

THE CROSS-ISRAEL HIGHWAY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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From the start, the Cross-Israel Highway Company was clearly aware that archaeological research would play a major part in the planning, and later, in the construction, of the highway. As our country is replete with archaeological sites, it would be irresponsible to plan such a highway without determining that it would not damage important sites along the way.

During the years 1993–1994 an extended archaeological survey was initiated by Mr. Yehuda Cohen, then General Director of the Cross-Israel Highway Company (1993–2010). The survey, unprecedented in its scale, stretched from the 'Iron Interchange in the north to the Soreq Interchange in the south (see map in cover pocket). On the basis of the survey results, work progressed in full cooperation with the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), aided by the archaeological institutes of several universities. Along the way, regulations, procedures and technologies were established regarding the integration of archaeological research with the highway development works, for example:

1. Defining geographical sections to be studied, comprising a central site and its surrounding satellite sites.
2. Establishing clear stages of work: survey, soundings (by mechanically cutting trenches), trial excavations and salvage excavations.
3. Appointing a senior professional referent to represent the company versus the IAA to meet the academic research demands.
4. Appointing a senior professional referent in the IAA to be responsible for all the academic,

logistic and coordination matters in conjunction with the Cross-Israel Highway Company.

5. Agreeing to the use of massive mechanical equipment and auxiliary mechanical systems.
6. Establishing formats of communication, outlining the research process up to its final publication (it should be noted that we did not always succeed in this matter, as many studies have not yet been published although the road has been in operation for more than six years).
7. Integrating properly the archaeological inspection activities and the road works during the construction.

Unintentionally, we succeeded in creating a unique longitudinal section, bisecting a large part of the country from north to south. Consequently, this section shed light on many periods and various cultures, which had heretofore been only partially documented, or altogether unknown. Unfortunately, at times, we found ourselves in the midst of the long-running conflict between the development needs of the country and the demands of the ultra-orthodox to guard Jewish graves; these points of conflict were sometimes very violent.

All along, we made an effort to preserve the archaeological heritage of the country along the highway for the public, primarily for educational purposes. Thus, we undertook salvage and conservation activities, such as the shifting of a remarkable winepress to the courtyard of our traffic control center at Nahshonim, the preservation of an exclusive segment of the Ramla aqueduct, the diverting of the highway near Moshav Sede Moshe to preserve a unique complex of winepresses, and the creation of an exhibition courtyard within the Ben Shemen Youth Village. Furthermore,

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we set up an exhibition in the company offices, with the help of the IAA Treasures Department, housing distinct finds from the excavations.

I will conclude with an equation I established some years ago, that “a happy archaeologist = a sad engineer”. That said, it is important to stress that with much effort on both sides, the

Cross-Israel Highway Company and the IAA, we succeeded in finding the golden mean, and thus, the national heritage was preserved and the highway was constructed as well. Thanks are due to the IAA for the initiative to publish this volume, and especially for its dedication to the memory of the late Moshe Levi.