



Former Nazareth Challenge organiser plans anniversary event return

In 2014, Shaun Newton organised the first Jesus Trail walk for the Nazareth Trust. Shortly thereafter, he played a role in bringing back the famous sponsored bike ride, which was eventually combined with the newly established walk to form the Nazareth Challenge. Since then the Challenge has been a highlight of the Trust's annual activities, and in 2021 Shaun plans on returning to Nazareth to take part in a special edition of the event as part of the Trust's 160th anniversary celebrations.

Nazareth Trust: What was it like to run the first sponsored walk?

Shaun: Organising such an endeavour from scratch was daunting. Would we get the arrivals and departures right? Would the accommodation be satisfactory? Etc, etc. But everything worked out well in the end. The very first walk was done in reverse, so we walked from Capernaum to Nazareth. That year we spent one night on a Goat Farm where the accommodation was a domed eco-lodge that had developed a leak over the winter... This just added to the experience and everyone took it well.

Nazareth Trust: How would you describe the reactions of those first participants?

Shaun: They loved it. Walking where Jesus walked in the company of a guide

who explained the flora and fauna, the history and the Biblical significance of the route all left an abiding memory with the walkers. Spending each evening as a group sharing what had been learned that day after a short time of worship helped develop the relationships between the walkers and the sense that this was something special. Finally, getting up early on the last morning on the Mount of Beatitudes to see the sunrise over the Golan Heights with its rays hitting the Sea of Galilee truly reinforced the coming alive of the Bible for the participants.

Nazareth Trust: Today the Biblical significance of the route remains at the core of both the walk and bike ride. Beyond this aspect, how has the event impacted the Nazareth Trust?

Shaun: The Challenge has brought elements of the Trust together in many ways. The first two walks were arranged through a third party, but after that we did the bookings from the UK and then slowly the arrangements were all done through our SERVE staff in Israel. Over time this saw greater involvement from all areas of the organisation, including the provision of lunch for walkers each day by members of staff, with some using their day off to prepare, deliver and share in their homemade lunch. This made a massive impression on the participants and helped to engender the family atmosphere that exists amongst the Nazareth family.

Nazareth Trust: Lastly, why are you coming all the way back to Nazareth to take part in 2021?

Shaun: Being present for the 150th celebrations introduced me to so many wonderful people who are no longer with us, such as Fred Holmes, Nancy Martin, Runa Mackay and John Vartan, who so willingly took me under their wing to train and inform me of the great history that is the foundation of the work carried out in Nazareth today. The thought of being present for another anniversary fills me with joy and anticipation knowing that God is not finished with the work in Nazareth. The Trust's healing in the name of Jesus that started in Nazareth in 1861 continues to this day.

