



A photograph of a rocky mountain landscape. The foreground is dominated by a large, craggy rock face with various shades of grey and white. In the middle ground, there are several trees with green and some autumn-colored leaves. The background shows more rocky peaks under a clear, bright blue sky. A semi-transparent white banner is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing the title and author's name.

Walks in Jabal Moussa

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A call from nature



I was introduced to Jabal Moussa by my friend Ghassan Beyhum some 15 years ago. What started as a day hike became an obsession! The mountain kept calling me back, and I kept answering the call. Few hikes were not enough to discover this great mountain. I only had to take a wrong turn, to find myself lost in a moon like crater from which it was hard to find my way back. Hiking at noon, without a compass or GPS was asking for trouble. The fog covers the mountain with little exception around 12:30, and all sense of direction is lost. It was then, when with Ghassan, we heard men calling each other from distance: Sayah...Gawar...Amer...

Where are you? We went to the rescue to find a group of 10 Syrian workers, scattered all over the place, carrying cement bags. They were relieved to see us and asked for direction to the Cross overlooking Yahchoush. They had started their walk from Ahmez with this heavy load, to install a bell next to the cross. We walked them there, since it would have been impossible for them to find the way on their own. Needless to say that they arrived completely exhausted. But their mission was accomplished and the bell is now ringing.

Discovery the right way



There are many ways to access the mountain, and I made it a challenge to discover them all. Edward, the local shepherd was helpful at times, but it was at the expense of getting lost many times that I finally made it. I always enjoy the trail from Brokta. The forest there is very beautiful, and the view from the cross overlooking Ibri is breathtaking. It was on one of those walks when I met in the forest a lumberjack. He asked me what I was doing there. When I said I was hiking, he had a smile on his face and said: come on! Show me the map. I said which map? He said, you know, the one which indicates where the gold is! Most villagers believe that there are treasures buried in the mountain, and we hikers are looking for them! He then took me by the hand and said: I am going to show you a sign. He pointed to some engraving on the rock and said: is this what you are looking for? Most probably the gold is underneath it! I did not find gold, but an amazing Hadrian inscription.

Taking the Ahmez entrance is the easiest access. The trail is marked and goes East to West going through the old houses, with the option of ending either at Mar Jiryès or Mchete. Half way through, to the right, one can go up to 'the peak of Mzar' the highest point of the mountain where one can enjoy a spectacular 360 degree view across half of Lebanon. A bowl engraved in the rocks can be seen there. The legend says that Moses drank from it and hence the name of Jabal Moussa. During the Lebanese invasion of 1982, the Israelis went there to investigate the authenticity of the story. Thanks God they found no traces of Moses, and withdrew without claiming ownership of the mountain on religious grounds!

The most challenging route is the north face, starting from Chouwen or Ibri. The slope is quite steep, and the trail difficult to find. I thought to ask the villagers for direction. They were astonished about how daring I was to venture into the mountain. They said: haven't you heard? There is a crazy man by the name of Pierre Doumet, who brought wild animals to the mountain and is feeding them. In case you are looking to being devoured by them, good luck to you! I went on nevertheless, and it was not my last hike.

Seasons

It is thanks to Pierre and his vision, at the helm of the Association for the protection of Jabal Moussa, that there is now a preserved piece of Heaven, 45 minutes away from the capital Beirut, where both humans and animals can enjoy nature, pure air, peace and tranquility.

The Jabal is a great destination for nature lovers all year round. In winter, the snow gives it a wonderful white blanket. The autumn colors are amazing, and the mushrooms very special. A large variety of flowers blossom during the spring, and the grounds are covered with all kinds of colors. The summer is cool at the top, where one can enjoy a relief from the heat of the littoral.

