

Makhtesh Katan to Oron

Maale Palmach

The Israel National Trail day 4 in the Negev

Closest Town **Dimona**

Difficulty **Difficult**

Length **20 km**

Duration **7-8 hours**

Recommended season **Nov – Apr**

Recommended time **Early morning**

Getting There:

By Car- This hike requires an arranged drop-off and pickup. The closest taxi services can be found in the city of Dimona.
*Through-hikers of the Israel trail will arrive on foot.

Hike Description: North to South

Starting Point: Small Makhtesh CG

Finish Point: Oron Phosphate factory

From the campground walk west along the dirt road until you get to the intersection with the road- south to Eilat and North to Yeruham. Follow the markers of the INT west up the hill on the west side of the intersection. As you arrive at the top of the ridge you'll notice the trail is following the ridge-line, in very gradual moderate angles.

After 2.3 km along the ridge you'll descend to a low saddle and continue for a little under 2km before you arrive at the Zafir stronghold. This is one of three strong holds that were built along "Scorpion's pass" a crucial section of the ancient road from Hazeva in the Arava valley to Mamshit and the center of the Beer Sheva valley. This small fort was built during the Roman period in order to secure the pass and protect it from bandits. About 50 meters to the west from the stronghold you'll come to a trail crossing. Head Northwest along the Blue markers (accompanied by the INT markers as well). The trail will, very gradually, descend along a wadi and after approximately 2.3 km, you'll cross another wadi with an acacia tree visible about 100 meters to the left. Head up the Northern bank of the wadi and walk for another 1.5km and arrive at a trail intersection right next to an impressive crack in the solid limestone that builds the flat floor of the wadi. From here you can see the next couple of kilometers of the trail below you in wadi Yamin and Wadi Hatira. Take the Green markers (INT as well) down

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into the wadi. The way down includes some loose rocks and steep rock faces. Be careful. When you arrive at the bottom, continue South, down canyon, for 700 meters along Acacia trees and salt-bushes.

Arrive at the meeting of the canyons- Yamin and Hatira. You'll notice a meeting of trails as well. Right at the intersection of the markers you'll notice a lush Acacia partly covered by a plant with red flowers. This parasite is the Harnug- No roots, just feeding tubes inserted into the branches of the Acacia. Camels and other grass eaters prefer the meaty leaves of this parasite on the tiny thorn-surrounded leaves of its host, and constantly trim it back, preventing it from completely taking over and killing the Acacia. Head Northwest up the Hatira canyon following the green markers and the INT markers with them. After 2 more kilometers in the canyon you'll arrive at a "dead end", facing two waterfalls- solid cliffs blocking your way. This same obstacle forced the young members of the Plamach, one of the 1940's Zionist militias, to create a new pass on the side of the canyon. During a 21 day march in the desert they arrived here looking for a hidden path to the water source at Ein Yorkeam. Using axes, ropes and sticks, and pulling each other up one by one, these determined teens and 20 year olds, found a way up the cliff and were able to complete their journey without being discovered by the british soldiers in the area.

Head up the steep trail on the west side of the canyon. You'll have to climb the rockslide, then up a ladder and along a narrow trail with occasional handholds and footholds. Right at the end of the narrow section look on the face of the rock to your left and find the inscription that commemorates the breaching of this pass in 1944. Continue up canyon along the markers and after 800 meters you'll start climbing out of the wadi on the right bank (Northwest). 200 meters later you'll arrive at "transparent" markers branching to the left (southwest) follow them down ancient carved stairs and arrive at Ein Yorkeam. An important source of water throughout history in this region, and the immediate destination of the young Palmachniks in 1944. After a rainy winter this waterhole is a great place for a cool dip.

Go back to the green markers and continue for another 500 meters, arriving at the Ein Yorkeam parking lot.

If you have an arranged pickup you can end the hike here.

Another option is to head northeast for 800 meters along the paved road to the Ein Yorkeam CG. INT hikers will continue Northwest, cross the road and head for the ridge along black markers. 600 meters from the road you'll arrive at a small tunnel under the train tracks. Enter the tunnel and follow the black markers for 250 meters to the west, crossing tilted layers of marine sedimentary rock.

The trail will then turn sharply to the north and head up along the "fin"- the edge of one of the tilted layers, for a very steep section of 300 meters. Arrive at the peak and catch your breath.

Head down, west, from the peak through two saddles, passing green markers on

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your right. Arrive at a split between the INT markers heading southwest and the black markers heading west. Continue along the INT markers along the edge of the cliff of the Large crater (Makhtesh Yeruham). After 1.6 km the trail will leave the edge of the cliff and slowly veer south and then east away from the crater, arriving, after 1km, to another tunnel under the train tracks.

The trail will first approach the paved road and then follow it southwest. Arrive at the Oron designated CG. You can also continue for another 800 meters to the entrance of the factory- the only safe parking in the area and a place to fill drinking water.

Attractions: Ancient trail, Hidden spring, Roman ruins, Challenging climbs, Tectonic cracks, Historical pass, ladders, view of the large crater, Colorful rock.