

## Al-Wadi Al-Jaded (New Valley)

West of the Nile is the beautiful Western Desert. Not completely free of life though, there are several pockets of life and vegetation in the middle of this wasteland. The area was named by **Jamal Abdul Nasser** in 1958 when he initiated a project to cultivate the Western Desert and have people move there to reduce the pressure on the Nile valley. It remains to this day the largest governorate in Egypt and the least populated.

### *Farafra Oasis*

South from Bahariya Oasis, the road to **Farafra Oasis** is not a disappointment. The landscape dramatically changes from the unearthly volcanic mounds of the *Black Desert* to the snow-like ergs and mushroom formations of the *White Desert*.

## White desert



**The White Desert between Farafra and Bahariya Oases, Western Desert**

**The White Desert** covers an area of 300 km<sup>2</sup>, and it is important to be seen on any desert safari. At its entrance there's **Crystal Mountain**, a ridge that is entirely composed of quartz crystals.

Another attraction in Farafra is the **Jara Cave** with its 9,000 year old drawings, a massive cave that contains prehistoric rock art. Most of the engravings depict big

Game hunts and everyday life. It was discovered by **Gerhard Rolfs** in 1873, only to be forgotten and rediscovered again by **Carlo Bergmann** in 1991.

Other attractions include **Badr Museum**, a showcase for traditional oasis life; **Qasr Al-Farafra**, Farafra is only town with its mud-brick houses and Roman fortress; and the **Bir Sitta Hot Springs**.

## **Dakhla Oasis**

About 250km southeast of Farafra is **Dakhla Oasis**. About 75,000 people live in 14 settlements spread in and around the oasis itself, supported by more than 520 wells. It does not lack in sites, there are Paranoiac, Roman, Coptic and Medieval Islamic monuments that can be explored around the main villages.



**The old village of Al-Qasr, Dakhla Oasis.**

The main base for travelers to Dakhla is the town of **Mut**. The old town is still at its centre with its old houses and winding passages that are an

adventure on their own. Around Mut there are several sites to explore and several hot springs to relax in. North of Mut is the old village of **Al-Qasr**, renowned with its old town. An international team from the Dakhla Oasis Project and the SCA has been carrying out restoration of the town for the last 30 years.

Close to Al-Qasr you can find the **Muzawaka Tombs**, they've under restoration for years, and yet further off the beaten path is **Deir El-Hagar – Stone Monastery**, an ancient Roman temple dedicated to the Theban Triad and the oasis deity Seth.

To the east of Mut on the road to Kharga Oasis you pass through several settlements with history stretching back in time to Roman and Paranoiac times. **Asmant Al-Khorab – Asmant the Ruined**, the local name for the ruins of **Kellis**, a Roman and Coptic settlement. The site is off limits due to excavations. Down the road past several smaller settlements and 10 km off the highway at the **village of Teneida** there are some **rock inscriptions** including giraffes, camels and hunters.

## **Kharga Oasis**

About 189 km east of Dakhla is **Kharga Oasis**, the capital of Al-Wadi Al-Jadeed, and the one oasis with a large collection of ancient monuments and sites. The town of Kharga itself is very much faceless, as a traditional oasis life for dreams of modernity back in the 1960s.



**The old Christian Coptic necropolis at Al-Bagawat in the Kharga Oasis (3-7th century CE)**

Taking the town of Kharga itself as a starting point, there are plenty of sites and excursions to the north and to the south on the road to **Baris Oasis**. To the north of Kharga there are the **Temple of Hibis**, the **Bagawat Necropolis**, **Deir Al-Kashef**, named after the local Mameluke tax collector, and the ruins of the **Temple of Nadura**. Other sites are less accessible and require a guide and a 4WD, include a marvel of Roman engineering, a grand **underground aqueduct** (road) at **Ain Umm Dabadib**.

To the south of Kharga on the road to Baris, there are to chief sites that can be visited: **Qasr Al-Ghweita – *Palace of the Beautiful***, a well preserved **mud-brick Roman fortress** enclosing a sandstone temple from the late period, now mostly surrounded by sand. The other site is **Qasr Al-Zayan**, another temple enclosed within a mud-brick fortress.

### **Baris Oasis**

Named like the French capital, **Baris** (pronounced *Barees*), doesn't offer much to travelers beyond **Qasr Al-Dush** about 23 km to the south of the main town; the ruins of the ancient town of **Kysis** and its hilltop fortress, and the impressive **Temple of Dush**, built by **Domitian** and completed in 177 CE by Emperors **Hadrian** and **Trajan**, the temple was dedicated to Isis and Serapes, and is renowned to have been partially covered in gold.

## **Al-Gilf Al-Kabir National Park**

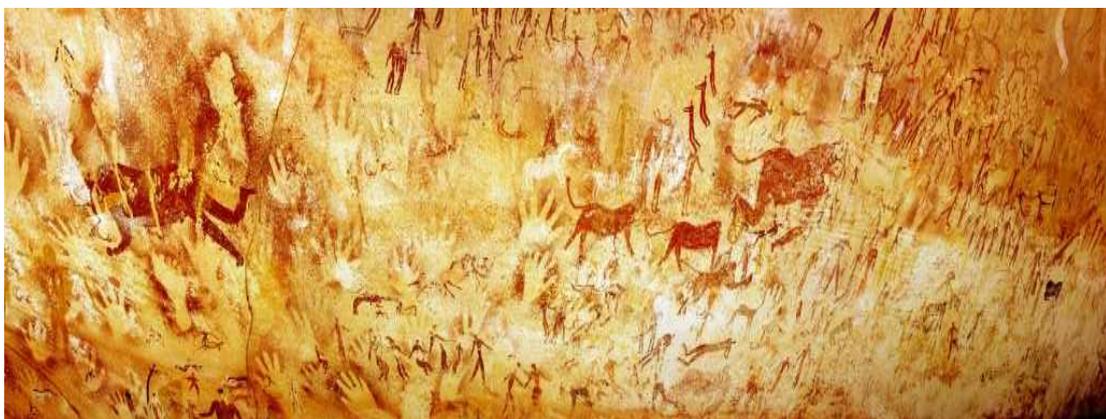
This is the final frontier of Egypt, the closest environment on earth to the surface of Mars. In ancient times the area was inhabited by **cattle pastoralist cultures** that left thousands of engravings and rock art depicting giraffes, ostriches, lions and cattle, as well as people hunting and swimming. This lifestyle came to an end when the climate changed dramatically, shifting savannah into arid desert around 5,000 BCE, making it a hostile inhospitable place. The closest water source is almost 500km away at Bir Tarafawi.



**Al-Gilf Al-Kabir Plateau and some of its rock formations.**

In 2007 the **Gilf Kebir National Park** was established, with a total area of 48,533 km<sup>2</sup>, at its heart is the **Gilf Kebir Plateau** a massive twice the size of Corsica, dissected by massive *wadis* (valleys). About 150km south of Gilf Kebir Plateau is **Jebel Uewinat**, a 1,934 meters high massive with a wealth of geological formations, rock paintings. Lastly, the **Great Sand Sea**; a complex chain of dunes that are among the largest of its kind in the world, it stretches for over 650km from Siwa Oasis to the Gilf Kebir Plateau.

The first to discover the Gilf Kebir “Great Barrier” Plateau was **Prince Kamal Al-Din Hussein**, heir to the Egyptian throne, in 1926. What followed was a flurry of exploration carried out by a handful of men from different nationalities who dedicated their lives to this region. The area later became an important stage of reconnaissance and during **WWII**. Several legends were born here: **Laszlo Almásy**, the *real* English Patient; and the famous [Long Range Desert Group](#) (LRDG) founded by **Major Ralph Alger Bagnold**, one of the original group of explorers of the Gilf.



**Abu Ras Shelter (Foggini-Mesikawi Cave).**

There are several must-sees in the area, the most famous of which lies in **Wadi Sura**, with the **Cave of the Swimmers** and **Cave of the Archers**, discovered by **Almásy** in 1933, and the **Foggini-Mestikawi Cave**, dubbed the '**Sistine Chapel of Prehistory**' due its 100s of perfectly preserved rock paintings, it was discovered by chance in **2002** by the **Italian Massimo and Jacopo Foggini** during an exploration with Western Desert veteran **Colonel Ahmed Mestikawi**.



**Jebel Uweinat, Wind Streaks. By NASA/Crew member of Expedition 4.**

**Jebel Uweinat – *Mountain of Small Springs*** – was discovered and named by Egyptian adventurer **Ahmed Hassanein Bey**, in 1923, crossed the entire Western Desert with a camel caravan starting from the Mediterranean coast heading south for 2,200 miles finally reaching Jebel Uweinat. Extending into Jebel Uweinat is **Karkur Talh, *Acacia Valley***, an open air museum with over 4,000 rock art sites.



**Commons. Tutankhamun's pectoral features a scarab carved from Libyan Desert Silica Glass**

The first European to traverse the **Great Sand Sea** was German explorer, **Gerhard Rohlfs** in 1874 with a caravan of 17 camels; it took a total of **36 days**. It is one of the largest expanses of sand in the world, at 72,000 km<sup>2</sup>; it is roughly the size of Ireland. It also holds on the greatest mysteries of the Sahara: **Libyan Glass**, it was discovered in 1932 by English explorer,

**Patrick Clayton.** However, a study of Tutankhamen's pectoral in 1998 revealed that the glass scarab adorning it was in fact made with ***Libyan Desert Silica Glass.***

The section regarding Al-Gilf Al-Kebir National Park is but a small summary of the very thoroughly detailed guide: [\*\*\*Gilf Kebir National Park, by Alberto Siliotti.\*\*\*](#) If you plan a visit to the park, this is one item that you cannot do without.

**Sania said**  
**A.R.I.D.O Egypt**

