

# Spotlight on 2009



It has been a busy year and we have enjoyed wonderful times in the desert with both old friends and new. Of many eventful journeys, highlights have included the construction of a shelter, well and garden (including planting 50 olive trees!) for the Bedouin community at Bir Sa'al by Gordonstoun School, and hot cocoa round the campfire with Dr Kenneth Wolfe and his Godolphin and Latymer team. We were also delighted to welcome to Sinai for the first time groups from The King's School, Chester, and Streatham & Clapham High School (more of which below).

## Return to Sinai

Flora Ellison, a Classics teacher at Streatham & Clapham High School, brought a group to Sinai nearly ten years after her first journey with Wind Sand & Stars.

"My first experience of Sinai came about whilst at Godolphin and Latymer. As a 17 year old going to Sinai was like being sent to the moon. We arrived at Sharm El Sheikh in the dark and drove in jeeps into the desert, unable to see anything of our surroundings. I think at the time we asked what we had



As we go to press, a group is embarking on an *Adventure into Silence*. Sara Maitland, who's recently published *Book of Silence* involved time in the Sinai with Wind Sand & Stars, will accompany the group and lead them in experiencing and exploring silence in the desert.

As always, we are indebted to Dr Rabia and his dedicated team for their support. Working in partnership with Sheikh Hamid and the Bedouin community, and with able support from Hady and Moussa among many others, they continue to provide outstanding

got ourselves into, trying to sort out our bedding in the dark. However, that first night under the stars is something I will never forget. Likewise, finally seeing the desert at dawn and fully appreciating the isolation and beauty of where we were. Dr Kenneth Wolfe, our school leader, encouraged us to take an hour each day to reflect and think on our own. In my final year, about to take A Levels, this opportunity for total time-out from normal life was invaluable.

Ten years on the impact has not faded. Now teaching at Streatham & Clapham High I was keen to offer my sixth form students the same opportunity and last Easter I took a group of 18 to Sinai. As a teacher the trip felt different, but no less exciting. There were daily reminders of why Sinai had left such an impression: delicious Bedouin bread, kafia fashion, Dr Rabia, camels, star-gazing, fire-side stories and amazing scenery. Being responsible for the girls made the trip slightly more nerve-racking, but the support provided by Wind Sand and Stars meant that I need not have worried. Watching a group



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# news

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hospitality. They send their greetings and look forward to sharing further experiences and adventures over the coming year. Some future journeys during 2010 are listed here and we are always happy to hear from you to discuss a tailor made itinerary.

*Fay Cox,*  
*Director of Operations*



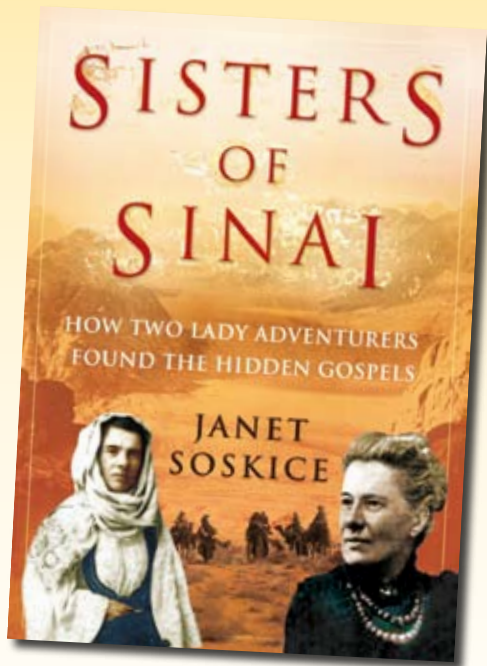
of teenagers having the time of their lives, whilst also getting filthier and filthier as the week progressed, was brilliant.

A student told me recently that for them Sinai had really been a life changing experience and I think I would say the same about my time there as a teenager. It is a uniquely special place and is somewhere I know that I, and all those I took out at Easter, will never forget."

## Congratulations

**Our congratulations to Emma on the birth of Jasper Patrick Loveridge on 25th August 2009. Emma and Jasper are doing extremely well and Mollie is a very proud big sister!**

# Sisters of Sinai



Janet Soskice travelled with Wind Sand & Stars out into the Sinai desert and to the Monastery of St Catherine during her research for her book about the twins, Agnes and Margaret, who discovered the Syrian Gospels from the 5th century during their own visit to Mount Sinai last century. The importance of the manuscript is matched only in importance for Biblical scholarship by the *Codex Sinaiticus*.

It was wonderful to have Janet with us, and her book *Sisters of Sinai* is a gem. It is that rare mixture of scholarship and story telling interwoven. In reading it you travel between the 5th and 19th century, through a scholastic voice from our own time with the joy of reading about the lives of two remarkable women and their companions. The story tells not only of the great discoveries from the Near East and the resulting scholarship

in 19th century Cambridge, but also the emotional stories of the key characters involved and perhaps, most intriguingly, their relationships with the Sinai monks and the Bedu.

If you have ever been to the Sinai desert and St Catherine's Monastery with Wind Sand & Stars, or indeed if you aspire to journey there, then this book is a delightful insight into that complex but appealing world of contrast with Bedu guides and pilgrimage, monks and scholarship, Byzantium and Protestantism. In many ways the unique history of individual relationships forged over vellum and parchment given voice in this book is not dissimilar to experiences which Wind Sand & Stars and many of our clients have had over the last 20 years. Do take the opportunity to read it.

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## Codex Sinaiticus

The *Codex Sinaiticus* or the *Sinai Book* is one of the two earliest collections of the Old and New Testament books. It is dated to the middle of the fourth century AD. Other than the *Codex Vaticanus*, the only manuscripts of Christian scripture of an earlier date are small portions of text. The *Codex Sinaiticus* is remarkable for its bound book format rather than scroll. Not only is this book one of the earliest nearly complete texts of our modern Bible, but it has eight centuries of corrections, small and significant, in its margins. These open a far greater understanding of the way the text was understood and developed during this period of Christianity when agreement on the content and order of the Biblical books was still fluid.

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The manuscript was initially broken up when in the 19th Century a man called Tischendorf, who was manuscript hunting in the Near East, was the first western scholar to see the Codex and realise its significance. The travels of the Codex and its separation into four parts is a story nearly a century long involving Germany, Russia, Britain and Sinai, a world war and a revolution. The story is fraught with controversy from the very first moment the Codex left St Catherine's Monastery.

The present resting place of the bulk of the Codex is the British Library. It was bought by the British Library, but only through a public appeal for the pennies of the public to save the manuscript post Russian revolution. The public, enthralled by such a precious document, did indeed find the vast sum

by the 1930's. The rejoining of the Codex digitally this year is a remarkable feat.

This important new project, which has brought together the four institutions who hold leaves from the Codex and opened them to the world on the new website, will give us insights into the way the texts of the Bible were copied, read and used.

There has been much effort to enable this project to happen by Father Justinus, whom many of you will have met on your journey with Wind Sand & Stars to St Catherine's Monastery, where the Codex was stored for centuries.

The Project website is [www.codexsinaiticus.org](http://www.codexsinaiticus.org) and there is also an exhibition at the British Library.

# Forthcoming journeys during 2010

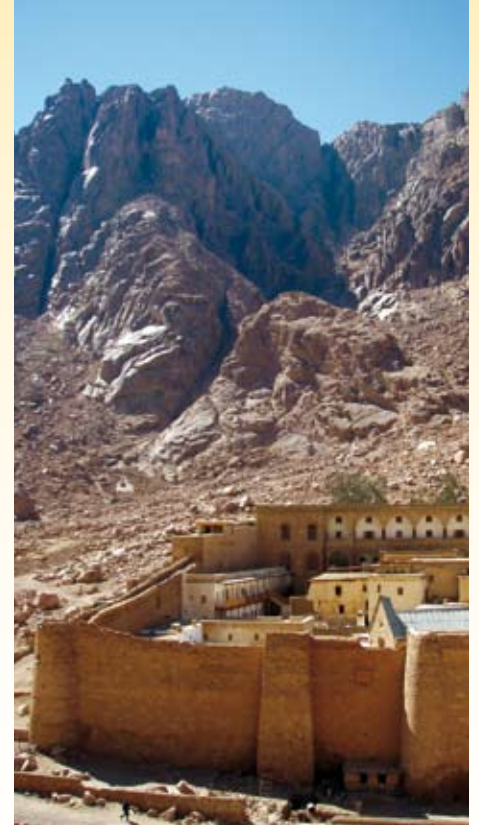
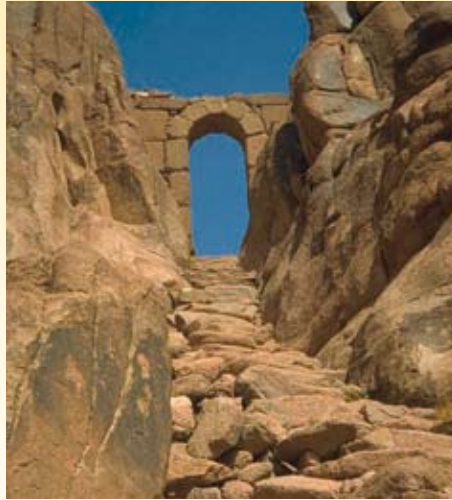
## Historical Odyssey

8 – 15 April 2010

*Accompanied by the Revd Dr Andrew Macintosh, Dean Emeritus of St John's College Cambridge & Old Testament Scholar*

We are delighted that Andrew Macintosh will join us again to share his unrivalled knowledge, inspiring us as we travel together on this gentle desert and mountain adventure. Culture, nature and biblical association are all part of this wonderful journey.

We travel from Mt. Sinai and St. Catherine's Monastery, to ancient historical sites encompassing chalcolithic buildings and inscriptions from the Ancient Egyptians. The itinerary will include a two-day camel trek with the Bedu families with whom we have worked for nearly 20 years. The scenery is unique to this desert and we travel through spectacular weathered sandstone hills with soft sand valleys, giving a sense of the Bedu family lifestyle into which we are invited and which dates back beyond the era of Moses.



## Sinai Retreat

15 – 22 April 2010

*Accompanied by The Revd Richard Warden*

Currently a Church of England Parish Priest and with a background in education at both Wycombe Abbey and Wellington College, Richard's experience of School and Army chaplaincy has involved taking several groups of people to the Sinai desert with Wind Sand & Stars. One of his great gifts, alongside his enthusiasm for sharing the physical and spiritual experience of the desert, is his pastoral care.



Richard Warden shares his thoughts on the appeal of a Sinai Retreat:

*"For me, spending time in the Sinai desert is about stepping back into the Old Testament and experiencing the continuity of the ages. Because the Sinai has deep historical and spiritual resonances especially for Jews, Christians and Muslims, one becomes more aware of the things that the different faiths have in common.*

*We are not made to feel intruders in the desert, but welcome guests of the Bedouin; we are safe in their care and privileged to experience their hospitality and culture. Although the desert is a wonderful place to find one's own individual space, paradoxically, sharing the experience with others bonds people in the group in an extraordinary way.*

*Wherever one may be on a spiritual or faith journey, the astonishing beauty and the friendly welcoming silence of the Sinai desert seem so conducive to spiritual reflection and personal growth. My times in the Sinai have been some of the most profound experiences of my life, and I am very excited to be able to return once again."*

Staying for five days in a stunning stretch of sandstone desert overlooked by weather-beaten hills, this retreat gives a unique opportunity for a sense of timelessness away from the pressures of urban life. We offer space for silence, times for discussion and optional gentle walks or camel treks with the Bedu. On the final day we drive to visit St Catherine's Monastery before a final evening at the Red Sea coast. The retreat is open to all faiths and denominations and the journey may also be combined with our historical pilgrimage.

## Tailor Made Journeys, for families and friends

If the journeys above are not exactly what you are looking for or the dates do not suit your calendar we are happy to arrange tailor made itineraries for both individuals and groups. Just let us know what you would like to do.

**For further details and booking information, please contact the office.**



# New website goes live!

We have been busy behind the scenes reviewing and updating the Wind Sand & Stars website. The site is now live and we are delighted with the new look.

The layout has been designed to make it simpler to navigate, so it should be easier find the information you are looking for; whether project ideas, information on Sinai or details on forthcoming journeys that you can join.

We will continue to add new content over the coming weeks, including more detailed

reference information and documents that can be downloaded, such as booking forms and risk assessments. Future plans also include creating a members-only site for looking up the latest journey-specific information.

Please have a look on [www.windsandstars.co.uk](http://www.windsandstars.co.uk) and let us know what you think. You can send your comments to us by email, on skype, or by using the new feedback form on the contact us page. Alternatively, please pick up the phone and give us a call.

We welcome your suggestions and look forward to hearing from you.

## Egypt's Western Desert

We are once again offering a spectacular journey of exploration through Egypt's Western Desert. Travelling by 4-wheel drive from Cairo, this eight-day journey follows ancient caravan routes linking the famous fertile oases at Fayoum, Baharia and Siwa. We can stop to explore towering

dunes in the great sand sea and we can also experience at close hand the timeless beauty and brilliant rock formations as we trek on foot through the White Desert. Accommodation will include hotels in oasis towns, and camping under the stars whilst in the desert.

A longer ten-day journey continues south to the Nile, visiting the legendary Valley of the Kings, plus the many temples at Luxor, before returning to Cairo on an internal flight.

Itineraries can be tailored to suit your group's age and special interests, whether arid geomorphology, Roman ruins or ancient Egyptian history. For further details and costs please contact the office.



## Thank you

A special thank you to our outstanding Wind Sand & Stars leaders for their hard work and dedication. All of our leaders are carefully selected for their combination of technical skills (in particular a high level of first aid), their experience and knowledge of the Sinai desert, as well as their personal skills. These 'soft skills' are arguably just as important in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of everyone in the group, including our Bedouin partners.

Leaders go through rigorous checking and training and will be meeting for a 2-day briefing in Bath during October, to share experiences and receive updates, in preparation for leading groups later this autumn and next spring.

## Stay in touch



The Wind Sand & Stars office is now based in Bath. Please stay in touch and do give us a call if you are in Bath, it is always lovely to have an opportunity to meet and catch up.

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