

Wofford's Israel Trip

JANUARY 01, 2006

ISRAEL BOUND on JANUARY 6!

The Wofford Israel trip leaves on Friday, January 6, on a 15 hour flight from GSP, through New York, and to Tel Aviv. With the 7 hour time difference, it will "seem" like a 22 hour flight. If you thought sitting through an 80' lecture from Dr. Moss was tough; wait til you try a 15 hour flight! [Of course, that includes a 3 hour lay-over in NY].

JANUARY 07, 2006

First Day In Israel

Hi from Nazareth!

We made it to Israel safely and with almost all of our things. It is great to be here, but we are looking forward to a good night's rest. We left the airport around lunchtime today and spent the afternoon in Caesarea and Megiddo. We had our first taste of Israeli food at lunch in a local restaurant. It was a lot different from our typical American restaurants, but I think we all enjoyed it. Caesarea is a Roman city built on the Mediterranean by Herod a few years before Jesus was born. The city contains a theatre, bathhouse, aqueduct, and palace among other things. The theatre was large and had a beautiful view of the Mediterranean. There was an aqueduct (about 12 miles of which are still in tact) which provided water to the city. The palace, which sits on the edge of the water, was home to Pontius Pilot after Herod's death.

We then went to Megiddo, which is a city, much of which was built by King Solomon over 3000 years ago. We did not have a lot of time here, but were able to climb through the underground canals, which led to a spring of water, which once was the city's water supply. The views from the top of Megiddo were spectacular. Looking out over the Jezreel Valley you could see Mount Tabor, Nazareth on the top of another mountain, and Mount Carmel. It was fascinating to see these places I have read about in the Bible and to actually be there.

We hope you are all doing well! Make sure you look at the pictures from the day.

Helen

JANUARY 08, 2006

DAY 2 IN ISRAEL

We started the day off at Zippori; an ancient Iron Age town, as well as a Roman town, which is built on top of a hill. Other than being an archeological wonder, tradition has it that Zippori is the hometown of the Virgin Mary's parents; Jhocim and Anna. Much of the culture of the town appears to be Jewish, but the structure of the town (to someone who is not an archeologist) is Roman. In a typical Roman city you must have an aqueduct, orthogonal street plan, a theatre and a race-track and bathhouses. Zippori contains 4 of these, and it is believed that they were all built sometime after the life of Jesus, although there is some dispute concerning the theatre. The first of these structures was the underground aqueduct which is 260 meters long, 10 meters

high and about 1-3 meters wide. It looked like an enormous tunnel. When we got up to the actual city on top of the mountain we came to an obviously orthogonal street plan with the dominate north-south street lined with pillars. You could see many rooms spreading out from the main streets and the rooms were covered by beautiful mosaics. There were also bathhouses and other meeting rooms with beautiful, large mosaics. The mosaics depicted scenes like the flooding of the Nile River in Alexandria, a centaur, Dionysus (the Greek god of wine), and many other aspects of life. At the very top of the mountain was a crusader citadel. It was not very large, but was built to ensure that the hometown of Mary's parents was kept safe from the Muslims (they did not succeed). On the other side of the citadel we came to an excavated neighborhood that Dr. McCane worked on for many summers. The theatre in Zippori has caused a great deal of debate, from an archeological perspective. The lower levels are believed to be built during the Hellenistic age in a Greek style, and the upper portion appears to have been constructed during the middle Roman Period (after the time of Jesus).

At Zippori there is a very distinct Jewish as well as Roman footprint on the town. The Jewish footprint consisted of the day to day aspects, while the Roman focused on larger structures and showing off to everyone in the town. It appears to be that the Roman footprint would not have been there during the time that Jesus was living in Nazareth, which is only several miles away from Zippori.

Next on our list of places to visit was Beth She'arim. It is a burial ground with caves and catacombs that are built into the side of a mountain as well as down into the mountain.

For the afternoon we were back in Nazareth and we experienced several holy sites from the life of Jesus. All of these sites may be in the exact location that they occurred, but probably are not. Archeologists concur that the sites are close to there original location, but no one knows where they were specifically. The first site was the Church of the Annunciation. This is where the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she would give birth to Emmanuel. There were several churches built on the site over the centuries, but the one standing today was built in the 1960's by the Vatican. The Catholic Church pulled down the church built in the 1300's by the Franciscan monks. The new Church is very modern, but still holds to a Romanesque style. We also went to the Church of St. Joseph. It is believed that this is the place that Jesus preached his first sermon from Jeremiah. In this sermon Jesus told the people of Nazareth that he was the Messiah. The Jews took him out of the town to stone him, but were not successful.

After this we went back to the hotel and 90% of us took naps and the rest wrote in their journals.

-Joel

BOB'S ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

FACULTY CORNER:

IF YOU WANT to plan a trip for yourself from our experience, here's what you'll want to know:

The flight was 15 hours, and for the 10 hour overseas leg, we were seated directly behind a baby who had the impressive ability to scream for 9 hours straight. Good earplugs are a must.

For 14 students, we have 4 chaperones. The two faculty, a guide, and driver. There's no question that the students are well supervised and taken care of.

Caesarea and Megiddo are both breath taking, and true testaments to engineering abilities millennia ago. I'd have to say the top of Megiddo is one of the most beautiful scenes I've ever seen. And the tunnels down to the spring are "inspirational".

We're staying in the Arab section of Nazareth, and actually HEARING the evening call to prayer was kinda neat.

The first night, we decided to stay in and relax. The guys went off on their own into town though [with our "blessing", as this part of town is safe and they took a cell phone along]. Some of the women were anxious to get out and "mingle" as well. Next time, I think I'd plan on taking the group out walking in the city for an hour or two after dinner on the first night.

Day 2, the Rabbi would never forgive me if I didn't mention going to Beth She'arim, and visiting the spot where Rabbi Judah was entombed. The caves and catacombs were pretty neat.

CLEARLY the most important thing for you to take on this trip is Byron McCane. His knowledge of the history and archaeology is impressive, as is his ability to capture the imagination of the students.

-Bob Moss

JANUARY 09, 2006

DAY 3 AT GALILEE

Brace yourselves- this is probably going to be a long one...

Before I start with today's very action-packed events, I need to backtrack quickly to last night. After dinner, the whole group went to a local bakery a few blocks from the hotel that we had discovered earlier. Byron (Dr. McCane) mentioned to us that you never want to get in a giving contest with an Israeli- and the people here proved that Israelis will always definitely win! After sampling everything in the store (including the group favorites of baklava and sweet cheese), the workers invited us behind the counter to see how the sweets were made. Be sure to see the photo of Joel cooking! The experience was so much fun, and showed how hospitable and friendly the Israeli people are- you would not believe how excited these people were acting that we were there. Before we left, they brought out even more food and insisted we eat because it was free and they wanted us to have more. We all left with smiles and full stomachs.

We spent today around the smaller towns of the Galilee region- many where Jesus was a regular. Tiberias is the biggest resort town on the Sea of Galilee and a favorite weekend retreat for many Israelis. We saw the remains of the Hamat Tevarya synagogue which included a mosaic zodiac floor. This is notable because it is from the 3rd century CE and shows that Jews were becoming comfortable with pagan aspects of the Greek and Roman world.

Next up was Kursi. Here was a Byzantine church that is the supposed location of the miracle of the swine (Mark 5:9).

Gamla was the next spot, and what a spot it turned out to be! Gamla is in the Golan Heights region of the country. It is a 1st century CE early Roman era town that is virtually undisturbed. The surrounding landscape is green, but very rocky. The Jewish inhabitants fortified the city and thought it was safe, however, it was conquered by the Roman army. Gamla means "camel" and you can see from the photos that the peak looks like the hump of a camel's back. We started off

on what we knew would be a difficult hike to the city; however, Bob (Dr. Moss) was the only one smart enough to realize how difficult it would be. I'm sure he was amused by everyone panting as we hiked along. We hiked across rocky trails to the city and then up to the summit. The view from the top was unimaginable. Even though we were quite worn out on the trip back, Jim summed up the experience for many by saying "this is the neatest place we've been so far." I personally thought "Mama Mia!" (in the words of Simon, our tour guide). It was incredible to feel the wind at the top and be so high. I cannot image how people could fight, even with tanks, in such a steep, rocky area but there have been major battles over the area. When we loaded the bus and I looked at my watch, I realized it was just after 5 AM in the states and we had just done what felt like several days work before our family and friends had even started the day!

Lunch was at a local restaurant, and many had St. Peter's fish from the Galilee. I must admit, it was both entertaining (with the head, tail, etc still attached) and tasty!

Capernaum is an early Roman era 1st century village. Unlike the other sites, this one shows no sign of the Roman footprint. Here is the house of Simon Peter. This village is the site of the popular miracle of multiplying the fish and the loaves. There is both a synagogue and a church located very close to each other, and this shows a level of religious toleration. The village is beautiful. It overlooks the Galilee and is decorated by bright flowers along with the ruins and a modern church built over the remains of the early octagonal church. Although we didn't have to show our passports, we were officially not in Israel at Capernaum since the country gave the area to the Vatican.

A boat ride on the Sea of Galilee was how we ended our adventures. How often do you get to say that... we rode a boat on the Sea of Galilee. For me, this was the most emotional thing so far. It was amazing. On a clear day you can probably see forever, but I almost liked it better in the fog I think. I'm sure the boat is a very touristy thing, but it was also neat. The ship's crew even played some English praise songs and Hebrew hymns which added to the experience. Since we boarded in the late afternoon, we got to start in daylight and then end when it was darker and the lights of the city came on.

Our day was a little longer today, but it was worth it! When I went to dinner, a group was playing cards and is going out for more sweets for dessert. There are fireworks going off all around since we are in the Arab section of Nazareth and there is a festival today. I wish everyone back home could see this, as I know everyone else does. I'm looking forward to seeing more of this wonderful country!

-Maggie Sanders

BOB'S COMMENTS, DAYS 2-3

DAY 2:

The catachombs and tombs at Bet Shearim were impressive; don't miss them. There were a few large groups of school children touring as well, each accompanied by an armed chaperone; one with a machine gun, one an M-16. I think that made an impression as well.

About a 10 minute walk from our hotel, we stumbled upon a pastry shop, with EXCELLENT Baklava. I don't know the name, but call at 052-3408442, or 050-5942080. No English spoken; the caller will need to speak Arabic, or at least Hebrew.

There were about 6 Arabs working in this shop when we arrived, about 8:30 p.m. We were the only customers in the shop. As soon as they found out we were Americans, they just lit up, and treated us like family. They took us in the back to show us how they make the dough and the cheese; gave us all a sort of "punch" drink, and samples of some of the cheese. The owner spent the next half hour "schmoozing" with Byron, as they both spoke a bit of Hebrew; one other worker had a few words of English. But for only a few dollars we sampled everything they made, had lots of smiles and conversation [as best we could since we didn't really have a common language!], and lots of smiles and laughs. It was great fun, great "international relations", and I think a great educational experience as well!

DAY3:

Gamla, the site of the last battle of the Romans vs the Jews in 67 AD, is an impressive site. You can get a wonderful view from the observation point; you can also hike about 45' each way to visit the excavation of the city directly. I started this hike, but it was so uneven and steep, I feared for my knees and ankles, and stopped. In retrospect I'm glad I did; many of the 18-21 year old students had a very difficult time with the hike. If you're in good shape, have great knees, and hiking boots, go for the walk; if not, skip it!!

Lots of shopping in Tiberias; we didn't really have time to take advantage of it, but if you're into shopping, check out down town Tiberias.

After dinner, we went to a "Patisserie" a short walk from the hotel. Make a right out of the Rimonim, and walk straight up the hill for about 5-10'. The chocolate mousse was EXCELLENT!!

THE RIMONIM: We stayed in the "Rimonim" in Nazareth. I'd suggest upgrading from this hotel. It has the bare minimum: Single beds, no tissues, wash cloths or bar soap, not enough towels. In my room, the temperature control was inadequate, so sleep was difficult [which is why I'm writing this at 4 a.m rather than sleeping!].

For any entrepreneurs reading this, they've got something in the hotel rooms we've got to bring over. In order for any of the power consuming things to come on - lights, TV, heat, outlets, your key card has to be in a little slot next to the door. Great energy saver, and also prevents you from losing your key in the room. It's staring you in the face as you walk out. I'd love to see something like that for HOMES!

Dinner at the hotel was merely acceptable; the students didn't care for many of the new tastes, and some of the main dishes of eggplant and chicken were just OK. So if you DO choose to stay at the Rimonin, I wouldn't take lunch or dinner at the hotel. The students at my end of the table seemed to agree. Breakfast was better, with both a table of eggs and croissants for those who didn't want to venture away from an American diet, plus a table of salads, fruit, fish and jellies as well.

-Bob

JANUARY 11, 2006

DAY 4

Today was definitely much slower than the last few days. We changed pace and location as we moved away from the “Then Israel” and took a close look at the “Now Israel.” We moved out of Hotel Rimonim in Arab Nazareth into Kibbutz HaSolelim, which is a Jewish community. Here, I believe a short history of Kibbutzim is needed for you back home who have probably never heard of this, as I had never before this trip: Kibbutzim began in the late 19th century when Jews began moving back into the land of Israel for protection and away from religious persecution in other parts of the world. Before Israel became a state in 1948, these communities were the only safe places for Jews. The original kibbutzim were socialist communities where no one owned anything, but everyone shared everything. All members worked the land and lived together in this large community. No rent was paid, but everyone lived in accommodations that were property of the whole community. At one point in time, there were as many as 250 kibbutz in the state of Israel.

In modern Israel, there are still some kibbutzim, however, not all of them have remained socialist. Kibbutz HaSolelim, for example, is no longer socialist. This kibbutz even has a residential section where families build their own houses, but do not work on the kibbutz. Yuram, a working member of the kibbutz, gave us an official tour of HaSolelim. We asked him about the present security issues for Jews and members of the kibbutz. Yuram said that this community has no security forces because there are no security issues, regardless of the claims the US media makes about the risks in all-Jewish communities. He says that the Jews here have great relations with all their neighbors, Jews and Arabs. Surprisingly though, most of the Jews living in this community are not religious. Yuram said that 80% of the Jews in Israel are not religious, but rather practice the culture and heritage of Judaism.

We found our rooms here on the kibbutz...humble quarters, I must say. There is a mini (and I mean mini) kitchen and you have to use a squeegee on the bathroom floor because there is no barrier between the floor and the shower. There is an amazing playground and we get to eat in a dining hall-it all screams summer camp.

After becoming acquainted with the HaSolelim, we went to plant trees. In the Jewish culture, it is an honor to plant a tree in memory or honor of a loved one in the Holy Land. Thus, most of us honored this tradition and planted saplings on a tree preserve. Dr. McCane even read the Jewish prayer we were given for our trees. We then headed to the mall in the Nazareth Illit (higher Nazareth), which is the Jewish side of town. I had my first Israeli hamburger at the mall, but they would not put cheese on it because a meat and cheese combo is not kosher. Otherwise, it was a pretty good meal. Liz and I hunted the whole afternoon and the whole mall for a t-shirt with Hebrew written on it. We didn't have much luck-thanks to American capitalism, I suppose, all we could find was English on any clothing item. We did meet some really nice Israeli store clerks and found Harry Potter in Hebrew (be sure to check out the pics).

Even though today was a rather slow day (especially compared to the hike up Gamla yesterday), we did get a good view at Israel now and the definite growth and changes that have occurred over the centuries. I think we are even beginning to get a weak hold on the conflicts facing this area, and an even better idea of how Israel really is, rather than how CNN and FoxNews tends to portray it. This land is so much more beautiful and the people are so much more courteous than I ever would have imagined.

Shalom!

Erin Blanton, B.O.D. (Blogger Of the Day)

JANUARY 12, 2006

BOB'S COMMENTS DAY 4

DAY 4:

OK, forget anything I said about the Rimoin; it's a palace compared to the 'bed & breakfast' at Kibbutz HaSolelim. Even the students disliked this place; and they're used to college dorms!

If you're in the area, taking a 1 hour tour of the kibbutz is probably a good idea; learning about how the Kibbutz works, and the history of kibbutzim is important. But there's no need to spend more time than that here. In addition to the shortcomings of the Rimoin, this one has no phones, no TV [at least in English], terrible beds, no real 'showers', just curtains roping off part of the bathroom. Dinner was: Good soup; kous-kous (sp?) with more soup as the "gravy"; chicken, cucumber & tomato salad, and a drink that seemed like colored water. And nothing at all to do within walking distance. This was the first time I've heard the students voice any kind of "discontentment" with any aspect of the trip.

-Bob

JANUARY 13, 2006

BOB'S COMMENTS

DAY 6 & 7:

What an interesting day for me! As you read in Liz' entry, the Israeli army made me get off the bus at the checkpoint into Jericho... No jews allowed into the city. We were all quite shocked! The bus drove me back to a gas station, where I waited the 2.5 hours or so for the rest of the group to see Jericho. Since our tour guide suggested to me that I not speak Hebrew while waiting, I was a bit nervous at first. I just sat at a table and watched the people. I saw all kinds of people, families, soldiers come and go, into the café next to the gas station, with no tension between them. Arab families with small children were running around playing; they didn't run out or grab the kids when the Israeli soldiers sat down in the café. Individual soldiers walked in, ordered coffee, sat down with no concerns for the others in the café.

Three Hassidic jews came in and had coffee, at a table next to arabs.

This is very unlike me, but when a group of about 10 young soldiers sat down, I decided to try to start up a conversation. I first asked if one of them could help me with the ATM, as I don't read Hebrew. One young lady instantly jumped up, and was happy to help. But then she sat down with her group again without another word.

About 10' later, I figured, I'm here to learn, so I decided to go ask them a question. I told them my situation, and asked them why I could not enter Jericho. "You can't go there", was the first answer. "I know", I said; "but WHY? Would it really be unsafe for me in Jericho, or is this just political??

They explained to me that nobody walks alone in Jericho anymore; and that a Jew walking alone in Jericho would be unsafe. They didn't volunteer additional conversation, so I thanked them and returned to my table.

After about another 10', with the same group talking, laughing and having fun, I took a deep breath, and asked if I could sit down. I explained I was a professor, with a group trying to learn about Israel and Isrealis, and did they have a few minutes to talk? They graciously invited me to sit, and answered all of my questions. When the bus arrived, the students all piled out to talk

with them too. I guess it was especially neat because both groups were the same age. The ones in green were well trained soldiers, officers in this case, in a land they didn't feel safe, responsible for the security of Israel. The others were enjoying their trip, spending their time learning about the world, and about their fields. One told me she spent a month in New York, and really enjoyed it. She knew no more about the geography of New York than I did about Jerusalem.

The officers told me that THEY don't feel unsafe in these areas, because "we're not the ones who would have to worry" [pointing to their guns]. So I asked, what if you were here in your civilian clothes. Would you feel in danger walking down the street? I got no answer to that one, except "We wouldn't BE HERE if we weren't in the army; it wouldn't be a place we'd choose to be."

The army also couldn't understand why we would be here STUDYING, Israel in particular; Jericho specifically. Why would Americans want to study THEM??

I also got a picture of a CAMEL riding into a GAS STATION, that I thought was kinda ironic!

The Western Wall is impressive, of course. I put the Rabbi's note into one of the cracks. I was a BIT disappointed about the commercialism around the wall; not only the Rabbis trying to sell you prayers; but also the big buildings with "donated by so-and-so Stein of New York" on the side of buildings pointing into the square. What's that old adage about Jewish charity??

The "7 Arches Hotel" is adequate; a small step above the Rinomim in Nazareth. I'd equate the Rinonim with "Two stars"; the Kibbutz HaSolelim with ONE star, and the "7 Arches" with perhaps 2.5. The food at the 7 arches was quite good for dinner and breakfast though. This is a good choice if you're traveling on a limited budget.

We went back to the Western Wall for the beginning of Shabbat tonight; and the energy and "power" were impressive. Seeing about a thousand or two Jews dancing, singing, praying at the Wall at the start of the Sabbath shouldn't be missed.

Even for a Jew, I found the Church of the Holy Sepulcher to be equally energetic and powerful. The structure itself is overwhelming; add to that the incense, the chanting, and the dedication of those who come to worship the site, and you have a power you can't miss.

It's been a bit tough to sleep at the hotel, as Moslem children are racing up and down the corridors all night, screaming at each other and shooting toy guns. That's another thing that has impressed me; nearly every young child in East Jerusalem has a toy gun.

■ DAYS 5-6 IN JERUSALEM

Day 5

Wednesday

January 11, 2006

I awoke this morning freezing and ready to begin a day of adventure. I knew that today we planned to visit Belvoir, Beth She'an, and Beth Alpha, three establishments from "Israel Then". Breakfast started at 7:00am, the bus was loaded by 8:15am, and we were on our way. In order to reach our first destination we traveled below sea level into the Rift Valley where the borders

of Jordan and Israel meet. We could see the Jordanian flag and the Israeli flag on either side of the road which ran parallel to the border. The countryside was absolutely gorgeous. (Look for yourself!!) Once we reached the last stretch of the travel to Belvoir we noticed the engine smoking and realized that we had pushed "Sinbad", the bus, too far. Dun, Dun, Dun! We exited the bus and noticed that we had been leaking incredible amounts of oil. It was then that we realized "Sinbad" would not make it to Belvoir today. After being informed of the time it would take to get a new bus we decided to walk to Belvoir. We didn't think the hike would be too bad, but then again we didn't realize the distance, the chill, and the amount of rain until we had spent at least 30 minutes climbing a MOUNTAIN!!! Once we reached the top we found a coffee shop, which seemed somewhat like a mirage, until we found it closed. We began touring the impressive Crusader fortress Belvoir, meaning fair view. This concentric castle was built in 1168 on the rim of the Rift Valley. There was a great view from the castle, which would have been seen well on a clear day. Belvoir is a prime example of the Crusader's defensive attitude, because it was built with a castle within a castle. The outer walls of the castle protected an inner castle, which may sound good theoretically, but not in this situation. The inner line of defense was reserved to guard the hardcore loyalists, and the mercenaries were tempted to fight with the enemy. In 1189, after Saladin lead Muslim forces to capture Belvoir, the defenders surrendered. This battle is found in the movie *Kingdom of Heaven*. This castle has a sally port, which is an escape route for the defenders. This castle was a very large compared to the other castles we have seen so far. The captions to the pictures will tell more about the history and the ruins. After the visiting the castle in the freezing rain, luckily, the coffee shop was open and we warmed up and waited for the bus replacement to arrive. While waiting we enjoyed various warm drinks, made up songs, and conversed the issues of the West Bank. Then after "Sinbad II" arrived we quickly loaded and returned to our travel. The second place we visited was Beth She'an, a site with a complete "Roman Footprint". This city was at once a very large roman city and lasted from the Early Roman Period through the Byzantine Period. Before touring this Roman City we sat down for lunch and enjoyed falafel and schnitzel. Before touring this city Byron pointed out a tree on the top of the mountain which was where Judas hung himself in the movie *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In first Samuel this was also the site where King Saul was hung from the hillside. You will notice from the photographs that this was a large city and in antiquity it was named Scythopolis. After visiting Beth She'an we visited a synogoue from C6 A.D. with a beautiful mosaic floor. Beth Alpha was the site of the ruins of a Byzantine Period synagogue which was uncovered by some workers of a kibbutz in the early 20th century.

Elizabeth O'Quinn

Blogger of the Day

Day 6

Thursday

January 12, 2006

Today we woke and packed for our travel to Jerusalem. Originally, we planned to stay another day at Kibbutz HaSolelim, but due to popular demand we have decided to skip the free day and have an extra day in Jerusalem. We began like other days with breakfast and bus loaded by 8:00am. As we continued to Jerusalem we again traveled into the Rift Valley and saw more of the conditions at the border of Jordan and Israel. We also were able to see the change in terrain between northern Israel and middle Israel. This city is in the portion of territory that is discussed as the West Bank. The country in this area is dry and mountainous. The travel from the kibbutz to Jerusalem is about 3 hours so we stopped in Jericho for lunch and to visit the ruins in this

Palestinian city. As we approached the city we were stopped by a checkpoint of the Israeli government and asked where we were from and what we were doing. They also asked if we had any Jews on the bus. They did not allow any Jews in the city of Jericho from any part of the world. Bob was not able to visit the city of Jericho today and we had to turn around at the checkpoint and take him to a local restaurant/gas station to wait while we visited the city. While we were in the city he did make some interesting friends! (Check the pictures for more information.) Allowing Jews into the city would be considered a safety hazard and because of the political situation with Sharon and elections the Israeli government is controlling all areas of danger. The checkpoints control all of the flow into and out of the city of Jericho because this is primarily a Palestinian city in the country of Israel. Jericho is often referred to as the oldest city on Earth; however the oldest city is more likely to be Damascus. After returning to the city of Jericho we visited an archeological site that was very run down. Once comparing this site to the other archeological sites visited thus far we noticed that this site had not been well funded and you could tell. There were a few digs that had once taken place but most of the uncovered material had been recovered by years of erosion. The site at Jericho holds many secrets and very few uncovered facts. In the Bible there are stories of travel from Jerusalem down to Jericho. Today we traveled from Jericho up to Jerusalem, and along the road we saw Bedouins, tribes of people who herd sheep and goats. Once we reached Jerusalem we went directly to the Western Wall, where many of the students left prayers, then to our hotel. The ride in to Jerusalem held fantastic views with many stories of religion, history and politics directly in our sight. We moved into the 7 Arches Hotel and plan to spend 5 days here in Jerusalem. Check back for more information!! By the way, do not listen to CNN unless you know the entire story.

Elizabeth O'Quinn

Blogger of the Day

JANUARY 15, 2006

DAY 7 IN JERUSALEM

Today was the longest day we have experienced since our date of arrival a week ago. We began the first full day in Jerusalem with just fabulous weather, not a cloud in site, but a little chilly as we began our morning events.

It was a walking day as we traced the steps of Jesus Christ on his last day of life from the Garden of Gethsemane to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We began at the top of the Mount of Olives where we looked towards the hundreds, maybe thousands of Jewish graves. Each tombstone was covered in rocks as is Jewish tradition for memorializing their beloveds. We continued on to the Dominus Flevit, the church that commemorates when Jesus came into the city and wept over its beauty (Luke 19: 41-44). Above all places this was the most beautiful view of the city. The Dome of the Rock was in perfect site as was the Western Wall and most of the stone colored city. We continued down the Mount of Olives and found ourselves in the presence of the traditional site for the Garden of Gethsemane. A garden and a church built beside it commemorate the events of Maudy Thursday, with Jesus praying alone in the garden, knowing that He will soon die. After some time of thoughts and mediation inside the Church of Nations at the Garden of Gethsemane, we continued our path onward to the Lion's Gate entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem.

Once inside the old city, we digressed a bit from our path down the Via Dolorosa and stopped at the pools of Bethesda (read about in John 5: 1-9) and the Church of St. Anne. The pools were among the best of the excavations we have seen (which have been many, for those of you who have not been reading up to this point). Located beside the excavated pools was the Church of St. Anne, in memory of the Virgin Mary's Mother. Inside, the church was all white but it is infamous for its echo. A few of us girls sang some verses from "Amazing Grace" "Silent Night" and a few other Christian songs. Somehow we came pretty close to sounding like angels (although I'm sure we had a little help from up above).

So - back to our path on the Via Dolorosa and onwards to the place of the Flagellation. Jesus met Pilate here and was flogged by the Romans. An orange tree grows in front of the commemorating church for the flagellation. We took another detour into the archeological museum that Byron just adored (personally - artifacts are great, but sometimes the pots from years past all seem to look to the same). Then we took a break for lunch at a local Palestinian restaurant - a coke a falafel for 15 shekels is the best so far.

After lunch we concluded our path at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. There are no words to really describe the feeling or the beautiful things inside the church, but here is the traditional site for where Jesus was crucified, buried and ascended to heaven. I can really only say my thanks and praises and one big WOW.

Ok - so free time at the Jerusalem Hotel Restaurant & Garden. We all had a hot beverage and the boys decided it was time to try out one of the hookah pipes. Of course, we had to get everyone in on the action including both professors (for all the parents - smoking from a hookah pipe is just tobacco, so have no worries that we were doing something illegal). We finished our drinks and made our way to the Western Wall for the beginning of Jewish Shabbat services. We stood around freezing while watching the Orthodox Jews sharing in reading scripture, song and dance. It was quite a moving site to see so many sharing in a religious tradition different from most of ours.

To conclude our evening we went into Bethlehem to the Shepherd's Field tent as a guest of our tour guide Gabi. This dinner was a true Palestinian feast. Friends and fellowship, good food, drink and hookah all made up a dinner that looked like something out of Arabian Nights. It was a magical evening from a different time, place and culture.

-Natalie

JANUARY 16, 2006

DAY 8 IN JERUSALEM

In wake of our enjoyable and entertaining evening spent in Bethlehem, the extra hour and a half of sleep was warmly welcomed by everyone. That morning, we piled into the ever faithful Sindbad and headed toward the Knesset and the Israel Museum. Our first stop was the Knesset. Due to some of the recent political activity occurring in Israel, we were not able to actually go into the building as planned, but we were able to walk outside of it. The Knesset, which is the Israeli government, has 120 seats. A large majority are occupied by Israeli's, but 6 of the seats are held by Israeli Arabs. The Israeli election is approaching, and with Sharon's sickness, the outcome is very much up in the air. The election process itself is a very democratic process. It is, in fact, the only functioning democratic nation in the area.

After listening to one of Byron's famous lectures and snapping a couple pictures, we headed back to the bus and to the Israel Museum. On the way, Byron told us to keep in mind the periods of human history and culture as we went through the museum. The periods, and the museum layout, begins with the Bronze age, then the Iron, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, and finally the Crusader period.

The museum was impressive. It contained a variety of archaeological finds including tile mosaics, lamps, bones, coins, and other artifacts. The highlight of the museum was seeing the Dead Sea Scrolls. These were the most important Archaeological discoveries of the 20th century. The Dead Sea Scrolls contained copies and scripts of all the Old Testament books except for Esther. The translations that scholars and the public have today and these are remarkably accurate and similar. It was very powerful to see actual texts of their age and to see firsthand such an important discovery.

After the museum, the rest of the day was spent haggling, shopping, and purchasing in the Palestinian market in Old Jerusalem. This really was a unique experience. Once you enter the gate into Old Jerusalem, everyone is your "friend." They all want to give "a very good deal" or a "big discount." I would say that about five percent of anything they say is true, and the other 95 percent doesn't even need to be heard or said. Jim Morgan summed it up like this, "shopping in the old city is like going into the ring with your hands tied behind your back and fighting Muhammad Ali." Despite all this, it was very enjoyable and everyone found what they wanted at a somewhat reasonable price.

None of us really knew the treat we were in for at dinner. We were able to host for dinner a Wofford graduate who is now living in Israel. Meg Auddette works with World Vision as a DME officer. She shared with us her life since her days at Wofford, and her very inspiring journey that brought her to Israel. To sum everything up, she has developed an immense compassion for her fellow humans, and has devoted her life to help them. She now works primarily in the Gaza strip, the West Bank, and Masada, where she analyzes communities and develops learning centers for Palestinian children. She has decided to put aside her personal desires in order to help others. Each of us was intrigued and touched in different ways by her story, and it was a great way to wrap up a great day.

-Will

DAY 9 IN JERUSALEM

Jerusalem is a unique city in that each weekend contains not one, but three separate holy days associated with three distinct religious traditions, with the Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays of each week given to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity respectively. It is due to this type of religious pluralism, according to Byron McCane, that every weekend in Jerusalem is a three day weekend. That said, I was particularly excited about this Sabbath in the holy city as it involved an opportunity to attend a worship service in the old city just a few blocks from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, in addition to including visits to two other sites of great cultural and religious significance, the Dome of the Rock, and Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Museum.

Our day started a little earlier than usual in order to fit all of these plans into our schedule, with our bus pulling out at 7:30 instead of the usual 9:00. Our first visit was to the Dome of the Rock,

the second holiest site in the Islamic faith. The Dome of the Rock is situated in the Old City of Jerusalem on the site originally intended for the second temple in Jewish tradition. The fact that the Dome's spot on the temple mount is only a few hundred feet from the Wailing Wall makes for a religious and cultural contrast that is both a little bizarre and oddly appropriate, especially considering the three-way religious conglomeration that is rest of Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock is widely considered to be the most ornate and richly furnished building in the entire world, and so it is unfortunate that we were not allowed inside, due to the fact that none of us were practicing Muslims. However, if you check out the pictures I have up on the blog site, I did manage to stealthily get one clandestine snap-shot of the inside through a crack in a doorway. Even without going inside, the Dome of the Rock is a sight to behold. Not only is it massive, but it is covered with ornate Arabic descriptions and geometric patterns, and the fact that the dome of made of solid gold doesn't hurt either. Byron informed us that the Dome is designed in a way that it is impossible to see the entire structure at once, alluding to the Islamic doctrine of Allah being more than any one human being can conceive of.

At this point about eight of us left the group to attend services at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer just across the street from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Attending a worship service in the city of Jerusalem is a particularly great experience, especially when one is attending church in a stone chapel within the Old City of Jerusalem There was a certain point at which it dawned on me that the events described in our Pastor's sermon probably took place somewhere no more than a mile from where I was sitting. Pretty cool.

Unfortunately for us, our trip to Yad Vashem had to be postponed for a day, due to an accident with one of the Sinbad Travel Agency's busses throwing a wrench into or transportation. Instead, we decided to spend the afternoon doing what Americans do best in Jerusalem, losing our money. In order to accomplish this to the best of our ability we made the trip to Ben Yahuda Street, in which everything from fine jewelry, and clothing, to Cuban cigars and can be had at relatively "reasonable" prices. I think it is safe to say that our small group single-handedly raised the economy of West Jerusalem a percentage point or two. With this task accomplished, we boarded the Sinbad and headed back to the hotel. We are sleeping in tomorrow, which is an incredible idea, and tomorrow we will make good on our plans to visit Yad Vashem and give Byron an opportunity to show us around some Israelite burial caves.

-Jim Morgan

JANUARY 18, 2006

DAY 10

The decision to sleep in today probably was the best decision we made. After a somewhat busy and tiring week it's always nice to get that extra few hours of sleep. Being a lover of sleep I was excited to wake up a few hours later than normal. You could tell that everyone was well rested and ready for a exciting day of Jerusalem.

Leaving the hotel at 11 AM we went to the Tomb of the Kings which was only a few miles down the road from our hotel. At first we had a little difficulty getting in because the people who operated it were obviously not prepared for us being there that early. As we know Byron's specialty is ancient burial tombs which we could see in his eyes when we were allowed in. We get to the tomb which is a good 30 feet lower than the street and there it sits ready for us to explore its inner chambers. Byron gives us his usual lecture about how its an early Roman tomb

during the time of Jesus and shows us the Jewish architecture of it as we step into its main chamber. The first chamber is impressive first of all because of the ceilings being above our head and the many other doorways and chambers stemming off from it. So once again Byron briefs us of the many interesting facts of why its big and tall which is custom for him except his is doing it with an eager voice that only captivates us more. We are only in the first anti-chamber and you can hear the excitement in Byron and in us as to what else is in this and why its so different from others. We go in another anti-chamber using my handy dandy flashlight that is guaranteed to never burn out. We are once again amazed at its height and many more passages that lead from this chamber. By this time the only light is from the single flashlight, making things a little spookier. We assume that a rich man built this tomb for himself and for his friends but all things change when Byron points us to the secret chamber. Up until this point we think that it has been made for a King hence giving the title of the Tomb of the Kings until we learn that the secret chamber once contained the body of Queen Helen. So this tomb becomes even more ridiculous to all of us. By this time we go off on our own and we start running around using our red lights on our cameras searching the deepest parts and levels of the tomb. Bob helps us out by getting candles from up top and letting us use these to help in our discovery of many tombs. This was once again one of my favorite things we have done on the whole trip. I think you will be able to see this in the pictures we took. After a good hour of learning and probing the tombs we leave and head off to a place more moving and less exciting, Yad Vashem.

We arrive at Yad Veshem with laughter and joy but realize its time to get serious. Yad Veshem is a historical museum that commemorates the millions of Jews lost due to the Holocaust. I will tell you beforehand that my words cannot even begin to describe to you the depth of the emotions and history that the museum conveys. When you walk in you see this gigantic 20 foot movie clip of a Nazi concentration camp with children singing in the background that instantly puts your spirit in a serious and solemn state. As you go through the museum it starts with the history, beginning with Hitler's reign and ending with Germany surrendering. But it's the testimonies, video clips of survivors, clips of people being shot in the face and dumped into a hole as if they were some kind of garbage that really builds hatred and rage for what happened to the Jewish people in Europe. The museum tells of almost every kind of slave camp, death camp, and inhumane things done to the Jewish people during the reign of Hitler. I had been to. The testimonies of people going through this and watching friends and loved ones die in front of them or on top of them is what really left an impression of me. I had been to the Holocaust museum in Washington last year that really opened my eyes to this horror but it couldn't even begin to touch me like Yad Vashem did. There were so many letters, family valuables, numbers of who died and where that all added up to make it so moving. Then at the end was the 3 story round room with the names of the victims of the Holocaust that gave it that physical reality like nothing else had done. After walking out I felt as though I had watched a mass murder, rape, pillage, utter destruction of a whole race in about an hour and I couldn't do anything about except watch. I believe we all felt like this because it was true in history and in the lives of all the Jews that were a part of it and those not a part of it. Now leaving the museum I saw Jerusalem right there in its glory and thought to myself wow there is hope through all this and I am looking it straight in the eye. So in saying all that I hope you get some sense of the emotions and hope we felt after walking through Yad Vashem.

After the museum we went back to the hotel kind of in a state of numbness and waited for dinner that night. Overall the day started out exciting and ended with an emotional trip through the holocaust.

-Andre

BOB'S ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

DAY 10

The Tomb of Kings is worth visiting if you have the time.

What to say about Yad Vashem? It's completely new since I was there in 1987; literally a new museum. This one is set up to be more of a "documentary" than to tug at your emotions than the old one was. I was fine making it through the exhibits, until one near the end, showing how the "liberators" loaded the naked, dead bodies; tossing them and stacking them up like so many sides of beef.

That was the tough point for me.

We spent 2.5 hours at Yad Vashem, and that wasn't nearly enough. Allow at LEAST 3 hours; 4 if you can.

DAY 11:

The first thing we did was swim in the dead sea. If you're going in, bring flip-flops or sandals to wear in the water; the rocks are sharp.

Masada is not to be missed!! Make sure you don't miss the ramp, on the far side of the mountain!

DAY 12

Kibbutz Lotan is doing some amazing things with eco-friendly building and living. It's worth a stop and a tour. The accommodations are about 1 star; I don't think you need stay there.

JANUARY 19, 2006

DAY 11

Although it is hard to measure, today may have been the most exciting day of the trip to date. We left Jerusalem early this morning and made our way south towards Eliat, a city at the southern most end of Israel. On our way to our final location, we made "pit stops" at amazing archeological sites beginning with Qumran, the location along the Dead Sea where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1940s. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls have been labeled the most important archeological find of the 20th century as they have revealed to scholars many interesting things about the Judaism at and shortly after the time of Jesus. When occupied nearly 2000 years ago, Qumran's community was comprised of VERY conservative Jewish men (their population only grew through recruitment) who left Jerusalem because they felt the temple was impure.

Qumran thrived until it was destroyed by the Roman army during the Jewish Revolt in 68 CE. Although the history of Qumran was very interesting, most of us found exploring around the cliffs and caves at the site to be the best part of the stop [See photos].

We continued south after Qumran and made our way to En Gedi, a rest area along the Dead Sea that provided us with the option to swim in the Dead Sea. Most of us ventured into the water (despite it being semi-cold) and had a blast. We walked down the beach and into the water and as soon as we fell on our backs we began to float out to sea. It was certainly an experience that was worth while, even though we were yelled at in Hebrew for venturing too far out and we were left with salts on our body for the remainder of the day. We ate lunch there and then continued south.

Our next stop, Masada, was incredible. Masada, a word that means fortress, is the most visited National Park in Israel today.

Masada was originally built by Herod the Great as a mountain top fortress and palace for himself, his family, and his closest friends during a period of unrest. Herod chose this spot because it seemed to be invincible to any attack, as it was at the top of a mountain with the Dead Sea protecting one side and cliffs protecting all the other sides. After Herod, Masada was left unoccupied until it was recovered by the last wave of resistance against Rome during the Jewish Revolt, as they too felt like they would be safe from attack. To put it simply, the 90 or so Jewish men were wrong. Led by Silva, the Roman army first built a complete wall around Masada. After the completion of the wall, the Roman army undertook an effort to build a ramp up the side of the cliff by building 8 X 8 squares, filling them with rock, and then putting dirt on the top. Originally thought to have taken two years, scholars now speculate that the ramp may have been completed in three months. It is clear that for the technology and resources that the Romans had, they were much smarter than we are today. Seeing that they would be defeated, the Jews living at Masada drew lots to kill each other instead of being killed by the Roman army. As a result, the site is so powerful for Jewish people today that the final ceremony held for Jews entering the army is held at Masada.

The historical significance was clear at Masada, but it definitely did not overshadow the physical makeup of Masada. To get to the top of the mountain, most chose to ride the lift to the top, while a few of us chose to take the snake path (a small path running up the cliff) to the top. Before and after reaching the top, it seemed like a good idea to walk up, but while Jim, Andre, Byron and I walked to the top we certainly regretted the decision. At the top, the views were amazing. It would be a challenge to put the physical makeup into words, so I won't try (just look at the pictures).

Masada was clearly one of the coolest places we have been thus far.

After leaving Masada, we drove two more hours to our luxurious (?) accommodations at Kibutz Lotan, ate supper, and headed off to bed. What a day.

- Matt

NEWS OF TEL AVIV

No doubt many of you have heard about the bombing in Tel Aviv this afternoon. We spent today in Elat, the southern-most tip of the country, far from Tel Aviv; no one was in any danger.

Of course we are monitoring the situation, and collecting information from a number of sources here in Israel. Right now the bombing looks like an isolated incident.

At the moment, we are considering altering our plans slightly, to avoid giving the students a free day in Tel Aviv. We will then travel only together as a group.

Rest assured that we will make any additional changes as the situation requires; of course safety is our primary concern.

For up to the minute news from Israel, we suggest you consult the English language website of HaArtz, Israel's equivalent of the New York Times:

<http://www.haaretz.com>

-Byron McCane & Bob Moss

JANUARY 20, 2006

DAYS 12-13

1/18/06

Kibbutz Lotan is an interesting place. During the night, some of us had some trouble with the heat not exactly working longer than an hour, and the power shutting on and off. Not to mention, the temperature in the desert dropped down to around freezing, so we all froze. So eventually, the sun came out, heated the desert up to a nice and toasty temperature, and we went to breakfast to see COCOA CRISPIES (amazing) along with what we liked to call “egg pallets” which are scrambled eggs that are not scrambled, or omelets without anything on the inside. Dean, the amazing Aussie cook of the Kibbutz, makes them special. Anyway, so there was not a big day ahead of us, maybe only a few mountains that needed exploring.

We drove a little ways through the land of the Kibbutzim, so called (by us) because of the many Kibbutz that dot the landscape on both sides of the road. Finally we came to the excavation site of the world famous archaeologist Byron McCane. The site was a late Roman fort with a small British police station from the 1930's on top. The Roman fort had four towers on the corners, rooms bordering the walls, and a large cistern in the middle. That style is called a quadriburgium. The Romans had many forts across the desert so they could keep communication with each other in order to control the whole area. To give you a mental connection, imagine the scene from Lord of the Rings where the torches are lit in order to send the message across the land that there was an attack, and move that to the desert. The fort was built around 300CE.

We were set free to explore the landscape and the dig site, and try to make some amazing archeological discoveries for ourselves. We found some bones, some pot pieces, and all brainstormed about the random circular stack of stones that seemed to have no purpose whatsoever. A few people ventured away from the dig site only to find themselves in the middle of a Bedouin grave yard. Byron called us all back, and we did what he called “reading a baulk” together. A baulk is the walls that the archaeologists leave to separate the different squares they are digging out. They can tell you a lot about the site. Because we are all not as knowledgeable as Byron, at first glance of the baulk we saw seven layers in the rock, some of them sloping, and some straight across. Byron informed us that the sloping layers were caused by nature, and the straight ones were man-made, letting us know that there were really only three layers in the rock. The Burn layers toward the top were Bedouin camp fires, the middle was early Islamic, and the bottom was Roman. The Roman floor was rebuilt three times, and one of those times was from a serious fire. Hooray for learning new stuff!

So after that lesson, we all left again to explore. Matt, Natalie, Andre, and I set out across the Bedouin graves and decided to climb a mountain. Why not? It was quite the hike to the top, but then it wasn't really to the top, because it kept going, and going, and going for as far as the eye could see. It was beautiful. I found a fossilized shell at the very top of the mountain which I brought down with me. It might be the coolest thing ever. The rest of the group decided not to take on the world one mountain at a time, and stayed below discovering. They found some bones and took them to Byron, who said they were human! Then they found the skeleton of a Bedouin, whose name was Bedouin Bob who apparently was dug up on a dig a few years previously.

We ate amazing ice cream after lunch and headed back for our tour of Kibbutz Lotan. Unlike the previous Kibbutz, this one is still socialist. All the money is put into one place and

divided up evenly among the 150 or so Kibbutz members. The children are all educated together, and everyone shares everything. They are also recycling Nazis, if you will. They have discovered a way to reduce the waste they produce by 70% which is very impressive. They use the organic waste as fertilizer for the trees and the non perishable wastes to line the inside of buildings and playgrounds for the kids. Then they take mud and cover the garbage, then coat it with used falafel oil to prevent water damage and let it harden. It is quite impressive some of the things that they have built, including a recycling center. They have also found a way to make houses from the same idea, except using metal poles to make what they call a "geodome" and covering that with straw and mud bricks. It stays cool in the summer and warm in the winter because the straw is an insulator, along with the structure being fire and earthquake proof. They also make a smell proof outhouse that takes the waste into a large drum which is broken down by the F.B.I. (AKA fungus, bacteria, and insects). They grow dates (NASTY) and have a dairy farm with tons of cows. This Kibbutz is all about natural. They grow the food naturally with no pesticides, and use the birds that migrate to the area to eat the insects. There was something about them that made me think hippie, maybe the watsu massages, but I am not really sure.

We ate dinner, then went to the Kibbutz pub and hung out, bonding with the Kibbutz members, and really immersing ourselves in the Lotan life which includes milk in a bag and potato pastries... hmmm...

~

Lindsey Lane

B.O.D.

1/19/06

FREE DAY IN EILAT!!! Lutvi, our bus driver, took us down to Eilat which borders the Red Sea,

Jordan

, and

Egypt

, for a free day of adventure! Everyone separated, and we all spent the day shopping and eating. It was a beautiful day, the temperature was really warm, enough to allow swimming in the red sea and sun bathing. I have come to the conclusion that people in

America

are more modest than anywhere in the world, and especially more than here. Some people should not wear Speedos. Enough said. Liz and I set out to continue our quest of world domination, and we succeeded in conquering Eilat. We started at the mall and took over that with ease. Then we made our way across the beach, talking to locals. Liz got a proposal in exchange for a green card and parasailing and I parted the

Red Sea

. We were crowned Queens of Eilat by Burger King. We went for a quick flight though the air on a sling shot, and then walked almost all the way to

Jordan

. We decided to turn around, so we walked back to the mall, ate some falafel with Byron and Bob, AKA the professors of love (if you need any advice, don't hesitate to ask), then we went to the internet café and chilled. We found Lutvi and we walked with him back to the bus and we pulled up to the meeting spot with style.

We ate dinner consisting of French fries and salad, which is served for all three meals... that's all. The evening involved Pictionary, piano, and reliving the best moments of the trip so far.

I think that the ghost of Bedouin Bob followed the group back to the Kibbutz, because my bathroom door opens and closes on its own. That could be because of the air from the vent or something along those lines, but in the middle of the night in a single room... it can get scary. That's why Tiger Lily is here to protect me tonight.

~

Lindsey Lane

B.O.D.

JANUARY 22, 2006

DAY 14

We left Kibbutz Lotan in the morning to go to Timna Park, about ten minutes south of the kibbutz towards Eilat. Timna Park features mostly rock formations caused by water. The park is found where the brown mountains meet the red mountains-or you can just look for the big Egyptian-like statues marking the turnoff.

Most of the interesting rock shapes were formed by water getting into the fissures of the rock, according to our guide Simon who led the way. The water then expands the fissure, making the stone crack and break.

We saw a rock named Mushroom and a Half-there was another stone next to it though not in any recognizable shape, hence the "half." I personally think the "mushroom" looked just as much as a tree or something, but whatever the rock hoped to be, it was pretty cool. Plus there was an ibex strolling around there, which the boys nearly caught, or so they claim. Another site was Solomon's Pillars, where the cliff face has also been eroded by water, forming deep long inlets in the rock so that the rock protrudes in columns looking like pillars (bet you didn't guess that). Another interesting formation was the arches, which we climbed through.

There are three distinct types of soil which make for a unique setting. Red mountains on the left have some black rock and dirt, reflecting mainly iron. Copper is also in the red mountains. Brass can be found in the light orange-brown rock on the right. The mining site is pretty much where these three elements meet.

Timna Park also marks a mining site used by the Egyptians and Midianites to mine for copper. Copper was the most important metal to the Egyptians despite their knowledge for a stronger metal by adding tin. They came mostly by sea, landing in an ancient harbor and then riding on donkeys to the area. There is no water nearby, so the stay in Timna was probably not the highlight of the miners' lives. Then again, I'm not big on mining in general. The Egyptians were sent by Ramses III, and they sent the copper back to Egypt. There are still holes where the shafts to the mines remain.

One of the most interesting things at Timna were the rock drawings of people hunting ibex with arrows, deities, animals, and other images drawn on the rock. Obviously these drawings were man-made. The only other man-made item in Timna is the temple to Hathor, an Egyptian goddess usually portrayed with the circular headdress or as a cow. She was their patron goddess, so the temple provided their religious needs. There were some votive figurines of her,

but none remain at the site now. Later the temple was converted to provide for Jewish needs. The temple was pretty small, though I assume large enough to accommodate the miners.

We ate lunch nearby, and then went to Hai Bar Yovata Reserve. Though we remained on the bus for the tour (with a CD to help us learn about the animals), we saw several animals. All of the animals are desert animals, including wild asses, ibex, addax, ostriches, gazelles, oryx, and onagers.

After the reserve, we returned to the kibbutz to get ready for Shabbat, or the Sabbath, which started at sundown. At six the service started in the synagogue, consisting almost entirely of singing songs and hymns. The service was very informal, which I really appreciated. There was also a strong sense of community and freedom, with children running in and out of the synagogue while everyone sings and claps. The service lasted about an hour, after which we moved to the dining hall to have Shabbat dinner.

Dinner consisted of breaking bread, literally, and a toast. Then we were served wine, chicken, rice, broccoli, salad, and more bread. As I hadn't had meat in a week, it was blissful. Plus it killed the rooster that crowed at 5:00 AM outside my room window every morning-or at least I didn't hear it again.

Later the pub opened around ten, which was full of people talking and then dancing energetically all night long. I have a newfound respect for these people who can work all day and dance all night. It was an experience, though, because they played mostly reggae and so the dancing was not like that of Wofford (who would've thought?). Everyone was dancing, which was great because there wasn't any "guys can't dance" excuses and all those other overused wimpy excuses.

-Rebecca Reid

Thanks!

DAY 15 FROM JORDAN

Aqaba is that way. It's just a matter of going....

Well, after a wonderful night of mature, responsible partying, we travelers awoke to a bright and shining new day...at 7:30. But none of us minded the early morning, because we knew we were having another fabulous breakfast at Kibbutz Lotan. When we arrived, we were pleased to discover a wide assortment of breakfast cereals, hard boiled eggs, and of course, bread. After eating our fill of Israeli cocoa pebbles and corn flakes and the like, we hopped on the bus happily; some of us were more excited about the drive along our faithful Route 90 than others. Though we would likely have been more hesitant all together if we had known that our beloved Sinbad III as well as Ludfi and Simon would be leaving us when we reached the border. Despite this harsh realization, we managed to get through both the Israeli exit point and the Jordanian entrance point completely unscathed, and in record time. We even managed to change money, although finding out that the rate is about \$1.5 American to JD (Jordanian Dinar) 1 was somewhat disappointing. At any rate we met our new guide Daoud (that's David for us English speaking folks) and our bus driver who for the moment does not have a name, as we boarded the Alpha bus. Within 30 minutes we oriented ourselves toward Aqaba and, as the in the lines from Lawrence of Arabia made ever Immortal in today's title, we went.

Aqaba was, at least in my humble opinion, unlike anywhere I'd ever been before. We had two hours there until we met for lunch, and there was certainly enough for us to do. There were two beaches (only one of which was free) along the Red Sea, from which you can see all the way into Eilat, which was our free day yesterday, as you'll recall. For those who forgot their swimsuits (cough...Byron...cough), all was not lost though. There was also all manner of stores for shopping. You could buy anything from cheap hookah pipes, to traditional belly dancing costumes, to your name in Arabic in a bottle of colored sand. Or, for people who just didn't quite fill up on cereal, there was even a brand new McDonald's. The city was a little tricky to navigate at first, because if you wander too far down any one street you'll wind up in parking lots, furniture stores, and buildings which resembled condos. But since there were no dead-ends, sooner or later you'll find your way back to something familiar. Or, if things ever seemed too out of control, you could ask for directions to the famous Captain restaurant (which was conveniently our meeting point) and be given clear directions in amazingly clear English. Apparently, no one ever visits Aqaba without eating at least one meal at the Captain. We certainly reinforced that rule today, and it's a good thing too.

After our lunch of a mixture of traditional Arabian foods like Shish kebab and Hummus, and slightly less traditional dishes like a cheeseburger and fries, we hopped back on Alpha bus, where we enjoyed a scenic two hour ride to the beautiful mountain city of Petra. Along the way, we not only enjoyed kilometers and kilometers of colorful mountains, and acacia trees, we also got to see the only railroad in Jordan. It is called the Hejazzy (not an exact transliteration) railway. When it was built from 1892-1901 it went all the way from Jerusalem all the way into Saudi Arabia. It was originally meant to provide transportation for the many Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. It was remarkably popular too, since it shortened the journey time from 120 days to about 2 weeks. However, when it started weakening, the government declared that the railroad could only be used to transport minerals like phosphates (which were, at the time, the leading export) through Jordan. Now pilgrims must take small planes or the roads for this part of their journey.

At any rate, the long drive, coupled with the early morning soon found most of us snoozing along most of our drive, but when we arrived at our hotel in Petra we were in for the best part of the trip so far. The hotel was incredible, and was a complete switch up from the modesty of the Kibbutz. It is built into the side of a mountain, and so is completely upside down. That is, the lobby is on the third floor, the restaurant is on the second, and guests must ride the elevator down to at least floor zero to get to their rooms. Other than the slight oddness we get from pressing floor number 8 on the second elevator and going down instead of up, this inversion was nothing, especially when we saw our rooms. Rebecca and I found our selves in a gigantic room, my only complaint about which is that the ceiling in the bathroom makes me (I'm only 5'5") feel incredibly tall. But the best part of all is that there are bathtubs! For dinner we had a huge buffet style meal, where we all enjoyed the various MEATS as well as the delicious desserts. But before that, we all met on one of our balconies (yes, balconies) and watched the sun set over the mountains of Petra. The colors were magnificent and the pictures don't do the nuances justice. That is certainly an experience that everyone has to have for him or her self in order to fully appreciate it. From where we watched, it almost seemed as if the sun set behind nothing, merely disappearing in the middle of the sky in front of us.

All in all, today was relatively relaxed and relaxing, which is good since we're apparently in for the workout of a lifetime tomorrow. So here's to a good night's sleep...

~Cary Watkins

Oh, and P.S. Good luck at Irmo HHS, and Happy Birthday God fadda! ;)

WHERE TO STAY, FROM BOB

KIBBUTZ LOTAN was certainly not "nice"; accommodations were about 1.5 star. However, the place has a special family feel to it; Shabbat services were kinda special; and Shabbat dinner was excellent. It would probably be worth spending 2 nights there, so long as they include a Friday night.

The Petra Panorama Hotel is nice, modern hotel. Unfortunately, it has absolutely no internet access at the moment!! But the food is excellent; an great place to stay if you're coming to Petra.

Petra is AMAZING; both the natural rock formations and the man made sculptures done into the rock are unbelievable. It's worth a "side trip" to Jordan to see. And the camel rides are fun too!!

-Bob

JANUARY 23, 2006

DAY 16 FROM PETRA

Today started out how every amazing day should. I woke up walked onto my balcony and gazed at Petra. After a delicious breakfast we began our adventure. Before the details of the day can be told a little background information is needed. Petra is not "Petra" to everyone. The locals call it Wadi Musa or Edom. Petra was inhabited and created by an Arab tribe called Nabataeans. This tribe lived in caves and carved elaborate facades out of the sandstone. It is sometimes also called the "Lost City" because from the 14th century until 1812 the West did not know of its existence. The rediscovery was made by a Swiss explorer named Johann Ludwig Burckhardt. People lived in Petra until modern times when they were relocated to houses near the ancient city.

After retrieving tickets at the visitors centre we made our way into the city. The first leg of the journey is a wide sandy stretch of road that brings you to the Obelisk Tomb and the Bab as-Siq Triclinium. The triclinium was used to hold sacred feasts. The next landmark is As-Siq which is just pronounced seek. This is a walk through a deep and narrow gorge. On either side are cliffs that can be as tall as 80 meters. This is the main entrance to Petra now, but there were three others when it was inhabited. The trek is ultimately leading up to the sight of Al-Khazneh or the Treasury. The Treasury was built in the 1st century BCE and is an absolutely astonishing site. Many of you have seen it in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. It is funny that this is the most photographed site in Petra even though it is one of 800 facades. It probably is famous because it is the first one you come to when you come out of the Siq. It is called the Treasury because they believed that the urn at the top of the structure contained treasure. It was sadly used for target practice by the Turks when they had control of the area. Other than some slight erosion and holes it is in remarkable shape.

After exploring the Treasury we were given free time to roam about with instructions to meet back for lunch. Natalie, Erin, Helen, Maggie and I then took off to see the theater. While we were there we befriended a five year old Beoduoin boy. It started off innocently enough with him begging us to give him one dinar for a piece of colored sandstone. Then it escalated to him

hugging my leg and begging for a biscuit. This kid was good. He had more street smarts and acting skills than Chuck Norris and Sean Penn rolled into one. His puppy dog eyes were two much for me so I gave him the only thing I had Purel hand sanitizer. We all had to show him how to use it for fear that he would drink it. After he used some he looked at a couple and shouted "one dinar!" and pointed to the bottle. Then Helen (that tenderhearted thing) gave him a cracker and some gum. We eventually had to walk away because this little boy would not stop asking for a biscuit. As Maggie later put it "I haven't seen a biscuit in so long-If I did find one it would be mine".

The next undertaking was just a little stroll up to the Monastery. Our tour guide had informed us that it was 1,000 steps to reach it. It is possible to rent a donkey to ride up the mountain. I thought that getting one would be a lazy thing to do so we did it on foot. Half way up I think I would have given 500 dinars to ride that animal. It was hot and the steps were steep but we made it (with several breaks) to the top. The view was amazing and I'm not much of one for landscapes. After lunch it was time to make our way back to the entrance. Most of us opted for the camel ride experience. Folks this is one thing you have to try before you die. The feeling of being thrown around by a galloping camel is just invigorating.

The interesting thing about the journey in and around Petra is that there are several modes of transportation. The first option just beyond the entrance is a horse that will carry you part of the way. Once you reach the As-Siq you can rent a chariot that fits two people. When you arrive at the Treasury you can ride a camel or donkey to the Colonnaded Street. If you are really brave you can also ride a donkey all the way uphill to the Monastery. All of these will cost you a couple of Jordanian Dinar and save aching muscles.

After the hiking and walking and walking and hiking we were all ready for some relaxation. So what's a girl to do when she wants to unwind around here...Turkish Bath! Let me start this story with some advice: When entering a Turkish Bath establishment check your modesty at the door. When we arrived the girls went to one floor and the boys to another. When we reached our lobby we were each given a towel. Then we timidly entered the steam room. This steam will rival any sauna in America. The steam was so thick that you had to yell out names to find where people were. After 20 minutes of steaming we were taken to at a time into the exfoliating room. It is like basically getting scrubbed gently with a Brilo pad. Let me tell you that woman can take off some skin. After the exfoliating came the massage; which was well received after a hard day at Petra. The perks of the Turkish Bath were soft skin and lots of giggling girl time.

-Ashley

BYRON'S POST

Byron's Blog

Greetings, Friends of the Wofford Israel Interim:

Like most of you, I have been following our blog with interest each day, and I have enjoyed the experience of reading what our students have had to say about the trip. It has been fun to see how each day of the trip has struck them, what sights (and sites) they have regarded as noteworthy, what has amused and/or confused them, and how they have made sense of it all. As I'm sure you could tell, they have been an energetic and outgoing group, taking in as much of this fascinating part of the world as they possibly could in such a short time.

They have learned a lot, including the fact that this place is far more complicated -- and far less violent -- than the American media makes it seem. They will never trust CNN or FoxNews again, and from my point of view, that's a good thing. But they have also learned where to go for intelligent and informed news about the Middle East, and I'd like to pass those sources along

to you as well. The best information is on the websites of good newspapers, including:

1) The New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com>). The columns of Thomas Friedman have won multiple Pulitzer Prizes, and Steven Erlanger is emerging as an insightful reporter.

2) Haaretz (<http://www.haaretz.com>). This centrist newspaper is Israel's equivalent of the NY Times. Most western media outlets generally do little more than publish an abbreviated version of what they find in Haaretz.

3) The Daily Star (<http://www.dailystar.com.lb>). Published in Beirut, the Star is a consistently thoughtful voice for Arab opinion. To understand how the US looks to Arabs, it is hard to do better than the daily editorial in the Star.

It has also been a pleasure to work with Bob Moss on this trip. We have made the perfect combination: he has looked after innumerable details and has smoothed our way over difficult hurdles more times than we could count. Basically I stand up front and do the talking, and he has to do all the real work that makes the trip go.

During our travels over these three weeks, I have tried to provide the students with a center of gravity around which each would be able to find his or her own orbit. They deserved a center which would be strong enough to prevent them from spinning out on their own, but not so strong that they would all collapse into a black hole in the middle. And it seems that somehow each of them has managed to find their own orbit, depending upon their own individual mass and velocity. Best of all, each and every day they have reminded me how it feels to see all of this for the first time, and they have asked me questions to which I got to say, "I don't know." In a word, they have been a delight.

I'd gladly bring them back here for another interim, or (better yet) for a dig. But it's getting to be time for us to come home. See you in a few days.

PS: this group has been a bunch of *climbers*, in the literal sense of the word. From Gamla to the Wadi Rum, if there was a rock or a mountain, up they went. Nothing stopped them – well, except when Bob or I would say, "That's high enough."

BOB'S FINAL POST

BOB'S FINAL ENTRY:

Let me first say that without exception, the students have been wonderful. This is my first travel interim; and I was a BIT nervous. I've heard stories about students getting out of hand, busting up hotel rooms, being 'drunk and disorderly', disappearing, etc. And we had only a bit of that... ☺ No seriously, not a SINGLE problem; the students were all "angels".

I've thoroughly enjoyed the trip. BESIDES the wonderful sites, I think my favorite part was just sitting up with groups of students talking about politics, religion, Wofford, and even dating (THEIRS, not mine!!). It certainly brought me back to my college days.

I'm not sure what each student will take away from this trip. All have seen some amazing sites; all have been introduced to the complexities that are Middle Eastern Politics. Some have disliked the food; some have disliked a few of the things we did. Some will now start to question their religious and political views. Heck, a few will even start to question their scientific views! And of course, opening students' minds to different views and different ways of thinking is the most important part of my job.

Let me again say that Byron did an incredible job planning this tour, and an even better job weaving fascinating stories for all of us encompassing the history, politics, archaeology, and religion. I would personally love to take my family back here, on a tour with Byron. But we might not have 20 days to spend, so I've been keeping a list of the slightly shorter tour I'd design were I to do this again with family, friends, or even students:

MY 'DREAM TOUR' WOULD BE:

FRIDAY DAY 1: Western Wall; preferably on Friday night. Day of shopping in the old city. Stay at 7 Arches.

SATURDAY DAY 2: Second day in Jerusalem; Church of the Holy Sepulcher; along with more SHOPPING there! Stay at 7 Arches.

SUNDAY DAY 3: Tomb of the Kings; Yad Vashem. Stay at 7 Arches.

MONDAY DAY 4: Caesarea, Megiddo; stay in Nazareth. Evening wandering around Arab half of Nazareth; PERHAPS the Rimonim Hotel.

TUESDAY DAY 5: Beit She'arim, Nazareth, Zippori; again staying in Nazareth. Evening wandering around the Jewish half of Nazareth, perhaps including the "mall" there.

WEDNESDAY DAY 6: Gamla, Sea of Galilee, Tiberias; a few hours for shopping in Tiberias; staying in Tiberias.

THURSDAY DAY 7: Plant a tree; tour Kibbutz HaSolelim; Crusader castle at Belvoir; Roman city at Beth She'an.

FRIDAY DAY 8: Dead Sea; Masada. Stay at and tour Kibbutz Lotan,

SATURDAY DAY 9: EILAT; stay at Kibbutz Lotan.

SUNDAY DAY 10: PETRA; stay at Panorama Hotel

MONDAY DAY 11: Wadi Rum; stay at Panorama Hotel in Petra.

TUESDAY DAY 12: Travel to Tel Aviv

WEDNESDAY DAY 13: Day in Tel Aviv

THURSDAY DAY 14: Fly home.