

On & Off The Beaten Track In

Timna Park

By Peter Abelow

*Wind and water erosion have left a mushroom-shaped rock, one of the many unusual and fascinating rock formations in the park.
Photo: Jack Hazut*

On a recent family vacation in Eilat, we found ourselves with a beautiful, sunny day but with temperatures that were too cool for swimming or water activities. The family turned to me, “the professional guide and tour organizer,” for ideas. I suggested nearby Timna Park, and by the end of the day, everyone agreed that it had been a wonderful choice.

Timna is the region described in the Tanach as Etzion-Gever. “And King Solomon built a fleet of ships in Etzion-Gever, which is besides Elot, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom” (1 Kings 9:26). King Solomon’s borders evidently extended all the way to the Red Sea and included this area. A visit to Timna Park today takes us back to that

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era and even earlier, into the period of Egyptian rule, millennia before.

There is a range of activities, appropriate for visitors of all ages, available at the park. Among the beautiful and unusual natural formations in the reddish stone hills are the famous King Solomon’s Pillars, massive columns of rock that project upwards. Visitors can follow a short trail up to the base of the columns and admire their beauty up-close. The descent is via a steep staircase that leads to what archaeologists have determined once was a shrine to the Egyptian goddess Hathor. Timna contains large deposits of copper, and this temple was likely a place of worship for the Egyptians who were sent here to mine the precious metal more than 5,000 years ago.

Within the park, there are many hikes and trails of varying degrees of difficulty. The Arches trail, which is suitable for children, takes one past beautiful natural arches eroded from soft, Nubian, white sandstone as well as some of the ancient copper mines. “Saucers,” round

depressions on the ground, provide evidence of the shafts by which ancient miners descended to the mines many feet below. Many rocks bearing traces of copper cover the ground; one fun activity is to have the children in your party search for rocks with copper in them. (Such rocks appear green.)

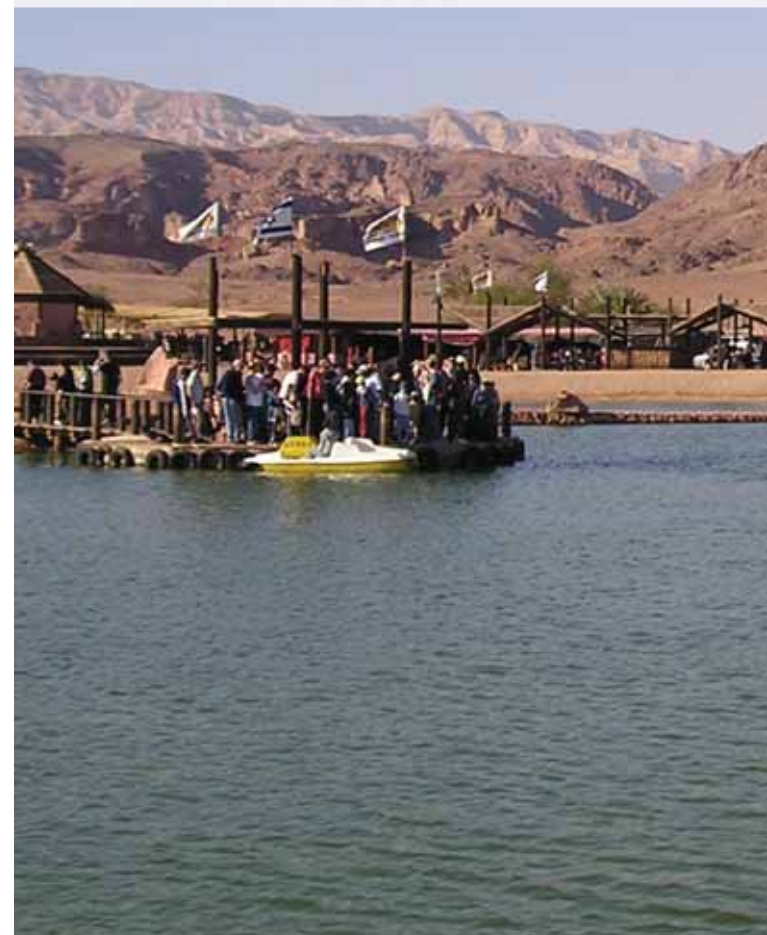
Another unusual natural formation is the “Mushroom,” a mushroom-shaped rock that was carved by water erosion and wind. Take a few minutes to stroll over to the rock. On the way, pause for awhile at a restored copper smelting installation where ancients extracted copper and melted it in furnaces in order to create copper bricks. The bricks were then shipped to Egypt for the manufacture of household utensils and objects of religious worship. Descriptive signs and diagrams help visitors understand this sophisticated process.

Undoubtedly, the highlight for my family was the stop at man-made Timna Lake. The Lake is surrounded by majestic mountain formations. We had our picnic lunch at one of the many lakeside tables,

and everyone enjoyed filling bottles with colored sand to create beautiful patterns and designs. Nearby, children can press their own King Solomon copper coins. The bottles, sands and coins are included in the admission price to the park. Also included is rental of a paddleboat. Relax and enjoy with your family! Camel rides are also available. Aside from the entrance area, the lakeside is the only place in the park with bathroom facilities and a shop to buy drinks.

The newest attraction at Timna Park is a multimedia exhibit with a revolving stage, a 360-degree projection screen and seven projectors. This fascinating presentation describes the geological creation of the park and the Egyptian culture that perfected the copper works. The exhibit is located near the park entrance and is an excellent way to begin your visit. It also sets the stage for a fun-filled, and potentially educationally rewarding, visit. Make sure to request a screening in English!

Most people who visit Eilat don’t take the time to appreciate the unique beauty of this wonderful place, only twenty-five kilometers (about ten miles) north of Eilat, just off the Arava Highway. On your next trip to Eilat, it is worth planning to spend an extra day, or at least an extra few hours, in order not to miss this special site! **JA**



*The man-made Timna Lake is surrounded by majestic mountain formations.
Photo: Peter Abelow*