

2026/05/04

Summary

***Monday

The meeting with the young people at the community garden was canceled. There was a small chance of rain and it was also Lag BaOmer evening. So I went to the central bus station and from there walked to Yirmiyahu Street to catch the bus to Arad in southern Israel. The bus filled up with Haredim (Ultra-Orthodox). Arad has turned from a secular city into a stronghold of the Gur Hasidim sect because of the high housing prices in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak. On one hand they need somewhere to live. On the other hand they don't exactly blend into the existing fabric of the place. I noticed two men constantly playing with their sidelocks. I didn't know they curl them and that you can tuck them under a kippah! During the ride I suddenly saw smoke from one of the guys' seat. Apparently he felt like smoking an electronic cigarette without caring about anybody else. "David, just let it go, just let it go." I got off at the stop near the small northern park next to the Israel National Trail. There's a bit of grass, tables, a basketball court, and a lot of wind. I set up the tent to escape the wind. I tied it to a branch and used my heavy backpack in the corner facing the wind, everything was fine. I had planned to arrive around midnight because of the work in the garden. Good thing I came earlier. I hadn't taken another meal (dinner) into account. Next time I'll bring more food. The plan was only for two days. The wind was cold outside. They made a bonfire across the wadi but even with all three layers of clothing, I couldn't stand the cold.

***Tuesday

I didn't sleep well. It was cold. Suddenly around 3:15, I woke up because of a strange noise, like a heavy branch being dragged. Then I felt drops. What kind of idiot sets up a tent on the lawn in a public park? It was wonderful without stones and bushes to block the wind. The brain works slowly after midnight. Sprinklers on several sides. To my bad luck, I had tied the tent to the branch on the side the wind was coming from, and I stood there getting soaked trying to untie the knot, pull out the stakes, and drag the tent out of the sprinklers' range. In the end I broke the branch. A summer tent is designed for light rain from above, not sprays of water from the ground. Good thing I took off the wet pants and slept until the alarm rang at 5:15.

The trail isn't properly marked in this section and the markings that do exist are hidden by weeds and wild wheat, so the only way is to use an app on the phone. After the Negev sections, the trail isn't that challenging. Until the afternoon I wore two clothing layers, which doesn't happen often. Strong cool wind. Sometimes also a few drops from an angry cloud. Good weather for walking, especially since most of the way was exposed to the sun with no trees nearby. After I passed Arad Park there were nut tree plantations, I don't know what kind. Also many new vineyards. In 2024 wines from the Negev were chosen as the highest quality in a very famous international competition. Apparently the heat during the day and the cold at night create grapes with a strong flavor. I passed a huge solar panel farm. Too bad they don't raise the panels higher to grow something underneath that needs a bit of shade. I bypassed the excavations at Tel Arad. You have to pay to enter and if you do enter, you need to dedicate several good hours to the place, which I didn't have. They say they found a replica of the Temple there from the time of the kings of Judah. One of the kings ordered all the altars and shrines smashed, but as sometimes happens in the army, the order wasn't carried out exactly as written and instead they just covered it with sand. Lots of wheat. You can see a village and a quarry beside the Roman road that still exists, built with steps every few dozen meters. They say that a guy a hundred years ago ran away from his family in some town in the Hebron Hills, not far away, and came to live in a cave there. He was urban, not Bedouin. In the village people work in liberal professions like lawyers, doctors, pharmacists. The fourth Arab place in the country in education and first in the Negev. The trail bypasses it too. The climbs up the mountain started, and here too I walked back and forth trying to find the trail. Until I got back on trail... I had to check every stone with mold or fungus to make sure it wasn't a trail marker. I found one marker and it directed me into a tall thorny thicket. I got through it safely. The problems were solved when I reached the Roman road. Impossible to get lost. Comfortable, but not as comfortable

as in Roman times. I'd like to see one modern road left abandoned for only a hundred years... On the Roman road you reach Mount Amasa, a point overlooking all the way to Arad. Higher than Jerusalem. I continued to the small fenced settlement with the same name and set up the tent in the grove opposite it. I hung the sleeping bag to dry and cooked macaroni. I was hungry.

***Wednesday

Several times during the night there was short light rain. In the morning the tent was wet outside but the ground wasn't. I ate oatmeal as usual with mint tea and set out. I didn't refill water in the settlement. The app says there's a blue faucet but when I tried to get water nothing came out. There was a Bedouin tent nearby and I didn't stop to ask them about the faucet. Their dogs barked as if they wanted to devour the tasty thru-hiker. The road also looked Roman. You immediately feel the change in the air, really. From a desert region to an area with pine trees. No wonder the old song says "smell of pines." Easy and pleasant walking. Still no summer heat. Yatir Forest. I like it. I reached an educational institution surrounded by an electronic fence and there were two Arab workers at the gate repairing the eruv cable above the electric gate. They tried to tie it back and it didn't work until they bent one of the poles... I asked if I could fill a water bottle and they said yes. The anxiety about running out of water passed. I met a pair of religious girls who had just gotten up from a rest, thru-hikers. I think they were wary of me. I understand them. A 25-year-old like man unshaven and untrimmed looks like a real homeless person. The truth is only today I could have gotten a haircut if I were home because of the Omer. They disappeared into the horizon within a short time and I was walking day dreaming, missed the trail turn without noticing. Until I reached an intersection that forced me to look at the app. There was a blue-marked trail. I understood I could reconnect with the Israel Trail later, but I didn't notice the zoom and in hindsight I would have preferred to go back, but that's not what I did. The blue trail was a dirt road like in the forests above Kiryat Shmona. From there you can see the southern Hebron Hills. A small country. You really don't understand how small. Quite a beautiful route. There was a preserved olive press by the roadside. Back on the trail I saw two figures on the hill, probably the girls I met earlier. Some beautiful viewpoints over the surrounding landscape. The end of the section is at Meitar in Meitar Forest. I found "Noam Lookout" with a water faucet where you can pitch a tent. Noam was killed in one of the operations in Gaza. There's a nice sitting area with a piano-like roof structure. Apparently he loved music. I decided to leave the last 2.5 kilometers for the next day instead of traveling all the way to Jerusalem in the dark. I dried the tent and sleeping bag. I made instant noodles with tea. I listened to two Daf Yomi Talmud lessons.

***Thursday

I woke up without pressure, packed everything, and continued through Meitar Forest to the bridge named after a commander who was wounded in the War of Independence and died at the hospital in Kibbutz Ruhama. In the forest there are also more beautiful picnic sites. Back to Jerusalem..