



درب الجبل اللبناني
LEBANON MOUNTAIN TRAIL

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
LEBANON MOUNTAIN
TRAIL ASSOCIATION

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Voices

OF THE LMT



ACCESS FOR ALL
ON THE LMT

THE LEBANON MOUNTAIN TRAIL

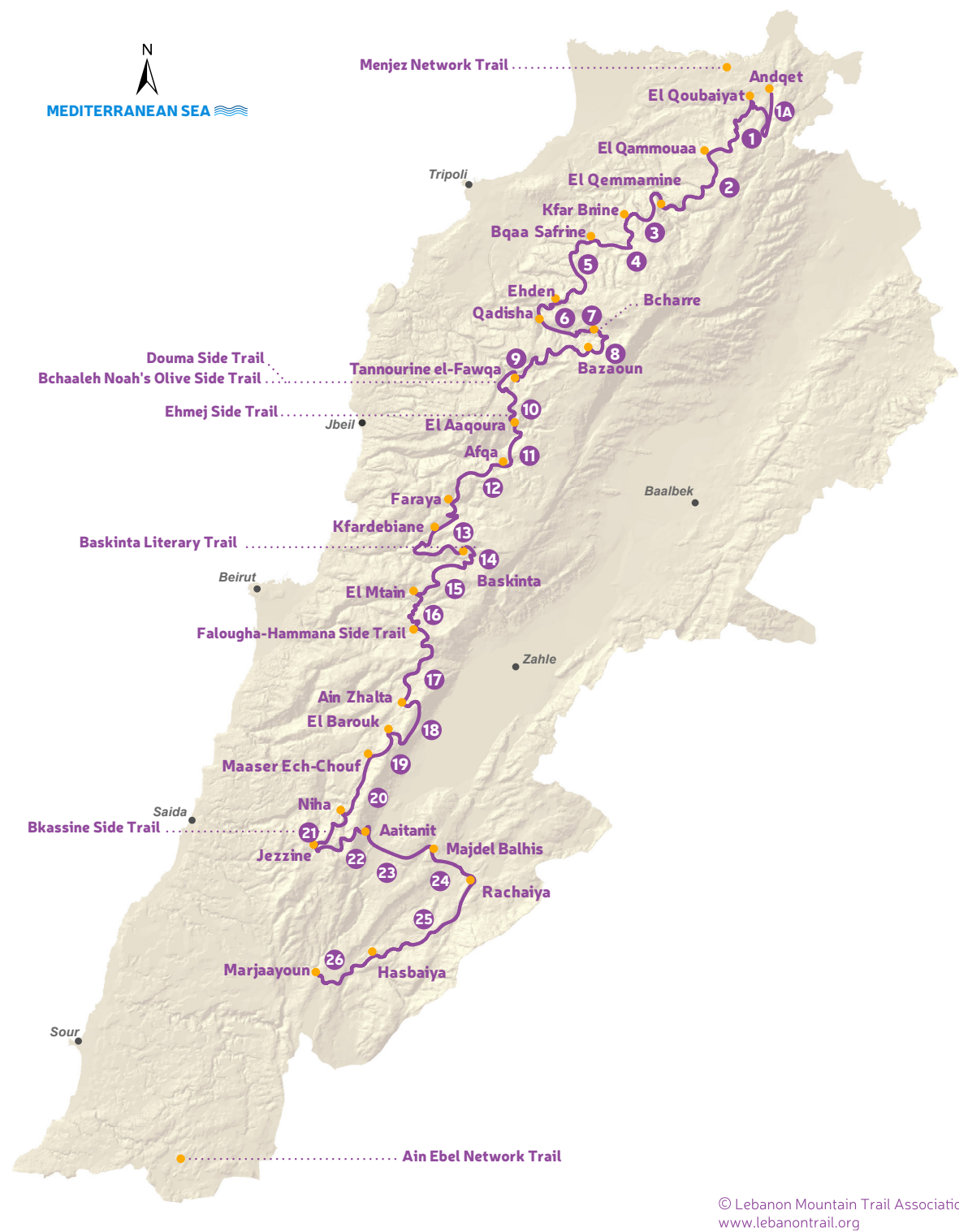


Photo by Gilbert Moukheiber

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear friends,

Our journey on the LMT started in 2007 and continues to grow sustainably, thanks to the efforts and commitment of staff, board members, active members and partners who trust and support the LMTA through various initiatives and projects.

2022 has witnessed an additional demand on outdoor activities in Lebanon and more specifically on hiking in different parts of the country. In addition to the adult category of hikers, we have been seeing more young people on the LMT and other local trails. This phenomenon is increasing the socio-environmental pressure on areas where hiking is on the rise, but it is also increasing the responsibility of donors and of trail developers and local communities to be more cautious by developing sustainable trails.

2022 has also seen the launching and development of new tourism products on the LMT. In February, the LMTA ambassador in Lebanon, Joyce Azzam, promoted the LMT as a winter hiking destination during her 28 day-traverse of the whole LMT in less than a month.

In June, LMTA launched its first accessible tourism project in five nature reserves, the result of which is that for the first time in Lebanon physically challenged people now have full access to three nature reserves located on the LMT -- Horsh Ehden, Arz Tannourine and Arz Chouf -- in addition to Jabal Mousa and Tyre reserve. There is more to come in 2023 for hikers with impaired vision and with other types of disabilities.

2022 was the year where LMTA trail experts got prepared to conduct national strategic work to launch the trail standards for Lebanon in 2023-2024. This standard, once approved by Libnor and the concerned ministries, will become the reference in trail planning,

development, maintenance and blazing.

2022 was the year of maintenance and upgrade of more than 600 km of trails on the main linear LMT trail but also on all existing side trails and new side trails and network trails. The LMTA was able to introduce one new side trail in Bchaaleh and two new network trails in Ain Ebel and Menjez. More side trails and network trails are expected to be developed in 2023. This maintenance and upgrade work was strategic in terms of renewing and strengthening our partnership with municipalities and other key local community members along the trail. 2023 and 2024 will be the years of creating LMT clubs on each section, side trail and network trail, with the local communities acquiring a more important role and assuming more responsibilities in protecting the trail.

2022 was the year of preparing and developing a new thematic trail, a first in Lebanon, a Geological trail in the upper mountains of Jbeil, expected to become operational at the end of summer 2023. It will be followed by another Geological trail in the Aakkar area.

2022 was the year of delegating the operational management of the Fall Trek and ThruHike to three tour operators who are members of USEIL. The objective of this partnership is to redistribute roles within the tourism value chain, which allows LMTA to focus more on the trail development, management and maintenance, develop new tourism products along the trail and improve other services with the local communities especially the local guides and accommodation facilities.

2022 was the year of developing the new strategy of LMTA which will allow our association to keep positioning itself as a leading national and regional reference in trail and rural development. During this year, a collaboration effort between LMTA and the Directorate General for Urban Planning (DGU) was launched



Omar Sakr
President of the LMTA

#HikeItProtectIt

of the LMT, ultimately as a 'National Trail' to be protected as a nationwide asset.

In this 11th issue of the LMTA and on behalf of the board members, I would like to extend a special thanks to the LMTA staff, members, donors, partners and to the ministries of Tourism, Environment and Culture who have been active in supporting LMTA to improve its impact along the trail and among communities living on the trail.



THE LMTA LAUNCHES A NEW LOGO!

By Joumana Brihi
Head of Communication Committee

From October 2022 until March 2023, the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association (LMTA) partnered with the Matisse Creative Collective (MCC) for the creation and implementation of a new logo and brand identity. A student competition was launched through MCC garnering interest from tens of students, among which 12 were shortlisted, and 3 finalists presented final logos to the Board of Directors of the association. Students were mentored by Leo Burnett's Creative Officer for the Levant and Qatar, and Global P&G Hub Mr. Malek Ghorayeb, who was instrumental in providing guidance and advise for the best possible outcome.

The new logo embraces the LMTA's positioning and its vision: it depicts the mountains in a clear and simple way, but also shows four mountain peaks representing the four regions that the LMTA hopes to start marketing in due time. The logo also embraces the shapes of the trail's blazing, integrating the colors of the LMTA's side trails (purple and yellow) of which we hope to have more and more in order to attract more hikers to the trail. Side trails offer easier hiking options, and loops that connect back to the point of departure, therefore better supporting local communities and villages where hikers would ultimately spend more time.



About the Matisse Creative Collective

The Matisse Creative Collective is an initiative that aims to tackle Lebanon's creative brain drain. From students, to teachers and professionals, Lebanon is bleeding its most talented creative minds. This is sad news for a country that prides itself for being the most creative country in the region. That is why Matisse Creative Collective was established: to contribute to retaining our talents, nurturing them and providing them with opportunities for growth and development.

The Matisse Creative Collective's mission is to harbor as many creative students as possible, from all creative fields, and pair them with clients in need of creative work to provide them with income generation and professional opportunities.

While working on each project, students are mentored by a relevant creative professional who can steer them in the right direction and help them fine tune their creative proposals to win the pitch!

This process provides students with hands-on experience, a better understanding of how client relations work, and an experience in professional pitching and presentations—ultimately readying them to join the workforce as soon as they graduate. Last but not least, students are given the chance to earn income that can support covering their tuition fees and complete their university derees.

To know more about the Matisse Creative Collective, visit the website:
www.matissecreativecollective.com



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HIKE IT. PROTECT IT. مشي لتحمي

رؤيتنا

أن يصبح درب الجبل اللبناني وجهة عالمية للسياحة في الهواء الطلق وللسياحة المسؤولة. أن يتمتع الدرب بالحماية من قبل الدولة اللبنانية والبلديات والمجتمعات المحلية، وأن يُعترف به من قبل المنظمات الدولية.

OUR VISION

For the Lebanon Mountain Trail to become a world-class destination for outdoor and responsible tourism, to become protected by the Government of Lebanon, Municipalities, and local communities, and to be recognized by international organizations.

أهدافنا

- الحفاظ على درب الجبل اللبناني والدروب المتفرعة وصونها وتطويرها.
- تعزيز درب الجبل اللبناني كمنتج سياحي ريفي.
- الحفاظ على الموارد الطبيعية وحماية الإرث الثقافي المتأخمة لدرب الجبل اللبناني.
- تعزيز الفرص الاقتصادية على درب الجبل اللبناني من خلال السياحة المسؤولة.
- البحث على تغيير السلوكيات من خلال نشاطات تربية وتوعوية

OUR PURPOSE

- To maintain, protect and develop the LMT and its side trails.
- To promote the LMT as a destination for rural tourism and well-being.
- To conserve the natural resources and protect the cultural heritage on the LMT.
- To advance economic opportunities on the LMT through responsible tourism.
- To encourage responsible behavior through targeted education, community mobilization, and outreach.

قيمتنا

- الالتزام
- التنوع
- الضيافة
- النزاهة
- العمل الجماعي
- التطوع

OUR VALUES

- Commitment
- Diversity
- Hospitality
- Integrity
- Teamwork
- Voluntarism

ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

STAYING TRUE TO OUR MISSION OF CREATING A TRAIL FOR EVERYONE

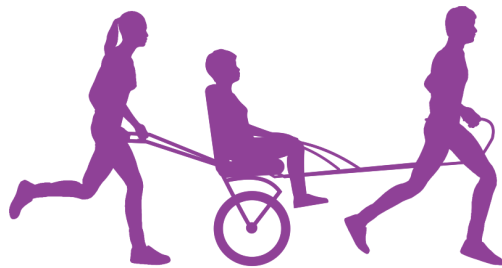
As with every hike we take, the only way forward is by taking many small steps. We now have decided to take this next step in advocating for diversity, equality and inclusion outdoors.

In the Summer of 2022, the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association announced the introduction of the Joëlette all-terrain one-wheeled chair, making the LMT and trails in 5 nature reserves (Horsh Ehden Nature Reserve, Tannourine Cedar Nature Reserve, Shouf Biosphere Reserve, Tyre Coast Nature Reserve and Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve) the first trails in the region to be accessible to everyone.

With funding from the Government of Italy through the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) and in coordination with the Ministry of Environment, the United Nations Development Programme has partnered with the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association to implement and promote inclusive and nature-based tourism within nature reserves and other protected areas in Lebanon.



The Joëlette chair enables any person with reduced mobility or disability, children or adult, to get involved in hiking with the help of at least two guides



“ I am a Paralympic Trialist from Canada and I was born a four-way amputee missing my arms and my legs. I have been on trails in Canada, Uganda, Nepal, Jamaica, Mexico and over 40 countries and I have never seen the ability to access trails like the LMTA has done with their able-to-access chair so that noone is left off the trails. Truly magical! Giving you a big arms up of approval!

- Unstoppable Tracey, Paralympic Trialist



The LMTA organized 2 two-day trainings on June 4-5 and June 8-9 in Tannourine Cedar Reserve and Shouf Biosphere Reserve respectively to introduce the Joëlette chair on the LMT and in selected nature reserves, as part of its Accessible Tourism Project.

More than 50 people attended the training in Tannourine Cedar Reserve, including people with disabilities (Angela, Rita and Elie), friends, family members and caretakers of the physically challenged persons, LMTA & UNDP Lebanon staff, Catholic University of Valencia experts (Pablo, Victor, Laura and Hector), Nature Reserves guides (Tannourine, Horsh Ehden and Jabal Moussa), partner Associations members (Sesobel, Darbessama, Enta Akhi, École de Montagne), Bchaale Trail volunteers, eco tour operators from USEIL (Union of Sustainable and Ecotourism Institutions in Lebanon) and one teacher from Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU).

In the Shouf region, we were joined by the trainers from Universidad Católica de Valencia (UCV), guides from the Shouf Biosphere Reserve & Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve, tour operators from USEIL, staff from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Lebanese Red Cross & Arc-en-ciel (AEC), volunteers from Scouts Du Liban & Guides Du Liban, Antonine University students, Ain Ebel Trail volunteer, LMTA staff and board members, UNDP Lebanon staff and people with disabilities (Ahmad, Kamal and Aicha) to try the chair.

The project introduced an entirely new perspective to sharing and protecting our natural heritage.

The LMTA is truly excited about the new experiences being offered to visitors and nature lovers, all of whom can now enjoy the great outdoors regardless of their physical conditions.



"I never though I'd experience what I just experienced today. An experience very difficult to put into words, but what I can tell you is that my heart was dancing of joy. While others can do this activity very easily, I was only able to do it thanks to the help of people with hearts full of love. I could feel how much these young men and women in the team were pushing with their hearts before doing so with their hands and legs and that was something truly magical. After being part of this experience, I can conclude that our country, despite all of its hardships, is still perfectly fine. Thank you!"

- Elie Tawk, Hiker with Special Needs

"This is my first experience on the Joelette Chair. I was thrilled and excited throughout the hike! Words cannot express what I felt during this event."

- Angela Akl, Hiker with Special Needs

"This collaboration project with Lebanon has been an enriching experience for us. We were able to share our training knowledge in using the Joëlette chair for people with disabilities. We want to acknowledge and thank the extraordinary work deployed by the LMTA to implement this ambitious training programme. The most rewarding part for us was knowing that people with disabilities now have better access to nature and that Lebanon can become truly inclusive. The LMTA is the greatest strength, and the ideal partner in bringing to life this accessibility project."

- Dr. Pablo Vidal Gonzalez

"Just because someone has a disability doesn't mean he/she can't do anything. We can do a lot of things."

- Ahmad Lion, Hiker with Special Needs

THRU HIKE RETURNS!

A FULL MONTH ACROSS ALL 27 SECTIONS TO CELEBRATE THE BEAUTY OF THE LEBANESE MOUNTAINS

After 2 years of absence, this year-long tradition, which is both an opportunity to reconnect with our country's natural, cultural and culinary heritage; and to show support of the LMTA's mission to protect and preserve the trail, resumed on April 6, 2022.

More than 85 hiking and nature lovers, including foreigners from 10 different nationalities, Lebanese residents and expatriates participated in the event led by our partner Eco-Tour Operators, members of USEIL: 33 North, Liban Trek and Lebanese Adventure who guided the way.

5 participants (Monique, Nadine, Tala, Hamada, Pedro) Thru-Hiked the entire 27 sections (470km) of the LMT while others chose their favorite sections and joined us on specific dates.



Accommodation was offered in guesthouses, hostels, small hotels and monasteries and the hospitality was more than wonderful. We discovered the extensive variety of Lebanese cuisine and were left with culinary experiences that surpassed our wildest expectations. We also encountered people that impersonate the trail, our mountains and this country! In each village, each guesthouse and on the trail itself, smiling faces welcomed hikers, shared experiences and love!

Despite Lebanon's ongoing crisis, the Thru-Hike attracted visitors from abroad and provided a gateway to promoting Lebanon's nature, culture and heritage amidst still uncertain times and a lingering pandemic that was still affecting appetite for travel.



“

"All along the LMT I saw breathtaking landscapes and walked through charming villages. We were welcome by locals who showed us their hospitality with the meals they prepared with pride. I learned about food that I had no idea existed and I even picked wild plants from the land and helped preparing dishes with them, but without a doubt, the highlight of the trip was my interactions with the people and the emotions I felt throughout the trek. Emotions that I still struggle to put down in words.

I was touched by so many and I think I touched some people's hearts. We deeply connected on different levels. We took care of each other physically and emotionally. We were each others healers and therapists. I wiped their tears and they wiped mine. I heard them laughing loudly and they made me laugh like I have never did before. They took care of me when I felt weak and I did the same. they fixed my blisters and my broken shoes. They carried my backpack. They lent me their socks, their warm jackets, their dry shirts, their sunglasses and their hats. They made sure I don't leave my things behind. They reminded me to drink to stay hydrated. We shared our food and it made us happy. We walked silently at times and had so much to share with others. We slept under the stars and woke up to the sound of birds. We watched sunsets and sunrises. We climbed trees. We soaked our feet in rivers and jumped in waterfalls. We sang out loud and danced like nobody was watching. We acted silly and playful and felt free. And this is only part of the experiences I lived.

The LMT meant a home that I never knew I was missing and a life changing experience I didn't know I needed.

I left Lebanon 33 years ago and I always called myself a citizen of the world but now, since the thru-hike, whenever I'm asked where are you from, I proudly answer : I'm Lebanese."

- Tala Farran, 2022 Thru-Hiker

"Every Lebanese should hike the Lebanon Mountain Trail, at least once in her/his lifetime. What you experience on these mountains is something very unique to Lebanon."

- Monique Bassila Zaarour, 2022 Thru-Hiker

"It is a unique experience. Lebanon is such a beautiful country and I urge everyone to experience what I just experienced. I am so proud of the result I've accomplished."

- Said Hamad Malaeb, 2022 Thru-Hiker

"It's really a very simple equation. We wake up, we have breakfast, we hike for about 7 to 10 hours, we arrive to the guesthouse in the other village, we have dinner and we sleep. And then the next day, we repeat. So it's really a very simple equation but what we go through during the journey is pretty different."

- Nadine Weber, 2022 Thru-Hiker & Former President of the LMTA

FALL TREK 2022

A 16-DAY JOURNEY CELEBRATING THE LMT AND PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM

On Saturday, October 29, both the Northern and Southern teams reached their final destination in Kfardebian, announcing the end of the this year's Fall Trek on the Lebanon Mountain Trail. The 16 day journey brought together hikers and mountain lovers from all walks of life as Fall painted nature and the mountains with its enchanting colors.

The event was operated by our partner ecotour operators, members of USEIL: Libantrek, 33 North and Lebanese Adventure.

Along with the Thru-Hike, the Fall Trek is meant to promote the LMT and create awareness about the LMTA's work in maintaining and protecting the trail throughout the year.

Two teams of hikers from various nationalities hiked for 16 days. The first team departed from the North, in Andqet, and the second from Marjayoun in the South. The two teams met halfway through the LMT, in Kfardebian, where the Fall Trek always ends.

Three hikers completed the Fall Trek: Rana, Darnell and Sassine.

The October and April Thru events on the trail are undoubtedly a time to discover Lebanon, its cultural and natural heritage, its local communities, traditions and culinary experiences; but they are also a time to campaign and advocate about the LMT, and to rally our audiences around one message, one motto that says it all: 'Hike it, Protect it'.

We will keep hiking as a reminder that our environment and our biodiversity too are threatened, that they too deserve to be protected, and that our future generations deserve to know the Lebanon that we have all known.



“ I think that something was taken from me , from this trail and this country. Something from my mind or my heart. I can't quite figure it out, so that's why I keep coming back to Lebanon.

- Darnell Bass, 6-time LMT Thru-Hiker

JOYCE'S WINTER TRAVERSE

THE LMT HAS SOMETHING TO OFFER IN EVERY SEASON

As the newest LMTA ambassador, and in the spirit of LMTA's core mission to promote the conservation of Lebanon's precious cultural and natural heritage along the trail, Dr. Joyce Azzam hiked the LMT starting on March 6 in Andqet, while showcasing the beauty of the trail as an outdoor winter destination.

Joyce's traverse was marked by harsh wintery conditions that she weathered until the very last day, highlighting the beauty of the trail and the Lebanese mountains in the winter. It was also marked by a warm welcome from local communities everywhere, a heartfelt support and guidance by all local guides, and a visit by the Minister of Culture to highlight the cultural heritage on the LMT and the LMTA's work in striving to protect it.

As difficult as it was on the legs, hiking on the winter solstice was much easier on the eyes. With snow blanketing the LMT, it was a great time to explore the sections transformed into winter wonderland.

Joyce's achievement and her love for expeditions, her country and its heritage is a call to action for all, to join forces in order to preserve and value the nature and culture that makes Lebanon so unique.



“*"I can't express enough the joy and pride I experienced over the last 20 days sharing this jewel of Lebanon, the Lebanon Mountain Trail!"*

Local guides showed me the way through this amazing winter landscape while 15 different and beautiful guest houses hosted me each night way with love, affection, and amazing local foods.

My LMT Winter Traverse reached its final destination in the Municipality of Judeidet Marjeyoun on Friday, March 25 and I am grateful to each and everyone who participated and assisted in this endeavor."

- Joyce Azzam



TIVADAR CSONTVÁRY KOSZTKA

A HUNGARIAN PAINTER ON THE LMT

In 1906, a Hungarian traveler/painter by the name of Tivadar Kosztka Csontváry came to the Middle East on a spiritual journey to “discover the true colors of nature”.

Upon arriving to Lebanon, he visited the Cedars of God in Bcharre and crossed to the Beqaa to enjoy the archaeological site of Baalbeck. These encounters inspired him to paint several large scale works of art, which today have made Csontváry one of Hungary's most iconic and well-known artists.

With the collaborative support and financial contribution of the Hungarian embassy in Beirut, the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association agreed to commemorate Csontváry's artistic legacy by placing an informative panel near the Cedar Reserve of Bcharreh, close to section 8 of the trail, shedding light on his life and works of art.

Under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture, the informative panel was set up as a reflection of the importance of protecting, preserving and promoting both the natural and cultural heritage of the Lebanon Mountain Trail.

The complete collection of the artist is available at his museum in Pécs, Hungary.

Link to the museum: www.jpm.hu

More About the Artist

Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka (1919-1953) is considered as one of the most well-known representatives of Hungarian painting of the late 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

After becoming a pharmacist, he started his career as a painter at the age of forty-two. From 1894, he enrolled at art schools in Munich, Karlsruhe, Düsseldorf, and Paris. Despite his academic training, he is generally regarded as a self-taught artist, one with “quasi-religious adoration of nature”, well reflected in many of his paintings.

Between 1890 and 1906, Csontváry travelled between Italy, Dalmatia, Germany, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In 1904, he made extensive voyages to the Middle East in search of the “true colours” of nature, including Egypt, Palestine, Syria (Lebanon), as well as Greece.



TRAIL RUNNING: UNE PASSION TOUTES SAISONS

Par Ali Kedami

4SeasonsMountainTrails (4SMT) est le résultat d'une passion! La passion du trail running et de la montagne. 4SMT est le projet de faire connaître et aimer la nature libanaise en courant. Quoi de plus normal donc d'utiliser ce qu'on a de plus beau dans notre pays, c'est à dire la montagne, nos villages, l'hospitalité des libanais et la Lebanon Mountain Trail (LMT).

Il y a plusieurs façons de découvrir ces endroits : par des randonnées, de l'escalade, une simple balade en famille dans des réserves protégées. 4SMT a choisi la course à pied en nature, le trail running. Courir en montagne est un challenge, celui de se découvrir soi-même en découvrant une nature formidable. Et pour cela 4SMT s'est fixé l'objectif d'organiser une course par saison. Quatre courses dans l'année, dans quatre endroits différents, couvrant tout le LMT, est un projet qui nécessite des moyens, et dans ces temps qui courent, nous espérons de l'aide. Nous avons néanmoins pu organiser une course cette année, le 25 juin dernier. Une course inédite et surtout un challenge exceptionnel et difficile.



“ Pour améliorer ma santé physique et mentale, j’essaie le plus que possible de passer mon temps au plus proche de la nature, plus particulièrement en montagne.

C’est l’un des meilleurs moyens de me vider la tête et de pratiquer le trail running. Cette chance m’a été offerte par 4SeasonsMountainTrails à Maasser el Chouf.

Cet évènement m’a donné l’opportunité de rencontrer et d’échanger avec d’autres coureurs avides et passionné(es) et de connaître le bonheur de l’évasion en partageant ma passion avec eux. Le plus important c’était de me retrouver avec moi-même, découvrir mon potentiel, et progresser dans ce sport que j’adore sur des chemins qui nous invitent à découvrir encore plus la montagne. Merci à 4SMT pour l’organisation et Merci aux habitants de Maasser el Chouf pour l’accueil.

– M. Wissam Kheir

La "Spring Maasser Endurance Trail 2022" (SMET) s'est déroulé dans le village de Maasser El Chouf, sur une boucle de 6 km, en utilisant la section 19 du LMT.

L'objectif étant de courir une boucle ; deux fois pour la course de 12 km, ou quatre fois pour le 24 km, ou sept fois pour le 42 km, avec à chaque fois une barrière horaire qui diminue de 5 minutes.

La difficulté était donc de faire et refaire la même boucle en ayant un temps plus court que la fois précédente.

Malgré la pluie et la chaleur, les participants (tes) ont apprécié ce moment d'efforts, de convivialité et de découverte. Découverte d'une course inédite et aussi, pour certains, d'une région et d'un village traversé par le LMT. Cette belle organisation est l'œuvre d'un groupe de personnes qui aiment le trail running, le partage et surtout, qui respectent la nature et la montagne.

- . Nayla Cortas, recordwoman de la traversée du LMT en 6 jours et 12 heures.
- . Neda Stevenson, 1ere dans la Cappadoce Ultra Trail en Turquie.
- . Carlos Akhrondis, amoureux de la nature et du trail running.
- . Toufic Shayboub, prêt à tous les défis pour aller en montagne.
- . Joseph Iskandar, l'espoir et un exemple pour les générations futures, 1er à Iznik Ultra Trail en Turquie.
- . Ali Kédami, votre serviteur.



Je tiens à remercier ceux qui nous ont aidés à réaliser cette course : premièrement nos sponsors, Coral Oil, Steep Production, B.Beirut Films, Aquafina, Taqa Snacks, Gnuts, Pic Blancs, Blat el atiq, Al Fundok, XXL Energy. Et nos Partenaires: Municipalité de Maasser el Chouf, Shouf Biosphere Reserve, Lebanon Mountain Trail Association, Fédération Libanaise d'Athlétisme.

Pour terminer, je voudrais lancer un appel à celles ou ceux qui souhaitent voir ce projet réussir, de nous aider dans cette démarche pour que le trail running se développe plus, et qu'à travers ce sport, la LMT soit conservée, choyée et appréciée.

MOLECATEN REPRESENTATIVES VISITING LEBANON

Staying true to their mission of contributing to the welfare of society and the environment, representatives of Molecaten company visited Lebanon and met with LMTA board and staff members during the month of October 2022 to discover more about the LMT and LMTA projects and their impacts.

During their visit, in order to better feel and understand the spirit of the trail, they were able to meet key stakeholders of the LMT, such as the President of a Municipality Council, the manager of a nature reserve, and the manager of an accommodation facility, along with local guides and hikers during the Fall Trek.

The LMTA is grateful for Molecaten partnership and the impact it is generating on and off the trail.



CAPITAL INSURANCE AND THE LMT

A FRUITFUL RELATIONSHIP

For the LMT, the Capital Insurance and Reinsurance Company SAL has been generously offering motor all risk insurance and workmen's compensation and Public liability coverage to the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association since 2016 - making it one of the most significant partners supporting our operations on and off the trail.

The Capital is a leading insurance company in Lebanon, providing a wide range of insurance products and services to individuals and businesses. With a solid reputation built on trust, reliability, and innovation.

“ The Capital has been serving the insurance needs of the Lebanese community since 1987 when the times were hard; solidarity and professionalism were needed by providing high-quality insurance services.

-Mr. Assaad G. Mirza (Chairman & GM)

In addition to its unique commitment to customer satisfaction, comprehensive range of insurance products and commitment to innovation, The Capital is a responsible corporate citizen. The company has a strong commitment to social responsibility and sustainability, and it has implemented various initiatives to support these goals. Via launching “The green vision” program to reduce its carbon footprint, by implementing energy-saving measures and promoting eco-friendly practices.

The Capital's support for the LMTA therefore falls within its strategic vision to extend a helping hand to charitable organizations and community initiatives, with a focus on heritage, sports, and social welfare.

We thank The Capital Insurance and Reinsurance Company SAL from the bottom of our hearts!



A SOLO JOURNEY ON THE LMT

By Elizabeth Yancey
Solo Hiker & Camper

I set up camp earlier than usual in a protected space next to the trail. After collecting water from the nearby spring, I secured my tent tightly and its raincover even moreso before cocooning myself snugly in my sleeping bag in anticipation of the first boom of thunder.

Thus began the night several people along the Lebanon Mountain Trail had warned me about, cautioning me to be careful or suggesting I sleep at a guesthouse instead of inside my tent. After almost three weeks of camping on the trail, however, I considered it home, and a storm wasn't going to drive me away. I woke up warm and dry the next morning, ready to embark through the sunshine on the last 43 km of my solo journey on the LMT.

I hadn't planned to hike the trail by myself. Honestly, I hadn't intended to travel to Lebanon at all. After attending the World Trails Conference, however, the LMT became my next destination. I aspired to backpack the entire trail, carrying all my gear and wild camping along the way, while absorbing the beauty and culture of Lebanon.

I arrived in Beirut with a friend in mid-October, and after a series of minibuses transported us seamlessly to the trail's northern terminus at the small, quiet village of Andqet, we began hiking the trail together. When we parted a few days later, I continued on alone.

Although I was an avid solo day-hiker and had completed multiday hikes and camping trips with friends, I had never camped overnight by myself, and the prospect of doing so for days on end was initially unsettling. My uncertainty evaporated, however, with each step through the juniper forests and apple orchards.

The prospect of hiking through Lebanon as a lone female didn't discourage me. I have always felt comfortable exploring trails alone, and I enjoy the challenge of relying solely on myself. The fact that I was in Lebanon, a country many westerners deem unsafe because of its portrayal in the media and government travel advisories, didn't change that, and I have seldom felt safer anywhere else.

I routinely woke at dawn and hiked until the last hour of daylight. I often walked more than one section of the clear, well-marked trail each day, finding the path easy to both navigate and traverse. I followed the trail descriptions and hallmark white and purple blazes, many of which appeared within sight of the previous one, relying on the GPS only when necessary to conserve my phone's battery.



Most locals were startled to see a girl walking by herself. Construction workers asked what I was doing, shop owners asked where I was sleeping and were appalled when I pointed to my tent, and several women and families invited me in for tea, water, or food.

Although we often didn't speak the same language, we communicated effortlessly through gestures, smiles, and online translators.

Along the way, I picked apples with Nouhad and Mariam, sympathized with Rabi's struggle to obtain a visa to join relatives in the United States, listened to Fouhad's stories of Lebanon's history, and drank coffee with Sunday hunters. The people I met became just as integral a part of the trail as the narrow footpaths, and I was humbled that they hadwelcomed me so graciously.

Although I hiked this trail by myself, I was never truly alone. I had a safety net spanning the length of the country due to the volume of phone numbers I received from new friends and acquaintances I met along the trail with sincere instructions to call if I needed anything and messages confirming I was safe.

I chose to end my hike in Rashaya, at the end of Section 24, rather than complete the entire LMT. It had been a transformative journey, and I wanted to complete it alone, without the guide required to continue through the last two sections of the trail.

I arrived in Rashaya feeling sore, jubilant, tired, and awed after trekking 400 km over a total of 24 days.

Experiencing the trail as a solo hiker and camper was a powerful experience, both physically and mentally, and the LMT was the ideal first long-distance solo hiking trail that set a high bar for subsequent hikes along other trails.

THANK YOU LMT!

by Rayan Barhouche
Passionate Hiker



It's 6 am. We've been hiking for two hours now. The sky is playing its favorite game: will there be sun or will there be rain? By the looks of it, we already know the answer. We find a pretty decent rock - the one with the least amount of tiny red spiders on it - to prepare our first meal of the day. We sit down, we're starving; we take out our mini croissants and our 3in1 coffee. As we're about to take our 1st sip, the wind mischievously blows all our stuff away and the sky showers us with its watery love. Someone witnessing this scene might think: What are these two cocoos doing out there? But we look at each other and, in that moment, we have this undeniable sense of knowing that there's no place we'd rather be.

In that moment, as we sit there shivering with our cold coffee and wet croissant between our hands, we have this inexplicable gratitude in our hearts. A sense of life coming back to our bodies.

A feeling we have lost living in this fast-paced busy disconnected lifestyle. We feel as if Mother earth is calling us home. To the wild. To ourselves. And we were there, ready to answer the call.

It's noon. The rain has gone to be replaced by the mid-day burning sun. Our backpacks get heavier with each rising degree. When we almost feel like fainting from the heat, we hear the heavy melody of a waterfall. It's almost like a symphonic mirage. Our footsteps suddenly feel lighter as we rush to get to this liquid heaven. We can't really explain it, minutes ago we were two weary beings dragging our feet around and now, magically, we're like two happy kids hopping from one rock to another splish-splashing each other, plunging our muddy faces and burning heads into the icy cold water, slip sliding as we cross to the other side of the river.

As our laughter merges with the loud waterfall, an inexplicable silence swiftly reigns over the place, compelling us to listen to it. We feel as if the rushing water was muted and peace settles into our hearts. In this moment, a flock of little white light flowers passes flying in front of us bringing a sense of a celestial Presence. It was only for a few moments, no words were spoken, but we both understood; We are not alone in this. The rushing waters resumed its busy-ness and we resumed our path, only now an invitation has settled in: to listen more and talk less, to trust more and worry less, to feel more and overthink less and oh boy do we want to accept it!



It's 5pm. We're in the South of Lebanon, the sun is getting sleepy and so are we. We honestly don't know where we're sleeping tonight. We're in a territory where we can't just put our tent anywhere. As we begin to question if this whole thing was a good idea in the first place, we hear a "Yoo-hoo" from far away. It was a gentle lady waving at us. As she had seen us coming from afar, she rushed and prepared for us some juice and fruits. We sat down and devoured the generous goodness and explained to her that we didn't have a place to sleep. Her first reflex was to offer her house, we politely and clumsily declined as we didn't want to intrude. She then made a few phone calls and worked her village-y charm and in few minutes, she had found us a safe place for the night. We talked for few hours, exchanged stories, experiences, different points of views but mostly a lot of appreciation. Us for bringing them some craziness into their lives and them for, well, saving us for the night.



It's 8pm, to say that "we're ready for bed" would be an understatement. We lay there exhausted, speechless and grateful. Replaying the events of the day over and over. Drunken with sleepiness and gratitude, our hearts whisper: Cheers to the two superstars of our story: Mother Earth and Human Generosity. Last May we decided to hike the LMT for 20 days from Marjeyoun to Tannourine. We packed our bags and our tent and we embarked in what would become one of the most memorable adventures of our lives. This was the first day of our journey, but it practically sums up what we lived these 20 days. A journey that helped us grow as a couple. It taught us to respect each other's different rhythms and weaknesses, to connect to each other and to nature, and to support each other in our physical and mental battles.

Thank you LMT!



**TRAIL
& CONSERVATION**

ILO/LMTA TRAIL CONSERVATION & EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

In October 2021, the LMTA in collaboration with the ILO and funded by the German Government through KfW Development Bank launched the "ILO/LMTA Trail Conservation and Employment Project" aimed to strengthen social cohesion and livelihoods through employment opportunities for the most vulnerable population and to increase the economic opportunities for the rural communities through trail management.

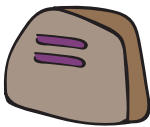
15 months into the project, our work continues, as we continue to create jobs and maintain the trail through and through, as well as its side trails.



53000 total working days achieved



More than 1100 workers benefited from short term employment inclusive of men, women and PWD



More than 590km of mountaineering trails of the LMT maintained and upgraded



Development of 3 New Side & Network trails in Menjez, Bchaaleh and Ain Ebel



LMTA's approach is to foster a sense of community & belonging between the field workers & a shared faith that each workers' needs will be met by their commitment to one another.

Implemented in partnership with the International Labour Organization as part of the "Employment Intensive Infrastructure Programme", funded by the German Government through KfW Development Bank, the project aims to conduct trail maintenance and upgrades on 33 sections of the LMT by providing short-term employment for more than 1,300 beneficiary.



People hike the LMT to be in a space that is as natural as possible. Our work part of the ILO/LMTA Trail Conservation and Employment Project is about respecting the land and leaving the green space as we found it - just a little bit more accessible, maintained and taken care of.



From building stone staircases and footbridges to clearing blowdowns and much more, our boots on ground have a complex dual responsibility: To reduce the trail's environmental damage while enhancing the user enjoyment.

The LMT will continue to bring communities together, promoting our rural and traditional heritage, in the good times and the bad; and supporting those in need through our networks and capabilities.



L'OCCITANE TEAM CLEANUP

ON SECTION 10 OF THE LMT

Part of the LMTA's mission is to promote the trail and create awareness about the dangers and threats surrounding it and affecting its sustainability.

In doing so, our team welcomes individuals, groups of friends, corporations or enterprises who are willing to support this mission.

In 2022, L'Occitane was one of them.

In line with the Group's corporate social responsibility and commitment to the environment, Groupe l'Occitane chose to partner with the LMTA in order to create awareness about the trail and about the need to protect and preserve Lebanon's natural heritage.

A cleaning activity was organised, involving a total of 20 persons : staff and executive personnel of L'Occitane, LMTA staff and LMT local guide, Samira Matta.

The main threat to this section is the excessive hunting that takes place there, leading up to the accumulation of a very large amount of hunting shells scattered all across, in addition to other factors polluting the area.

The team collected 33 KG of empty shells and handed them to Live Love Recycle in Beirut.

While contributing to a localized clean-up, L'Occitane's team was also able to enjoy a nice and easy trail passing through beautiful apple orchards and ending up at the natural wonder of Baatara sinkhole.

This collaboration with Groupe L'Occitane is a good example of how important it is to come together – NGOs, public and private sector - to create awareness about the dangers affecting our mountains and the LMT, and to contribute to a greener Lebanon.

The LMTA welcomes more similar partnerships and calls on Lebanese, regional and international private sector enterprise to reach out and work together to help restore our ecosystems and promote eco-tourism.



صوت من البراري

على درب الجبل اللبناني قسم 2

كريستيان أخرس
مدير الدرب

الاودية و الدجال الوعرة. السهول و الغابات الكثيفة، الينابيع و السواقي، انها عكار.

القسم 2 بين تاشع - القموعة و القمامين هو من الاقسام الرائعة.

نبدأ رحلة السير على الاقدام من منطقة مرتفعة حوالي 0761م عن سطح البحر و هي تقع في نقطة على طريق عام كرم شباط و القموعة، انها نقطة الوصل بين قسم رقم 1 و القسم رقم 2، حصلت تعديلات كبيرة على هذين القسمين منذ حوالي السنتين و قد تم تأهيلهما و وضع العلامات عليهما و صيانتهم نهائيا.

نسلك الدرب باتجاه الجنوب على طريق الأنكليز بين شجر الشوح واللزاب و اشكال الصخور الكلسية الرائعة. نتعمق اكثر في الغابات والأودية لهذه المنطقة فيستمر الدرب الانحدار تارة يمينا و تارة شمالا كالثعبان، ندخل في غابت ارز صغيرة و نبدأ بالنزول على الدرب نحو وادي البلاط مروراً بعينها تحت احدى الشوحات المعمرة، فعلا شجر الشوح عملاق في هذه المنطقة، يتوزع يمينا و شمالا على التلال و الاودية بأفضلية على الأنواع الخرى مثل اللزاب و البرو و العرع و الأرز وغيرها.

نقطع وادي البلاط لنسلك طريق ترابي للعود و نسلك درب آخر يؤدي مباشرة الى عين الحجل، استراحة قصيرة و مياه عذبة لا مجال لتلويثها من المحيط، نتابع لنسلك طريق ترابي آخر وصولاً الى مفترق طرق، نسلح ممر للمشاة صعوداً مروراً بمنظر و اشكال جيولوجية رائعة حيث نمر مسلك ضيق يمر جنب مصفر لجسر طبيعي او قنطرة صخرية جميلة جداً.

نكمل مسيرة المشي لتتعمق اكثر على منحدرات جبل العروبة اعلى جبل في عكار 5322م و يسمى قلعة العروبة نسبة للأشكال صخرية جميلة منتشرة على قممه، نصل الى طريق ترابي لنغير منطقة عين المشلة و عين الخيار نزولاً نحو شير كزير. من هذه النقطة نكمل نحو طريق ترابية تصلنا ب سهلة المرح المحاطة بشجر اللزاب. نكمل المسير الى منطقة العيون ف عين الحجل، و يبدأ النزول على الطريق الترابية في وادي حقل الخربة مروراً تحت مغارة التبن، بعد عدة دقائق من السير نزولاً نترك الطريق لنغير مجرى ماء ناشف و تسلك درب جميل يصل الى عين كاف التين بعد ما ان نقطع نهر وادي مشمش، نستريح بعد ان نكون قد انهينا النزول المنحدر نتابع على طريق ترابية مستحدثة من ثم درب جميل وصولاً الى قرية القمامين على ارتفاع يناهز ال 068م، عند العين يكون القسم 2 قد انتهى!

تعليمات مهمة:

بعض من مسارات القسم 51 يمر على دروب القديمة والتي ما يزال يسلكها بعض من ابناء المنطقة. على من يقرر سلوك هذا القسم ان يكون متمرس بالمشي في الجبال نظراً لصعوبة بعض الممرات من جهة الجهد الجسدي وغيرها لكن ليس من ممرات خطرة كما ان المسار لا يتعدى مسافة الخمسة عشرة كيلومترات ونصف تقريبا. يمكنكم سلوك هذا المسار في فصل الشتاء واستعمال معدات خاصة فهو يكتسي معظمه بالثلوج لبضعة أيام و حسب المواسم و قساوة الفصول و يبقى المسلك رطباً و زلقاً في بعض الاماكن. حذار سلوك دروب المشي بمفردك، تأكد من الحصول على المعلومات الكافية عن المسار خاصة اذا كانت الينابيع متوفرة والا تزود بالحاجة المطلوبة. لا تنسى تحضير كل لوازم و عدة المشي وعلبة اسعافات اولية و التأكد من احوال الطقس و طريق الوصول و الخروج من القرى المحيطة. حافظ على نظافة البراري ابقى راسب ما اكلت و تخلص منهم في اقرب مستوعب للمهملات و لا تترك شئ خلفك لأن الحيوانات ليست بحاجة الى اكلك للبقاء على قيد الحياة. ابقى على المسار المحدد من قبل الجمعية ولا تقوم باختصار المسار عند المنعطفات فهذا الأمر يؤدي الى تهوّر الدرب، لا تقطف الأزهار او الأعشاب فهذا مكانها الأصلي، لا تشعل النار الا عند الضرورة، في حال حدوث حادث ما اينما كنت اتصل على ال 041 (الصليب الأحمر) و اعطي معلومات كافية عن موقع الحادث و نوعيته او اتصل على الرقم الموجود على صفحة الموقع الإلكتروني للجمعية، اخيرا اركن سيارتك في مكان لا يزعج السكان المحليين و ابقى اسمك ورقم هاتفك واضح على الجهة الامامية ناحية السائق.



**COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

A POSITIVE IMPACT

ILO/LMTA TRAIL CONSERVATION & EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

by Lea Ghanem
Project and Fundraising Coordinator

The LMTA's mission to protect and preserve the trail is deeply rooted in its sound and trust-based relationships with local communities thanks to the work that is done on a daily basis across all sections of the trail; and to the trail's contribution to ecotourism in rural areas.

It is thanks to our team's ongoing and relentless commitment to this mission that the ILO/LMTA Trail Conservation and Employment Project, funded by the German Government through KfW Development Bank, was launched in 2021 and continues to be implemented across 590 kilometers encompassing the LMT's main and side trails.

Employment from within local communities is at the very core of this project. Under the ILO's guidance, women participation and decent work principle have been implemented throughout and the LMTA's relationship with local communities was only made stronger and more productive.

The project contributed to strengthening social cohesion and livelihoods through employment opportunities for the most vulnerable population and increased the economic opportunities for the rural communities through trail management by achieving three main goals. First, short-term employment and immediate availability of income were provided for vulnerable unskilled/semi-skilled workers in rural communities, inclusive of women, youth, and people with disabilities (PWD) capable of performing specific tasks, such as drivers, distribution of PPEs and refreshments to workers. Second, existing trails benefited from maintenance and upgrades, new trails were developed, and opportunities were identified to further expand the trail network. Lastly, capacity building to Cash for Work participants on trails management and maintenance was provided including identifying and empowering local key actors to become LMT stewards.

To this day, more than 1,300 direct beneficiaries have been provided with work opportunities for a total of 53,300 working days. In addition, the project offered opportunities for indirect beneficiaries such as the local guides of the LMT, the owners of guesthouses, owners of the rental venues to house the training sessions, municipalities, tools, and equipment shop owners, local producers of refreshments and nutritional snacks for workers, etc.



The LMTA ensured that not only people benefited from the project but also the environment to preserve the local trail and trailside environment. Environmental awareness and trail protection principles were communicated to the workers while on site covering three main topics. Firstly, ethical and decent approaches to fauna and flora systems are communicated on a daily basis with workers and beneficiaries. Secondly, coordinators and senior supervisors constantly monitored the pruning and clearing of trees and bushes by using adequate techniques, tools and safety measures. Lastly, wastes picked up from the environment were handed to the municipalities on all working sites, and sorting and recycling activities took place wherever possible.

The village of Hasbaiya restored an old saray abandoned for more than a decade and developed a playground in its yard. Today, following the restoration that took place in collaboration with the local municipality, this saray can host social and artistic events.

In Hasbaya, Menjez and the villages surrounding the Shouf reserve, a zero-waste approach was adopted by using byproducts from the trail maintenance activities such as small branches and bushes from pruning, soil from cleaned paths and creating an active compost mechanism that would serve the reserve, local community and the surrounding agricultural lands.

In Bkassine and especially in the protected pine forest area, the municipality has provided a wood and shrub shredder to break down into shreds all by-products outsourced from the daily maintenance and cleaning operations.

Last but not least, upon request from the Municipality and the Civil Defense in the villages of Aandqet and El Qobayat, the LMTA team and workers opened and cleared many paths in the forests, thus providing firefighters with quicker and easier access in case of forest fire incidents.

Overall, the interventions occurring during this project have had a positive impact on the social and environmental side of the villages on the LMT trail by providing work opportunities to their people and building capacity to promote and ensure the sustainable management of their environment. In the future, these changes will hopefully attract more visitors to hike on the LMTA and help generate income for those areas all while respecting the trail's environment and keeping it proper and wholesome for other hikers to experience.





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EDUCATION

4-DAY EDUCATIONAL TRIP

ABTAL EL BI'A PROGRAM

The LMTA is committed to environmental education for young Lebanese who are the generations of the future that will participate in shaping attitudes and behaviours towards our natural heritage. The LMTA's education activities contribute to empowering youth by promoting environmental behavior and ecological awareness to ensure that youth in our communities are prepared for their own environmental leadership journey.

With support from the LMTA's education committee and volunteers who have been involved in Abtal El Bi'a for several years, 2022 saw the relaunch of our annual summer camp.

A 4-day educational trip took place on July 2,3,4 and 5 with 15 kids selected and sponsored by Holdal Group and Fattal Group in Tannourine and Majdel Akoura.

The LMTA would like to thank Holdal/Fattal Group and all the wonderful families for their trust. In times of difficulties and hardships, spreading knowledge is more important than ever.



These activities were part of the Local Development Programme for Urban Areas in North Lebanon (UDP_NL). The Programme was implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH in partnership with the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association, MoSA, and the Union of Dannieh Municipalities. The programme is co-funded by the European Union and Germany.

THERAPEUTIC HIKES FOR CHILDREN

BEIRUT RELIEF INITIATIVE

The LMTA's educational team organized 2 therapeutic hikes for children on July 21 and 25 on Sections 10 and 11 of the LMT.

We were assisted by trained counselors as part of our #BeirutReliefInitiative sponsored by the Australian co-Ambassadors' fundraising following the Beirut explosion.

Research studies have always shown that interacting with nature offers a sense of connectiveness to the natural world which decreases anxiety, improves mood and increases self-esteem.

During our therapeutic hikes, we follow nature based mental wellness techniques such as mindfulness, meditation and grounding skills while periodically stopping to observe nature and the natural life.

Those activities are organized in collaboration with Rosaire Missionary Group.

The Beirut Relief Initiative helped families and children to reconnect with their country, and appreciate the beauty that is still around despite all of the hardships, and what is worth protecting and fighting for.



A thank you to our co-Australian LMT Ambassadors, Cathy Laird and Loubna Haika, who have put together a fundraising campaign for the Beirut Relief Initiative, in particular for the therapeutic hikes. On top of that, individual donations were received for the accomplishment of this activity.

GUIDED HIKES FEATURING EDIBLE PLANTS ON THE LMT

The LMT offers a wealth of natural and cultural features and treasures that we truly encourage our community to explore and discover throughout the year. That is why we have launched a series of events that will be organised throughout the coming months and years, each time highlighting one or more of the trail's unique offerings.

The first ever such event was launched on December 17 on the Ehmej Side Trail with a focus on edible wild plants found in the area, and more generally across Lebanon.

The LMTA wild plants' specialist, Takla Koueiry, brought her wilderness awareness skills to help the participants identify some of the wild edibles growing in the area like "دردار", "برقوق", "زعرور احمر", "زوف" and discover their nutritional values and uses. The LMT experienced guide, Samira Matta, also provided hikers with valuable insights and competent advices during the hike.

At the end of the activity, participants were invited to take in a few stories and a cup of wild tea at Arz Ehmej. The group of hikers left the experience with new knowledge and more connections to the beautiful nature of Lebanon! It is definitely rewarding to know our plant neighbors better; they are beautiful, fascinating and useful!

Stay tuned for more events to come in 2023!



“ Beautiful initiative by the LMTA aimed at creating awareness about aspects of our wildlife that we knew little about. A truly lovely ambiance within the group added even more to this pleasant experience.

- Haifa Kassir

“ Before going on the wild herb foraging hike organised by the LMTA, my experience of foraging was mainly limited to drinking infusions of wildflowers at night. On the walk, I learnt that foraging is the best way to connect with nature by relating to the vast kingdom of plants it offers. Takla Khoueri, our guide who carries traditional knowledge and generational expertise responsibly, ensured we enjoyed our exploration of the land's offerings and left enough of the plant to rejuvenate and preserve itself for the next season.

- Lea Ghanem



LMT SECTIONS

*ST: Side Trail
** LT: Literary Trail

Moderate
Challenging

Difficult
Very Difficult

Section #	From	To	Distance in Km	North to South		South to North		
				Elevation	Difficulty Level	Elevation	Difficulty Level	
1A	Andqet	El Qoubaiyat	17	+663	-720		-663	+720
1	El Qoubaiyat	Tashea	18.5	+1216	-642		-1216	+642
2	Tashea	el Qemmamine	23	+1022	-1511		-1022	+1511
3	el Qemmamine	Kfar Bnine	9.3	+922	-587		-922	+587
4	Kfar Bnine	Bqaa Safrine	14.7	+1060	-1027		-1060	+1027
5	Bqaa Safrine	Ehden	18	+1143	-897		-1143	+897
6	Ehden	Qozhaya/Qadisha valley	10.4	+484	-959		-484	+959
7	Qozhaya/Qadisha valley	Bcharre	13.7	+1277	-797		-1277	+797
8	Bcharre	Bazaoun	19.3	+897	-912		-897	+912
9	Bazaoun	Tannourine el-Fauqa	19.7	+1210	-1109		-1210	+1109
Douma ST* p1	Baatara (via Sikket el Sham)	Douma	6.3	+213	-691		-213	+691
Douma ST p2	Baatara (via Foghri Mountain)	Douma	7.5	+704	-216		-704	+216
10	Tannourine el-Fauqa	El Aaqoura	17.2	+980	-1068		-980	+1068
Ehmej ST p1	Ehmej	Baatara Sinkhole	8.7	+508	-667		-508	+667
Ehmej ST p1	Ehmej	El Aaqoura	15.8	+1057	-777		-1057	+777
11	El Aaqoura	Afqa	20	+932	-958		-932	+958
12	Afqa	Faraya	18.2	+946	-803		-946	+803
13	Faraya	Kfardebiane	12.5	+357	-753		-357	+753
14	Kfardebiane	Baskinta	21.3	+947	-1004		-947	+1004
Baskinta LT**	Saydet Nih Convent	Mikhael Naime Mausoleum	24	+1200	-850		-1200	+850
15	Baskinta	El Mtain	17.5	+1004	-1099		-1004	+1099
16	El Mtain	Falougha	14.7	+1072	-607		-1072	+607
17	Falougha	Ain Zhalta	18	+560	-936		-560	+936
18	Ain Zhalta	El Barouk	22	+1093	-1221		-1093	+1221
19	El Barouk	Maaser ech-Chouf	14	+1067	-668		-1067	+668
20	Maaser ech-Chouf	Niha	14	+518	-629		-518	+629
21	Niha	Jezzine	16	+852	-918		-852	+918
Bkassine ST p1	Niha Fort	Bkassine	7.5	+298	-678		-298	+678
Bkassine ST p2	Bkassine	Jezzine	15	+615	-433		-615	+433
22	Jezzine	Aaitanit	15	+951	-881		-951	+881
23	Aaitanit	Kaoukaba Bou Arab	15.3	+716	-624		-716	+624
24	Kaoukaba Bou Arab	Rachaiya	8.7	+458	-246		-458	+246
25	Rachaiya	Hasbaiya	24.5	+829	-1311		-829	+1311
26	Hasbaiya	Marjaayoun	16	+626	-601		-626t	+601



KNOW YOUR WAYMARKS

	LMT الدرب الأساسي	SIDE TRAIL الدرب الجانبي	CONNECTING TRAIL الدرب الرابط	NETWORK TRAILS شبكة الدروب
GO STRAIGHT إلى الأمام				
TURN LEFT إنعطف يساراً				
TURN RIGHT إنعطف يميناً				
WRONG DIRECTION إتجاه خطأ				
END/BEGINNING OF TRAIL نهاية/بداية الدرب				





**LMTA
OVERSEAS**

WORLD TRAILS CONFERENCE 2022

SKIATHOS, GREECE

The LMTA is an active and enthusiastic member of the World Trails Network (WTN) taking part in its various activities every single year. To keep with tradition, several members of the LMTA joined the 2022 World Trails Conference in Skiathos, Greece in September 2022, alongside 118 international speakers from the six continents.

The World Trails Conference is a global gathering of trail experts, trail managers and builders, trail destinations, enthusiasts and academics, who meet every two years to share knowledge, network and ensure the benefits trails offer society, continue to be sustainable and supported around the world.

The Conference is a great forum to connect with the global community of trails and explore new ideas, innovations and best practice for the benefit of all.

The Program included a Pre-Conference Trail Journeys on 3 different Greek Trails, a Young Trail Ambassadors Gathering, a Film Festival, Workshops & Green Flag Trails Training and the WTN Conference itself where trails from every region could come together and engage in relevant dialogue, networking and cross-learning.

During the Conference, the Lebanese team presented on a range of subjects: Promoting Environmental Behavior and Ecological Awareness on the LMT and Beyond (Maya Karkour, Former LMTA President), Global Connections for Old World Trails - Volunteering and Reverse Migration Marketing - optimizing Diaspora engagement (Wafaa el Osta, Former LMTA Ambassador to Canada), Unlocking Nature- Accessible Tourism on the LMT (Omar Sakr, LMTA President of the Board), Cultural Heritage on the Lebanon Mountain Trail (Alia Fares, Member of the Heritage Committee and Former Board Member), Trails and Food: seeking a deeper connection to nature and culture (Zeina Jeambey, LMTA Active Member).

On the way to the Trails Journey prior to the Conference, Active Members Salam Khalife, Maya Karkour and Joumana Abou Jaoude, as well as our UK Ambassador Desmond Astley-Cooper, representing the LMT, embarked on a full week hiking expedition on the Sifnos Island Trail, as an excellent way to promote the LMTA and build strong ties with other trail professionals from around the world.

Active members Martine Bteich and Dany Njeim were also among the participants who shared knowledge and expertise with others in interactive forums.

The event was highly valuable to our team who connected with like-minded individuals and organisations from around the world. It helped the team promote the LMT and LMTA, and share experiences and relevant insights and success stories with dynamic leaders and trails enthusiasts across the trail space.

With the WTN community, we also share our passion for nature, heritage and trails.



“ It was quite incredible to be part of the energy transmitted by passionate trail experts and trail lovers from around the world ! During a week packed with information, best practices, hikes, activities as well as laughter, we connected with old WTN friends and created new friendships with other members.

- Maya Karkour, former LTMA president

“ It was a great opportunity to meet the trail communities from all around the world in such a cool setting (Skiathos, Greece). The conference itself had everything from Zeinab highlighting the culinary delights of the LMT to walking among animals in Africa to a short film about restoring a trail in Japan. I thoroughly recommend the experience!

- Desmond Astley-Cooper, LMT Ambassador - UK

“ What a lineup of amazingly good people!! The WTN 2022, Skiathos, Greece gathered Trail Experts in one place. I had the pleasure to present a project and ways to connect Diaspora with homeland through trails presenting the LMT as a case study, and learned how trail stewards from around the world are becoming active change makers, how they celebrate connection with nature and culture and how trails become ways of knowing and a path for peace in the Caucasian across mountains and across generations such as the case of Jeju Olle trail.

- Wafaa El-Osta, former LMT Ambassador



FROM A FRIENDSHIP TRAIL TO A PROJECT FOR TRAIL STANDARDS IN LEBANON

by Olivier Zuber
LMT Ambassador for Switzerland

The creation of the Friendship Trail between Lebanon and Switzerland, initiated in 2019 by the LMTA with Maya Karkour (former president), has led to a deep and fruitful exchange between the LMTA and Switzerland. Mainly with Valrando (the hiking association of the canton of Valais). It also led to the honour of myself being appointed as the Lebanon Mountain Trail ambassador to Switzerland!

There are many geographical similarities between Switzerland and Lebanon. They are both small countries with most of their territories covered by mountains. They are also both made up of a multicultural people that constantly need to find and make compromises to find a harmony in living together.

The Friendship Trail between Lebanon and Switzerland connected me again with Lebanon and the LMTA during the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, during which a new project emerged for establishing unified trail standards for Lebanon.

The project for unified trail standards for Lebanon led to multiple questions as what domains these standards should cover. Should they cover the construction, renovation and maintenance of trails? The markings and signage? The planning of the expansion with new trails? The development of a trail network?

What type of trail network do we want for Lebanon? Is it a network for purely recreational hikers? Could the trails also be used by non hikers? Will the trail network also be used to link villages or places of interest for people to use in their everyday lives? Like going to school, taking a walk around where they live, and encouraging people to walk small distances under ½ an hour rather than take a car. What type of trails will link the already existing and marked trails created by the different associations in Lebanon?

The hiking trails of Lebanon, for the time being and apart from theLebanon Mountain Trail (LMT), are conceived as loop hikes with a theme. So as a foreign tourist who comes to hike Lebanon for the first time, or as a local person that wishes to take up hiking, where should one get the information he needs? Must one visit the websites of the different hiking associations to get information on markings and signage? If that is the case, is there a national website that can direct the tourist to local association's websites and guides? How can a hiker plan to hike around Jabal Moussa, then section 14 of the Lebanon Mountain Trail, and then hike Jabal Sannine to have a view of the Mediterranean coast on one side and the Bekaa plateau on the other?

Are the trails meant only for average hikers or will they also address beginners and/or more advanced technical hikers? How will a hiker evaluate the trail's technical difficulty (will it require some scrambling or does it have an exposed or vertiginous passage)? For the time being the difficulty of a trail in Lebanon is based upon the hiking distance and the elevation gain.

These questions seemed easy to address at first, but as we studied the project the problems became a bit thicker with each solved problem opening the door to a new one! With the LMTA Trail Standards Committee we studied and looked at many other trail standards such as the French, the American, and the East European standards, as well as the Swiss ones.

Whichever way we looked, it became clear that the project for a unified trail standards for Lebanon would mean some major changes. Physical changes on the trails, as well as changes in the way we think of a national trail network.



These relations that were initiated with the Friendship Trail before the pandemic, the geographical similarities between Lebanon and Switzerland and the discussions I have had with the members of the LMTA Trail Committee, have made it quite clear that the Swiss trail network with its national trail standards were extremely well suited and transposable to Lebanon with adaptations that take into consideration the work already achieved by the LMTA and other hiking associations in Lebanon.

The Swiss system brings together the two concepts of a theme hiking network, and a full-fledged national hiking or pedestrian network. A future network of hiking and pedestrian trails that can be open to all the Lebanese population, regardless of their hiking abilities or their level of fitness, and that can provide all levels of hiking and tourist experiences for local of international tourists looking to discover the geographical and cultural beauties of Lebanon.

Throughout this article, the key word is "network". The vision of a hiking and pedestrian network that links and connects all the places, villages, cities, peaks, lakes, rivers, archeological and natural sites of the country as does the road network for cars. The task is great and the road is long, but if the standards we set today are wisely chosen and kept as simple as possible, they will allow us to pave the way towards that goal for the good of this beautiful country.

After meeting with the LMTA Trail Standards Committee in 2021 and early 2022 it became obvious to us that the best way to convince people in Lebanon that the Swiss trail standards were a good option to reach our goal. The best way to achieve this was to organise a workshop, here in Valais (Switzerland) for the members of the Trail Standards Committee so that they could experience the system and see how it works, how it is organised and maintained, and how it is financed.

A dense 7-day workshop was organised at the end of August 2022 with a comprehensive program for 5 members of the LMTA Trails Committee and a delegate from LIBNOR. A friend in Valais lent us an apartment in a chalet, and the Valais Ministry of Sports lent us a 9 seater van for the transportation during the workshop.

The workshop aimed for the participants to try the different technical levels of the trails, to see for themselves how the trail network is interconnected and how they are organised. To meet with the local associations and understand their roles and the way the governance, planning, maintenance, signage, and markings were done.

The workshop was not only successful in meeting these objectives, but has deepened the relations with Valrando and allowed for new relations to be established with Suisse Rando (the Swiss umbrella association for all the hiking associations in Switzerland), Suisse Mobile (a foundation that aims to encourage soft mobility for Swiss citizens and visiting tourists), Agritourisme Suisse (the association for the promotion tourism with farmers in rural areas), the FDDM (a foundation for the sustainable development of mountainous regions), and the Lebanese Embassy in Switzerland.

The workshop delegates have enchanted their Swiss counterparts and paved the way for some of them to come to visit Lebanon on the inauguration of the Friendship Trail between Falougha and El-Mtein in November last year, two years after the inauguration of the friendship trail on the Swiss side between Crans-Montana and Leukerbad. I sincerely hope we can continue to build on this success by organising further workshops and exchanges in 2023 and deepen this relationship between Lebanon and Switzerland.

CONNECTING WITH THE LEBANESE DIASPORA IN BRAZIL

FOR THE LOVE OF LEBANON, TRAILS AND NATURE

Salam Khalife, LMTA life member and active member, embarked on a 2-week mission to Brazil in November and December to present to the Lebanese Diaspora the LMT and its natural and cultural heritage as well as the importance of programs implemented by the Association. The objectives were to network and to develop relations between the LMTA and the Lebanese Diaspora in Brazil and to organize hikes on a Brazilian-LMTA friendship trail.



Introduction to Brazil

Brazil is the largest country in both South America and Latin America. At 8.5 million square kilometers and with over 217 million people, it is the world's fifth-largest country by surface area. It has borders with every country in South America with the exception of Chile and Ecuador. Its Amazon basin includes a vast tropical forest, home to diverse wildlife, a variety of ecological systems, and extensive natural resources spanning numerous protected habitats. The Amazon region represents 49% of the total surface; 90% of the energy is hydroelectric thanks to the Amazon and the Parana rivers. The highest peak is Pico de Neblina at 2,995 meters.

According to Guilherme Mattar, General Secretary of the Brazil-Lebanon Chamber of Commerce in São Paulo, there is an estimated 10 million Brazilians of Lebanese origin (5% of the population of Brazil but of course most of them are from 2nd/3rd/4th generation).

Trails

The management, maintenance and standards for trails are entirely under the responsibility of the Minister of Environment in Brazil. All the work conducted on trails is done by volunteers all over the country. For example, for the Transcarioca Trail of Rio de Janeiro (180 km long - 25 sections), 60 volunteers are involved in communication and administrative work and 200 members in maintaining the trail.

In Rio there is a club of mountaineers (founded in 1918), where kids come to experience a climbing wall and get prepared for hiking. They are the volunteers of tomorrow.

Adults pay a specific amount per month as members and hikes are organized twice a week by volunteers.

During her mission, Salam hiked for 2 days on the Transcarioca Trail sections 18 and 13 and noticed how well the trail is maintained: no trash at all for example along the path.

Seminario

During her stay in Brazil, Salam participated in a 2 days' Trail Conference, the first day in Ciudad Del Este in Paraguay and the second in the National Park of the spectacular Iguazu Falls. The Conference topics were mainly South American Trails in Brazil/Paraguay/Bolivia and Argentina, but also included a segment on biking trails. In this Conference, Salam realized how the dream of the Pan American Trail was taking shape and coming to life! One fascinating path presented during the Conference was the ancient 4,000 km long Peabiru Trail, considered by the natives as the "the way of the sun". It links the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans since ancient times and it runs from the coast of Brazil, through Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru, all the way to the north Chilean coast. Legend speaks about "Portals", connecting Pedra do Fenicio ("Phoenician Stone" – at Pedra da Gávea Mountain, Rio de Janeiro) to São Tomé das Letras, to Cusco, and to other parts of the "world"! Plenty of communities and history connecting past to present (they found Rupestrian Art dated back to 5,000 years)! Conference participants were also introduced to the Trilha do Oiapoque à Barra do Chuí, a 5,000 km trail being implemented along the Brazilian Coast.

Presentations on the LMTA

The LMTA was presented in Arabic language at the conference (in eastern Paraguay there are over 5,000 recent Lebanese immigrants from 1989 and more recently). Salam had dinner with the conference sponsor, a well-established business man and land owner originally from South Lebanon who enthusiastically adopted an LMTA section which crosses his native village. Salam presented the LMTA at the Monte Libano Club of São Paulo, the oldest and most prestigious Brazilian Lebanese club with 4,000 members. Mr. Rudy El Azzi, Consul General of Lebanon in São Paulo was among the 60 attendees along with Bishop Edgard Madi from the Maronite church in São Paulo.

Salam then has separate introductory meetings with Bishop Madi, then with Mr Nabil Alamedine, representing the Druze community and by Mr Hassan and Mrs Hassana Kreish representing the Shite community. They were all very receptive and interested in the LMT project and the work of the Association. A visit to Consul Azzi was also organized to present LMTA's work, mission and impact.

In Rio, Salam visited the Lebanese Counsul, Alexandro Bitar, and he then joined the celebration of the friendship Trail with 7 other members of the community and 4 members of the Transcarioca Trail, a very nice and peaceful segment in the jungle of Rio. Section 13 of the Transcarioca Trail was twinned with LMT's section 9 in Tannourine.

The last presentation of Salam took place at the Mountaineer Club of Rio. A supporter of that club later contacted Salam and expressed an interest in writing an article about the LMT.

It is anticipated that, thanks to this mission, the LMT should be receiving some visitors in 2023 for the Thru Hike and Fall Trek and hopefully more support from the Lebanese Brazilian Diaspora to persevere in our mission and work on our beloved Trail.



NEWS FROM OUR AMBASSADORS

3 NEW AMBASSADORS

Our LMTA Ambassadors, aside from being our 'hearts and mind' abroad, part of our extended family, are also partners in promoting the LMT in their countries. They support us by connecting with potential donors, providing information about the LMTA and the trail, about Thru-Hikes and Fall-Treks and so much more.

Joyce Azzam (based in Lebanon)

On February 17, 2022, Joyce and the LMTA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) announcing Joyce as the new LMTA Ambassador based in Lebanon.

From living in a cramped bunker during the Lebanese civil war to battling chronic lung condition and a potentially debilitating hypermobility syndrome, Dr. Joyce Azzam became the first Lebanese woman to complete “The Seven Summits Challenge,” braving frigid temperatures and killer oxygen levels by successfully climbing the tallest mountain on every continent, one of the first three women in the Arab World and one of 75 women worldwide.



Pablo Vidal González for Spain (based in Valencia)

Following his outstanding leadership during the project on accessibility last spring.

Pablo is Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Catholic University of Valencia. Author of numerous publications, books and articles in prestigious journals, he has supervised 10 doctoral theses. His areas of interest are intangible heritage, nomadism, rural environment, landscape and mountains.



Monique Bassila Zaarour for Quebec - Canada (based in Montreal)

Following her experience of the Thru Hike in 2022, Monique fell in love with the LMT and wants to work to further enhance the LMT's visibility in Quebec (CAN), in collaboration with the CFLMT.

She is a certified Dietitian and a very committed public figure in her community. She has already committed to mobilizing Canadian hikers for the next Thru Hike in 2023.



THE LMTA & CRANS-MONTANA

A FRUITFUL RELATIONSHIP



In 2019, with the support of the Embassy of Switzerland in Beirut, Switzerland became a new partner of the LMTA global Friendship Trail Sistership Program. The Leukerbad-Montana trail in Crans-Montana/Valais was twinned with the Falougha-Mtein Section 16 of the LMTA.

In September 2019 a group of LMTA members and Swiss friends of Lebanon under the leadership of the former president of Switzerland Pascal Couchepin hiked from the spa town of Leukerbad to the famous ski resort of Crans-Montana taking a mountain trail overlooking the highest Alps from Mont Blanc to Matterhorn and Monte Rosa.

In November 2022 a group of Swiss representatives of the Crans-Montana municipality, Valrando and Suisse Rando visited Lebanon to discover the beautiful pine forests of Jabal Kneisse. On November 5th 2022 an official ceremony took place in Falougha, in the presence of HE Marion Weichelt, Ambassador of Switzerland to Lebanon, to seal the sistership agreement which includes training courses on trail management by Valrando.

For most of the Swiss participants it was their first visit to Lebanon. They were thrilled by the beauty of Mount Lebanon and by the hospitality of their hosts. Such exchanges not only foster friendship among trailers and nature lovers but also contribute to the reputation of Lebanon as a top hiking destination and to the international support to the LMTA.



“ Such exchanges not only foster friendship among trailers and nature lovers but also contribute to the reputation of Lebanon as a top hiking destination and to the international support to the LMTA.

– Francois Barras, Former Ambassador of Switzerland to Lebanon & friend of the LMT



AFLMT WEBINAR SERIES ON THE LMT, THE TRAIL THAT KEEPS GIVING

The American Friends of the LMT (AFLMT) is proud of its partnership with and support to the LMT Association (LMTA) in its mission to protect, maintain and promote the LMT. Building on this strong partnership, the AFLMT launched a three-webinar series on the LMT in 2022. Webinars 1 and 2 were held on June 29 and November 2, 2022, respectively (see topics, moderators and panelists in announcements below). Webinar 3 (“The LMT, a threatened conservation corridor”) will be held in the first half of 2023 and updates will be posted on AFLMT’s social media channels.


LIVE WEBINAR

THE LMT, WHY YOU SHOULD CARE!


WEBINAR 1 - PART OF A 3 WEBINAR SERIES




MODERATED BY




KARIM EL-JISIR




MONIQUE BASSILA
2022 LMT THRU-HIKER




KEVIN BOUERI
2018 LMT THRU-HIKER




TALA FARRAN
2022 LMT THRU-HIKER




NADINE WEBER
2022 LMT THRU-HIKER



29 JUNE 2022
WEDNESDAY



6:00 PM - 7:15 PM
U.S. EASTERN TIME (ET)



Registration Required

Four panelists shared their experiences on the LMT-the diversity, the people, the views, the food-and how the LMT has transformed their lives. Video snippets of their stories can be found on the AFLMT page on Facebook.

For Monique Bassila Zaarour, “every Lebanese should do the LMT at least once in their lifetime. What you experience on these mountains is unique to Lebanon... The views and sceneries are stunning! We hiked South to North. Had we hiked North to South, I am sure the views would have been completely different, like you were in a different country...”

Tala Farran left Lebanon a while ago: “The LMT was not on my bucket list, I did not even know it existed until last year. I do hike, I am an avid trekker, I trek around the world. This 30 day thru-hike on the LMT really, honestly changed my life!” Tala shared Monique’s experience of the trail’s amazing diversity, adding: “I remember talking to one of the hikers; he was from Portugal. I asked him: what do you think of this? His response was: I would stay here forever! The views were just spectacular...The ways people welcomed us was not something I had ever experienced before. The food, we could not wait to taste the local foods... It was the excitement at the end of each day. We’re exhausted, we are tired. But we cannot wait to go shower and discover what was for dinner today...Food was just out of this world!”

Nadine Weber Constantine shared her experience not only as a thru-hiker but also as a former president of the LMTA: “In the beginning, the idea of the trail was rejected by local communities because they were afraid of losing their land if the trail was protected. But some municipalities are now competing and asking the LMTA to connect their village to the trail. They see how important it is, how it can boost their economy, the guesthouses, the local guides, etc. More tourists, more people will come and inject money in their community.”



Kevin Boueiri, a Lebanese American, said: “My foundational years were spent between Broummana and Beirut from when I was 7 to 16. Yet, during that time, I never felt I total belonged to Lebanon. My Arabic was not fluent. People in school did not consider me Lebanese in various ways. This was a sore point for me. My experience on the trail really helped me to answer this fundamental human question: who am I and where do I belong? I was able to reclaim this Lebanese identity in two ways. First by connecting to history, personal history. My great grandfather emigrated from Zahle to the US in the late 1800s, and when my mom would ask him how far his town was from Beirut, he said: a two-day walk... And then I went on the trail and began to understand what he meant. One day, I was walking on the trail near where he might have walked, I thought.”

Kevin published his PhD thesis on the LMT: “Trail of dreams: journeys of belonging on the Lebanon Mountain Trail” Beyond personal motivation, the LMT attracted him because it is one of the few places in Lebanon that drives people from all different villages and backgrounds together. He was curious about what happens in this shared space that brings Muslims, Christians, and Druze together into one another’s homes. He added: “What was truly shared between everyone was this search for belonging to a country that is always pushing us away... This Trail was a way where people were able to process this grief, sadness, and anger and find the Lebanon they dreamed of, on the trail. A Lebanon where one belongs, a Lebanon blessed by diversity and not sectarianism, a Lebanon where people value the environment.”


LIVE WEBINAR

THE LMT, A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC LIFELINE TO MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES


WEBINAR 2 - PART OF A THREE-WEBINAR SERIES




MODERATED BY




JAD ABOU ARRAGE
SUSTAINABILITY PRACTITIONER




JACKIE KHAIRALLAH
LOCAL GUIDE ON THE LMT,
GUESTHOUSE & WINERY OWNER
(AL-MTEIN, LEBANON)




PHILIPPE GERMANOS
GUESTHOUSE &
AGRI-TOURISM FARM OWNER
(MEJDEL AL-AQOURA, LEBANON)




MEHDI EL FAYEK
LOCAL GUIDE ON THE LMT
(RASHAYA AL-WADI, LEBANON)



3 NOVEMBER 2022
THURSDAY



6:00 PM - 7:15 PM
U.S. EASTERN TIME (ET)



Registration Required

Three panelists shared their stories of how their lives and livelihoods have become intertwined with the LMT. Video snippets of their stories will be posted on the AFLMT social media in the coming months.

For Jacky, a mother of four: “The LMT changed my life. Guiding on the LMT opened many doors and gave me economic opportunities that I did not have before... Once tourists and hikers started coming to Mtein, they were curious to come and visit our winery. So, I started to have ideas about hosting people for food, for wine tasting. My husband and I have now opened two wooden chalets for accommodation. All of this happened because the LMT opened this new vision for me. When I first started as a local guide, 100 percent of the people who came to visit the winery and taste our wine were hikers on the LMT. Nowadays, 60 percent of our business comes from LMT hikers...Initially, there was only one guesthouse in Mtein, established by the LMT project. Mtein now boasts of more than four guesthouses. The LMT initiative sparked all these tourism-related activities.”

Mehdi el Fayek shared his story: “I’ve always been passionate about showing my village to people who came to visit Rachaya. Then came the LMT project, which put Rachaya on the path of the LMT and established a guesthouse in Rachaya. The LMT became an attractive destination. People had trust in the LMT project and the people behind the project, and as a result in me as a guide and a host. In 2014, I established a guesthouse in Rachaya. My family now has three sources of income, from my work as a guide, from hosting guests, and from making and selling local produce. I used to guide one group of hikers per month. Thanks to the LMT, we now have groups of hikers on the LMT or to Mount Hermon once or twice a week, which helped me to increase my income and to stay in my village and not think about going abroad. Again, LMTA is a trusted organization, a recognized brand in our region. That is important. It gives us credibility!”

Philippe Germanos returned to his hometown to take care of the family’s farm and soon expanded it into an attractive guesthouse and agrotourism destination: “One day, I met Christian Akhrass of LMTA, who told me that the LMTA was looking for an accommodation facility in Afqa, which is 10 minutes from my village Aqoura. The next morning, I called him and told him that my house in the mountains is now a guesthouse and the LMT is more than welcome to use it. Two months later, we received our first two guests, two American hikers who came to hike the LMT. I then integrated the farm and the guesthouse together into one project. We are in our seventh year now.”

Philippe added: “During the first few years, our guests were primarily hikers. Right now, 30 percent of our visitors come as part of a hiking experience on the LMT or in the region. Seven years ago, no one in the village knew what hiking was. Since then, awareness of ecotourism, hiking and nature has increased, but has not reached its full potential yet. The LMT and LMTA are a big contributor. We now have more guides and accommodation options, and there is an increase in the number of hikers.”

Marianne Skeen was one of three Appalachian Trail Conservancy staff/volunteers who came to Lebanon in 2006 in the early phase of ECODIT’s project to establish the LMT, under a Cooperative Agreement with USAID Lebanon. Marianne was very honored that she was able to be part of the LMT project and so excited to see that it really is making a difference. She added, “I’ve traveled a lot around the world, and I don’t know where I might have ever felt more welcome than in Lebanon, and I just am thinking now let’s see maybe I could go and do at least part of the trail.”

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AU PLUS PRÈS D'UNE TERRE MULTIMILLÉNAIRE

Par Mireille Clapot
Écrivaine-Voyageuse



Après une année 2021-2022 chargée en adversité et en contraintes, mon mari et moi ressentions le besoin de nous engager dans un séjour dépayçant et en reconnexion à la nature. Un projet en Amérique latine s'étant révélé trop éloigné, trop coûteux pour deux semaines, nous avons recherché les possibilités de trekking plus proches de la France... et Internet nous a conduits sur le site de la LMTA. Au-delà du trekking lui-même, très bien décrit et donc faisable selon notre niveau, nous avons compris l'intérêt de contribuer au développement des territoires montagnards traversés. Le Liban est certes un pays en souffrance, à l'actualité tragique, mais le découvrir à pied est une bonne façon de l'aider, respectueuse et ouverte, au rythme de la randonnée. Pas question toutefois de s'engager sans préparation : nous avons pris des renseignements auprès de l'“ambassadeur en France du LMT” Jean-Pierre Cressot, confié l'organisation à une agence locale, puis créé l'irréversible en achetant les billets pour Beyrouth.

Autant le dire tout de suite : le professionnalisme et le sérieux de notre agence et de notre guide ont rattrapé les imperfections de notre préparation. Partir deux semaines sur un sentier de cette difficulté nécessite de voyager léger ; or nous avions eu la main lourde en bagages et il a fallu se délester du superflu dès le premier soir. Hormis cette erreur d'appréciation réparée sur place, les autres choix ont été judicieux : de l'équipement – chaussures, pantalon (indispensable contre les épineux), chapeau, bâtons, ... – à l'itinéraire, en passant par les hébergements et l'accueil. Notre préparation physique était sans doute un peu inférieure à ce qui aurait été idéal pour parcourir deux semaines de dénivelés quotidiens entre 700 et 1000 m, mais l'endurance a pallié ce manque.

Marcher sur le LMT, c'est suivre les balises mauves et blanches : comme des marquages de GR où le rouge aurait été remplacé par du violet, couleur murex, du nom de ce coquillage qui faisait la fortune des Phéniciens. Nous sommes en montagne pourtant, des altitudes avoisinant les 1500 mètres, mais les mers recouvraient ces lieux, comme en témoignent les poissons fossiles dans les boutiques de Jbeil, qui cultive la nostalgie de l'antique cité de Byblos.

La couleur violette est pourtant dominante dans le paysage car les épineux, présents partout, dardent des boules magnifiques, précisément de cette couleur. L'ocre de la terre, le blanc des rochers et des falaises, le vert des arbres parfois rarissimes ou des potagers foisonnants, le rouge des tuiles composent un tableau bigarré qui se renouvelle chaque heure. Mais une couleur nous obsède: cette couleur violette, dont la trace peinte sur un rocher ou sur un arbre ou sur un pylône, aux côtés de sa jumelle blanche, nous indique la direction et témoigne qu'ici, sont passés, armés de seaux de peinture et de pinceaux, des pionniers un peu fous ouvrant le passage. Leurs esprits nous accompagnent et nous disent "oui, tu peux y aller, ça passe." Et effectivement ça passe... ça passe évidemment sur les routes asphaltées qu'on trouve à des altitudes inattendues, pour desservir ces villas, aux allures de palaces, toujours plus hautes, toujours plus grandioses ; ça passe sur les chemins de terre parcourus par les 4x4 et les motos des exploitants agricoles ; ça passe sur les sentiers parsemés de feuilles sous les chênes verts. Ça passe le long des conduites d'eau potable agrippées aux falaises, ça passe au milieu des rochers où il faut parfois s'aider de la main. Parfois, c'est un peu vertigineux, mais toujours ça passe. Ce sentier relie donc, tel un pointillé violet et blanc sur des centaines de kilomètres, des sommets, des cols, des exploitations agricoles, des stations de ski, des villages maronites, des communes chiïtes, des bastions druzes, des villégiatures de nababs, des hameaux de fortune pour ouvriers agricoles - probablement syriens-, des vestiges de temples grecs, des mémoriaux d'écrivains, des sarcophages phéniciens... Bizarrerie : dans la réserve du Chouf, le sentier existe toujours mais les balises ont disparu.

Trait d'union entre ces Liban si différents, le LMT permet au voyageur de prendre de la hauteur sur ce foisonnement, alors qu'à 40kms à peine, les villes côtières se distinguent par temps clair, et que leur frénésie automobile semble relever d'une autre planète.

Marcher sur le LMT, c'est aussi imposer à son corps un effort soutenu, que les rituels quotidiens aident à accomplir. Une nuit réparatrice en constitue le pilier principal. Les literies fermes et le silence des nuits montagnardes y contribuent... sauf peut-être dans ces villages prisés de la jeunesse beyrouthine : à Faraya, l'arrivée par la falaise se fait au son d'une musique digne d'une boîte de nuit, contrastant avec l'ascétisme du monastère qui nous héberge. Vers 7h30, petit déjeuner à la libanaise avec tomates, mini concombres, galettes au zaatar, oeufs, fromage aigre, fruits et eau chaude pour le thé et le café soluble (n'espérez pas de vrai café!) On avitaille les boîtes à pique-nique en picorant dans cet assortiment, et en complétant avec les restes de la veille. Gourdes remplies avec de l'eau achetée en bouteille plastique, car l'eau de source ou des fontaines domestiques est impropre à la consommation des touristes ; sac à dos remballé avec les affaires éparpillées durant la nuit, le peu de peau apparente crémée, chapeau et bâtons en place : c'est parti! Dans la chaleur du mois d'août, il faut plusieurs pauses pour se réhydrater, de préférence dans des spots photos : le pont naturel de Kfadebian en est un remarquable exemple. Ainsi, la recherche de l'eau ponctue nos journées : non pas pour la boire car nos estomacs fragiles risqueraient de ne pas la supporter, mais pour y tremper le chapeau, l'imbibber d'eau et bénéficier d'une réfrigération naturelle.

Dans ces terres largement cultivées et proches des sources, le système d'adduction d'eau quadrille l'espace, le plus souvent avec des tuyaux bien hermétiques. Parfois, une réserve d'eau ou une source ou même une fuite font notre bonheur. Après plusieurs heures de marche, le choix du lieu de pause-déjeuner est stratégique : ombragé, doté de rochers permettant de s'asseoir, et jouxtant un tapis d'herbe rase pour une micro sieste ou l'observation des nuages qui remontent de la mer. Ainsi, nous avons élu à cet effet le sanctuaire de Sehta à 1800m d'altitude entre Aaqoura et Afqa, mais nous avons préféré décamper à l'arrivée de jeunes hommes descendant de 4x4, bouteille de Chivas en main, venus s'adonner à des ripailles et à tuer le temps. De même, nous avons apprécié l'arrêt sous un noyer majestueux, au centre d'un plateau jonché de vestiges romains entre Kfadebian et Mtein près de Zaarour. Une autre pause s'est déroulée après la visite du temple de Faqra, une autre encore sous les cerisiers de Baskinta : bref, que de bons souvenirs! Après cette pause méridienne, il est temps de repartir car une journée de six heures de marche, ça se gère avec raison.

Notre ombre qui rapetissait, s'allonge à nouveau... Un pas devant l'autre, et de nouvelles collines franchies, et de nouveaux points de vue qui s'ouvrent. Parfois, un troupeau de chèvres, son berger et ses chiens ; parfois des ouvriers agricoles ; dans la réserve du Chouf réputée pour ses cèdres majestueux, quelques promeneurs ; mais dans l'ensemble très peu de présence humaine alors que les maisons sont partout. Un vent frais vient heureusement rafraîchir nos corps désormais pressés de trouver le repos. Nous descendons sur le village-étape, souvent pour remonter une pente asphaltée extrêmement raide, et arriver au lieu du couchage. C'est le temps de notre contact, superficiel, avec les villages traversés. La plupart des déplacements des habitants s'effectuant en voiture, difficile pour le randonneur d'approcher les habitants. Enfin voici la chambre d'hôtes, ou l'hôtel, ou le couvent qui nous accueille le soir. Une douche, généralement chaude, et des couchages confortables et propres, nous y attendent. Point n'est besoin d'occupation après une journée de marche, mais j'en ai fréquemment profité pour approfondir sur Internet tel ou tel point discuté dans la journée avec notre guide. Le pays peut se déchiffrer de tant de façons différentes ! Et les conversations du dîner, lorsque nos hôtes se joignent à nous, éclairent certains pans de l'histoire tragique de ce jeune pays, composite avec ses dix-huit communautés religieuses, meurtri par une guerre de quinze ans dont chacun garde un souvenir terrible, traumatisé par l'explosion du port de Beyrouth en août 2020, et en proie à une crise bancaire qui ruine les épargnants. Entre le houmous et le gratin de pommes de terre, la soupe de poulet à la cannelle et le gâteau aux pommes, nous commentons l'histoire des Druzes ou les relations entre la France et le Liban. Nous nous étonnons aussi de la saleté de certains lieux traversés, au sol jonché de bouteilles de plastique et de cartouches ; nous entendons le peu d'appétence des Libanais pour la marche. Et la fascination pour les villas somptueuses, au point que le paysage en est mité, me laisse rêveuse : que de kilomètres de tuyaux d'assainissement doit-il falloir enfouir pour garder la terre préservée des souillures... à supposer que ces règles soient respectées.

Après nos onze journées de marche, nous repartons avec la besace pleine d'images de montagnes, de vues fugaces sur la mer, de points de vue sur la plaine de la Bekaa qui sépare le Liban de la Syrie, de senteurs de pins et de cèdres, de bruits de cigales, de cèdres et de marques du LMT. Cette terre multimillénaire qui se présente en profondes vallées parallèles, nous l'avons parcourue dans ses replis et avons découvert quelques-uns de ses secrets.

Recommandations pratiques :

- se préparer à ne pas avoir toujours d'électricité
- la langue parlée est uniquement l'arabe
- le mois d'août est approprié (chaud, sec, avec une légère brise)
- prendre absolument un guide car le balisage est inégal

Nous avons aimé la diversité des paysages, la sécurité tant sur le sentier que dans les villages, le calme, les points d'intérêt sur chaque section, les fruits offerts par les paysans ou à acheter aux étapes (prunes, pêches, pommes, poires), les repas maison.

Nous avons regretté les déchets presque partout (emballages, cartouches de chasse), l'absence de faune, l'urbanisation galopante, les traversées de village extrêmement raides



**CULTURAL AND
NATURAL HERITAGE**

FOLLOWING ANTIQUE TRAILS ALONG LEBANON’S MOUNTAIN RANGE

by Alia Fares
Archaeologist / Active Member

Lebanon’s mountains boast some of the richest trails on our planet in cultural heritage wealth and massive diversity. But how did this cultural heritage come to be and who was it built for?

To survive, humans shaped the landscape of our mountains for many millennia, directly or indirectly manipulating its rivers, valleys and hilltops with physical activity, as well as with substantial pastoral traditions, such as agricultural terraces. They exploited the earth’s water sources, animal, faunal and floral immense wealth. Along the Lebanon Mountain Trail, there is much evidence to attest for this interference in our ecosystems. Beginning with military campaigns to seize its natural resources, emperors such as Assyrian king Assurnasirpal the 2nd (9th c. B.C) bragged off, claiming, *“I have seized the entire extent of the Lebanon Mountain and reached the Great Sea [the Mediterranean sea] of the Amurru country.”...**“I ascended the mountains of the Amanus [mountains along the Turkish Syrian borders] and cut down logs of cedars, stone pines, cypresses, and pines, performed sheep-offerings to my gods.”* Other emperors, such as Hadrian (138-117 A.D) from the Roman period were known for having commissioned more than 200 inscriptions in the dense mountain forests of Lebanon, confiscating the trees and cutting them down for his military campaigns and construction works (fig. 2). Entire roman army legions (one legion was made up of around -5000foot soldiers, excluding their cavalry, engineers and equipment!) travelled long distances for months, to reach and conquer new territories at the frontiers of the Roman empire (fig. 2).



Fig. 1: One of the 200 Latin Inscriptions commissioned under emperor Hadrian (138-117 A.D) found on section 9 of the LMT, confiscating the trees of the forest for his military campaigns and construction projects.

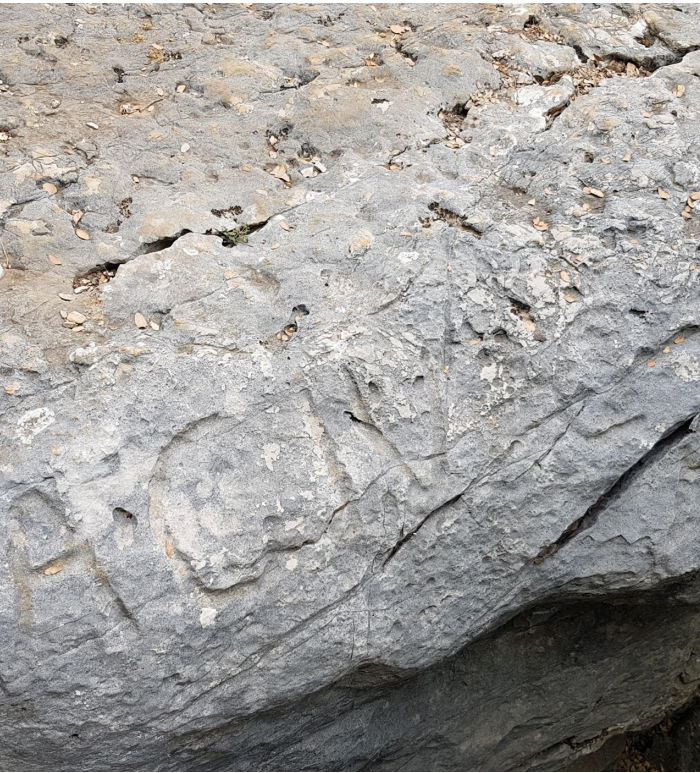


Fig. 2: A latin Inscription commissioned under emperor Hadrian (138-117 A.D) on section 9 of the LMT, confiscating the trees of the forest for his military campaigns and construction projects

Prior to cars and trains, human movement on land relied solely on wheeled carriages and on foot to carry one between villages, cities and country borders. In the Roman army, officers were often engineers, commissioned to design and implement major roads and bridges. The roman road network today is considered one of the most intricately well-designed antique highways in the ancient Mediterranean world. These ancient practices, linked to both military practices, agro-pastoral traditions societies, and pagan rituals to remote sacral buildings, often left traces in form of settlement remains and movement paths. So how did the armies and the locals move between these rugged highlands, dangerous steep slopes of the valleys and their mountain peaks? They learned to build roads!

One of these antique “viae” is found on section 16 of the LMT, between Mtein and Falougha, 2 villages, reflecting the effects of ancient human activity on our mountains very clearly. Starting with the -300year-old palatial Abillama’a architecture in the village, this section takes one down to a valley, crossing various heritage features, including an ancient roman bridge and a well-preserved roman road, which used to connect Mtein to its upper highlands towards Falougha. (fig. 3). The Roman antique road is visible at various intervals, with irregularly shaped cobbles, which haven’t been torn up or destroyed. Another example comes from section 11, in the “jurd” of Aqoura, where an ancient Roman road is still visible today. It was probably used to connect the ancient city of Byblos and its Afqa water source with that of Yammouneh on the other side of the mountain in the Beqaa valley.



Fig. 3: Roman road still visible today on section 16 of the LMT between Mtein and Falougha. Foto by Norbert Schiller

These ancient trails are not the only ones on the LMT. But they are a clear indicator of the exploitation of the mountainous landscape since millennia.

Centuries ago, the impact of humans on our natural landscape was minimal, slightly affecting the ecosystems. Today, this impact is very heavy, with the industrial revolution, and the introduction of plastic, the effects of which have become ever more devastating on our biodiversity. With dangerous global warming and climate change, we wish to reduce human effect on our surrounding landscape, hoping to secure it safely for future generations. The Lebanon Mountain Trail Association is tracking these archaic trails, a testimony of continuous human movement. With this, the association hopes to reduce the impact on our beloved mountains by hiking on the same traditional paths, which our ancestors have been using for millennia.

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Find out how you can support us: via an annual donation, through a membership, by becoming a Trail keeper and more!

LMTA welcomes both cash and in-kind donations.

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Your donation will go to our General Fund, which is used for projects with a high impact on communities or work most urgently needed on the Trail: lebanontrail.org/donation

SPONSOR ONE OF OUR PROJECTS

By sponsoring one of our programs, you can make a real difference in trail preservation and you can make a lasting impact on trail-side communities across Lebanon.

Project-focused support will allow you to direct your donated funds to a particular area of interest or to a specific project dear to your heart and see the impact of your contribution.

Our main programs are:

Trail & Conversation / Community Development / Education /Cultural Heritage. To have more information please contact: info@lebanontrail.org or +961 5 955 302 / 3 | +961 3 76 75 74

JOIN OUR MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

Become a member and you'll join a growing group of people who play a part in nature conservation in Lebanon – and who are determined to make sure that our national Trail, our natural and cultural heritage are valued and protected.

In terms of membership, there are currently two options:

- Annual Supportive Membership at \$100/ year
- Lifetime Adrian Membership at \$750 – the money raised from this membership

is reserved for future long-term work in terms of protecting physically the trail, possibly through land acquisition in areas on the LMT with high biodiversity or heritage.

You will benefit from many discounts at carefully selected sports outlets, guest-houses, restaurants, organic produce retailers, health providers, LMTA hiking events, and much more.

If you wish to become a member, you can either pay by bank transfer or by cash at our office in Hazmieh, or through our website.

BECOME A TRAIL KEEPER

Thanks to our Trail Keepers, we're closer to our goal of \$470K to protect the 470 km of the LMT.

You can support us in our mission to maintain the Lebanon Mountain Trail by becoming a Trail Keeper. Sponsor 1 km of the LMT for \$250!

"Becoming a trail keeper is a way for us to share with our friends our love for the Lebanese mountains by bringing awareness to the added value of the LMTA and by being part of their pool of supporters who make this such a successful and incredible venture."

- Peter & Natalie Hredechdakian

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The American Friends of the LMT (AFLMT) is an independent non-profit organization qualified as 501(c)3. Its aim is to strengthen ties between Lebanon, in particular the nearly 80 communities along the LMT, and Lebanese Americans and American hikers and friends of Lebanon, as well as to facilitate donations to LMTA from the United States. Donations made through AFLMT are tax-deductible in the US as applicable by law. Read more about AFLMT on www.aflmt.org

For those who prefer to Donate by check, please make your check payable to "American Friends of the LMT" or "AFLMT" and mail it to the address below:

Mr. Joseph Karam
AFLMT President
1300 Wilson Blvd, Suite 920
Arlington, VA 22209

All donations are tax-deductible. You will receive a letter or email from AFLMT with a confirmation receipt of your donation for your tax records.

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Planned gifts enable LMTA lovers to create a powerful philanthropic legacy by making a direct impact on trail sustainability, Natural and Cultural Conservation or any of our far-reaching programs. Planned giving can be tailor made to respond to your wishes to support our work and mission. For more information, please contact Alfred Farwagi at farwagialfred@gmail.com.

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