

Our Trip to Israel

March 4 – 16, 2008

Vacation? You gotta be kidding. This was an “educational tour” and precious few moments to rest. The tour was run by the Ramah Israel Institute and included a custom made source book to help us understand what we were experiencing.



Our main teacher was Ariel. Here you see him holding a Sephardic Torah. Very few questions stumped him and even when there were changes in plans, all went smoothly.

March 4

We left Phoenix Sky Harbor at 7:40 PM and flew to London's Heathrow.

March 5

Arrived at Heathrow for a 10 hour layover. Why waste the time? We took a 5 hour tour of London.





It sure beat hanging around an airport. Then it was back to Heathrow for a second overnight flight to Israel.

March 6

So what does Israel look like? Lots of sand and rock maybe? Not in the central and northern parts. See all of these trees? Almost every tree you see was planted. It is a long standing tradition to plan trees in Israel. Very few are cut down.





We traveled through farm land and you can see that nothing is wasted.

Our first major stop was a hill that overlooked the valley where David fought Goliath. Nice view but did not feel all that real to me. Then we went to Beit Guvrim and hit the mother load.



A short climb down this ladder and we were in man made caves. About 2100 years ago the town over these caves was about to be overrun. The people decided to destroy their homes and dump the debris into these caves that had been used to store food. The result was a sequestered area of known age. Tourists are able to go down there and find pottery shards.



The chambers we were in are only about half dug out yet the floor is about 15 feet below the roof.



The dirt is very loose and in no time I found the handle of a large urn. See it above resting on the top of my pick axe.



Then I found a bowl. It was impossible no to find pottery. All of it was 2100 years old. The biggest surprise was after we finished. They let us each keep a few shards of pottery.



Some parts of the cave were completely excavated. Here is one of the store rooms.



These stairs were very easy to climb. All of it was carved from the existing rock.



This is an olive crusher down in the cave. The wood is a reconstruction but the wheel and basin are original.



Next to the olive crusher is this olive press. The crushed olives are placed in baskets that are stacked in the slot under the tree trunk. Then the trunk is somehow weighed down and the oil ran out the bottom. This oil was mostly used for fuel. Note that the small logs slung under the tree trunk can't be rigged correctly. As shown, they don't do much.

We have been going for about 30 hours so far but the day is not over yet. Next stop, Jerusalem.



Here we are walking on top of the city wall. Out ahead is the Mount of Olives. It is the oldest continuously operational cemetery in the world.



Everything is close here. Looking out from the Old City you can see the security wall around the West Bank. At one point we did hear gun shots but it turned out to be a wedding over there. It is their custom to have “celebratory gun shots” at such times. The sound echoes all over the place.

March 7



Off to the right is the Kotel which is also called the Western or Wailing Wall. This section is south of the area commonly shown for prayers. These walls date back to around around 538 BCE (Before the Common Error also known as Before Christ – BC).

We could not get any closer today because there was concern that violence would erupt after 8 students were murdered. The students were are Jews but the concern was that the Arabs would riot. Hard to understand. Fortunately everyone remained calm.