

Izbet Abu Basal Village Profile

Name of Village: IZBET ABU BASAL

Name of person doing the survey: Anna P and Hannah

Date of Survey: March 24, 2005

Izbet Abu Basal is 14 km east of the Green Line, 8 km west of Ariel's eastern border

Looking southwest out our office window across the settler highway and atop a steep hill, there is a house. According to our map, this should be Dar Abu Basal. After arranging a meeting time with the family living there, we set out on a beautiful day to walk in as straight a line as possible from our home to his. Ignoring the longer but easier path of the roads, we walked up and down terraces, across roads, and through olive groves and tall grass with budding flowers marking the beginning of Spring. We found Sahim working in a field next to his house.

We discovered quickly that this house was not Izbet Abu Basal, but Izbet Dar Qaid (Qaid is their family name). One family of 10 currently lives on the land, although members of their family have been living there longer than anyone knows. Their ownership papers, given to them by the Ottoman Empire in 1910, reflect only some of the history of the family's presence in that spot. On their 253 dunams of land are a variety of crops and animals, although it has been too difficult to bring their 500 goats back and forth between the izbe and Kifl Hares since the settler highway was built a few years ago. They face threats from the army and from the cars that drive too fast along the road. Mohammad Qaid, Sahim's father, was hit by a car and killed last year at the age of 76 as he was crossing the road with his donkey.

The family has seen other deaths as well. In 2001, Ariel settler authorities cut down 500 of the family's trees, claiming that the land was Ariel's. The family went to court with their ownership papers, and was told that the land was not theirs, but Ariel's, and that if they didn't demolish their own home the army would come do it for them. Their home has not been demolished, and the family has not been bothered since then, although they are well aware that the path of the Wall will go next to or through their land, and that they will be caught on the wrong side of it, if completed as planned. Sahim will no longer be able to ride his donkey around a mountain to work every day in Kifl Hares, the children will not be able to go to school (or will have to live permanently in Kifl Hares to do so), and, similarly to the situation in Izbet Abu Adam, the family will be completely separated from the rest of the West Bank.

From Izbet Dar Qaid, we finally spotted Izbet Abu Basal, our original destination. Figuring we couldn't stop now, we continued our hike, this time along a small agricultural road. We arrived to a group of very talkative sheep that let out loud "Baaa!"s each time we hollered "Salaam Aleikum!" but nobody else—human, that is—was there. We started to head home, and happened upon an older man with a herd of goats. He was just the man we wanted to speak with, one of the few remaining inhabitants of the izbe. We had a short conversation, curtailed by our limited Arabic skills, his limited hearing, and the intense attention paid to keeping his many goats from running loose. We discovered that the family moved to the hill in 1948, refugees from Kfar Saba, and has been living there since then. The man's wife lives most of the time in Salfit, as do his sons who work there. We had heard from Sahim that one of the man's sons was killed after throwing a stone at a jeep last year. This was confirmed by the man, who was visibly upset when we mentioned the incident, so we did not push the matter further. The conversation ended quickly after he ran off for good to get a goat and we continued on our way, trying to find the road that would lead us back to Hares. We found ourselves inside the nearby Ariel industrial area, which Ariel claims as its western boundary despite the 4 kilometers of Palestinian land between this area and the westernmost inhabited part of Ariel. A confused security guard asked us what we were doing as we walked out through the gate, but we ignored him, found a taxi