The agricultural use of the land has strong historical value, and still conserves a significant strategic role in the Palestinian economy.

The beauty of the agricultural landscape, although heavy intrusions are threatening its integrity, is still strictly correlated to the agricultural use made of it; even today the modalities of cultivation of the soil conserve many similarities with the ones used for thousands of years.

The main water source in Battir area depends on springs for both irrigating the village’s crops and also for domestic use. Currently people reduce using the spring water for their own needs; rather they are using piped water that is provided by the Israeli Water Company of Mekerot. There are five springs in Battir, the main is “Ein Al-Balad and Ein Jami’”. Due to the fertile soil, dense forested areas occupied mainly by pine trees and some other native plants and shrubs, and the presence of water from springs, Battir area witnessed a diversification of its natural habitat, both flora and fauna.

Touring Tips
Visitors may choose to start this trail from any of those villages. Within the limited watershed area of Battir, one can find several, natural, archeological, historical and cultural sites of interest. Amongst them is Kharbet Al Yahud (which is said to be a biblical site from the Roman Period), and the Al-Khirbeh Al-Sharqieh (which is located to the eastern part of Battir, and has many coves, tomb, and walls dated back to the Canaanite Period).

At Wadi Fuqeen, a short hiking trail is designed to give a glimpse of the natural and the agricultural system that is resemble to this village, in addition to show the major threats caused by Bitar Illit Settlement.

Why Wadi Fuqeen and Battir?
The recharge area of Wadi Fuqeen aquifer encompasses lands under the jurisdiction of Tsur Hadassah, Wadi Fuqeen, 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.

Good water Neighbor Path
This trail is one of the 25 paths that deal with the issue of shared water, environmental resources and peace building between Palestinian, Jordanian and Israeli communities. The generals goal of these trails are to:
- Raise public awareness of shared water and environment concerns to the communities.
- Promote cross border cooperation for solving environmental problems
- Develop potential for local ecotourism

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Background
Wadi Fuqeen and Battir can be considered as typical areas that resemble the past interaction between man and its culture and existing natural resources. This interaction is shaped out through the intensive agricultural system (i.e. terraces, irrigation canals and the old irrigation system, the many archeological and historical places, and the acquired legend beyond these places). In addition to the human-nature interaction, this area has scenic characteristics with regards to topography, location, and the ascetic value of the landscape. Wadi Fuqeen and Battir’s ancient irrigation system represents a rare preserved model of ancient agriculture, making it an important heritage site of landscape and culture. In the past few decades, however, both villages and their natural springs and the Aquifer have been severely damaged by nearby development. If this continues, it threatens the survival of this unique natural habitat and the communities in that area.

What to See!
The area of Wadi Fuqeen and Battir can be considered to be a feature of a landscape that has always maintained the delicate balance between culture and nature. According to the criteria,
which define cultural landscapes of the World Heritage Convention, this area symbolizes a sample of the cultivated terraces in the West Bank and outlines their value at the environmental level as well as their important historical role at an economic level, deriving from the productive use of the land. However, throughout this trail, tourists would encounter various environmental and social hazards threatening the value of such area.

Wadi Fuqeen

Wadi Fuqeen is located to the west of Bethlehem, just over the Green Line, between Israeli town Tsur Hadassah and the settlement of Beitar Illit. Today comprising 1,300 residents, Wadi Fuqeen has existed for 800 years. 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.

Concurrently, the village’s core groups of activists are cooperating with their neighboring Israeli community of Tsur Hadassah in order to prevent further environmental degradation to this area. Throughout a hiking trail which is designed along the village, the following stations have been highlighted:

“Future Vision” Institution and the Old Mosque Dome

The “Future Vision” Institution is located near the main village’s water spring (the Ain Al-Balad spring) that was recently restored through the Good Water Neighbors Project. The spring is used for irrigation purposes via its traditional pools and channels. The Institution houses a kindergarten and a climb up to its rooftop offers visitors a wonderful view of the village and the entire valley. Adjacent to the Institution is a mosque that can serve as a gathering place for groups before they begin their journey along the Neighbors Path.

Look out point

From this point, one can visibly see the effect of Beitar Illit Settlement to the Wadi and the surrounding landscape. 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 Fuqeen.

Canaanite eras, and the residents originate from Iraq and Yemen

Battir is identified with the Jewish town of Beitar, which was a stronghold during the 2nd century Bar Kokhba revolt against Roman rule in Judea. Located on a steep hill to the west of Battir, the remains of the ancient town are known today as Khirbet al-Yahud, Arabic for «ruin of the Jews.»

The village is located in a sloped mountainous area that descends steeply towards what’s called Battir Valley to the north of the village. Due to the steep slope the stretches from its northern to southern parts, it has become a necessity to build stonewall terraces to prevent extensive soil erosion, in addition to conserve soil-moisture and to provide more suitable land for cultivation, though numerous stonewall terraces are distinctive to the area of Battir.

Battir

Battir is an ancient and biblical town, located approximately 5 km to the west of Bethlehem. It is said that the name Battir originates from the Phoenician word “Batara”, which means sever and slash as it does in Arabic. Other narratives refer the name to Beit At tair (the house of a bird). Battir village dates back to the Roman and