



40 Days on the Trail

Israelis of all ages are taking to the Israel Trail – some for a few days and some for the 40-some days it takes to hike the entire 940-km. trail. Two hikers share their experiences on the trail with ERETZ.



Shachar Feder, 12, and his father, Avi, 56, spent 40 days last summer hiking the entire 940-km.-long Israel Trail. The ambitious idea was Shachar's. Avi, who has enjoyed hiking since he was a youth, agreed and planned the trip, even though he was not sure they would succeed.

"I thought it would be a great challenge," Shachar said, adding, "It was harder than I expected, even though I had expected it would be hard."

"There were a lot of moments when I thought Shachar was going to stop and quit, but he didn't. He demonstrated determination and physical and mental strength. I admire him for doing the whole thing.

"The hike was also very hard for me," said Avi, who has led hiking clubs and is a veteran of the IDF's elite reconnaissance unit, the *Sayeret Matkal*.

Though they hiked the trail in the summer so that Shachar would not miss school, they both advised other hikers to avoid doing so. If the summer is the only time available, then they suggest hiking north to south as they did. The north is cooler and so by the time you reach the

Right: Avi and Shachar Feder begin their trek at Beit Ussishkin, the starting point of the Israel Trail.

Below: The Feders enter the Negev, one of the more difficult parts of the hike in the summer heat.

For Shachar, an avid bird watcher, the hike was an opportunity to see several rare birds. He already has spotted over 300 of the more than 500 different species of birds that can be found in Israel.



south you are used to the physical exertion of the trail and the heat does not overcome you, Avi explained. In winter, they suggest starting in the south. He recommends hiking the entire trail quickly as they did only to people who really have a strong desire to do this. "You really need to want to do it to complete the entire trail at once," he noted, saying there are other ways to plan a hike, such as basing it on when and where flowers are blooming, meeting people along the way, or pausing at selected spots to enjoy the landscape.

Avi and Shachar hiked the entire trail quickly so that they could complete it on Shachar's twelfth birthday. Shachar's mother Mali and friends met them at the end of the trail in Eilat, with posters congratulating him on both his birthday and the hike and they spent a few days relaxing at a hotel in Eilat to celebrate both accomplishments.

For Avi, who knows the land of Israel well from the many excursions he has taken over the years on foot, bike, and motorcycle, the hike was a chance to return to some favorite places and to visit some new ones.

For Shachar, who has been an avid bird watcher ever since he read the book *Tziporei Agada* (Bird Stories), the hike also was an opportunity to add several rare birds to the list of birds he has spotted. He already has seen over 300 of the more than 500 different species of birds that can be found in Israel.





Left: Shachar cools off at Nahal Tananim.

Below: Shachar celebrates completing the trail by taking a drink of water.

First Person: My Hike on the Israel Trail by Shachar Feder

I first heard about the Israel Trail in the middle of sixth grade. I immediately decided that during summer vacation, I would hike the entire trail, from beginning to end. I'd carry my gear on my back and sleep in the field like a real scout. I love hiking (I'm even in the hiking club of my hometown, Mevasseret Zion) because it allows me to get to know the land. Plus I thought it would be a great challenge.

I knew I couldn't do something this big alone and decided that my father, Avi, who had recently retired from the Israel Police, would be a good partner. When I told him my idea, his eyes lit up, but then he said that it wouldn't be possible for us to hike such a long, difficult trail and that I didn't understand what I was suggesting. I insisted that I did. He said that it would be difficult. I insisted that we could handle it. He responded that it would be way too hot in the summer. I didn't waiver. And when he said that to cope with the heat we would need to rest around noon and walk in the morning and night, I realized that I had succeeded in convincing him.

And so, towards the end of the school year, my father Avi, our dog Nina, and I set out on a Friday morning for a trial hike in the Jerusalem Mountains. I carried 13 kg. of gear and my

father carried 20 kg. The hike was very difficult. We descended and ascended the along the twisting slopes, such as Ein Hendak that goes straight up. We walked more than 20 km. a day, even though it was very hot. Despite the difficulty and aches and pains, we reached Mitzpe Masua after two days, just like my father had planned. I learned that, as he had said, it was definitely not simple. Even though I suffered during parts of it, I enjoyed the hike and it brought me great satisfaction. My father said that he hadn't believe that I would make it, but I had surprised him and passed the test. And so, I decided that, despite the difficulty, we would make the journey.

While I was busy with school, my father planned our hike: how far we would walk each day; where we would get water and food; where we would sleep; and where we would meet my mother Mali each Friday so that we could spend the weekend together at a bed-and-breakfast.

We set out on July 3, 2005, along with Nina, who accompanied us for about half of the journey. We took a bus to Beit Ussishkin, the nature museum at Kibbutz Dan, and started walking.

At first, I thought that we would make a campfire every night and cook great meals. We did

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that until we realized that it took too much energy. We woke up very early so that we could walk as far as possible in the pleasant morning hours, before it got too hot. However, we soon realized that if we didn't walk during the hot hours, we wouldn't make any progress. Even though it was very difficult to walk at noon, we did it, walking slowly and taking frequent breaks. By the time it was evening, all we wanted to do was pitch the tent and go to sleep as soon as possible. We didn't have the energy to do anything extra.

We had tons of experiences along the way. We met other people who were hiking the entire trail. Some of them had started on the same day and at the same point as we had. Others had started in the south and were nearing the end of their trek. They had a lot to tell us and gave us good advice to use as we continued our hike.

We lost our way a few times. When we were climbing Mt. Tabor, we didn't see the trail markings. I told my father we should go to the left, but he insisted on going to the right. When we realized we were going the wrong way, we walked straight uphill, through a thick forest. Branches stabbed at us like swords and we bare-

Right: Shachar enjoys the view from Har Neria.

Below: Avi and Shachar planned the entire trip carefully before setting out.



Even though it was hard, this hike was worth it. I enjoyed every second and every step and will remember this experience for my entire life.

ly managed to find our way back to the path.

We hiked at night a few times because we wanted to reach the end of the trail exactly on my twelfth birthday. Once, we hiked along a very good path, but it was a dark, moonless night and we couldn't even see the ground in front of us. When we were hiking at Mt. Timna, the night caught us by surprise, while we were walking on a very twisty path. We turned on our flashlights, but still couldn't see that well. When we finally reached a Beduin tent, we were thrilled.

The main point of the hike was to get to know the land. We passed through dozens of places that had wonderful landscapes. Nahal Meron and Nahal Amud have flowing water and green groves just like in Europe. In the desert, there are great open areas and amazing cliffs and canyons.

We also met many animals along the way – rabbits, hares, gazelle, ibex, jackals, insects, lizards, rodents, and many birds. For example, when we sat down to rest at the Hava Pool in the Negev, Sinai rosefinches, trumpeter finches, desert larks, and house buntings came to drink the water from the pool right in front of us. It was so beautiful that we didn't want to leave. During another break, we saw a fat sand rat (*Psammomys obesus*) collecting food to take back to his lair. He was really cute.

In conclusion, I can say that even though it was hard, this hike was worth it. I enjoyed every second and every step and will remember this experience for my entire life. ■

