

**ECO-MASTERPLANNING
FOR GREEN CITIES**

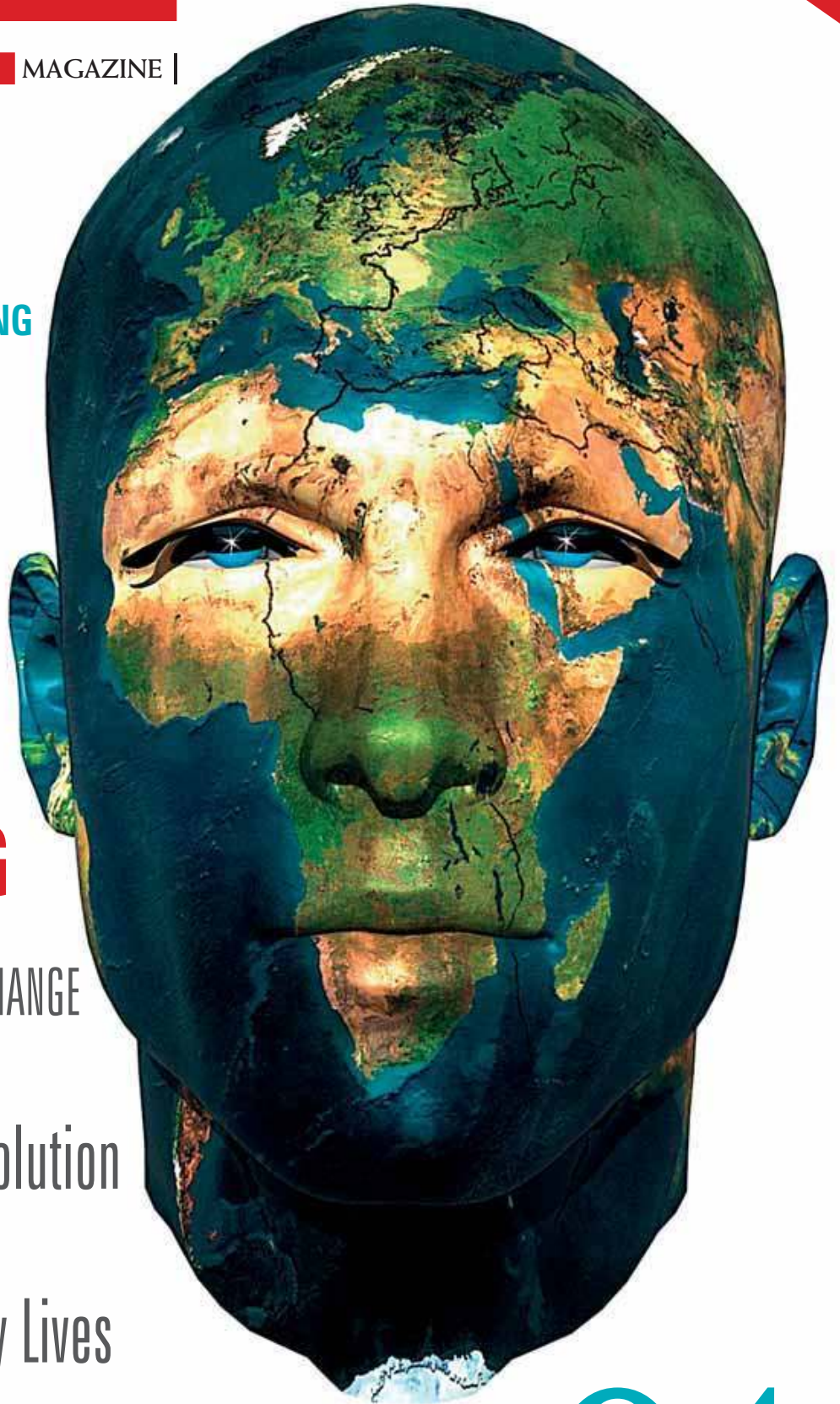
**SPECIAL
GLOBAL
WARMING**

ACT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

BIANCA JAGGER:
A Copernican Revolution

CLIMATE CHANGE:
Affecting our Daily Lives

THE OBAMA PLAN FOR CLEAN ENERGY:
A Great Opportunity for Europe



By John KEYROUZ

THE LEBANON MOUNTAIN TRAIL

A TRAIL OF PROMISES



As a young boy, I was lucky enough to grow up in several countries and travel around the world. Every summer my parents would take us back to Lebanon and I remember spending some of the most magical and fun filled moments at our house in the mountains.

The warmth of a neighborhood in which everyone felt like family, the homemade food and a house that was always full with friends, family

and guests from all over. The crisp mountain air and gentle breeze, the shade under the grapevine canopy and the sweet smell of flowers; each one of these memories is truly a treasure to me. Nowhere else in the world I did feel more at home and at peace than in the mountains of Lebanon.

In January 2009; I was 29 years old and living in Los Angeles, California. I came to the conclusion I had enough of Corporate America and wanted to move back to Lebanon. So, I packed my bags and returned.

Upon my arrival; I took a break off work and chose to re-discover my heritage. I wanted to hike all over Lebanon, visit villages and experience the awesome landscapes this wonderful country had to offer.

In the early spring of 2009, I decided to trek the lower region of Mount Sannine which towered majestically over the town of Baskinta. This muse of a town had the magical ability to seduce and inspire poetic giants like Mikhail Niame, Amin Maalouf and Abdallah Ghanem. Its landscapes resembled a scene out of a J.R Tolken book. It could have easily been the enchanted land of the wooden elves; the mountains were full of snow and the fields were teeming with the

early blooms of flowers. Green, yellow, pink, red, orange and white colors were everywhere. Bees and birds were busy chirping their individual songs. The fresh air carrying the mountain perfumes filled my lungs.

Trickling streams of glimmering snow water, painted their way across the lush green landscapes that danced back and forth, circling and defining the peaks of smaller royal mountains that stood in awe of Mt. Sannine.

The soft cool breeze carried whispers to my ears, recounting God's brilliance at his creation. The sun's rays softly massaged and warmed my skin. I took in a deep breath, coaxing my heart and lungs. As I made my way up to the top of the path ahead of me I was surprised to see what





looked like a sign in the middle of nowhere. I was so curious, that I sped up to reach it faster, and there it was: a directional sign which explained where I was, where I could go, and the history of the land on which I stood.

I was awestruck! A small feeling of pride began to trickle down my spine, tingling all over me forcing a smile on my face.

My dream of a better Lebanon had come true in some sense. A clear sense of purpose and organization had finally been introduced to our beautiful moun-

tains. Someone had actually taken the time to develop and label some of the points of interest and beauty in this amazing rural landscape.

That sign legitimized the very path on which my friends and I had walked. It solidified the purpose for these modern mountainous gardens of Eden to be protected and tended to.

Below the signs, and, in fine letters were the names and logos of ECODIT, USAID, Baskinta Literary Trail, and the Lebanon Mountain Trail.

In my mind I kept repeating the name "Lebanon Mountain Trail" and thought, what if there are more signs? If so is this a trail across all Lebanon? Have a group of people finally realized the absolute importance of protecting the heritage, history and ecological beauty handed down to us by our forefathers and taken it upon themselves to protect it?

My mind raced with questions and possibilities. I made it a mission to go back home and research the name. I discovered that the LMT was an as- >

The Lebanon Mountain Trail

› socation established in 2007 whose mandate was to develop, maintain and protect “the Lebanon Mountain Trail”.

The first long-distance hiking trail in Lebanon, the LMT, extends from Qo-baiyat in the north of Lebanon to Marjaayoun in the south, a 440-km (275 miles) path that transects more than 75 towns and villages at altitude ranging from 1000 meters to 2000 meters (about 3000-5600 feet) above sea level.

This project, which started in 2005, to develop a trail across all of Lebanon, was conceived, developed and executed by ECODIT with funds from the USAID. It ended successfully in 2008. Since then, the “Lebanon Mountain Trail Association” had taken on the responsibility of mothering and nurturing the trail.

I also noticed a job opening at the association for the position of Executive Director and so I applied.

Fast forwarding to today
October 2009:

I have been offered the position of Executive Director in this honorable and wonderful association taking great pride and joy in my daily work.

The LMT is more than just a trail. It is more than a sustainable development project, more than a touristic destination or eco-touristic project.

It is a trail of Promise: A promise that, through dedication and love, great strides can be accomplished in the development and protection of the physical, ecological, geographical, historical and cultural treasures of Lebanon. It is also a promise that with proper education and empowerment, we can encourage ownership of the trail by the rural villages and communities along it.

This project has served to define a new era in the livelihood of these mountainous communities and to shed light on the issues and threats of

the 21st century that endangers these rural communities. So far, and by raising public awareness to these threats, the LMT has served to protect the Lebanese rural mountains in several cases. While the LMT’s activities and future projects expand on these effects and are intelligently prepared Funds and support for these programs are much needed.

Examples of these are:

- ✓ Ongoing Trail Clearing and Maintenance events are routine and ongoing to ensure the safety of the increasing visitors while protecting the environment.
- ✓ Ongoing Training of Guides and Guesthouse Owners. Under the LMT project, ECODIT trained 50 local guides on basic guiding skills such as trail interpretation, tree recognition, first aid, and navigation using compass and maps. Now the Association needs to develop a more advanced training for those guides who have shown interest and commitment in past years. The Association needs to continue to monitor the performance of family-run gues-

> FACT SHEET

Trail Distance	440 Km
Number of Sections / Days Needed to Complete the Trail	26 days
Distance per Trail Section (Average distance per section: 17 Km)	Shortest: 9 Km Longest: 24 Km
Trail Altitude	600m – 2000m
Number of Protected Areas along the Trail	3
Number of World Heritage Sites near the Trail	1
Total Number of Towns and Villages	75
Number of Towns and Villages with Municipalities	56
Number of rural lodging facilities available in trailside communities*	57 Campsites (3), Guesthouses (19), Inns (6), Rural hotels (25), and Monasteries (4)
Total Distance Cleared & Marked	170 km
Can I walk the entire Trail?	Yes
Do I have to complete the entire Tail in one journey?	No
Number of Trail Guides Trained in 2007	45
Number of Newspaper & Magazine Articles	165
Number of TV & Radio Interviews	32
Potential Number of Visitors in: 2009	57,667
2014	254,731
Potential Direct Revenues in: ** 2008	\$4.2 million
2014	\$22.0 million

Communication Materials: General brochure (3 languages) 26 Sectional Brochures (English only) A Guide to the Lebanon Mountain Trail (English only, pocketsize, softbound) 20 LMT Maps for Hikers (scale 1:25 000).



thouses established by the LMT project (11 guesthouses so far) and provide additional and advanced training as needed. The association is also seeking funding to refurbish two new guesthouses in Tachea and Aitanit respectively (these villages have no formal accommodation but candidate homes have been identified).

✔ Trail Corridor Plans that address the numerous threats from many sectors including urban sprawl, quarrying, waste disposal, road construction, and fires that the LMT faces daily, by reviewing land ownership and earmarking lands for long-term conservation (land trust, easements, etc.).

✔ Trail to Every Classroom (TTEC) works with the Ministry of Education and Higher Learning (MoEHL) to integrate the Lebanon Mountain Trail in the school curriculum / extra-curricular activities -biology, geography, history, civic education, etc. It will

produce an LMT training kit for educators, organize youth walks on different sections of the trail, and invite schools to “adopt a section” working in partnership with local community groups. In short, TTEC has the potential to make a lasting contribution to environmental education in Lebanon and to national reconciliation.

✔ Annual Spring Thru-Walk 2010, Builds on the success of the annual spring Thru-Walk for 2009. The Association always seeks partners for this national event which draws about 10 core hikers and more than 200 section hikers every year. The 2009 spring event infused more than \$15,000 in the local economy along the trail and generated more than 30 reports and appearances in local and international media.

As a young association we have accomplished much. However the scope of our aspirations for the 21st century is large and we depend on the hearts,

minds and hands of volunteers, active members, supportive members and donors. I have managed to hike on my free time 19 of the 26 sections on LMT to this date and interactions with the local communities, their guides and guesthouses have been equally rewarding. All positive, all warm, all inviting and proud of their participation in the experience of the Trail, a reminder of my childhood memories and a dream come true for me, a citizen of Lebanon.

I have since then developed a new dream, a dream that involves you and those with whom you share this article. Yes, a dream that involves you planning your next vacation to Lebanon and giving us a call at the LMTA to help. Come by and experience a taste of heaven for yourself. ■

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:
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