridge, a sloping ramp (green with grass in the spring) and with a small path on its right can be seen across the valley, on the opposite hillside, and just above the wadi junction. Go up the wadi to reach the path and scramble up steeply, then more easily to reach the next top. GPS alt 105m N32 29.833 E35 37.872 1/2hr from the wadi. Just ahead and to the right a good track will be seen beyond the trees. Follow it round N then NE soon meeting another good track, once again coming down from Juffein. This descends easily to the NNW for 1km, becoming a small road before reaching some farm buildings where we were kindly offered tea by the farmer. Looking directly ahead across the valley a path can be seen going up a side valley on the opposite side. This is the next objective and takes you to the top of the final – and highest – hill.

At the farm, the road makes a big zig-zag bend round olive groves, but this can be short-cut by a path through the trees, beyond which the road crosses Wadi abu Ziyad GPS alt minus 100m N32 30.279 E35 37.629, 15mins from the top to reach a main road going up the valley to Deir abu Sa'id, about 3hrs, 7km, from the start. Go up the road a short way to reach the side valley and follow the path pleasantly and not too steeply up trending left to enter trees where the path fades out before reaching a good track along the ridge in 1/2hr. GPS alt 100m N32 30.721 E35 37.852. The next objective, a large building, can now be seen 1/4km ahead to the N. A shallow valley intervenes. To pass it go right and descend slightly by olive groves, crossing a small (probably dry) streambed before rising slightly and contouring along through olive groves above a wall to reach a previously hidden road. Follow this along, passing behind (E of) the building, GPS alt 115m

N32 31.039 E35 37.742 in 15mins, then continue along as it bends round left, going down N then W and revealing the first views of Ziglab Dam 220m below to the N.

When the road rises up to the left near a small building, leave it for a path that continues ahead before heading NW steeply down the long hillside for 1km or so into a shallow valley above and W of the dam wall. On reaching the lower edge of an olive grove on the right (and still higher than the dam wall), go right, along the bottom of the grove to its far end. There an obvious path leads down the hillside to the perimeter fence of the Eco Reserve.

Follow the fence along to the right for maybe 100m until a deliberately bent section allows access to the Reserve. Descend to the broad track at the SW end of the dam wall (clearly seen from above) GPS alt minus 105m N32 31.416 E35 37.216. Once at the actual end of the dam wall a footpath lined with small stones heads out W across the hillside above the valley which it descends gently into by long zig-zags, through waist deep flowers in spring, finally reaching the Visitor Centre over a wooden bridge and past huge eucalyptus trees, GPS alt minus 165m N32 31.563 E35 37.067.

There are cabins here to stay overnight and meals can be provided. The cost for bed, breakfast and evening meal is ????. Or, Lunch (each) 10JD, Dinner 7JD. There are also camping facilities.

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Pella Countryside Hotel, Deeb Hussein:

<http://www.pellacountrysidehotel.com>

Email: dheebjawahreh575@hotmail.com

Single and double room costs only 40JDs that include bed, breakfast and dinner.

You can enjoy Special Jordanian traditional lunch for 7 JDs for a person, soft drinks included and fresh Jordanian fruits.

Route walked by M Khano, M Shaw, D Taylor, T Howard & M Hawawreh, March 2012.

Khirbet Us 'us – Wadi Sir connection

At the request of API we had a second look at an Us 'us – Wadi Sir connection and having driven though on nearby roads realised the problem with the Birqish Royal Lodge fence, which extends all the way to Beit Idis, where it is hoped to locate a homestay before continuing down Wadi Sir past the Jesus Cave.

Unable to head SW from the exit of the Us 'us path onto the road because of the houses and private land, we went up the road and tried from higher up. So here is our route (which can be improved):

The route

From the exit of the Us 'us path onto the road, GPS alt 650m N32 27.740 E35 43.442, go steeply up the road, up zig-zags for 1/2 km leaving where the road levels out near an obvious parking area on the right, between two pylons, GPS alt 720m N32 27.390 E35 43.415. Walk out to the valley edge just visible through the trees. Now either head SW across the top of the wooded valley aiming for a white house 1km away, GPS alt 700m N32 27.023 E35 42.996, contouring pleasantly round just below the head of the valley, or walk more to the right, WSW, down into the valley and up the other side. Either way will bring you to a road. (Although sometimes concealed by trees the fence of the Birqish Royal Lodge follows the left side of the road down the hill.)

If you chose to go towards the house, the road descends the hillside from there, zig-zagging downhill for about 1km. The other way should bring you out near the bottom of the zig-zags. (When walking down them, some can be easily and pleasantly short-cut by taking a direct line on their right.)

Soon after the road levels out, GPS alt 585m N32 27.099 E35 42.469, the fence leaves the road and it is now possible to walk easily down into the valley on the left, S, not far from the first houses. This is the head of Wadi Sir. Follow it down easily and nicely for 1/2km, on what seems to be an old cobbled Ottoman road,

GPS alt 535m N32 26.860 E35 42.235 once more alongside the fence, eventually entering an olive grove on a path, which crosses the wall. Continue down the valley bottom, soon exiting the grove and before long meeting a road. Follow this down the left side of the wadi, past houses on the northern edge of Beit Idis (possible homestays?) until after 1/4km it meets the main road exactly at the Jesus Cave junction just beyond GPS alt 514mN32 26.557 E35 41.632.

The trek down to Pella can be continued from here either by walking the road to the Jesus Cave (about 1km) or by walking down the continuation of Wadi Sir and up to the Jesus Cave (a bit stony at the start of the wadi from the road– see Al Ayoun guide).

4km, 1 1/2 to 2hrs max.

The downside of this 'connection' is the short but steep uphill road walk at the start, and (depending on where you meet it), the road walk near the end before going down into Wadi Sir after the zig-zags. Nevertheless it is a good halfway point between Qabla and Pella, though if we add an extra bit by starting the walk in Orjan and walking to Qabla, it will be well over half way! In that case it might be better to find a homestay above Us 'us, which could be used for both walks, finishing either by Wadi abu Salih or Wadi Sir.

As an alternative to the above, it might be possible to leave the road above Us 'us before the zig-zags and cut across the valley lower down to arrive at the point where the walk descends into upper Wadi Sir below the fence. This would remove most of the road walking.

Khirbet Afana to Rasoun via Mar'jam and the dolmens (or directly down Wadi Sittat - The Ladies' Valley)

Not just a very nice walk, but also connects a number of important historical sites. Khirbet Afana has huge Roman underground cisterns and numerous cave dwellings and tombs, some Roman, some Ottoman(?). Abu Ibrahim can remember his grandparents telling him about people living in caves like these, with their animals tethered in the stable section eating from the feeding troughs cut out of the limestone, whilst the people lived in the other, slightly raised areas. In at least one of these caves there is a neatly cut hole in the floor about 1m in diam (with a recess for a stone slab to cover it). The space below is about 2.5m square and maybe 2m high, then there is another room of similar size beyond that.

Afana ruins are fascinating places. Torch essential. Needs a good clean-up and information boards for visitors. Deir El Youss which is just S of Afana is also worth a visit for similar ruins if you have 4WD. At the other end of the walk are the iron-age dolmens above Rasoun. Lower down the hillside there are also caves (tombs?) and nearer Rasoun, the ruins of a church (see R19), all of which make an equally interesting end to the trail.

Maybe contact Olfat Alsmadi (head of 3rd tourism project) at Ajloun, or Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities or Amman Uni Dept of Archaeology for info on the Afana antiquities and Rasoun dolmens and caves?

Approach Whilst driving north to Afana the road from Al Ayoun, Ajloun or Jerash via Suf also passes close to Khirbet Deir el Youss, which can be reached by 4WD vehicle. Turn L about 1/2km N of the Ibbin traffic lights at GPS alt 1105mN32 21.903 E35 47.999, and after a short distance wind up the hill on a rough track to its top at GPS alt 1125m N32 22.073 E35 47.286. There is a large (Roman?) cistern with steps into it close to the top of the hill and the ruins of numerous other tombs or buildings are nearby.

The turning for Khirbet Afana is 2km further N (just over 2km from the Ibbin lights), GPS alt 1120mN32 22.457 E35 48.756, below the obvious small hill with masts, Ras Munif. The village is reached in less than 1km. Just before reaching the mosque, a raised grassy mound can be seen. Beneath is a huge Roman cistern GPS alt 1095mN32 22.834 E35 48.305. Columns support the roof and there are holes in the floor (going down to another cistern?). Nearby local resident Abu

Mohammed is very helpful and knowledgeable and speaks English. Apparently the cistern was also used as a storage space by the Jordanian army in the early seventies (they cut the holes in the roof). It was also designated as a potential shelter during the first Iraq War.

Just to the S, in a small cliff above a lane is a tomb with a Greek (?) inscription cut into the rock above some steps. A little way further along the lane with white house on the right are more caves probably used for houses, stables, tombs and cisterns (?), GPS alt 1070mN32 22.714 E35 48.257. Ahmed Algadah, tel 077

211 5611 lives in the lowest of the white houses on the lane and is very helpful. Info needed on tombs etc from Jordan Uni Dept of Archaeology, or MoTA (or UNESCO). Could Aseel get this info?

Grade Easy trek

Details 5km, descending 430m, from around 1100m to around 670m at the Rasoun road, 2hrs with stops. Or, 7km via Mar'jam and the dolmens to Rasoun with an additional 150m of ascent and descent, 3hrs

The route having visited the Roman pool and caves, walk W past the mosque, along the road on its left side, and continue out W on a small lane for just over 1/2km to a dip where an obvious track goes down to the left, GPS alt 1045mN32 23.011 E35 47.877. Follow this well used track down left (ignore the vague track on its right). It curves down the hillside, soon reaching a gate into an olive grove, GPS alt 1010mN32 22.896 E35 47.834. Go R here to bypass the groves on a small path which follows the fence down through trees into the valley bottom, 1/2hr, GPS alt 990m N32 22.836 E35 47.767.

Once there, follow the valley of Wadi Sittat down through delightful countryside, reaching farmland after 1km. Bypass the field on its R to emerge onto a small lane, GPS alt 930mN32 23.019 E35 47.123. Up to the L is the little village of Es Suss, but go R then immediately L on another lane to continue down the valley. Immediately after passing R of the last house where another lane goes left, (this is the first house reached if you walk up the other way from Rasoun, see R19 Al Ayoun guide), GPS alt 915mN32 23.122 E35 46.951, 1hr from the start. You now have two options, both enjoyable:

1. Follow a small path between rocks on the right of the road opposite the house up the wooded hill to Mar'jam, trending left as you near the top, and continue to the dolmens and Rasoun, (see R19 Al Ayoun guidebook), about 2 hrs. (3hrs in total).
2. Alternatively continue NW along the track and down to the Rasoun road, 805mN32 23.507 E35 46.2361.5km, 1/2 hr or so, 2hrs in total.

Correction: Wadi Sittat is incorrectly named Wdi Sittal in Al Ayoun guidebook.

Ajloun to Pella

We looked at alternative ways for day 1 of this 2 day trek and identified a good alternative.

NB If following the route in the Jordan guidebook, take care to keep down the nose of the hill when leaving the end of the ridge beyond Ajloun castle, passing just right of Sami's Cliff into Wadi Muzeirib. If you are too far right getting down the thickly forested hillside is a real struggle.

Have fun and please keep us updated on any developments, Di & Tony