

## Reflection Paper Soils 497U Trip to Jordan Garrett Guinivan

I feel by the beginning of July I will look back on this summer and realize that I may not have a more enjoyable summer for quite some time. The first leg of my amazing summer started with the trip to Jordan from May 16<sup>th</sup>-June 6<sup>th</sup>. Everything about this trip was eye-opening and unique in a lot of ways. I have taken two semesters of Arabic and I am taking another semester in the fall, so going to Jordan also brought a language aspect that I relished. I may have known only basic Arabic but the trip made me learn so many cultural aspects and lots of new vocabulary.

After being in Amman for a day or two I realized that I was no where near to fluent in Arabic and I was very overwhelmed. Once we met with Raed and our 4x4 drivers I began to get a grip on the area and began to open up more with my knowledge of Arabic. I found that our drivers, Raed and especially our tourist police officer Saad loved that I studied the language and that I could speak it, or try to speak it at least. I started to learn little differences and nuances in the language that I could have only found out about by being in Jordan for such a long time. This is a testament to how complicated that the Arabic language is and how many different dialects exist in the language.

I started by just making small talk with our drivers and being able to read Arabic really helped with street signs, posters, business signs in the cities, etc. I then began to use my knowledge when talking with street vendors and people I didn't know, which helped because I heard many different voices and words. I couldn't hold extremely long

conversations but every little bit helped. I also noticed that I seemed to gain more respect because I had a grasp on the language and was trying to communicate. Whether I was trying to haggle prices or just make small talk with guides or people we met, I noticed more respect even though I'm sure I sounded choppy and a little ridiculous to the native Jordanians.

A turning point for me was at Wadi Mujib where I realized that I had made progress with the language, albeit just conversational Arabic. Aside from that fact, Wadi Mujib was an amazing hike that I will never forget, I found out how my Arabic had progressed when I finished rappelling down the waterfall of the river canyon. At the bottom 4 Jordanians, originally from Palestine as I would find out later, began to talk to me. I immediately started using Arabic and held a conversation with them until everyone was done rappelling down the waterfall that day. I smoked a cigarette with them, despite absolutely despising cigarettes, because they wanted to talk to me more and they wouldn't take 'Laa' for an answer. When I first started talking and said I was from America, they didn't believe me, which was interesting, because they didn't expect an American to know Arabic. Despite the situation that was unfolding with Israel and Palestine, and their Palestine descendents, they seemed to have more of a respect because of me using the language. They still most likely despise the US in many ways but I really think knowing Arabic helped with me personally.

After getting to use my limited knowledge of Arabic, and learning so much I really want to learn even more about the language and eventually become fluent.

Aside from the language aspect, the sites we went to on the trip were absolutely phenomenal. I liked it better when we were hiking instead of driving, but our 4x4 drivers couldn't have been any better. We also lucked out with Saad, and I also feel Saad lucked out with us a group. Being able to talk to him a lot, I came to find out no group was like us and he had barely any interaction with group he has been with before. I am still keeping in contact with him via email and Facebook and I hopefully stay in touch with him for quite some time.

I can not put a favorite site on the trip but there were a few that stood out to me. The water canyon hike was a top site for me because I have already rappelled before, meeting the Palestinians and just the sheer beauty of the place. The wine tasting was amazing in its own way and also the owner of the farm was brilliant in his approach to being organic and hopefully I can use his ideas when I eventually get into international agriculture advising in the future/agriculture advising in the Army. Also the hike and stay in Wadi Feynan was amazing with the 14km climb up the mountain. I couldn't have asked for a better training exercise for me and the sights were amazing, along with drinking tea with the guides Bedouin family. Staying in Ajloun was also amazing and very different because I never thought I would say that I was legitimately shivering in Jordan. Also I was happy too because I got to run around Ajloun and I can say hands down I have never ran in such a beautiful area in my life. Lastly was our last day in Wadi Rum. Staying a night in the desert, going off-roading in the desert, dancing with a Bedouin tribe are three things I can cross off my bucket list. Also that night having the entire group smoking argileh (hookah) really was the only time everyone in the group was truly together outside of daily activities. It was nice to have everyone interacting and

relaxed with each other. In addition, I have never seen a star-scape then what I saw in Wadi Rum, it was absolutely beautiful, I will never forget it as I will never forget this trip.

Pictures...

1. Group picture floating in the Dead Sea
2. Group picture with our translator and guide Raed on the right
3. Me after the 14km hike to our campsite atop a mountain in Dana
4. Me riding a camel out of Wadi rum with the PSU flag

