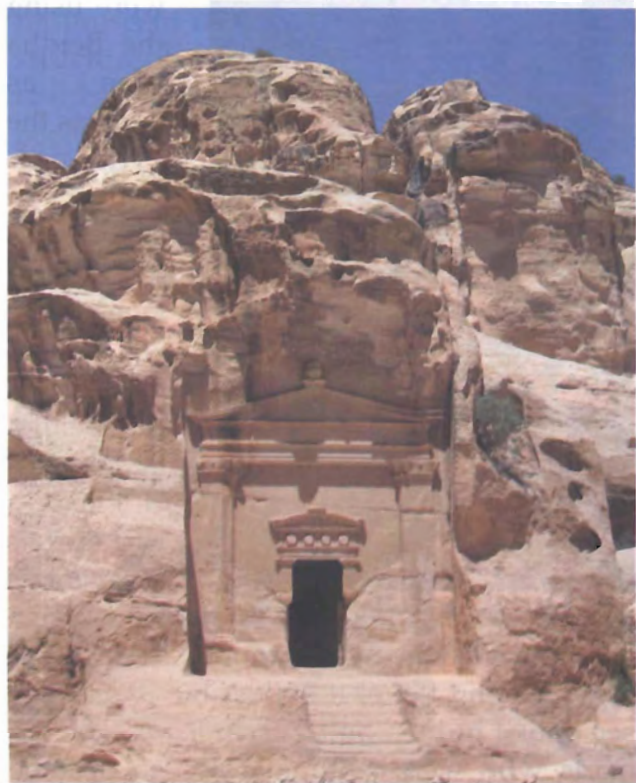

Beidha: Little Petra



NABATAEAN FACADE AT BEIDHA

Just a ten-minute drive north of the visitor's center at Petra is Beidha, often called Little Petra. The site is a perfect half-day excursion and is a suitable alternate for those who would find the walk into the main site too difficult. There are four separate areas at Beidha: the Neolithic or New Stone Age site, the Nabataean village, Siq al-Amṭi, and Siq al-Barid, called the Little Siq.

The Neolithic Site

Attracted by the presence of water, salt, and high quality flint to make tools, early nomads



AERIAL VIEW OF THE NEOLITHIC SITE

were using the Beidha area as early as the 11th millennium B.C., but it is for the village of the 7th millennium B.C. that Beidha is famous. Diana Kirkbride's excavations between

1958 and 1983 uncovered more than 65 buildings. Among them, it is possible to actually see one of humankind's great leaps. The nomads who were settling down to become farmers rather than wandering hunters and gatherers of wild foods initially built round houses. These were easy to construct but had a serious drawback—it was difficult to add a room to a round structure. At Beidha, the struggle for a solution is visible. There are round houses, houses that are almost rectangular but have curving walls and round corners and, finally, rectangular structures, some with two stories.

The Nabataean Village

Although there has been no excavation of this area, called Umm Qussa, many structures are visible. The largest of these are a cistern and a cave with a vaulted roof. There are many



UMM QUSSA, A NABATAEAN VILLAGE

caves that were used for storage and as housing. This is a good illustration of the way the Nabataeans used the soft sandstone as a building material in an area where wood was so scarce it was only rarely used for building. The multiple cisterns and water channels also demonstrate the ability of the Nabataeans, and the other inhabitants of the region before them and since, to exist in a harsh and arid environment by saving every drop of water that they could. In the cliff at the entrance to Siq al-Amti one can see steps leading up to a modern door. This leads to a large Nabataean cistern that is currently in use by the Amareen Bedouin of Beidha. The Amareen were traditionally camel and goat herders who provided services to passing caravans. As late as 1929, caravans of 300 camels could be seen at Beidha.

Siq al-Amti

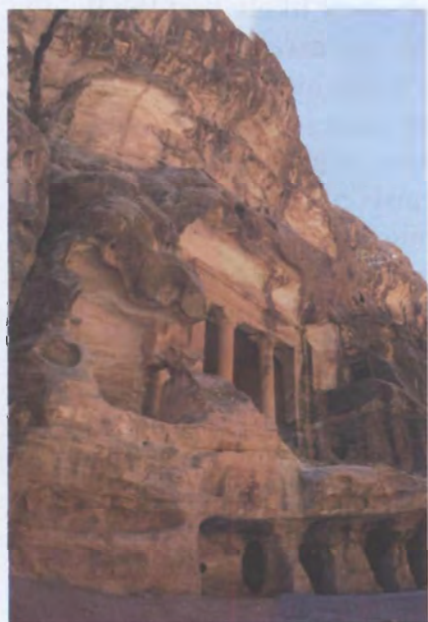
It is believed that there were also large caravans in antiquity that stopped at Beidha. There is no place inside the city of Petra for large groups of camels and so there had to be one or more stations outside of the city. The existence of large cisterns and open fields for grazing, plus the security offered by Siq al-Barid for actual trading, make it likely that the Beidha area was used by the caravans. Whether the large square building at the center of Siq al-Amti was part of that use cannot be established. There are two large wine presses cut into the bedrock in this canyon—one near the entrance and another along the cliff opposite the large building. The walls visible in the canyon probably enclosed agricultural fields, perhaps for grapes. Some believe that the name Beidha, meaning white, refers to a type of grape, not to white sandstone.



SIQ AL-AMTI

The Little Siq

Siq al-Barid (Cold Canyon) contains a number of Nabataean carved facades which make it reminiscent of Petra. However, most of the structures here were probably not tombs but homes and shops. Cool in the summer and protected from the wind in the winter, the location would have been very attractive. It



NABATAEAN BUILDING, PERHAPS A HOME

could also be easily defended; one can see remains of a door in the narrow entry. One of the most beautiful buildings, shown here, is thought by some to be a temple, but others believe it is simply the

living room of a house that also included the rooms below it. One of the rooms has shelves in the walls indicating that it may have been a kitchen. At the end of the canyon, a rock-cut stairway leads out to the west. From here or from the Neolithic village area, it is possible to walk to the city center of Petra in less than two hours (a guide is essential).



Key:

- 1) Road from Wadi Musa and Petra
- 2) Road from Shobak, Hisheh and the Amareen village
- 3) Road from Wadi Araba (4-wheel drive only)
- 4) Parking area, kiosks, and entry to the Little Siq (Siq al-Barid)
- 5) Siq al-Amti (named for a tree that grows in the canyon), perhaps a Nabataean wine production center
- 6) Nabataean village, Umm Qussa
- 7) Neolithic village; there is a track suitable for 4-wheel drive vehicles from the parking lot (4) to the village (7)

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