

Nimrod Fortress

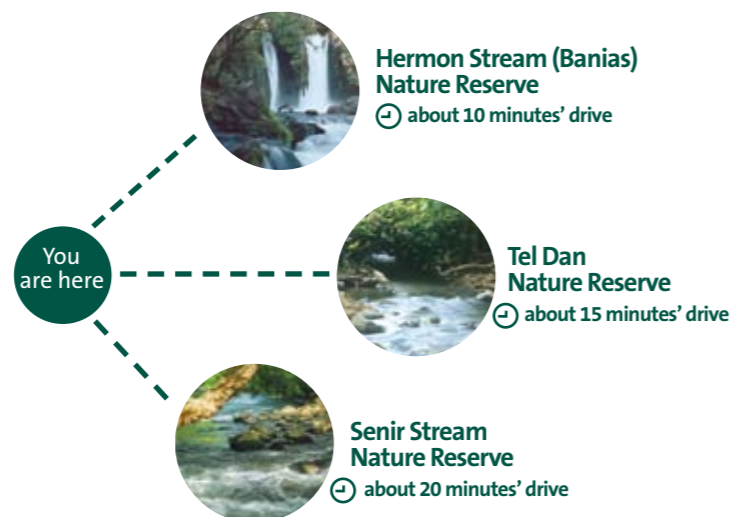
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Nimrod Fortress National Park, Tel: 04-6949277

Welcome to Nimrod Fortress National Park



Description of the National Park

Nimrod Fortress National Park is located in the midst of a magical mountain landscape on the slopes on Mount Hermon, atop a ridge 815 m above sea level. From the crest, the northern slope drops steeply to the north toward the Guvta Stream, while the southern slope descends moderately southward to Wadi a-Naqib.

The ridge falls westward toward Banias and then rises eastward toward Mount Hermon.

The national park extends over 195 dunams (19.5 hectares). Within its boundaries lies the fortress, occupying 33 dunams (3.3 hectares), surrounded by olive groves and natural vegetation, mainly Calliprinos oak (*Quercus calliprinos*).

The fortress may be entered by any of three ways:

From the parking lot

1. Recommended route – by way of the northwest tower via a path and a staircase.
2. The “service road” – passage through a breach in the western wall, which enters the fortress without the need to climb stairs.

From the cashier's booth

3. This route is for fit hikers. It ascends via a steep path to the donjon (keep) and may also be taken in the opposite direction. Leave your car at one end and return to it on foot.

A Visit to Nimrod Fortress National Park

The Israel Nature and Parks Authority, in conjunction with the Israel Antiquities Authority, the Golan Regional Council and the Israel Government Tourist Corporation, have made improvements to the park, including pathways, handrails and signs to enhance your experience.

The recommended route goes along the walls inside the fortress and includes the most impressive spots to visit.

From the parking lot follow the arrows along the stepped path that crosses the moat. This route will lead you to the following places:

The northwest tower (1) – The impressive gate installed in the tower bears an Arabic inscription of the Ayyubid governor al-'Aziz 'Othman and belongs to the first stage of construction. The stones of the arch shifted in an earthquake (1759), but miraculously the arch itself did not collapse. This “veranda” is part of a room, the ceiling of which buckled and was rebuilt in 1275 by the governor Bilik. At that time the tower was expanded and two more stories were added. Also from this period is the opening in the tower's ground floor leading to a cistern, above which is a shaft 7 m high; through it water was raised to the uppermost story. South of the room, a toilet was discovered. West of the gate tower, at the end of the “veranda,” a secret passage was constructed that leads outside the northern wall (13).

The route passes through the gate, enters the courtyard of the fortress, and turns right.

The Baybars inscription (2) – A monumental Arabic inscription, among the largest of the Mamluk period (1275). The inscription contains words of praise and eulogy for Sultan Baybars, who tasked his subordinate Bilik, commander of the fortress, with the building and reconstruction work. The inscription was apparently placed on the facade of the second story, where Bilik's palace was almost certainly located.

The western tower (3) – A westward-facing tower, as yet unexcavated.

The “service road” (4) – A modern pathway that passes through a breach in the wall, and through which one may directly enter the fortress.

The southwest tower (5) – The top of this tower provides a magnificent view of the Galilee, the Hula Valley and the slopes of the Golan. The stairs lead to the interior hall of the original tower. The tower was enlarged in Baybars' time, after which

additional embrasures for archers were built. From this hall, a spiral staircase descends to the southward-facing rooms, where you will also find embrasures.

The large reservoir (6) – It is 9 x 25 m in area and 7 m high. Rainwater flowed into it via channels, long since destroyed. Its northern side is roofed with a barrel vault and stairs descend to the bottom. The southern part is roofed with a cross vault. A later breach in the southern wall, made by shepherds, permits a glimpse of the reservoir.

Rahat (7) – A public drinking fountain (*sabil* in Arabic) located on the eastern side of the reservoir and fed by its water. Above the basin is an inscription by Fahr a-Din Hassan, who reconditioned the fountain in 1240.

The “beautiful tower” (8) – This semicircular tower, which projects from the wall, was built by Baybars. The inside of the tower is octagonal, two sides of which were joined so that it now has seven sides. The roof of the tower is vaulted. The tower, the cut stones and the embrasures are of outstanding construction quality. In the right-hand corner is a toilet cubicle similar to that in the northwest tower.

The moat (9) – Hewn into the bedrock, the moat separates the fortress from the donjon (the keep). The route crosses the moat in a place where it was somewhat filled in, but it can better be seen on the right side. The moat was crossed by a wooden bridge. At the end of the moat, in the southwestern corner of the donjon, is the earliest inscription found in the fortress, dating to the rule of the governor al-'Aziz 'Othman (1228).

The donjon (the keep) (10) – A fortified, free-standing structure above the fortress. If the lower fortifications were overrun, the defenders were able to continue to defend the fortress from this massive and powerful structure. Its gate is in the northwest corner. At the four corners of the structure square towers were erected. In the area between them remnants were found of the arches of a ceremonial hall, additional halls and water cisterns.

From the northeast tower, a steep trail for fit hikers descends toward the park entrance.

The view from the top of the donjon (11) – Here one realizes the clear supremacy of the donjon over the rest of the fortress. It affords a breathtaking panorama of Mount Hermon, the Golan Heights, the Galilee and the Hula Valley.

The northern tower (the prison tower) (12) – This well-preserved tower was apparently also built by Baybars. It

includes a central hall, with walls pierced by embrasures for archers and a staircase that ascends to the roof. From the top of the tower, Mount Hermon and Mount Dov can be seen. During the 15th century, the place was apparently used as a prison.

The secret passage (13) – The route returns to the northwestern tower (1). In the corner of the “veranda”

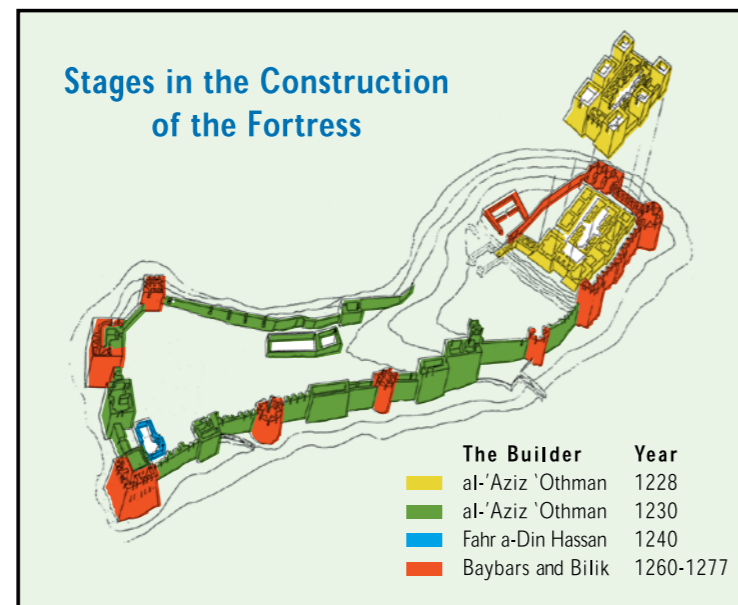
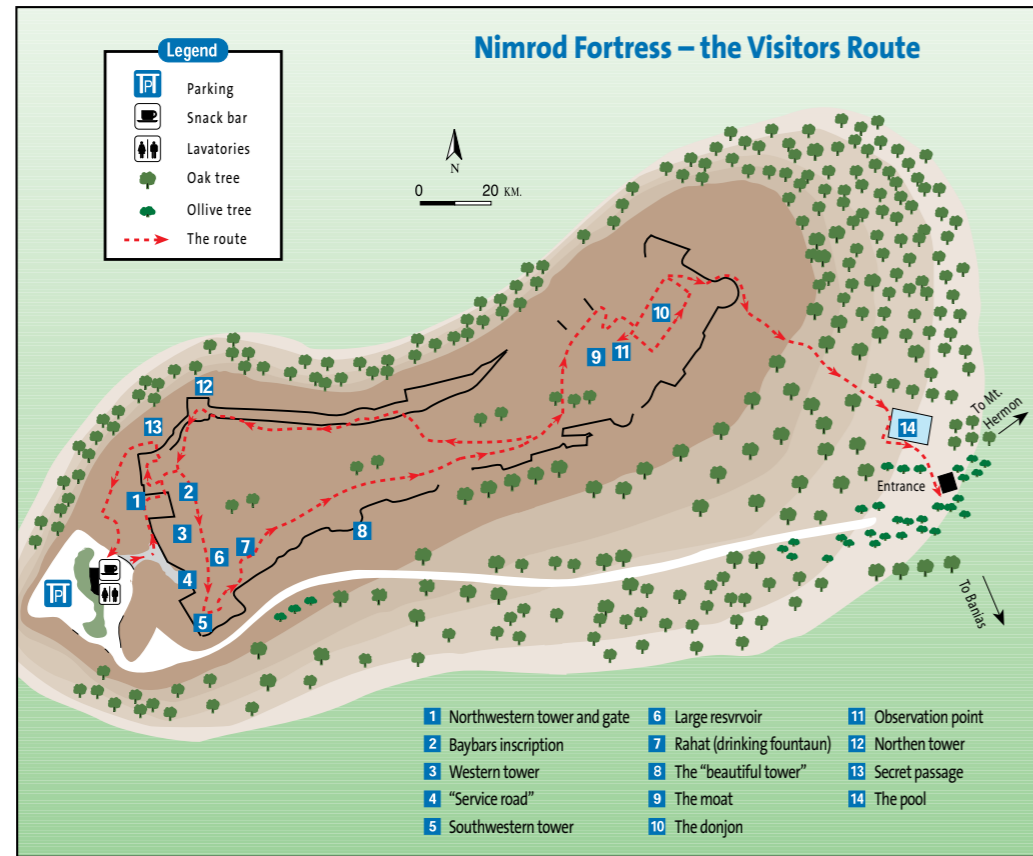


Secret passage

is the entrance to a secret, graded passageway leading northward. It is 27 m long, 1.8 m wide, and has a high, arched ceiling. A row of stones can be seen in the ceiling that were displaced by an earthquake. The passage ends in an opening (postern) to the outside of the northern wall that was hidden by a pile of rocks. From here the route returns to the western wall and goes around it on the outside to the parking lot.

The pool (14) – Located outside the fortress on its eastern side, the pool has a surface area of 26 x 54 m and a depth of at least 5 m. Its location on the slope enabled the collection of large quantities of rainwater that in peacetime served the residents of the fortress, and may even have been used for irrigation and watering flocks.

The pool can be reached, by a path that begins at the cashier's office, or by the path for fit hikers mentioned above.



The Fortress

Nimrod Fortress is one of the largest and most impressive medieval fortresses in the Middle East. It controlled one of the region's main roads, from Tyre on the Mediterranean coast, through the upper Hula Valley and Banias to Damascus.

The long, narrow structure of the fortress conforms to the special topography here. Its width varies accordingly, from 50 m to 150 m; it is 420 m long. The fortress is surrounded by a virtually impregnable wall fitted with towers. The original entrances were via three gates – two on the south and one on the west.



The “beautiful tower”

The fortress consists of two parts: the donjon (keep), which occupies about a fourth of its area, and the lower courtyard with its various buildings, walls and towers.

Nimrod Fortress is also known by its Arabic names: Qal'at Subayba (the Cliff Fortress) and Qal'at Nimrud (Nimrod Fortress). According to legend, the latter name is connected to the mighty hunter Nimrod, King of Shinar and great-grandson of Noah. In this place, says the legend, Nimrod was punished by Allah, who put a mosquito inside his head that drove him mad. According to another fable, Nimrod built his castle here, and from it stretched out his long arm to draw water from the Banias Stream.

History of the Area

After the battle at the Horns of Hittin (1187), the Crusaders lost their hold on most of the Land of Israel. Salah a-Din, who commanded the Ayyubid army against the Crusaders, was lord of the land. He and his troops systematically destroyed the fortresses they conquered. The Crusaders attempted to retake the Holy Land in subsequent crusades, but they were only able to gain hegemony on the coastal plain and in the Galilee.

The Baniyas area, which also fell to the Muslims, was placed under the rule of al-'Aziz 'Othman, nephew of Salah a-Din. Intrigues between Sultan el-Kamal in Egypt and his brother al-Moatis, governor of Damascus, led to the construction of the fortress in the following way: After the army of the German Kaiser Fredrick II arrived in the Holy Land, Sultan el-Kamal provoked the German emperor to engage his brother in battle, and even gave Jerusalem to Frederick. Al-Moatis, who feared that the Crusaders were about to attack Damascus and conquer it, initiated construction of the fortress in 1227 with the help of his younger brother, al-'Aziz 'Othman, in order to defend the road to Damascus. After the danger had passed, the Ayyubids decided to reinforce the fortress and expand it westward. Construction continued for about a year and was completed in 1230. In 1253, the Crusaders tried once again to reconquer the fortress, but to no avail. The Mongol invasion of Syria and the Holy Land from Central Asia seven years later brought about the destruction of the fortress.

The Mamluk army managed to stop the Mongols at the Battle of 'Ein Jalud (En Harod), considered one of the most important battles in history. It was at this point that the Mamluk commander Baybars named himself sultan and gave the fortress to his second-in-command, Bilik. The new governor began broad reconstruction work, bringing the fortress to its most grandiose state, including semicircular towers. Bilik commemorated his work and glorified the name of his sultan in the impressive inscription from 1275. With the surrender of the Crusaders and their final ejection from the Holy Land at the end of the 13th century, the prestige of the fortress diminished. In the 15th century it served as a prison for rebels, and was later abandoned. From that time on, shepherds and their flocks would occasionally use it for shelter.

Lion, sculpted in stone, the royal emblem of Sultan Baybars (1275 CE), discovered in the archaeological excavations of Nimrod Fortress National Park



Mameluke sultan



Please follow these rules:

- Do not harm flora, fauna or inanimate objects. Do not carve on the ancient stones! Keep the park clean!
- Walk only on marked paths!
- The ground is uneven; there are hollows and bumps. Watch out for open pits!
- Do not go near the cliff edge. Be careful of falling and rolling stones. No rappelling or cliff-climbing allowed.
- Do not roll or throw stones!
- Do not climb walls and do not enter unauthorized spaces in buildings or caves.
- Caution! After rain or snow falls parts of the trail can be slippery.
- Do not enter the water! Danger of drowning! The area around water sources can be slippery!
- Wear walking shoes and a hat.
- Do not bring bicycles into the park.
- Dogs are allowed in the park only when leashed and muzzled at all times.
- Visitors are allowed in the park only during opening hours.
- Do not make fires!
- Visit at your own risk.

Enjoy your visit!

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