

Nahal Perat (Ein Farah)— In the Footsteps of Yirmiyahu

By Peter Abelow

History, natural beauty, serenity, springs and beautiful pools all come together at this breathtaking spot nestled in the hills, just twenty minutes east of Jerusalem. The drive through the Judean Desert between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, past Ma'aleh Adumim, gives no indication of the oasis of Nahal Perat, located at the beginning of the better-known Wadi Kelt, which lies just below the *yishuv* of Anatot.

The modern Anatot (also known as Almon) is presumably the location of the Biblical town of that name, which is first mentioned in the book of Yehoshua as one of the forty-two cities that were set aside for the Levites (21:18). At the time of the destruction of the First Temple, the prophet Yirmiyahu purchased land in Anatot to dramatically demonstrate his faith in God's promise that the Jewish people will return home after the exile to Babylon (Yirmiyahu 32). Anatot is once again mentioned in the books of Ezra (chap. 2) and Nechemiah (chap. 7) as a place to which Jews did, indeed, return.

Access to the Nahal Perat National Park is through Anatot. If you are driving towards the Dead Sea, shortly after passing Ma'aleh Adumim, turn left onto Road 437. After about seven or eight kilometers, turn right towards Anatot. At the entrance to Anatot, follow the signs to a narrow and occa-

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sionally steep drive along a winding road into the canyon.

The natural springs that emerge from the rocks were undoubtedly a source of water in ancient times for the residents living in the hills above. King Herod, who ruled during the period of the Second Temple, took advantage of this natural phenomenon and built an elaborate and sophisticated water system, which brought the water to his winter palace in Yericho, about ten miles to the east. Remnants of the Herodian channel can still be seen along the path within the park. Almost 1,800 years later, local Arabs took advantage of the volume of water flowing steadily from the springs and built a grain-grinding mill, parts of which still remain.

In the fourth century, the Byzantine monk Haritun built a monastery into the cliffs over the springs. A monk, who can occasionally be seen coming and going, now lives in the structure, which had been abandoned for hundreds of years. You can also discern the remains of a British pumping station and pipeline that brought water to Yerushalayim in the earlier half of the twentieth century.

Today, visitors can conveniently enjoy the beauty of this extraordinary oasis in the desert. Although sections of Wadi Kelt that are closer to Yericho are no longer accessible, the National Parks service maintains the Nahal Perat area. Children can jump and splash in the pools, and families can take advantage of the picnic area in the shade along the stream. There are modern, clean restrooms at the site, and National Parks personnel are available to answer questions and assist in making your visit a memorable one.

Photos: www.sassontiram.com