The Lonely Tree
Here, only a few minutes away from Tsur Hadassah, we are in nature’s wide open spaces, seemingly untouched by human hands. South-west from here winds Ha’elah Valley, and to the north east is San-San Ridge, with Wadi Fuqin located on its other side. According to Abu Mazen, an elder resident of Wadi Fuqin, during the Ottoman era this lonely tree was a local landmark and meeting place for young couples.

On the San-San ridge
We are standing on the ridge named San-San, a few hundred meters from the Green Line, in what seems like an area of open nature, but is actually subject to many planning conflicts. The recharge area of Wadi Fuqin aquifer encompasses lands under the jurisdiction of Tsur Hadassah, Wadi Fuqin, Beitar Illit and the Israeli Civil Administration. In order to preserve the Wadi’s unique character, planning must take into consideration this fragile hydrological system. Unfortunately, destructive urban planning and massive development (buildings, roads, etc.) have ignored the local eco-system and are responsible for the continued drying-up of the springs. The residents from both communities, have prepared an Alternative Master Plan for the area, warning the planning authorities about the severe damage being done and offering planning alternatives.

View of Agricultural Fields
From here we have a splendid view of Wadi Fuqin in all its beauty, a green oasis of spring-watered fields and irrigation pools. The Wadi’s irrigation system is a reminder of agriculture in biblical days, and thanks to its local aquifer, its crops are known in the entire region to be of high quality. Some years ago, the residents of Tsur Hadassah began to purchase vegetables and fruit from the neighboring farmers of Wadi Fuqin. Today, a few small cooperatives of Israeli consumers purchase agricultural produce directly from the farmers of the wadi (for more info contact ilan - 054-5692059). From this point we can witness the present threats to the future of Wadi Fuqin posed by the two new communities built on both sides of the valley: Tsur Hadassah to the west and Beitar Illit to the east. Beitar Illit is one of the largest settlements in the West Bank, an ultra-Orthodox city whose population has grown in a decade to 40,000, and will likely continue to grow. Its construction has covered huge stretches of the permeable soil with asphalt and concrete, disrupting the natural feeding system of the springs of Wadi Fuqin. Two springs have already dried up, and according to a hydrological survey, when the development programs detailed in the conflict map will be completed, there will be a 50% decrease in the flow of the remaining springs. In addition, building materials and ground from the construction of the settlement are dumped illegally and improperly into the valley. The ground waste has not been stabilized properly and endangers the farmers of the village and their lands, especially in the rainy season. Solid waste piles now scar the landscape, damaging the unique character of the valley, and should be dealt with properly. The sewage of Beitar Illit is pumped into the Gihon Wastewater Treatment Plant via several stations. However, defective planning has led to repeated accidents which caused raw sewage to overflow into the Valley’s fields, making some farmers’ plots unsuitable for agricultural use. Activists from Tsur Hadassah raised this issue before the City Council of Beitar Illit, and in lieu of any response, turned to the law enforcement authorities. Finally in the spring of 2010 after 4 years of occasional sewage spills The Beitar Eilt municipality was forced by the ministry of environment to connect an extra tank to prevent overflow.

The Path’s Stations

Overlook of the village
Under the British Mandate up to 1948, Wadi Fuqin’s municipal boundaries encompassed 12,000 dunams of terraces and pasture land. In 1948 the village was deserted and its houses destroyed. However, the residents, who ended up in the Dehaisha refugee camp near Bethlehem, returned daily to cultivate their fields. In 1972, Moshe Dayan, in an unprecedented move, allowed the residents of Wadi Fuqin to return to their village and rebuild their houses out of the ruins. However, three quarters of the village’s land was confiscated, and today it is left with only 3,000 dunams of agricultural land.

In the 1990’s the Civil Administration prepared a master plan of Wadi Fuqin, which restricts the village’s development and prohibits any expansion. Because of this restriction and the expansion of Beitar Illit neighborhoods down the slopes, the residents of the valley are forced to build on agricultural lands, or to build many stories (see the frame of the tall building), in a way that limits their livelihood and damages the village’s historic landscape. In addition, plans were drawn up to pave a new intercity road east of the village (Road 374 connecting the settlements of Gva’ot and Beitar Illit to Jerusalem) and to build the Separation Barrier to the west. If implemented, the road and Barrier will imprison the valley in a narrow corridor of 500 meters width. The fence that is planned to separate between Wadi Fuqin and Tsur Hadassah is a secondary barrier, in addition to the main Separation Barrier planned around the Gush Eztion settlements. If constructed, it would be “the last nail in the coffin” for Wadi Fuqin. For these reasons, Tsur Hadassah residents launched an intense public campaign against the building of the Barrier, signing hundreds of residents on a petition, contacting the Minister of Defense and IDF, and finally turning to legal aid in order to identify security alternatives and prevent the ruin of Wadi Fuqin. Their activism brought results: the IDF has “frozen” its plans to build the secondary security fence in the valley. To read the petition: http://foeme.org/events.php?find=59

With a view back towards Tsur Hadassah
Plans to expand Tsur Hadassah also threaten the wadi’s drainage basin. Many residents from Tsur Hadassah are active in environmental projects, and together with Friends of the Earth Middle East, are promoting an environmentally sensitive approach to any further development of their town. In addition, there are diverse activities in the Hadassim Elementary School and in Ein Kerem’s high school, where student “Water Trustees” participate in meetings with youth from Wadi Fuqin, and take part in eco-building and water-saving gardening on the school grounds.
This trail is one of 25 paths or trails that deal with the issue of water and peace building between Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian communities that share a common water source. The routes were planned during 2007 in the framework of the “Good Water Neighbors” project in cooperation with community representatives as well as the municipalities.

The goals of the trails are to:
• Raise public awareness of shared water and environment concerns of the communities
• Promote cross border cooperation for solving environmental problems
• Develop the potential for local eco-tourism

The “Good Water Neighbors” project was established in 2001 by “EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East” in order to promote local cooperation efforts to protect the shared water and environment between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

“EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East” is a regional environmental organization that works out of 3 offices, Tel Aviv, Amman and Bethlehem to promote cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage.

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Information about the rest of the “Neighbors Paths” can be found at: www.foeme.org

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