
Looking for the Dhab

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When I was filming Dag'aa, I was curious about the Bedouins mode of navigation in the desert. Of course, we know that they do that with the aid of the stars and other tools of nature. But in addition to that, there are also markers in the terrain that are not particular at all but are imbued with meaning by the Bedouins as navigation tools, such as one rock between many, a hill, a dead camel's body, and so on. In addition to that, they hide things in the desert – not in the traditional way of hiding but through making them visible. The vastness of the landscape almost swallows intentionally – hidden things that they seem unidentifiable. With a trained eye and a familiarity with the space, being positioned in a certain spot and looking for a certain thing, it becomes visible. Noting the above as a mode of Bedouin movement, the Dhab was mentioned to me throughout the trip as an edible energy booster, specifically for a vision, which becomes a complimentary aid for that movement through vision. We hadn't encountered the Dhab as we navigated the desert, and the bedouin smugglers wanted me to try it.

Eventually they told me I could find it in Jordan and that meant flying from there through Sharm el Sheikh airport. Initially, I had entered Sinai by land through the Taba border from Eilat, where I was interrogated for two hours by the Egyptian security. They didn't want anyone to enter with a camera and they were questioning the reason for my visit as they suspected I was a journalist. Since I had some footage of a sensitive nature, given the political circumstances in Egypt, I was reluctant to go back the same way. So I decided for safety reasons to go through the airport and at the same time to try to fulfill that visual experience from eating the Dhab.

– Shadi Habib Allah, June 2017



We could not locate the Dhab on that trip. It's a yellowish lizard with thick scales and a wider body in the middle. It can grow up to 4ft and move with speed. It is found in the desert of that region. The Bedouins say that when you eat it, it makes your vision sharper; that you can see details on the far horizon.