
**ACCESSIBILITY AT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN LUXOR
(KARNAK TEMPLE, LUXOR TEMPLE, LUXOR MUSEUM)**

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ABSTRACT

Egypt has declared that 2018 as the Year of Persons with Disabilities, following the same line, the ministry of antiquities conducted a project in partnership with an Egyptian NGO Helm Foundation, that specializes in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. The project covered the main aspects of disabilities i.e. Mobility Access (by building accessible physical trails), Visually Impaired (Brochures in braille), Deafness and hearing loss (videos translated into hearing disability Signal), etc. The main challenges and difficulties was the Lack of smooth paths. There are many areas with large stones or dusty/sandy loose soil.

KEYWORDS: Karnak – Luxor – Thebes - Disabled – Accessibility – Museums - Mobility Access- Visually Impaired

INTRODUCTION

Egypt has declared that 2018 as the Year of Persons with Disabilities, following the same line. The ministry of Antiquities conducted a project in partnership with an Egyptian NGO called Helm (which translates into English as "Dream") that specializes in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. The main Challenges and difficulties was the Lack of smooth paths. There are many areas with large stones or dusty/sandy loose soil. And because ramps are far too steep; they are actually dangerous for wheelchair users.

Luxor (also known as Thebes) is famous for its major ancient monuments, being one of the primary cities of ancient Egypt. It was the capital of Egypt during the period of the Middle and New Kingdoms. With the temples at Karnak and Luxor, and the necropolises of the Valley of the Kings, the Valley of the Queens, Thebes is a striking testimony to Egyptian civilization at its height. Most archaeological sites in Egypt are

inaccessible for people with disabilities and facilitating the access to those locations. Luxor and Karnak Temples are among the first ancient sites to see improvements, with wooden ramps and paths for wheelchairs, along with information boards accessible to those with impaired sight and hearing. Egypt's antiquities ministry has launched a project to make archaeological sites and museums more accessible to people with disabilities, starting with improvements to Luxor Museum and the temples of Karnak and Luxor. Special paths constructed at Karnak and Luxor to facilitate the movement of wheelchairs, while information boards will be put up that are accessible to those with disabilities. Also a documentary film on display at the visitor center will have sign-language incorporated. The podium area and the area between the Teharaka column and the open-air museum will feature ramps measuring 1.5 meters in width, he explained, while a wooden slope will be installed from the start of the Avenue of Sphinxes.

The project was conducted in partnership with an Egyptian NGO called Helm (in English Dream). Helm Foundation is specializes in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life.

Concerning the archaeological sites in general and specifically Karnak temple, the main Challenges and difficulties was the Lack of smooth paths. There are many areas with large stones or dusty/sandy loose soil. And because ramps are far too steep; they are actually dangerous for wheelchair users.

Accessible tourism in Egypt's archaeological sites in Luxor project carried out in two stages:

STAGE 1: DESKTOP ASSESSMENT AND CONDITION ASSESSMENT OF LUXOR TEMPLES

People who use wheelchairs and mobility scooters are particularly impaired by uneven and unstable floor surfaces. For example, gaps between floor surfaces or paving slabs, poorly laid surfaces, broken or cracked paving, and irregular surfaces (such as cobblestones, loose earth and loose gravel/stones) significantly impede the movement of a wheelchair or scooter. Furthermore, travelling across a surface with an undulations or an adverse camber can result in the sideways instability and the loss of directional control of wheelchair or mobility scooter. Another common barrier to accessibility is poorly designed ramps. For instance, a ramp with a steep gradient or slope results in ramp being unusable by most wheelchair and mobility scooter users. Manual wheelchair users may lack the strength to push themselves up a steep slope and/or control their descent down a steep slope. Mobility scooters are also limited by having

maximum slopes they can climb. Ramps may also be rendered inaccessible due to their being a lack of space to manoeuvre on to the ramp, or the ramp being too narrow to allow a wheelchair or mobility scooter user to use the ramp safely. Additional barriers that make access more difficult or impossible for wheelchair and mobility scooter users include: raised thresholds and sills, narrow pathways, stairways, and the lack of a ramped access.

TYPES OF PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Physical disabilities can range from mild to severe conditions that affect some aspect of a person's physical functioning, most typically their mobility, dexterity or stamina. A person with a physical disability therefore is constrained by his or her ability to perform an activity independently such as walking.

- **Wheelchair or Mobility Scooter Users:** This category includes persons who are dependent upon or are regular users of a wheelchair or mobility scooter. Dependent users are persons who require a wheelchair or scooter for all mobility. Regular users include persons who have a limited mobility and require wheeled assistance to move around in their environment.
- **Older Persons or Elderly:** This group is often defined as people aged 60 and over. People within this group often experience changes in the functional abilities and mobility.
- **Visually Impaired:** This category includes persons with moderate to severe visual impairment (commonly referred to as low vision) and the blind. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that in the world there are 246 million people with low vision and 39 million blind people (World Health Organization 2012: 3). Depending on their vision loss, persons with a visual impairment may or may not use a long cane when negotiating around their environment.¹

STAGE 2: ACTION PLAN

Collaborating with Helm Association and applied the assessment of the first stage (focused on Karnak temple).the project aimed to develop the archaeological sites to involve disabled people. It was a big challenge to make access of our archaeological sites. In the beginning, it was decided to work on Mobility access then do more and more in next projects to involve the visual and hearing impairment by making facilities on our archaeological sites to be able to welcome all kinds of disability.

¹ Improving Disabled Access at the Archaeological Sites of Egypt, Joanne Stables and Jane Akshar, online article.

The action plan was prepared for the most visited sites in Luxor: Karnak temples, Luxor temple, El Deir El-Bahry, Habu temple and Ramesseum temple. But this plan applied only for Karnak, Luxor temples and Luxor Museum. This project aims to achieve (interpretation panels - direction signs- Ramps or portable handicap ramp- Wheelchair- Physical trails).

1- KARNAK MOBILITY ACCESS ²

The walking circuit of Karnak begin with the visitor center, which has Ramps, but unfortunately the door which reach to this ramp is closed and the ramp outside the center covered by the baggage of the bazaar.



(Figure 1) Karnak Visitor center



(Figure 2) Wooden step ramp narrow security gateway at Karnak

² For the historical background of the Karnak temples see, *Legrain, Georges, Les Temples de Karnak*, Bruxelles: Vromant, 1929.

After this ramp, the visitor will face a gentler ramp but the ground is very bumpy and needs to be smoothed and also all the physical trails of Karnak temples need the same³.



(Figure 3) Unsmoothed trails at Karnak

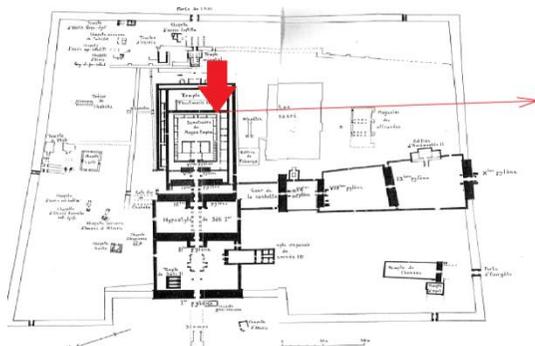
1.1 THE RAMPS

Ramp No. 1

Material: Wood, limestone or sandstone

Vertical Rise: 80 cm.

Location: South to Akh Menu



(Figure 4)

Ramp No. 2

Material: Wood

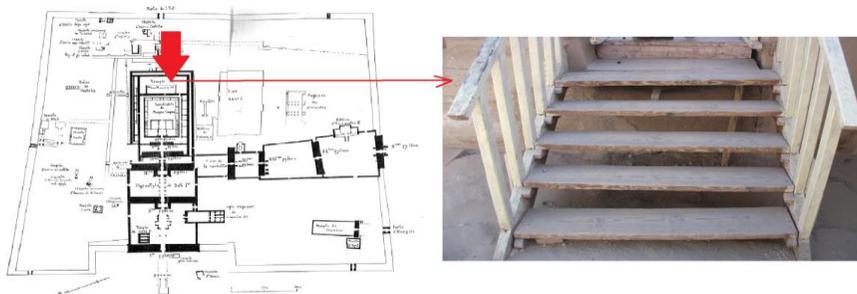
Vertical Rise: 1.20 cm.

Ramp length: 2.20 cm. x 2

Location: East to Akh Menu

(wooden stairs reach to Botanical room)

³ For more information about the world standard physical trails see, Imrie, R., "Challenging disabled access in the built environment: an evaluation of evidence from the United Kingdom", in: *the town planning review* 68 (1997), p. 423- 448; Prudon, th., Dalton, st ., " The Accessible Path in Historic Properties " , in: *Bulletin of the association for preservation technology* 13 (1981) , p.31- 39 .

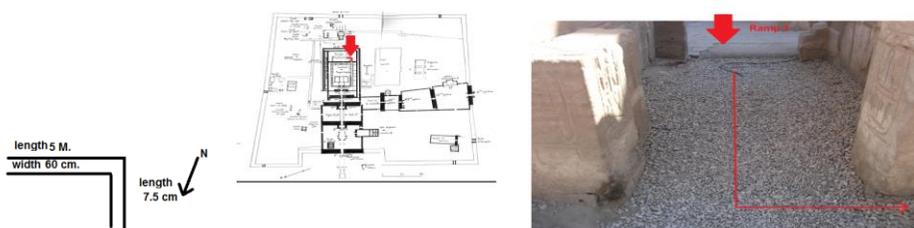


(Figure 5) location of Ramp No.2

1.2 PHYSICAL TRAIL

The trails smoothed all and create one as the following:

Physical trail No. 1. Material: sand stone



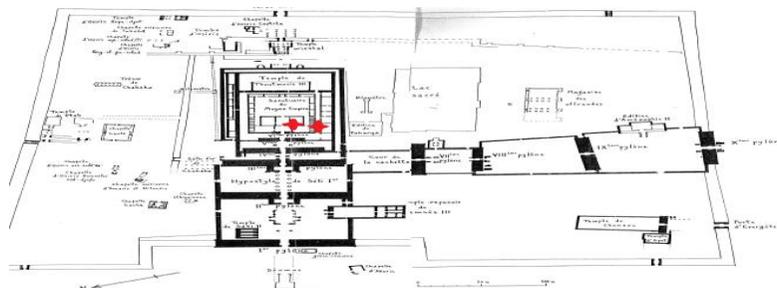
Location: Akh-menu (next to ramp 1)

(Figure 6) Physical trail No.1

1.3 PANELS⁴

The walking circuit of mobility access panel Has been set up on the entrance of the temple and 3 direction signs one on the back of the visitor center refer to the ramp and others on the Akh-Menu.

⁴ For more information about interpretation panels: Ballantyne, R., Hughes, K., “ Measure twice , cut once : developing a research – based interpretive signs check list “, in :*Australian journal of environmental education* 19 (2003) p. 5- 25; Carter, J., *A Sense of Place : an Interpretive Planning Hand Book: Inverness Tourism and Environmental Initiative*, London 1997; M . Gianna, “Stores of People and Places Interpretation, Tourism and Sustainability”, in: hall c: Michael, Gossling, Stafen and Scott Daniel (eds.) *the Routledge Hand Book Tourism and Sustainability*, Rotledge, Abingdon, UK, p. 294- 301.



(Figure 7)

1.4 MOBILITY ACCESS

The project accessibled the walking curcuit of the Karnak Temples by removing the bumby stones along the physical trails and add another sand stones more smoothed than the old ones. During this stage, the original passage of the temple was taken into account and the team dealt only with new pathway, and we asked specialized experts from Centre franco-égyptien d'étude des temples de Karnak (CFEETK) to join the time to be sure that we are not dealing with archaeological routs but new construction in the 20th century. We also used old maps of karnak to identify the archaeological features in the pathway.



(Figure 8) The ramp before and during the repair.



(Figure 9) The trails of Karnak waking circuit after accessibility,

The project replaced the wooden ramp which step the Karnak temples by another ramp matching with the standard which mentioned above to be the entrance of the temple is accessible.



(Figure 10)The ramp before and after



(Figure 11)Sample for the direction signs leads to the waking circuit of Karnak

The project also provided direction signs lead to the accessible toilets in the visitor center of Karnak temples and to lead the physical trails of the waking circuit of the Karnak.

2. VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Visually Impaired: For the visually impaired difficulties often arise due to a loss or significant decrease of visual acuity, contrast sensitivity, peripheral vision. In some instances, a visual impairment may result in the occurrence of central blind spots. Consequently, the visually impaired are often unable to distinguish everyday obstacles such as the edges of steps

(especially steps with open risers and tapering treads), changes in floor levels, slight undulations or inclinations within a floor surface, uneven floor surfaces (such as gravel or loose stones), and broken or cracked paving. Additional hazards include: thresholds and sills, path edges or architectural features (such as a pillar or column) that are not clearly defined by a raised perimeter (kerb) or a contrasting hazard warning surface, narrow pathways, and ramps that are not identified by a warning surface.

3. DEAFNESS AND HEARING LOSS

Among the most important achievements of the project was also the translation of your films for both Visitor centers of Karnak temples and Luxor museum. Around 466 million people worldwide have disabling hearing loss, and 34 million of these are children. According to the World Health Organization, It is estimated that by 2050 over 900 million people will have disabling hearing loss. It may be result from genetic causes, complications at birth, certain infectious diseases, chronic ear infections, the use of particular drugs, exposure to excessive noise, and ageing. 60% of childhood hearing loss is due to preventable causes. 1.1 billion Young people (aged between 12–35 years) are at risk of hearing loss due to exposure to noise in recreational settings.

Unaddressed hearing loss poses an annual global cost of US\$ 750 billion. Interventions to prevent, identify and address hearing loss are cost-effective and can bring great benefit to individuals.



Visitor center of Luxor Museum and Karnak temple movies translated into hearing disability Signal

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