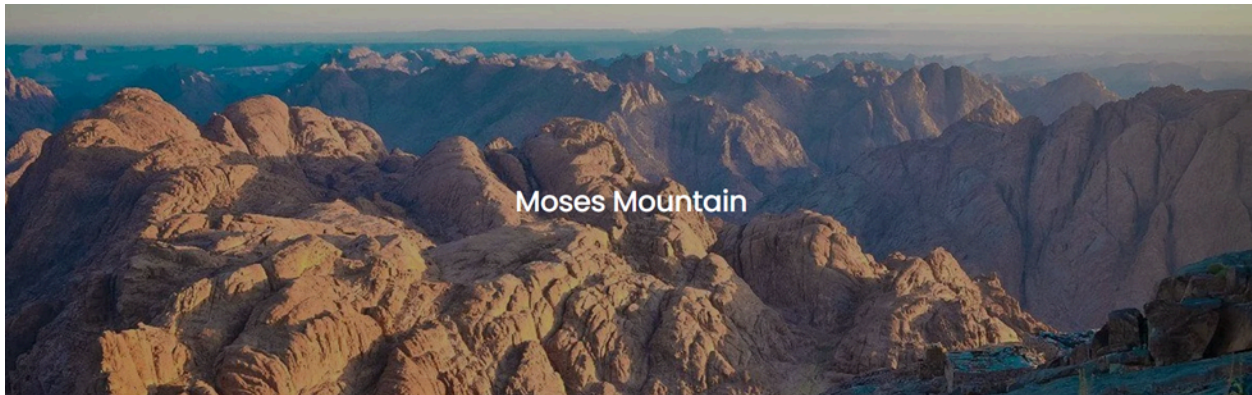


Awesomeness of Har Sinai



Before I started to look into the topic of Har Sinai, I was imagining some flat desert floor in the southern Sinai Peninsula with a cute flower covered mountain in the distance. I did not expect to encounter one of the most awesome places, the “mountain of God”, the meeting place of God with man, hovering at its base, where the camp was located, over 5,000 feet above the sea level.¹

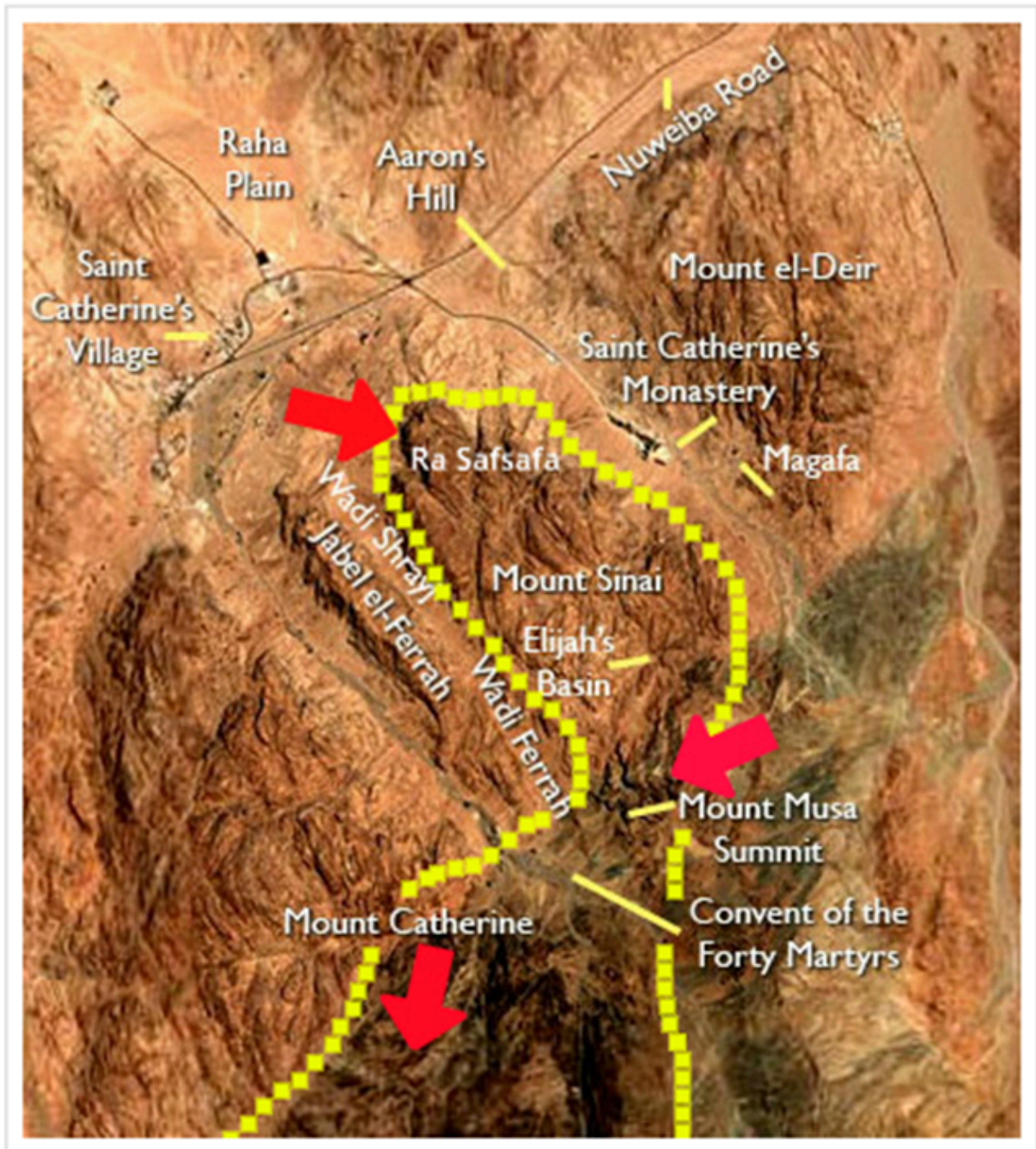
The whole Mount Sinai granite range looks from afar as a single peak, but, as you enter the group, you see that there are more than one. The highest mountain peaks are Mount Katherine, rising 8,550 ft. above the sea, and its sister peak, Jebel Musa (7,497 ft.). Mount Katherine and Jebel Musa are both much higher than any mountains in the Sinaitic desert, or in all of Egypt.

At the northwestern side of this very steep, two mile long mountain range, over 5,000 feet above the sea level, begins el-Rahah plain (Wadi er-Raha), which extends 7,000 feet in length, and occupies approximately one square mile. This plain is widely thought to be the location of the Israelite camp: “They journeyed from Rephidim, and they arrived in the desert of Sinai, and they encamped in the desert, and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain.” (Exodus 19:2).

Rising about 2,000 feet over the el-Rahah plain is Willow Peak of Mount Sinai or Ras Safsafah (7,046 feet above the sea level). It is interesting that the much higher peak, Jebel Musa, located on the opposite side of the range, is not visible from the plain. According to some, Ras Safsafah is the biblical Mount Horeb.

D.A. Randall, who travelled to Holy Lands in 1862, was impressed with el-Rahah plain and Ras Salsafah, stating: “The bold and frowning front of Horeb was directly before us, rising up from the plain in an almost perpendicular wall from two to three thousand feet into the air. The site was majestic beyond description”.

¹ See Exodus 19:4: “... And I bore you on eagles' wings, and I brought you to Me.”

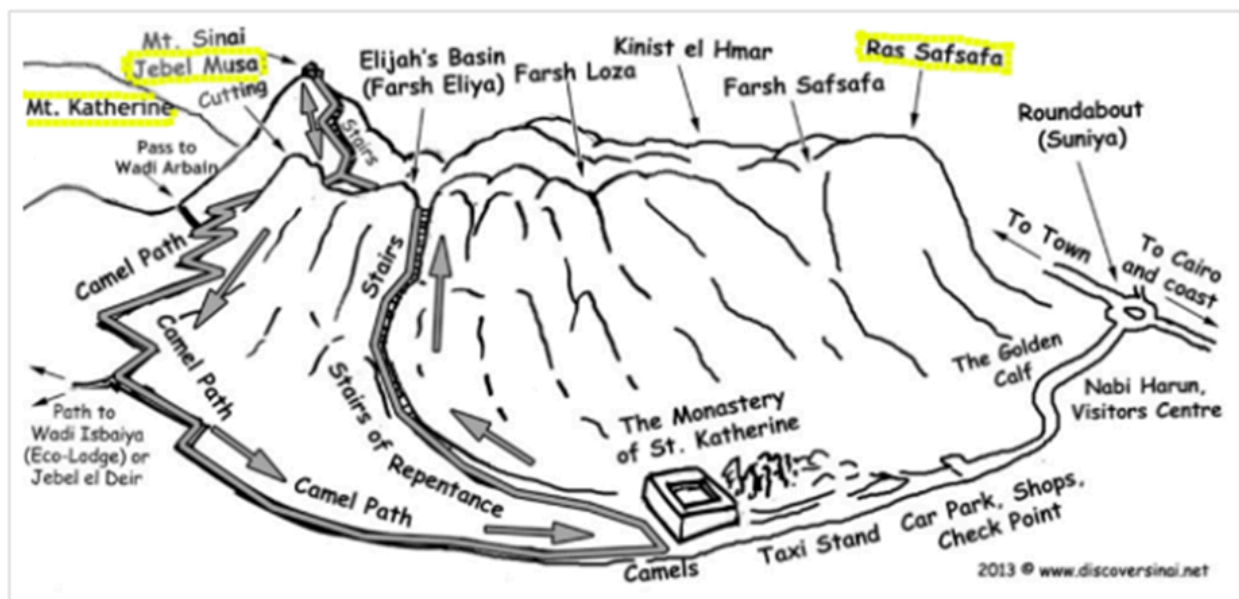


In the spring of 1882, sceptical Dr. Henry Fields travelled to southern Sinai in search of the biblical Mount Sinai. He climbed Ras Salsafah and was immediately converted: "When I reached the summit and looked down into the plain of Er-Raha, I saw that the conditions were met, and no longer doubted that I was standing on the holy mount".

Grollenberg shared his experience in the Atlas of Bible: "The huge granite formations are an awe-inspiring spectacle. The atmosphere, the light and the colours, the incredible stillness, all conspire to make the scene an unforgettable setting for the meeting of God with man".



Willow Peak of Mt. Sinai, Ras Safsafah, towering over Wady er-Raha.



Mount Sinai visitor center map



Walking down Jebel Musa, on the Camel Path



A side view of Mount Sinai from St. Catherine's monastery. Do you see a mountain face and the bushes in the oasis below?

Historical fact: St. Catherine's Monastery was built between 548 and 565, and is the world's oldest continuously-inhabited monastery. The monastery was built by order of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I, enclosing what is claimed to be the burning bush seen by Moses.

Interestingly enough, the ethnoarcheological research into Mount Sinai surrounding wadis by Perevolotsky and Finkelstein shows that “the wadis in the red granite area enjoy an actual water economy equivalent to approximately 15 inches per year, while only 2 inches of rain fall directly on the rock surfaces”.

Greater quantities of water, the most essential commodity for survival in arid locations, are available in the south Sinai because the granite mountains cannot absorb the rain. Rather, the water runs off into wadis, collects in pools, and can be dammed up. Beit-Arieh pointed out that “water accumulated in these pools can be drawn on for many months of the year”.

D.A. Randall on his visit to Mount Sinai in 1862, also noticed that there was a seasonal water source located at Ras Salsafah, just 10 minutes walk from St. Catherine monastery where he was staying: “A few rods from us, flowing directly from a crevice in the granite rock (!!!) of the mountain was a copious stream of pure sweet water. How refreshing, after the stale water we had so long to drink!”²

²See Deuteronomy 9:21: “... And I cast its dust into the brook that descends from the mountain.”



Willow Peak of Mt. Sinai, Ras Salsafah, close up view from Wady er-Raha.

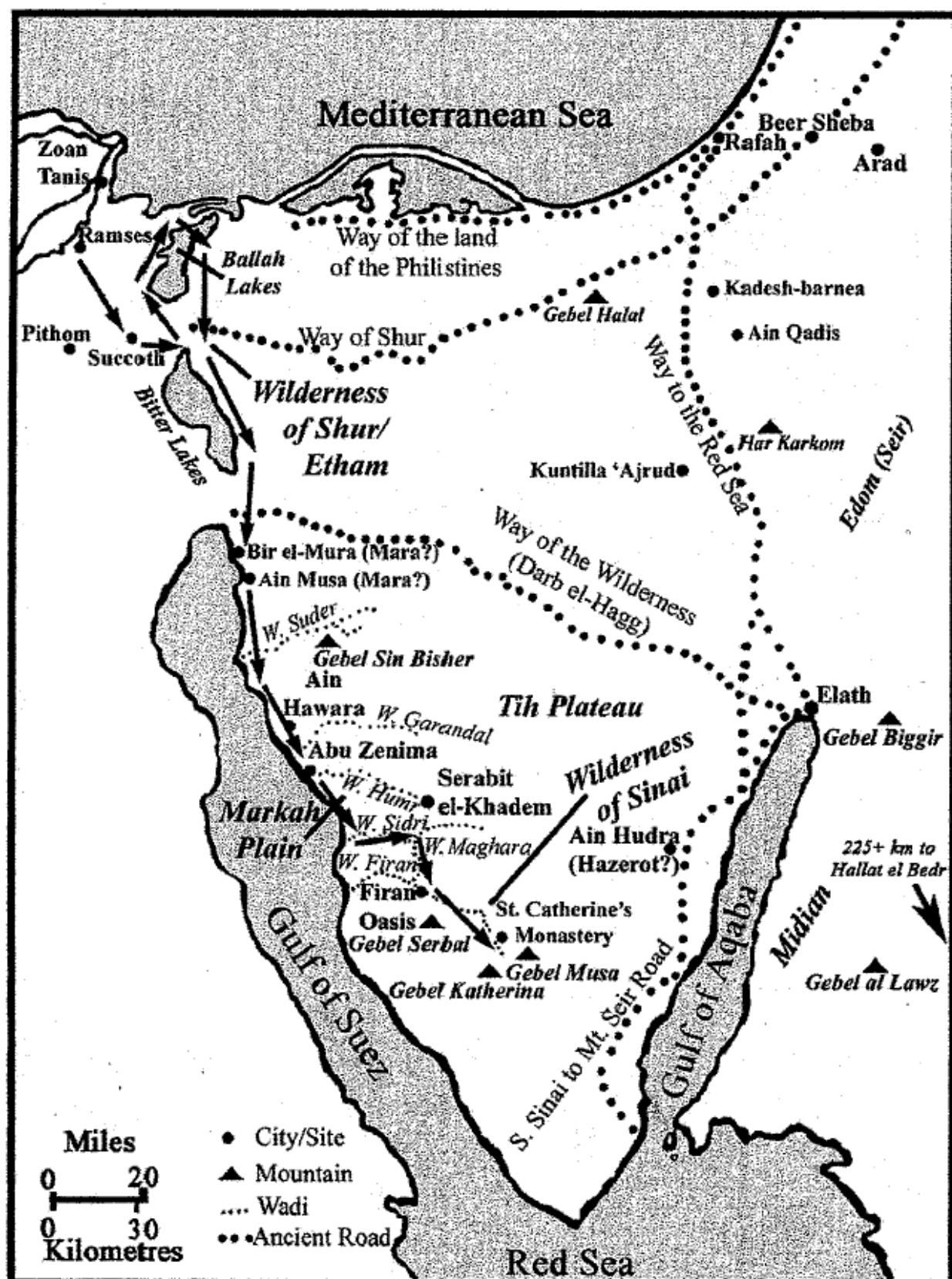


View of the surrounding mountain range from Jebel Musa, looking north. The Er-Raha plain is obscured behind Ras Safsafah ridge directly in front.

Another interesting fact about Mount Sinai is the travel distance from it to Kadesh Barnea, which is widely identified with the the most fertile oasis in northern Sinai, Ain Qudeirat, standing less than six miles apart from the smaller one, Ain Qadis: "It is an eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea." (Deuteronomy 1:2). Both words "Qadis" or "Quds" in Arabic and "Kadesh" in Hebrew mean "holy" or "sacred".

Modern roads in the ancient Near East often are constructed near and sometimes over their ancient counterparts because the ancient routes typically followed the natural roads provided by wadis. Following modern-day roads from the Jebel Musa region to the eastern coast of Sinai, and north to near Eilat, where this road would meet Darb el-Azza, the Gaza Road, and then north to Kadesh Barnea, covers approximately 320 kilometers (200 miles).

Breaking this figure into eleven travel segments would mean an average distance of 29 kilometers (18 miles) per day. This figure precisely lies between the 24 and 32 kilometers (15 and 20 miles) per day that was calculated based on comparative daily travel distances derived from ancient texts. Travelling from the region of south Sinai to Kadesh Barnea by the way of Mount Seir fits admirably the description given in Deuteronomy 1:2.



On the way to Mount Sinai



Egypt, Sinai Peninsula, Near Nuweiba, Desert Highway...

See you at Sinai !!!

Further Readings

1. ["Ancient Israel in Sinai" by James K. Hoffmeier, 2005](#)