



# NGSBA Excavation Reports

## Volume 1 (2009)

### Salvage Excavation and Documentation of Sites at Nahal Gov - 2004 Final Report

Excavation Permit: B - 292/2004  
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Academic Sponsor: Hebrew Union College



Figure 1: Location map of the archaeological investigation area (plan no: 272/03/10 – Sdeh Gov).

## Introduction

In an archaeological survey carried out in February 2004 by Dr. Tali Erickson-Gini (Southern Negev Supervisor, Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA)) at the request of Rotem Emprat Negev Corporation Ltd, forty-three potential archaeological sites were located in the area of Sdeh Gov. After further research, on 17 October 2004 the IAA reduced this number to fifteen (see table below). These sites were excavated under the direction of Y.G. Contract Archaeology executive Yehuda Govrin in mid-November 2004.

Before excavations commenced, Yehuda Govrin and Tali Erickson-Gini toured the area in order to confirm the sites and their locations, and to establish what would be the satisfactory extent of excavations and recording. Altogether twelve sites were marked for excavation, and three for documenting.

Below is a table showing the sites, their types and the IAA excavation and recording demands of each. Site 5, initially defined as a pile of stones, was subsequently cancelled from the list, while Sites 34, 35, 43, 46 and 50 were deemed outside the client's proposed mining impact area, thus eliminating the need to investigate them.

| Site no | Site            | X      | Y       | Requirements           | Total |
|---------|-----------------|--------|---------|------------------------|-------|
| 1       | Grave           | 162360 | 1033340 | Excavation 2/2.5       | 5     |
| 2       | Grave           | 162356 | 1033345 | Excavation 2/1         | 2     |
| 3       | Grave           | 162171 | 1033516 | Excavation 1/2         | 2     |
| 4       | Campsite        | 162170 | 1033479 | Test excavation<br>2/2 | 4     |
| 5       | Rogem           | 162788 | 1033536 | Excavation 2/3         | 6     |
| 6       | Structure       | 162177 | 1033546 | Excavation 2/3         | 6     |
| 8       | Stone line      | 162224 | 1033350 | Recording              |       |
| 9       | Stone line      | 162221 | 1033350 | Recording              |       |
| 10      | Grave           | 162251 | 1033371 | Excavation 2/2         | 4     |
| 11      | Installation    | 162275 | 1033374 | Excavation 1/1.5       | 1.5   |
| 12      | Grave           | 162308 | 1033381 | Excavation 1/1.5       | 1.5   |
| 13      | 2 Graves        | 162361 | 1033437 | Excavation 2/2         | 4     |
| 14      | Campsite        | 162361 | 1033425 | Excavation 2/2         | 4     |
| 34      | Grave           | 162411 | 1033419 | 2x2.5                  | 5     |
| 35      | Rogem           | 162392 | 1033432 | 4x4                    | 16    |
| 36      | Sq<br>Structure | 162352 | 1033432 | 2x2                    | 4     |
| 43      | Structure/II    | 162493 | 1033909 | Excavation 1/1.5       | 1.5   |
| 46      | Structure       | 162196 | 1033700 | Excavation 5/5         | 25    |
| 50      | Shiniyot        | 162562 | 1033027 | Recording              |       |

## The Sites

### **Nahal Gov – 1** (identified in the survey as a grave)

Location: 162340 – 033350, altitude: 43m (GPS)

Description (Fig.2): A cluster of stones on a slope. Fieldstones of various sizes were concentrated as a pile within a 1.3m diameter. The stone cluster rests on *Hamada* soil whose surface is covered with small stones and natural brown flint fragments.

Excavation (Fig.3): A 2 x 2m square was excavated to a depth of 0.15m, down to the natural soil. No finds were recovered during the excavation.

Conclusion: There is no certainty that this site was man-made since no architecture or finds were recovered. It is possible that this site was a natural cluster of local limestone.



Figures 2, 3: Site 1, general view before and after excavation.





**Nahal Gov – 2 (identified in the survey as a grave)**

Location: 162345 – 033341, altitude: 32m

Description (Fig.4, 5): A large rock broken into seven parts was found on this extended slope. The rock is brown and stands out above the ground to a height of 0.40m. The site was not excavated; it was identified as a natural rock broken into a number of fragments with no associated artifacts.

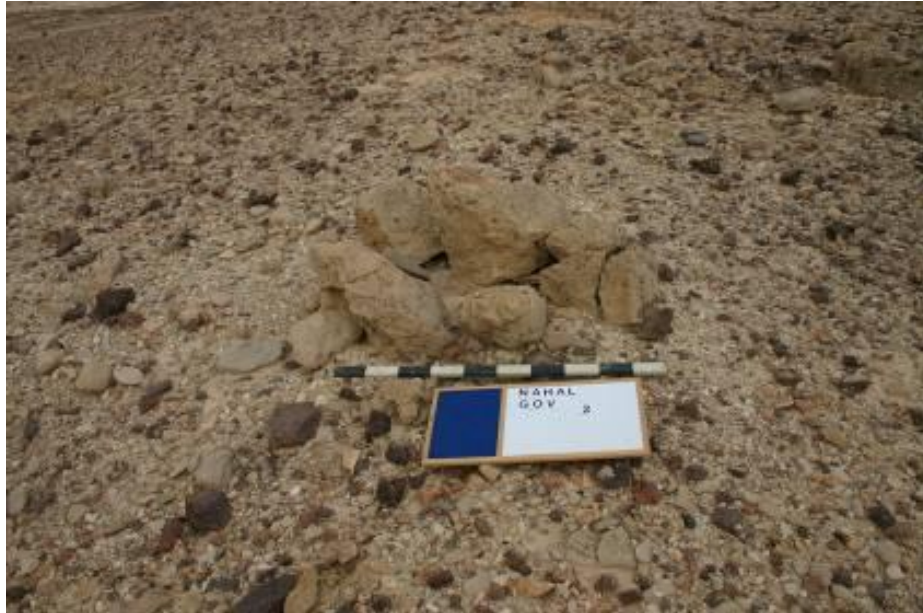


Figure 4: Site 2, the broken rock general view (photographed from east).



Figure 5: Site 2, general view of the broken rock (photographed from west).

### **Nahal Gov – 3 (identified in the survey as a grave)**

Location: 162186 – 033527, altitude: 45m

Description (Fig.6): An elliptical feature oriented east-west and measuring ca.2.90m long and ca.1.80m wide. The feature rests on *Hamada* sediment mixed with small and medium-sized stones.

Excavation (Fig.7): A 4 x 4m square was excavated to a depth of ca.0.5m, reaching sterile gravel subsoil. We uncovered a course of large and medium-sized stones placed on a course of small and medium-sized stones.

Conclusions: No pottery or lithics were found in the excavation. Despite this the impression is that this is a man-made structure, its purpose and date unknown.

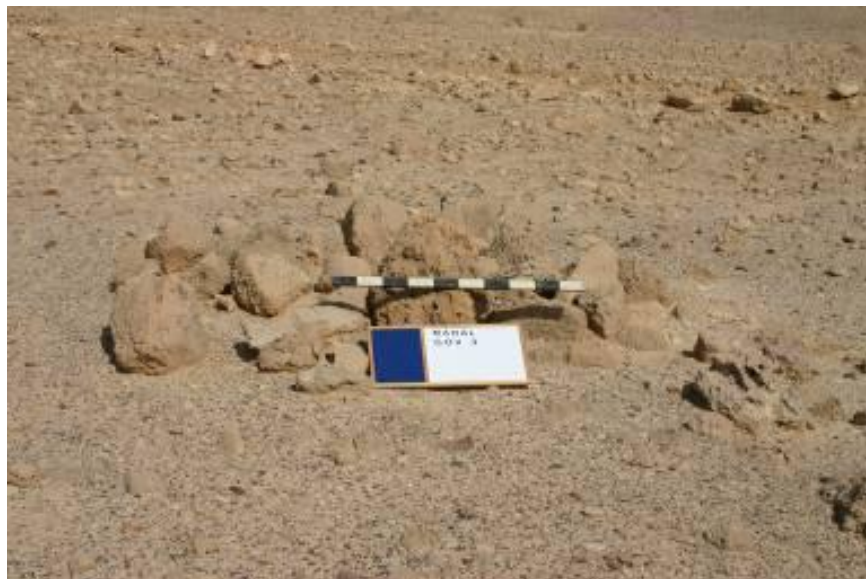


Figure 6: Site 3, general view before excavation.

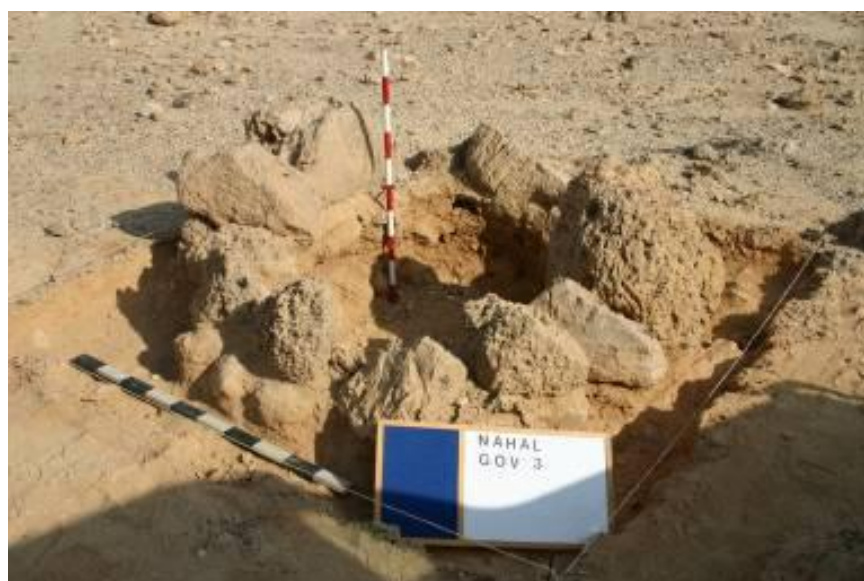


Figure 7: Site 3, general view after excavation.



**Nahal Gov – 4 (defined in the survey as a campsite)**

Location: 162149 – 033470, altitude: 46m

Description (Fig.8): The remains of a stone circle preserved only in its northern section, to a height of ca.0.25m. The circle was built from medium-sized brown flint stones set on *Hamada* soil mixed with small brown-black flint stones.

Excavation (Fig.9): An area of 2.5 x 4m was excavated and a section of the one-course stone circle was exposed. No finds were recovered. The soil was sterile under the layer of gravel, and its color yellowish-white.

Conclusions: This feature was probably a stone circle, the southern section of which was carried away by a shallow stream.

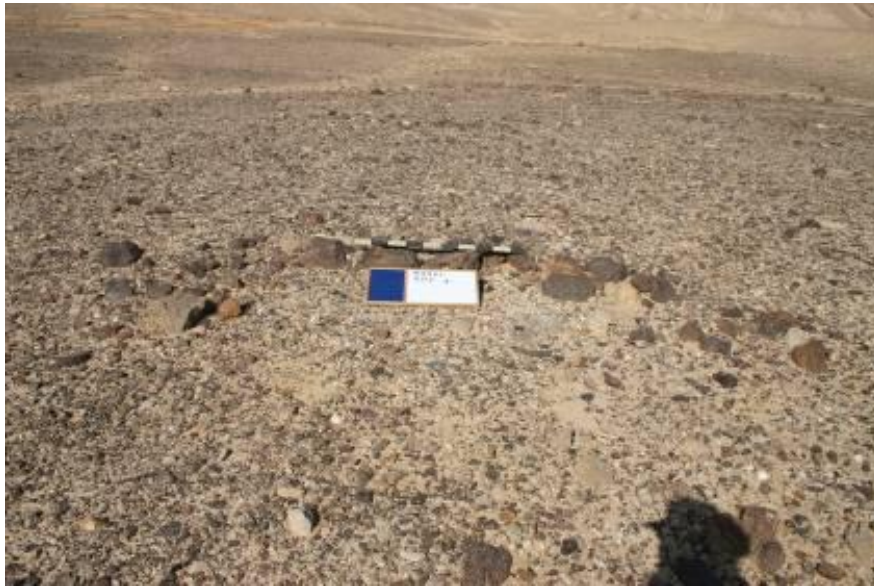


Figure 8: Site 4, general view before excavation.



Figure 9: Site 4, general view after excavation, (photographed from south).

**Nahal Gov – 6 (defined in the survey as a structure)**

Location: 162179 – 033536, altitude: 43m

Description (Fig.10): An irregular concentration of large and medium-sized stones found resting on an area of *Hamada* soil close to a stream.

Excavation (Fig.11): A 3 x 2.5m rectangle, oriented east-west was excavated. Two rows of one course of large stones were found, forming an ellipse filled with stones. The double wall's width was 0.80m, the inner diameter ca.1m and the depth 0.30m. No finds were recovered.

Conclusions: This was probably a man-made feature, but without datable or indicative finds we did not venture a detailed interpretation.

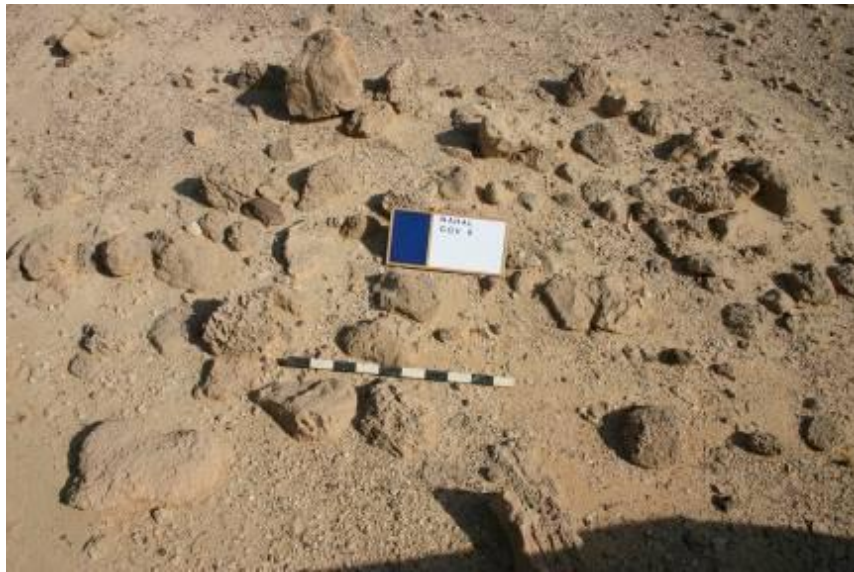


Figure 10: Site 6, general view before excavation.

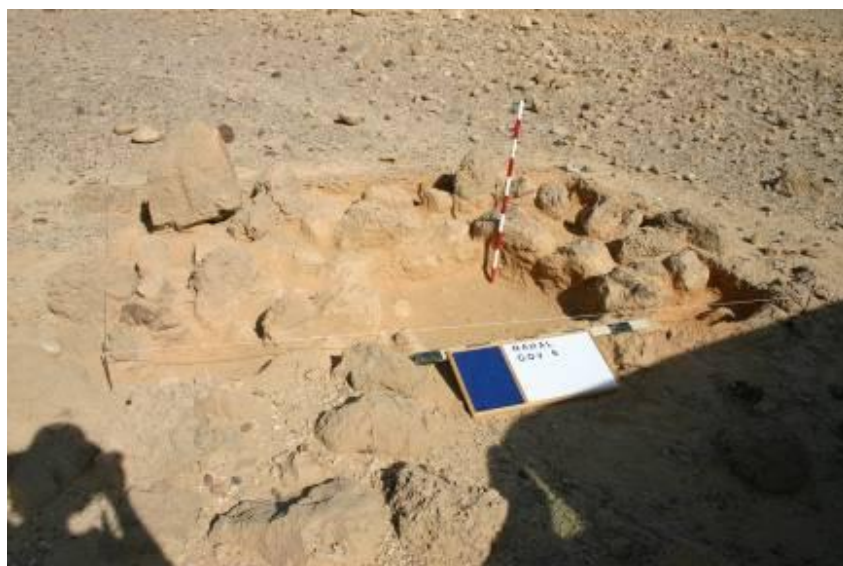


Figure 11: Site 6, general view after excavation (photographed from south).

**Nahal Gov – 8 (defined in the survey as a line of stones)**

Location: 162223 – 033344, altitude: 56m

Description (Fig.12, 13): A line of stones 30m from and parallel to the Nahal Gov cliff, with a general north-south orientation, pointing to the next line of stones (Site 9) which lie perpendicularly oriented, 25m southeast of Site 8.

Documentation: This line of stones was built from large and medium-sized stones, one course wide and high, and is badly preserved. The feature is comprised mainly of dark-colored stones which stand out against the white surface on which the feature was built.

Conclusions: From its position and association with the topography and a nearby line of stones (Site 9) this feature was probably used as a road marking or other navigation aid. There were no associated artifacts found, so we cannot postulate a date.



Figures 12, 13: Site 8, general views taken from east and north.





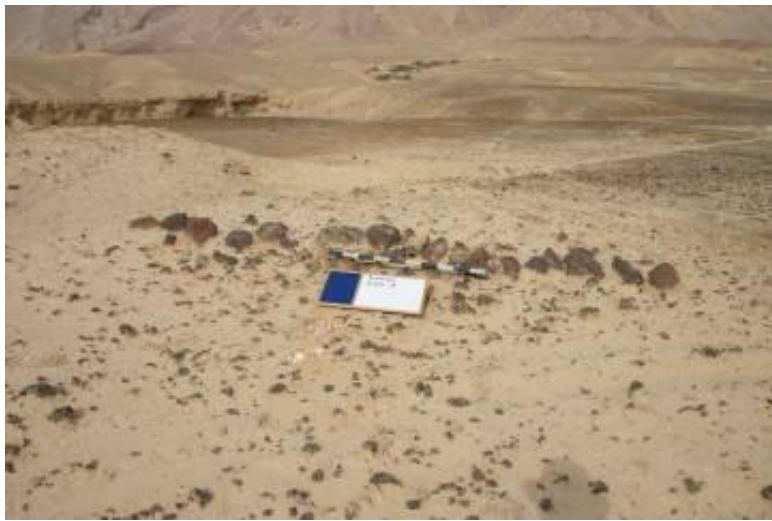
**Nahal Gov – 9 (defined as a line of stones in the survey)**

Location: 162226 – 033365, altitude: 54m

Description (Figs.14, 15): A line of stones oriented southeast-northwest. This feature is built of one course of stones, arranged in a straight line.

Documentation: The line is built from twenty brown-black, medium-sized stones, on a white lime soil surface. The wall's length is about 4m. The feature's orientation is approximated towards the Nahal Gov stream, located ca.50m from the line of stones.

Conclusions: This linear feature was probably used as an ancient road marking, associable with Site 8. The period is unknown since no artifacts were retrieved.



Figures 14, 15: Site 9, general views taken from east and north.



**Nahal Gov – 10 (defined in the survey as a grave)**

Location: 162250 – 033374, altitude: 52m

Description (Fig.16): A number of limestone blocks projecting up from the stone-littered *Hamada* topsoil.

Excavation (Fig.17): A 1.5 x 1.5m area was excavated to a depth of 0.15m.

Conclusions: These three large stones probably split from one large rock, they being the same brown-colored hard limestone type. There were no finds from the excavation. Throughout the entire depth of the square, which reached under the *Hamada* topsoil, the ground was bereft of artifacts. It appears that this was a natural site.



Figure 16: Site 10, general view before excavation.



Figure 17: Site 10, general view after excavation.

**Nahal Gov – 11 (defined in the survey as a built feature)**

Location: 16226 – 033376, altitude: 51m

Description (Fig.18): A cluster of black medium-sized stones on a moderate slope close to the edge of a ridge of high ground.

Excavation (Fig.19): A 1.5 x 2m rectangle running north-south was excavated. The excavation's depth was about 0.10m. A number of large and medium-sized split brown-black flint stones were found on the *Hamada* surface, creating a general outline of two parallel rows. Around the stone lumps were many flint flakes which had naturally detached from the larger pieces. Under the stones was a sterile yellowish-brown sand and a layer of white gypsum. No artifacts were retrieved.

Conclusions: This is a natural concentration of local stones with no evidence of human activity.



Figures 18, 19: Site 11, general views before and after excavation.





**Nahal Gov – 12 (defined in the survey as a grave)**

Location: 162300 – 033380, altitude: 46m

Description (Fig.20): A natural stone circle on a moderate slope, formed from a depression in a single hard, irregular, brown limestone.

Excavation (Fig.21): A 1 x 1.5m area was excavated, leaving part of the limestone rock outside the excavated rectangle. The excavation's depth was ca.0.10m, reaching a layer of sterile soil and stones. The internal diameter was 0.70m, and the external 1m. No finds were retrieved.

Conclusions: This is a large lump of limestone which fell apart naturally and stands out against the *Hamada* soil background.

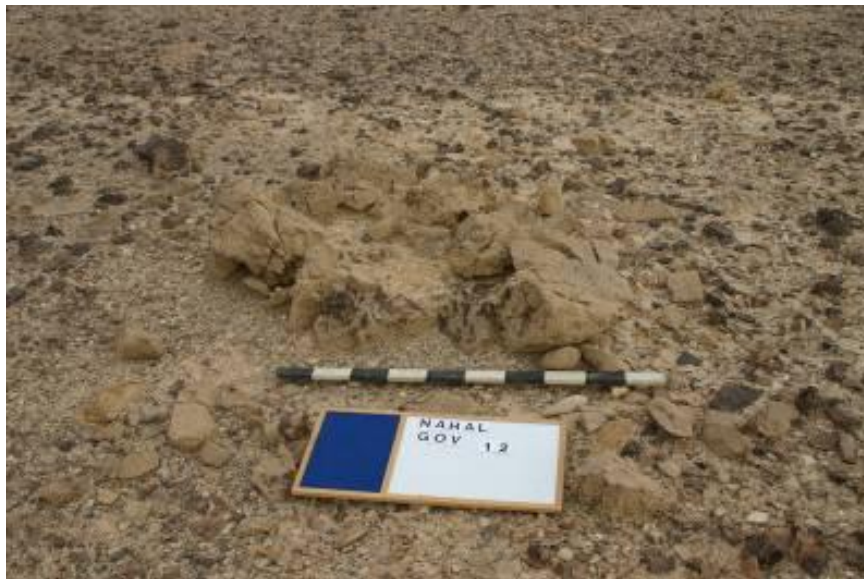


Figure 20: Site 12, general view before excavation.



Figure 21: Site 12, general view after excavation.

**Nahal Gov 13A – (defined in the survey as a grave, along with Site 13B)**

Location: 162413 – 033400, altitude: 28m

Description (Fig.22): An ellipse-shaped structure built of small and medium-sized stones, oriented east-west on a flat surface. The north end of the feature is scattered with stones. Dimensions: 2.90m long, 1.90m wide, 0.40m deep.

Excavation (Fig.23): The interior of this the elliptical feature was excavated to a depth of ca.0.60m. The soil was entirely sterile, with moderate stone quantities but no indicative artifact from the feature or its surroundings was recovered. Excavation clarified the architectural remains, showing this structure to be preserved to one course high and one row wide, and constructed of local medium-sized limestone.

Conclusions: Due to the lack of any finds beyond the simple architecture characterizing it, the identification of this feature should be altered from grave to man-made built feature, the nature and date of which are unknown.



Figures 22, 23: Site 13A, general views before and after excavation.





**Nahal Gov 13B** – (defined in the survey as a grave, along with Site 13B)

Location: 12422 – 033400, altitude: 29m

Description (Fig.24): A small stone circle measuring 1.70 x 1.20m, found approximately 5m east of Site 13A.

Excavation (Fig.25): The interior of this circular feature was excavated to a depth of 0.30m; no artifacts were found, the excavated fill being made up of well-sorted stones mixed into sterile soil. The circle's architecture is simple: one course of small and medium-sized local limestone.

Conclusions: This is a small man-made stone feature, the dating and nature of which it was not possible to discern.



Figure 24: Site 13B, general view before excavation.

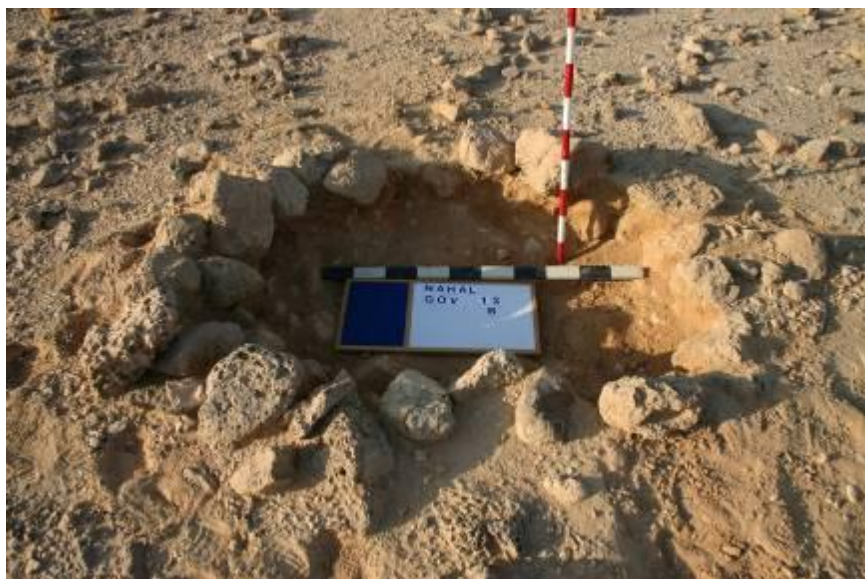


Figure 25: Site 13B, general view after excavation.



**Nahal Gov 14 – (defined in the survey as a campsite)**

Location: 162356 – 033427, altitude: 33m

Description (Fig.26): An incomplete circular feature, of internal diameter 0.70m and external 1m. Three quarters of the feature's perimeter is extant, opening to the east. The feature is located on low ground, where the Nahal Gov stream widens as it descends from the Gov heights to the north.

Excavation (Fig.27): A 2 x 2m square was excavated to a depth of 0.1m. The feature was built with large and medium-sized hard limestone rocks. The fill was light brown and archaeologically-sterile down to the excavation limit of 0.15m.

Conclusions: This feature's circular form was probably breached by water flow, it being located on the stream bed. Beyond that, and the fact that it was definitely man-made, no further interpretation was justified.

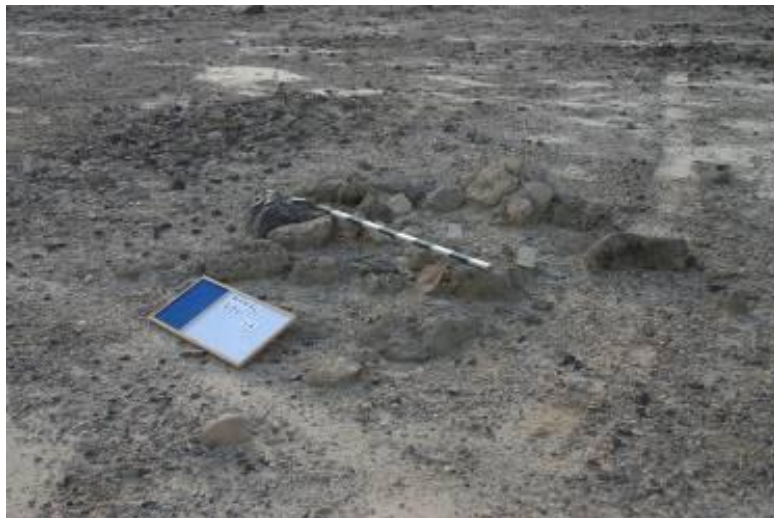


Figure 26: Site 14, general view before excavation (photographed from south).



Figure 27: Site 14, general view after excavation.

**Nahal Gov 36 – (defined in the survey as an installation)**

Location: 162364 – 033421, altitude: 30m

Description (Fig.28): A concentration of small- to medium-sized stones, ca.10m east of Site 14.

Excavation (Fig.29): A 2 x 2m square was excavated to a depth of 0.10m, down to the light brown sterile subsoil. No finds were retrieved.

Conclusions: This is probably a natural cluster of stones rather than man-made.

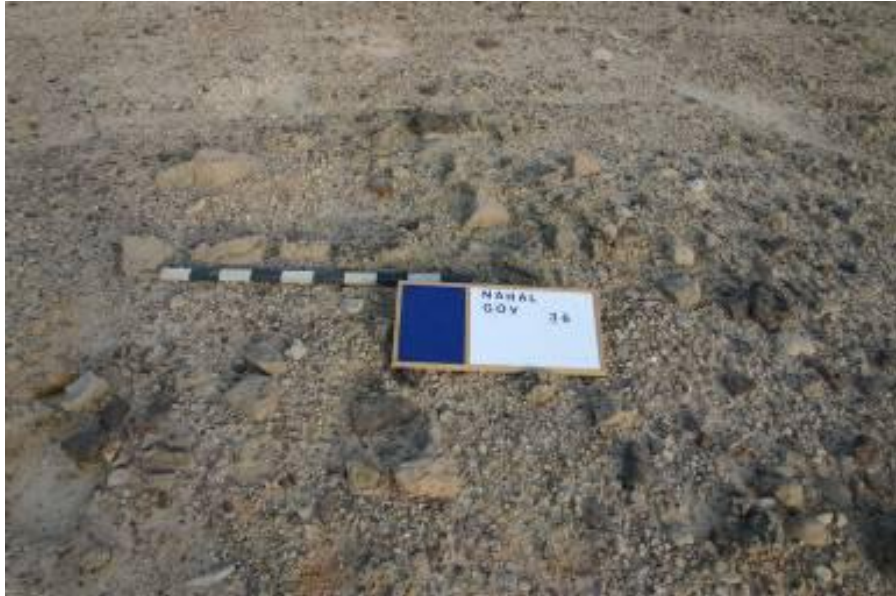


Figure 28: Site 36, general view before excavation.



Figure 29: Site 36, general view after excavation.

### **Nahal Gov 50 – Shiniyot (non-intrusive survey)**

Location: 162568 – 033034, altitude: 33m

Description (Figs.30-33): Five small stone circles in linear formation at the edge of the Nahal Gov cliffs, near the stream's confluence with Nahal Zin. A stone circle with a diameter of ca.1m, made of black-brown rocks, is found at the western end of the line (Fig. 33) (location: 162536 – 033038). The stone circles are in poor states of preservation, standing two courses high at most.

Documentation: The site is outside the mining area and will remain at its location as part of the conservation of the Nahal Gov cliffs.

Conclusions: This *Shiniyot* (stone piles) site was probably used as a road marker on the way to Ma'ale Akrabim. The location of such *Shiniyot* at the edge of this prominent ridge, near the confluence of Nahal Gov and Nahal Zin, and pointing east-west all strongly support its interpretation as a signpost directing the traveler on his journey from Nahal Zin to Nahal Gov and from there to Ma'ale Akrabim. There is no way of dating these *Shiniyot*, however, since no associated indicative artifacts were recovered. It is possible that other linear stone features which we recorded (Sites 8 and 9) also made up part of this route's signage.

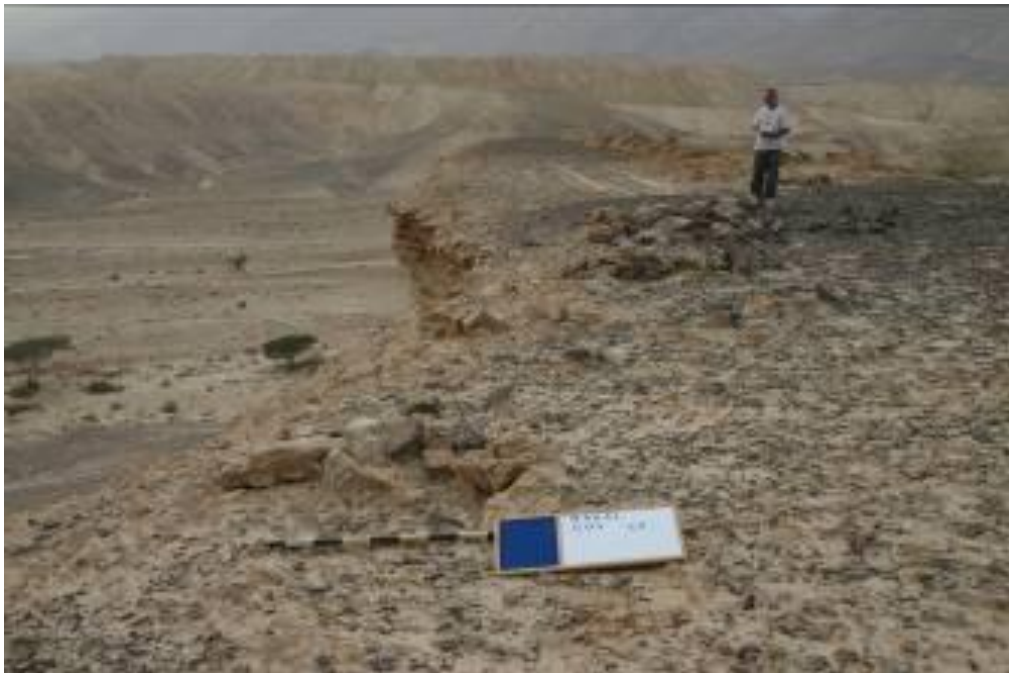


Figure 30: Site 50, general view of the *Shiniyot* line (photographed from east).



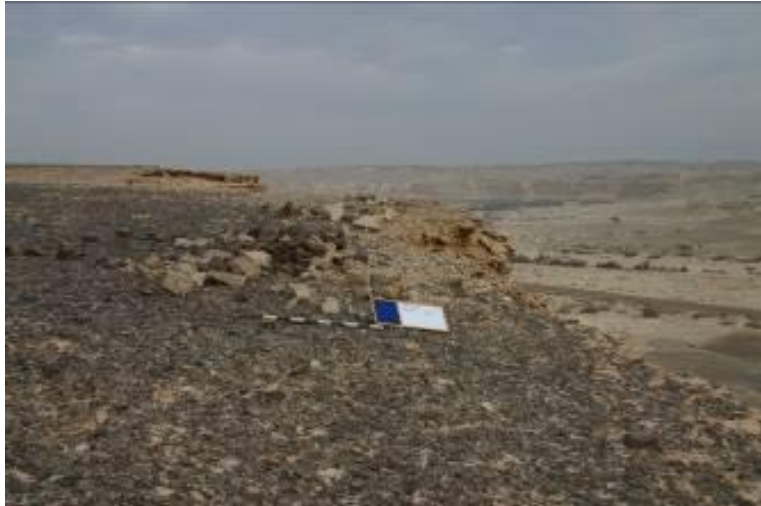


Figure 31: Site 50, general view of the *Shiniyot* line (photographed from west).



Figure 32: Site 50, general view of the *Shiniyot* line (from north) (Nahal Zin behind).



Figure 33: Site 50, detail of one of westernmost stone circle of the *Shiniyot* line.

## Summary

Of the fifteen sites analyzed, six were found to be non-archaeological (1, 2, 10-12, 36). Most of these were a result of limestone outcrop fragmentation, visually conspicuous against the pale *Hamada* soil of the area.

We identified nine archaeological sites over the course of this project. Six we defined as man-made built features with simple architecture (3, 4, 6, 13A-B, 14). These were mainly medium-sized stone circles (round or elliptical). In the excavation of these installations no artifacts of any kind were found to enable us to date them or interpret their nature. From both their interiors and exteriors sterile soil was retrieved. The impression is that these structures were built directly on the surface, to a height of one course of stones.

Three sites (8, 9 and 50), which we recorded without excavating, were defined as features used most likely as signposts, marking the route of an ancient road passing from Nahal Zin to Nahal Gov on the way to Ma'ale Akrabim. However, the poor state of preservation of these features and the lack of associated artifacts precluded the possibility of dating them.

## Further Reading

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