

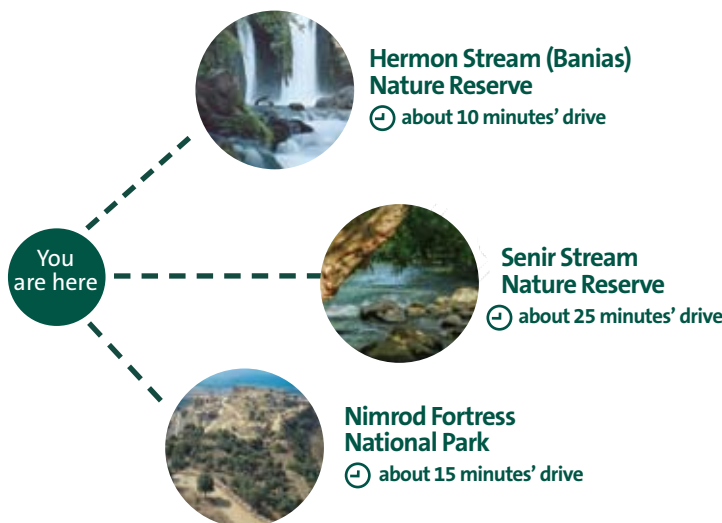
Tel Dan Nature Reserve

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Tel Dan Nature Reserve, Tel: 04-6951579

Welcome to Tel Dan Nature Reserve

Entering the Tel Dan reserve is like stepping into a wonderland: scores of bubbling brooks feed into a running river; tall treetops reach for the sky, the ground is always shaded and refreshingly cool, even at noon on a hot summer's day. It is no wonder that some 7,000 years ago people chose the small hill above the springs as the spot to make their homes.

Of the three sources of the Jordan River, the Dan Stream is the largest and most important. Its springs provide up to 238 million cubic meters of water annually, equivalent to the water flowing from the Hermon and Snir rivers combined. Some 8.5 cubic meters of water flow through the Dan spring every second, almost 365 days a year.

The natural drainage basin of the Dan Strem is very small, which means that the springs are the source of all of the water that flows here. This is the reason for the water's low, stable temperature (about 14.5 degrees centigrade) and high quality (only 10 milligrams of chlorine per liter). The springs are fed by the snow and rain that fall on Mt. Hermon. The water seeps into the mountain, dividing into hundreds of springs by the time it reaches the foot. Together these springs form the largest karstic spring in the Middle East.

Until the 1967 Six-Day War, the Dan Stream was the only source of the Jordan in Israeli hands. The shortage of water in Israel and the use of the Dan to meet the needs of the population almost meant the end of the reserve. The need to use the Dan's water is not a matter of dispute; the question is only from where the water should be taken. In 1966 Israel's water planners decided that it would be best to siphon the water from the source and use the force of gravity to carry it to the Hula Valley. Nature lovers in Israel believed that the reserve should not be harmed and that the water should be taken from a point farther to the north. This struggle went on for three years, but in 1969 the conservation lobby won out and the Tel Dan reserve became a reality.

The tiny Tel Dan reserve covers only about 120 acres. Nonetheless, thanks to its location and unique environmental conditions, the reserve contains plants and animals from a variety of worlds. The **Cairo spiny mouse**, a desert rodent, "climbed" here along the Syrian-African Rift. The amphibious **fire salamander** is commonly found in Europe. Adult specimens have elongated black bodies with yellow or orange splotches. During the rainy season, the salamanders gather in the pools of water to spawn their offspring, and the rivulets of the reserve are teeming with them. The **broadtoothed mouse** is a nocturnal Mediterranean rodent



Purple loosestrife



A Dan tributary

that feeds primarily on acorns. **Tristram's jird**, a representative of the central Asian steppe, is a rodent that lives in burrows and eats seeds and foliage.

The flora in the reserve are also endemic to a wide variety of places. **Syrian ash**, which grows between the rivulets, and **Jerusalem thorn**, a large, thorny, thicket-like plant, are Euro-Siberian in origin. The very large **Atlantic pistachio** and the **lotus jujube** with its crooked branches are typical of steppe regions. **Laurel** and **alaternus**, generally found in the damp part of the reserve, are Mediterranean trees, and **Christ's thorn**, whose fruit resembles tiny apples, is typically seen in eastern Africa.

The water in the rivulets contains a world in itself. The islands in the river are home to **marsh fern**, a northern fern that disappeared from the Hula Valley and can only be found in Israel here along the Dan Stream. This is the southernmost distribution of the marsh fern in the world. Another rare plant is the **stinking St. John's wort**, which can be up to four meters tall. Typical riverbank vegetation can be seen close to the water, such as **holy bramble**, **loosestrife**, **common hemp agrimony**, **gallingale**, **bedstraw**, **cynanchum** and **willow herb**.

Many invertebrates live in the water flowing through the Tel Dan reserve: **melanopsis**, a black-shelled snail, whose diet is primarily composed of the algae it scrapes from rocks; **amphipode**,



Fire salamander

Dear Visitor

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Tel Dan Nature Reserve. Please remember that the plants and animals are the permanent residents of the reserve and we are their temporary guests.

The rules of the reserve are designed to ensure that you and future visitors will have a pleasant visit to Tel Dan.

- Smoking and fire lighting are prohibited.
- There is a picnic area at the entrance to the reserve. Eating and drinking are allowed only in the picnic area.
- For your safety and comfort, please wear sensible walking shoes when touring the reserve. The entire length of the trail is rocky.
- Please stay on the marked trails.
- Do not enter the river or rivulets. Bathing is permitted only in the wading pool.
- Do not harm the flora, fauna, or inanimate objects. Do not pick the plants or take any out of the reserve.
- Please keep the reserve clean. There are garbage cans all along the hiking trails.
- Dogs are permitted in the reserve only when leashed and muzzled.

Visiting hours:

January to December: 8:00 to 16:00 (entrance until 16:00).

On Fridays and holiday eves, the reserve closes one hour earlier.

Telephone: 04-6951579



a delicate crab; and **hydrometrid**, a common water bug that can be up to 12 millimeters long. The hydrometrid lives in standing or slowly moving water and eats mainly mosquito larvae. The quiet waters typical of the part of the reserve dubbed the "Garden of Eden" contain a whole host of marine animals, and therefore visitors may not bathe or walk in the water.

The reserve is also home to several species of fish. The **Damascus barbel**, adapted to life in quickly flowing water, can climb up meter-and-a-half-high waterfalls. The **Levantine sucker**, which can grow to 14 centimeters long, is equipped with a special surface that enables it to attach itself to rocks. Its source of nourishment is the algae it scrapes into its mouth. These two species live primarily in the deeper parts of the river. In contrast, the 8-centimeter-long **Jordan loach** is found in all parts of the river. This fish can be identified by its pale yellow skin and large spots. It lives among the rocks on the streambed or hides in the sand.

Although it is difficult to spot birds flying between the tangled branches, visitors can enjoy the chirping of **Cetti's warbler**, a small songbird that hides and nests in the thicket. **White wagtails** sometimes nest on the "islands." In recent years, many **jays** fly over the reserve.

There are four trails in the reserve (see the map in this pamphlet). Part of the route is wheelchair accessible.



The Canaanite gate - "Abraham's Gate"

Bet Ussishkin

Bet Ussishkin, a regional nature and archaeology museum, is located in Kibbutz Dan very close to the Tel Dan reserve. The museum displays the world of flora and fauna in the Hula Valley and the surrounding region, beginning from before the draining of the Hula Swamp in 1951. Bet Ussishkin has an impressive exhibition of animals and plants from the surrounding countryside, including Mt. Hermon and the area containing the sources of the Jordan River.

The permanent exhibition of findings from Tel Dan contributes greatly to visitors' understanding of the ancient city and brings 5,000 years of history to life. Visitors can see tools used by members of ancient cultures on the tell from the beginning of the second millennium BCE until the Roman period. In addition, the museum has multimedia displays, including a computer program that demonstrates the changing form of the ritual site, and a hologram of the Mycenaean grave from the Late Bronze Age (the second half of the second millennium BCE).

Visitors can also enjoy an audio-visual presentation about the Jordan River and Mt. Hermon region.

Located near a flowing brook, this special building, designed by renowned architect Leopold Krakauer, is in harmony with the environment. The arch in the center of the building frames a view of Mt. Hermon, which is snow covered almost all year long.



A Dan tributary

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Cover photo and Syrian ash: Gabi Eldar

Production: Adi Greenbaum

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The Israelite gate

Ancient Dan

In 1966 a team led by Prof. Avraham Biran began to excavate Tel Dan. The impressive findings included sections of imposing walls and gates, as well as a ritual site that dates to the the time of dramatic events recounted in the Bible.

The earliest findings from a settlement on the tell belong to the Ceramic Neolithic Age (beginning of the fifth millennium BCE). A city was first built here during the early Canaanite period. It was populated between 2700 and 2400 BCE. In the eighteenth century BCE, during the middle Canaanite period, a tremendous earth glacis surrounded the city, protecting it for centuries.

The tell is identified with the city of Laish, captured by the tribe of Dan. The tribe of Dan found it difficult to deal with the Phillistines, and therefore decided to north: *"They proceeded to Laish, a people tranquil and unsuspecting, and they put them to the sword and burned down the town. There was none to come to the rescue, for it was distant from Sidon... They rebuilt the town and settled there, and they named the town Dan, after their ancestor Dan who was Israel's son. Originally, however, the name of the town was Laish"* (Judges 18:27-29).

Important remains were discovered in a Mycenaean grave from the late Canaanite period; these are on display along with other artifacts at Bet Ussishkin (see below).

One of the fascinating finds from Tel Dan is a piece of a fossilized tablet from the second half of the ninth century BCE. Carved onto it is an inscription of Hazael, King of Damascus, boasting of his victory over the king of Israel and the king of the house of David. This is the first time that the words "house of David" were discovered outside of the Bible. Unfortunately, archeologists have yet to find the inscription in its entirety. Dan continued to be inhabited until the Roman period. It was then abandoned, and the center of settlement moved to Banias.



Tour of Ancient Dan

Visitors to the tell first encounter a massive wall, built during the Israelite period (the First Temple period). Most of the wall was constructed from unhewn basalt stones, with hewn travertine blocks placed on top. When we go around the wall from the right (still outside the city limits), we see an open space paved with original flooring. Here archaeologists discovered remnants of the cult, which correspond to a verse from Kings: “... the shrines of the gates, which were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua, the city prefect – which were on a person's left as he entered the city gate” (II Kings 23:8).

Visitors interested in seeing the impressive “Abraham's Gate” should continue east on the path for another hundred meters. The roof over the gate protects it from harsh weather conditions. An environmentally friendly restroom is available for your convenience.

The approximately 50-acre mid-Canaanite-period city (eighteenth century BCE) is surrounded by a immense glacis, which reached a height of 10 to 15 meters. The base, built from layers of earth, stone, pebbles and other materials, is 60 to 70 meters thick. The gate is in the southeastern corner. It is difficult to understand from where the few thousand people who inhabited the city drew the resources to create this giant structure.

Prof. Biran had the good fortune to discover a 7-meter-high brick gate, of which 47 courses are preserved. The most remarkable discovery from this part of the tell is that the gate remained completely intact. Its arch-shaped lintel is one of the earliest complete arches found in the world and one of the only ones still standing.

Visitors return to the paved square along the Israelite-period remains and Roman-period channel. Opposite the opening in the outside gate of the wall is a base of a canopy. To the right we can clearly see a bench, on which the elders of the city once sat. It is possible this is where delegations made offerings to the king of the city. On the left, in the shade of a Mt. Tabor oak, are explanatory signs. Behind the outside gate are remnants of the main gate of the Israelite city from the time of Ahab. The threshold, the stone doorstep and the indentations for the hinges are all original.

The main gate was constructed from three pairs of beams. From there a paved path leads to the observation platform, which offers a view of the gate complex. The flooring of large basalt stones is original to the top of the glacis; the smaller stones on the way to the ritual site were laid recently for the convenience of visitors.

The path passes the “settlement pits” (to the right). Here archeologists found large collection of tools as well as the remains of a sparse settlement, generally thought to have been inhabited by the Israelites during the settlement period (twelfth century BCE), a time before the construction of real buildings.

The paved path continues to the ritual site from the period of the monarchy. Although the Bible speaks of a temple in Dan as early as the settlement period, the earliest ritual artifacts discovered date to the period of Jeroboam. Jeroboam led the people's revolt against the heavy taxes levied by Rehoboam, son of Solomon. In 930 BCE the kingdom was divided and Jeroboam established ritual centers in Bethel and Dan. He erected a golden calf in Dan and built a building to house the sacrificial high places.

During the entire time in which this ritual site was in use, the same stones were used. The people simply added walls, stories, chambers, and courtyards, or opened up existing partitions. The altar stood in front of the large platform, surrounded by finely chiseled stones. A metal frame now indicates where the original pieces are missing. Near this area, archaeologists discovered a round reservoir from the Hellenistic period as well as animal bones. On the western side of the site, the team uncovered small altar rooms and priestly chambers, with special implements for offering incense. A Hellenistic-period wall surrounds the ritual site. Here, an inscription was found in Aramic and Greek: “to the god who is in Dan.” This site was used for ritual purposes until the Roman period. From here, the trail continues to the “command-post outlook,” which can be reached through the original defense trenches. The Israel Defense Forces used this post until the 1967 Six-Day War. Below is the patrol road. At the foot of the tell is a white path that is on the other side of the border with



The high place

Syria, which was determined in the 1920s. This area has a beautiful view of the slopes of Mt. Hermon, with the Syrian earthworks for the diversion of the Hazbani River, the abandoned Syrian command post Nuheila, and the village of Al-Ayam in southern Lebanon.

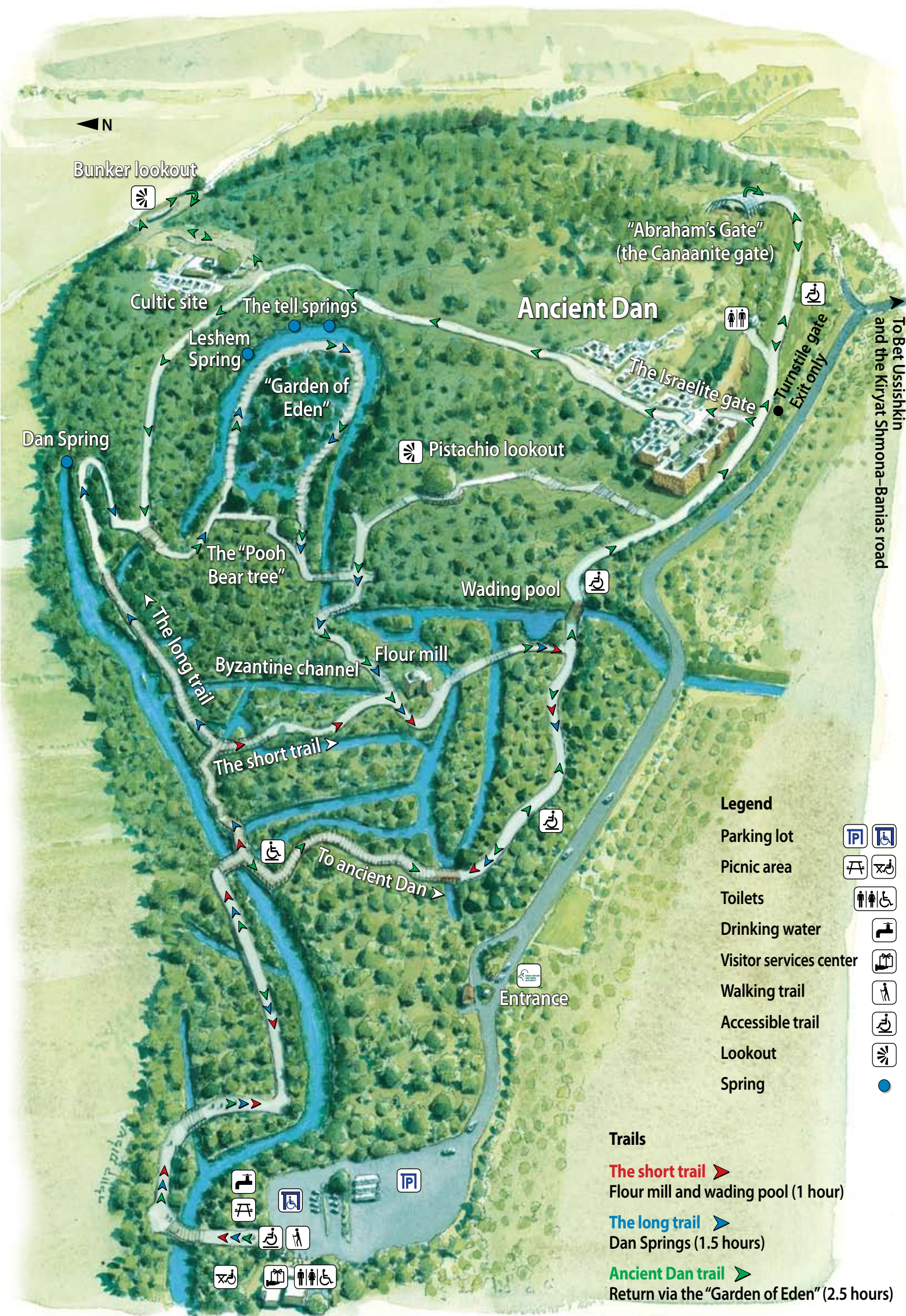
This ends the tour of ancient Dan. We recommend that you return to the parking lot via the “Garden of Eden,” the flour mill, and the wading pool. The eucalyptus trees that shade the parking lot were planted by the members of Kibbutz Dan when they took possession of the land in 1939.



The Dan Stream



A mulberry tree



The “Pooh bear tree” – a Syrian ash

Attractions in the Reserve

Wading pool

A shallow pool that is the only place where children (and grown-ups, too) can wade in the cool water to their hearts' content.

The Pistachio lookout

A view of the reserve, the Hula Valley, the Naphtali Mountains, Mt. Hermon, and the Golan Heights. The lookout is named after the large Atlantic pistachio tree that grows there.

The “Pooh Bear tree”

A very large and picturesque Syrian ash tree reminiscent of the home of the famous literary bear.

The tell springs – Leshem Spring (in Arabic En el-Khadi)

A large group of springs on the ancient tell.

Dan Spring (in Arabic En a-Lidan)

The largest spring in the Dan Stream. Also called the Dan headwaters.

The “Garden of Eden”

Tranquil streams, very tall laurel and other trees, cool air, peace and quiet. You can imagine this is the way the Garden of Eden was.

The burnt pistachio

The charred remains of an old Atlantic pistachio, burned by careless visitors. The circumference of the trunk is more than six meters.

The flour mill

The mill was built about 150 years ago and operated on water power until 1948. The mill has two pairs of millstones.

The command post lookout

These trenches served the Israel Defense Forces until the Six-Day War (1967). They reveal a fine view of the old patrol road, the slopes of Mt. Hermon, the abandoned Syrian outpost of Nukheila, and the village of el-Hiyyam in Lebanon.

The high place

A shrine from the time of the Kingdom of Israel, apparently part of a complex built by King Jeroboam son of Nebat (930 BCE).

The Canaanite gate

A gate from the eighteenth century BCE, completely intact, with an arched entry, one of the oldest complete arches in the world.

The Israelite gate

An impressive gate built of three pairs of pilasters, apparently from the First Temple period.

