

The Hidden Valley of Jebel Es Sahki

Looking back from Aqaba in the direction of the Amman highway a range of mountains can be seen, of which Jebel Baker with it's jagged summit at around 1500m is the highest, and the next most prominent is Jebel Es Sahki at 1250m. Depending on the time of day and in which direction the sun is shining you can from a distance, be fooled into thinking that this is all one mountain whereas in fact the structure is very complicated and the range comprises several different peaks separated by huge crags, deep gullies and valleys.

On any given day the entry point to the hidden valley of Jebel Es Sahki, will be passed by the occupants of numerous vehicles travelling along the Amman, Aqaba highway, the majority of whom probably only give the mountains a cursory glance.

A walk in this valley will provide more adventurous individuals with the opportunity to discover a wild and rugged area visited by few people, and yet easily accessible to those in the know. To date I have only done the walk on the basis of one way and back the same way, but there are endless possibilities for further future exploration. Also the time you wish to devote to the walk is dependent on how far you want to go before retracing your steps, noting that the higher you go the valley gets steeper and slightly more difficult.

Approach:

Coming from Amman a motor boat has been positioned as a tourist attraction at the right hand side of the road, and you might find a place to park nearby as the start of the walk is adjacent to a communications tower with a white cabin at it's base that can be seen across the valley. Alternatively continue for a further 1Km towards Aqaba and turn right at the sign for Ash Shamiya. Almost immediately turn right and right again onto tracks that run along the valley bottom (4WD vehicle preferred). Continue back in the direction of Amman until you are near the previously mentioned motor boat and communications tower. The altitude at this point is 165m according to my Casio Trekker watch, but Google Earth gives the altitude some 80m higher at 245m.

The Walk:

Proceed up the sandy track to the the left of the communications tower, entering a cleft in the hillside after a 100m. The track soon turns to the right which means

you are very soon out of sight of the road. Almost immediately the way is blocked by a jumbled mass of huge blocks of stone, some of which show signs of drill marks associated with past quarrying activities. There are numerous possibilities for climbing over and through the stone blocks, but the easiest route is probably along their left hand edge.

Once past the blocks just continue along the gently ascending sandy trails marked by the hundreds of goat hoof prints and the occasional thorny tree, all the while ensuring plenty of stops to admire the increasingly rugged scenery.

After 35 to 40 minutes from the start a rugged gully can be seen to the right and this was the gully used as the key to the previous ascent of Jebel Es Sahki. Climbing higher up the valley and looking back towards the previously mentioned gully, streaks of black basalt can be seen high up on the cliff face forming a huge letter X (x marks the spot).

After two hours the head of the main valley can be reached at altitude 540m (or 620m on Google Earth) and if time is limited, this can be considered to be the turn-around point of the walk.

If further adventure is required continue up the the increasingly steep and narrowing valley to the right for a further 1 hour, passing very large boulders and small pools after Winter rains, until a huge white boulder the size of a bungalow is reached at an altitude of 695m (or 775m on Google Earth). To the right the steep groove in the rock face was used during the descent from Jebel Es Sahki, and the large white boulder was used as a convenient target to aim for when descending.

Although it should be possible to continue beyond the white boulder and reach the summit via the increasingly steep valley/gully, I found this to be a convenient place from which to retrace my steps back down the valley to the starting point.

Total time 5 to 6 hours depending on number of stops for viewing the scenery and change in altitude 530m up and down and a distance of approximately 12Km.

BH November 2015