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Natural Bridge

By Ammar Khammash, The Jordan Times Weekender - September 2003

One of the most dramatic landscapes of Jordan is the eastern shoreline of the Dead Sea. More than other parts around this lake, the eastern part stands like a wall, so close to the water, that it adds to the landscape a powerful contrast in color and texture, animating a wonderful line where mountains meet the sea.

The general redness of the mountainside, in the most vertical areas around the mouth of the Zarqa Ma?in and Mujib gorges, comes mostly from sandstone. One can notice the similarity of most of the sandstone of this area with that of Petra. Geologically speaking, the overwhelming stretch of sandstone you see here is of the same layer in which Petra was carved; the Um Ishrin Sandstone Formation. This layer is Jordan?s most colorful rock and it is easily recognized by its striped patterns that look like ?raw beef? or wood-like grain on a larger scale.

Besides its brilliant colors and intricate striped patterns, this sandstone layer has a tendency to produce amazing rock formations, such as hanging canopies, geometric erosion patterns, and strange-looking pillars. In one location this layer has produced a natural bridge, similar to the more famous one in Wadi Rum but on a smaller scale.

In one of the narrow gorges, few kilometers south of the Mujib Bridge, this natural bridge spans a Siq-like gorge ?its rocks form an arch giving the valley a monumental gateway. Natural arches happen when erosion cuts a gap in a softer or looser layer below a harder or more compacted one, keeping part of the original mountain formation spanned like a man-built arch. Jordan has at least three natural bridges of sizes significant enough to mention. Most people know the bridge (or bridges) at Wadi Rum. There is also an impressive natural bridge in Wadi al Himmeh to the northeast of Pella at the hot spring site of Himmet Abu Thableh, and this is the third bridge that can be added to the national collection.

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