

The little things that make the difference - Accessibility for all in the forests

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The KKL-JNF forests are used as rest and recreational sites, receiving millions of visitors every year. The demand for visiting the forests is on a constant upward trend due to the growing health and physical need for activity in natural sites and the constant growth in the population.

The field of accessibility has been an integral part of KKL-JNF's day-to-day activities for years. In the 1990s, a large-scale process of opening the forests to the public began. KKL-JNF was the pioneer in the field of making open spaces accessible even before the law and regulations for equality for people with disabilities was enforced in 1998 - based on the concept that the forests are open to everyone, and everyone has the right to enjoy nature.

Our overarching aspiration is that our sites would be accessible to a variety of populations. That is, we design the sites for all visitors, including those with unique needs, to be able to participate in activities in our open spaces, such as families with small children or the elderly. This we based on the concept that planning adapted to the needs of the population, derived from the nature of the area and the ability to maintain it, allows access to nature without the need for high costs or complex and expensive development. Unlike the development of urban sites, the development in natural areas is mostly done with a minimalist, modest and as simple an approach as possible, the goal of which is to enable travel and spending time in nature at a reasonable level of comfort, with maximum affinity

and respect for the values of the place with easy, convenient maintenance.

As part of the requirements of the law and practice in the field of making forests accessible to the public, KKL-JNF prepared and promoted a multi-year work plan for the years 2011-2018, over which time, over 300 sites in the forests were accessed and adapted with an emphasis on experiencing nature and preserving the spirit of the place.

With a long-term view, KKL-JNF promotes master plans. One example of this is the national bicycle master plan prepared by the Toch-Sargosi Ministry (2018) in a joint team with KKL-JNF. One of the main goals of the plan is to connect the local communities to the forests. The plan established a principle designs according to which at least one bicycle path in every forest cycling complex will be accessible. The accessibility aspects are incorporated into every stage of planning, from the master plans, through the detailed development plans prepared for each forest, to forest and interface plans.

The development components and the planning principles that we work according to are practical and are very focused on the ability to maintain the nature of the site, with the aim of creating a language uniform and integrated, and avoid complex details that make maintenance difficult: a simple, minimalist design that does not compete with the site and its character.

The planning should allow access from the parking lot to the main site, including picnic areas adapted for people with disabilities. In the design of the elements, we avoid stairs and obstacles in the accessible path, and incorporate the forest and

its landscape qualities. We try to create paths that naturally wind through the forest at slopes of up to 8% and install handrails if necessary. Sometimes we find other solutions to avoid visual overload.

The accessible paths in the forests are mainly asphalt or concrete paths combined with natural stone and natural stone and cut stone flooring. The use of stone for paving is challenging, and stems from the desire to allow easy access on the one hand and preserve the wild nature of the area on the other hand. The accessible bike paths are adapted for hand bikes and tandem bikes. The sawmill and KKL's execution unit specialize in the production of unique forestry elements, such as forestry furniture adapted for accessibility, KKL-JNF tables, benches, barbecue facilities, accessible fire circles and more.

Most of the sites that KKL-JNF has developed, such as the information centers and hides to view wild animals, now have adaptations for people with disabilities. This is a significant challenge due to the constant increase in the number of visitors to the forests, the changing and updating of accessibility standards and the severe vandalism in the forests. An example of this type of project is the park for the blind in the Ben Shemen forest (Forest, Issue 21). Other sites that have been upgraded and made more accessible in recent years are: the Ilanot Arboretum Center, which in 2015 won Israel Accessibility Association's accessibility award, and the Nahal HaShofet site, which was designed twenty years ago as an accessible flagship site and is currently being upgraded. This type of planning work gives us a sense of mission, even if what is required are small touches, a few more paths and benches, their importance and contribution to accessibility is very great.



Ramot Community Forest in Jerusalem, sketches before renovations
Photo: Bella Nudelman



Wooden benches combined with a stone wall. Carried out by: Eshtaol Sawmill, Nahal HaShofet Project
Photo: Bella Nudelman



Upgrading and renewing a park for the visually impaired in the Ben Shemen forest
Photo: Bella Nudelman



An accessible bonfire circle in the Forest of the Martyrs, at the Jews of Yemen site. The circle allows people to sit in a group for instruction or around a campfire. Carried out by: KKL-JNF Central Area
Photo: Bella Nudelman



Stone paving that was designed for accessibility for the Nahal HaShofet project: a bush hammered stone, processed to look natural, with minimal force at the height of the stone to get most of the surface leveled and without protrusions
Photo: Bella Nudelman



Ramat Community Forest in Jerusalem, after the renovations
Photo: Bella Nudelman

