

The Cedars

The Cedars in History

As remote as they are, the cedars are not untouched by history. The grove we see today descends from an immense primeval forest of cedars and other trees such as cypress, pine and oak that once covered most of Mount Lebanon including part of its East facing slopes. The Cedar is an historical entity mentioned often in the Bible and other ancient texts, often playing an important part in the culture, trade and religious observances of the ancient Middle East. Serious exploitation of these forests began in the third millennium B.C. with coastal towns, such as Byblos growing wealthy from the timber trade with Egypt. Over the centuries, Assyrians, Babylonians



Cedars of Barouk

and Persians made expeditions to Mount Lebanon for timber or extracted tributes of wood from the coastal cities of Canaan-Phoenicia. The Phoenicians themselves made use of the cedar, especially for their merchant fleets. King Solomon requested large supplies of cedar wood, along with architects and builders from King Hiram of Tyre to build his temple. Nebuchadnezzar boasted on a cuneiform inscription: "I brought for building, mighty cedars, which I cut down with my pure hands on Mount Lebanon". Prized for its fragrance and durability, the length of the great logs made cedar wood especially desirable. Cedar was important for shipbuilding and was used for the roofs of temples, to construct tombs and other major buildings. The Egyptians used cedar resin for mummification, and pitch was extracted from these trees for waterproofing and caulking. In the second century AD., the Roman Emperor Hadrian attempted to protect the forest with boundary markers bearing inscriptions, most carved into living rock, others in the form of sepa-

rate engraved stones. Today over 200 such inscriptions have been recorded allowing scholars to make an approximate reconstruction of the ancient forest boundaries. Two of these inscriptions, carved in abbreviated Latin, can be seen at the Museum of the American University of Beirut.

In the centuries after Hadrian, Lebanon's trees were used extensively as fuel, especially for lime burning kilns. Within the Middle Ages, mountain villagers cleared forests for farmland, using the wood for fuel and construction. The Ottomans in the 19th century destroyed much of the forest cover and during World War II British troops used the wood to build a railroad between Tripoli and Haifa.

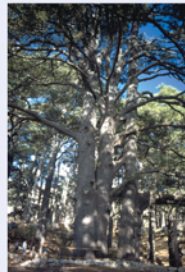
All the inscriptions of Hadrian are related to the karsts. They are engraved or resting on a Karstic support (therefore running erosion and erasing danger). Their distribution covers the whole Lebanese mountain at the north of Beirut. They are left on rocks or big stones either on cliff flanks or nearby footpaths. They stack up from starting 250 till 2000m of altitude. Nowhere else had the emperor such inscriptions engraved. Thus they represent a unique world Heritage. Dr Hani Abd el Nour "Decade", a publication of the Lebanese British friends of the National Museum



The Cedars Forest of the Maronite Patriarches



Cedars of Tannourine



Arz el Rab

The Cedar Tree Itself

Cedrus Libanus

Of the immense forests of history only isolated patches of cedars are found in Lebanon today. Growing at high elevations, often in craggy difficult-to-reach locations, these majestic trees still stir the imagination. In the north of the country, stands of cedars grow in the "Arz el Rab" forest in Bsharre others at the **Horsh Ehdén** Natural Reserve. More inaccessible are the trees near **Hadeth al-Jubbé**, whose shape has been changed by trimming, and the cedars near **Tannourine** and the **Qamou'a forest**. In **Jaj** near Laqlouq isolated specimens of cedars are still scattered on the rocky peaks above the town. Deep in the shouf district on top of **Mount Barouk**, cedars some 350 years old grow in an enclosed grove. These trees, which are in pristine condition, can be easily admired from outside the protective wall. Above the town of **Maasser el-Shouf**, there is another cedar forest, which has an extended view of the Beqaa valley. Cedar trees also grow in near-by **Ain Zhalta**.

The slow-growing cedar, with its long life span, requires at least 40 years before it can even produce fertile seeds.

There is three main kinds of Cedars in the world: *Cedrus Deodora*, *Cedrus Atlantica* and *Cedrus Libanus*.

Cedars of the Shouf

The Shouf cedars natural reserve is the largest to be found in Lebanon. It's occupying 15600ha; it is divided into four forests: A'in Zhalta-Bmahray, Barouk, Maasser el-Shouf and Niha. Blanketed with oak forest on its northeastern slopes and Juniper and oak forests on its southern slopes, the reserve's most famous attractions are its three magnificent cedar forests of Maasser el Shouf, Barouk, and A'in Zhalta-Bmahray. These cedar forest

Shqif Tyron, is located in the southwest region of the reserve, is also known as the fortress of Niha. It is a fortress-cave that overlooks Jezzine and was once used by the crusaders as an observation point on the road that linked Sidon to the Béqaa valley and where the prince of Mount Lebanon Fakhreddine II sought refuge to escape ottoman's capture.

accounts for a quarter of the remaining cedar trees in Lebanon, and some trees are estimated to be 2000 years old. The size of the reserve makes it a suitable location for the conservation of medium size mammals, such as the wolf and the Lebanese jungle cat, as well as various species of mountain birds, reptiles and plants. This reserve is a popular hiking and trekking destination, with trails catering to all levels of fitness. Bird watching, mountain biking and snow shoeing is also popular. From the summit of the rugged mountains, visitors enjoy a panoramic view of the countryside, eastward to the Beqaa' valley, Anti Lebanon and the Hermon Mountain, and westward toward the Mediterranean Sea.



Cedars of Jaj

Cedars of Jaj

In the mountain above Jaj on the western slopes of Mount Lebanon at between 2.000 to 2.500 m above the sea level, remain the scattered remnants of a once-vast majestic and glorious huge cedars forest of the "Land of Negao" that ones dominated the area. Five of the oldest trees measure about 3 meters in circumference and 15 in height. From these trees and not from others of the remaining groves on Mount Lebanon, came the wood for the solar boats, coffins, and mummification resin of the ancient Egyptians of the earliest dynasties. Most of the Egyptian maritime material as well as Cedar objects of sacred nature seem to have come from Byblos' back country "land of Negao".

Cedars of Tannourine

The Tannourine cedars forest natural reserve protects one of the largest and densest cedar forests in Lebanon. Ninety percent of the trees in the forest are cedars which represent 25 percent of the remaining cedar forest in Lebanon... The unique geography and topography (rocky terrain) of the forest has sheltered the area from excessive tourist activity. Visitors enjoy the impressive mountainous landscape, with cedars seemingly defying gravity and growing on extremely steep slopes. Also afforded to Visitors, is the opportunity to discover rock-cut or naturally occurring grottos on their hike, as well as rare flowers particular to this high altitude terrain, like the mountain tulip.

Not far from Tannourine and Jaj is located the Laqlouq ski resort.

It is advisable to visit the troglodyte dwellings and the abyss of Balaa and the one of Jouret el Abed in the Tannourine area.

There is Tannourine el-Faouqa and Tannourine el-Tahia. From the center of Tannourine el Tahia the fork off to the left leads to Douma a typical Lebanese village with its red tiled roof. While the fork off to the right leads across to Tannourine el Faouqa Hadath el Jobbeh Bsharre Qadisha valley.

The Laqlouq ski resort: There are three chair-lifts, three ski-lifts and three baby-lifts. Most of the slopes are suitable for beginners to medium ability, although one technical Alpine slope has been approved by the International Ski Federation as suitable for Giant Slalom events and international competitions. Ski rentals are available from local shops.

The Cedars Forest of the Maronite Patriarches

It has been founded by the AUT and inaugurated by the Maronite Patriarche Mar Nassrallah Botros Sfeir. It is located between Hadath el Joubaa and Diman. Each tree carries the name of a Patriarche since St John Maron, the first Maronite Patriarche.

Cedars of Bsharre (Arz el Rab)

The most famous cedars, known as Arz el Rab or Cedars of the Lord are those of Bsharre. Only this grove, the oldest in Lebanon, gives an accurate idea of the stature and magnificence these trees attained in antiquity. About 375 cedars of great age stand in a sheltered glacial pocket of Mount Makmel. Four of them, many hundreds years old, have reached a height of 35 meters

and their trunks are between 12 and 14 meters around. They have straight trunks and strong branches that spread



The great cedar at the main entrance of Bsharre cedars

great antiquity, the Bsharre cedar grove requires special care and protection. Concern for this modern remnant of historic cedars goes back to 1873-83, the time of the Mutassarref Rustom Pasha, when the 102-hectare grove was surrounded by a high stone wall. Financed by Great Britain's Queen Victoria, before her visit to Lebanon in 1898, the wall protects against one of the cedar's natural enemies: goats that enjoy feasting on young saplings. More recently, a "committee of the Friends of the Cedar Forest", organized in 1985, is attempting to control the damage and disease wrought by both man and nature that afflicts the trees. To improve the general health and appearance of the forest, the Committee has removed tons of dead wood and fertilized the soil. Various pests and diseases are being treated and lightning conductors have been installed for further protection. Three thousand meters of attractive pathways have been built so visitors can enjoy the grove without causing damage.

Also due for care and attention is a Maronite chapel in the center of the forest. Built in 1843 when these cedars were under the protection of the Patriarchate, the chapel is the location of a special annual celebration on the 6th of August.

The Lamartine Tree dried up by the lightning and subsequently turned into a sculptural monument titled "the Trinity" by the son of Bsharre Rudy Rahme.

Sometimes, one sees from up there paragliding amateurs.

their regular horizontal boughs like fans.

Also among the inhabitants of the forest are some thousand young trees, planted in recent decades to ensure the future of this national icon.

Like any other treasure of

great antiquity, the Bsharre cedar grove requires special care and protection. Concern for this modern remnant of historic cedars goes back to 1873-83, the time of the Mutassarref Rustom Pasha, when the 102-hectare grove was surrounded by a high stone wall. Financed by Great Britain's Queen Victoria, before her visit to Lebanon in 1898, the wall protects against one of the cedar's natural enemies: goats that enjoy feasting on young saplings.

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Cedars in the Lebanon (in part after M. W. Mikesell)

Cedars of Qamou'a

The mountain peaks at 2200m and is around 30km from the coastline. The forest encloses mainly fir trees (shouh) Abies Cilicia, besides oaks and flora. The few remnants majestic cedars are scattered in the midst of fir trees. It is a very diversified forest which once upon time was a huge cedar's forest. It is this area that was crossed by Nebuchadnezzar in order to get the cedar's timbers. In winter, one sees there ice stalactites. The site has yielded a stela dedicated to Baal & Ashoret (now in Beirut Museum).

• Guides are available for the pleasant walk through the grove. It is advisable to check the opening days.



CLIMB LEBANON'S HIGHEST PEAK

You can ascend the 3088-meter high Qornet es-Sawda (or Black Horn,) by foot or take advantage of a rough track suitable for four-wheel drive vehicles.

Allow a whole day if you want to make the entire ascent and return by foot. The initial climb, following the path of the chair lift, takes about two hours and brings you to a small hut at the head of the lift. From here you hike north along the top for another hour. Look for patches of last winter's snow and porcupine quills along the way. An easier way to the top is to take a road suitable for four-wheel drive vehicles that starts at Dahr el-Qadib on the highest point on the road between The Cedars and Yammouneh in the Beqaa.

From the summit, which is marked by a large metallic tripod, you have a panoramic view of the coast of Lebanon towards the west. It is said that on a clear day the island of Cyprus can be seen.

OUYOUN ORGHOCH

From the Cedars, a summer excursion takes you east over the mountain towards the Beqaa valley to Ouyoun Orghoch. Here tented restaurants cluster around a large spring fed wetland where trout is farmed. Flowing Cold water keeps drinks chilled on the warmest days. In the spring and early summer expect to be presented with snow instead of ice for your arak.

SKIING IN THE CEDARS

The scenery and the quality of the snow make the Cedars an exceptional skiing venue. The pistes form a natural amphitheater.

And the high elevation means the season usually lasts from December through April.

A French army ski school opened here in the 1930's and the handsome building, which now

belongs to the Lebanese army, can still be seen near the cedar grove. The chair lift, installed in 1953, is no longer in use but the main runs are equipped with five T-bar lifts. There are also four baby slopes with lifts. Ski rentals are available from local shops, which also arrange ski lessons with qualified instructors.

Snack bars, hotels and restaurants service the ski area. More facilities are available at the Cedars "village" and in Bsharre, 15 minutes down the mountain.

IN THE CEDARS AREA

The Cedars resort is set in an area of unusual natural and historical interest. In only 30 minutes you can drive from the crest of the mountain which soars nearly 3,000 meters above the resort, to the bottom of the steep-sided Qadisha gorge at less than 1,000 meters. Within this area are rivers, springs, waterfalls, caves and other natural formations as well as rock-cut churches, monasteries and interesting villages to visit. There is always the promise of a friendly welcome from the hospitable people who live there.

For details on how to visit the monasteries and cave churches of Qadisha, see the Ministry of Tourism's brochure, "One Day in Lebanon: Qadisha".

Lebanon The Cedars



Lebanon - Ministry of Tourism

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