

Archery in the Holy Land

Saturday night, September 3, 2011, found me sleeping in a stable in Bethlehem, Israel. Now, before you jump to any conclusions let me explain the details. First of all, it was not Bethlehem in Judea as in the Bible story of Jesus' birth. Instead it was Bethlehem in the Galilee. You see there are two towns named Bethlehem (actually Beit Lehem in Hebrew) in Israel and I was in the less famous one staying with archery friends. It's located between Haifa and Nazareth not far from the Mediterranean Sea – a beautiful location.

The stable part also needs some explaining. It's actually a very sturdy stone structure built about 1900 by a German Christian Order. By the 1930s the building was being used to keep horses. You can see in the picture that my room on the lower floor and to the right (open door) was the horse stable. In fact it still has the feeding trough mounted on the wall. Obviously, the building is now a beautiful bed and breakfast owned and operated by one of the local archers, Yossi Yegger.

Regardless of the details, I did

actually sleep in a stable in Bethlehem! That's a fact! The second neat thing about this "stable" is the fact that the local archery club uses a small building and the field behind the B & B for their club. So I also got to shoot archery behind a stable in Bethlehem.

When Editor Tim Dehn learned about my upcoming trip to Israel, he asked me to summarize my experience for *ArrowTrade* readers. It's a chance for our North American readers to experience archery in another land, and maybe be more grateful for the opportunities we have here, particularly for the strong network of full-service pro shops.

LEARNING THE COUNTRY:

As you may already know, Israel is a small country only three hundred miles long from its northern tip at Mount Hermon (2224 m) to its southern tip at Eilat on the Gulf of Eilat. At its widest point between the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea, Israel is about 120 miles across. Consider also that the mostly desert southern half has very little population and you realize that

the nearly 8 million citizens are densely clustered in the mid and northern areas. Its north-latitude at Tel Aviv is 32 degrees – about the same as Savannah, Georgia.

The road system is quite good, about the same as here in the USA, so I found it relatively easy to drive over 600 miles in my two weeks in Israel. Route 6 is the major north-south highway that traverses most of the northern half making my travel between archery clubs easy. Just like in the USA, travel in or near the major cities is crowded requiring lots of patience, a GPS unit or, in my case, Google Maps on my phone. The most challenging travel was in Nazareth – one must not be shy while driving on the narrow streets in the hills of that city.

According to the latest information found on Wikipedia, the population of Israel is 75.5 percent Jewish, 16.8 percent Muslim, 2.1 percent Christian, 1.7 percent Druze and 3.9 percent unclassified. The population consists of immigrants from over 24 different countries. Israel is diverse with a great variety of ethnic foods available – all



The former horse stable is now a beautiful Bed and Breakfast. The owner, Yossi, also does some of the cooking at the small restaurant on the premises. It's a beautiful area to visit and a great place to stay.



The rooms at the B & B are well appointed. The former feeding trough is now a nicely decorated accent to the room. Contact me if you plan a trip there and I'll arrange a room for you.

of them really good! And lots of great beers to choose from!

The climate is very dry for eight months of the year, March through October. During the winter months they get all of their yearly rainfall making it necessary to irrigate during the remainder of the year to cultivate their crops. The further north you travel in Israel the more green you see with the greenest section located around

the Jordan River valley. The drive up the western slope of the mountain on the way from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is also very green – and very beautiful. The temperatures during the first two weeks of September while I was there ranged from 80F to 90F with only two days having high humidity.

TRAVEL SCHEDULE:

I visited six different locations to train coaches and archers that belong to the six clubs and three military groups. My first week was spent entirely at the Rishon Le'zion archery club located just south of Tel Aviv. It was my pleasure to work with seventeen aspiring coaches and archers for five days developing many of the same concepts taught in the NFAA/USA Archery Community Coaches Course.

We spent much of the first two days gaining an understanding of good archery form and the biomechanics needed to employ it. The remaining three days of class were spent on teaching techniques, reinforcing good shooting form and using digital still and video pictures to assess improvements and make plans of corrections.

My first Friday and all of the second week I traveled to the other locations: Beit Haloheem in Tel Aviv, Beit Lehem in Galilee, Beit Haloheem in Jerusalem, Givatayim near Tel Aviv, Herzelia north of Tel Aviv and Modi'in west of Jerusalem. My final day was spent back at the Rishon Le'zion archery club for the Israeli National Target Championship. Not only did I get to work with the members of the local archery clubs but I was honored to also assist members of three different Beit Haloheem military veterans groups with improving their archery skills. Many of the vets needed special adaptations to their shooting form and equipment to accommodate their various physical challenges caused by injuries incurred in the line of duty. Their gratefulness and hospitality are among my favorite memories of the trip.



Narrow is the best way to describe many of the streets of Nazareth. Some of the main streets were divided two-lane but off the main streets travel was congested and assertiveness was required as I tried to keep up with my host, Eric, just ahead of me. Actually we were lost at this point, trying to find the Mediterranean-style restaurant where we had reservations. It all worked out well after Vicki took over driving.



The sign over the club house at the Rishon LeZion Archery Club uses an emblem of an ancient archer as its insignia. The small medal containing the archer was uncovered during archeological digs and dates back over 2000 years. This is a replica of the original medal. The archery club has adopted it for their logo.



This is the clubhouse facility for the Rishon LeZion Archery Club and like most archery clubs in Israel it's not big. Land is hard to procure in Israel because it's such a small country so any facility is put to use. This building has an air-conditioned classroom, an equipment room, an office, rest rooms and a small kitchen. Actually it has everything you need and worked well for our week-long course work.

COACHES TRAINING:

As I understand it, the Israeli Archery Association has about 150 dues-paying members. Some of the dues from this association are used to pay the coaches that work at each of the nine clubs. My job for two weeks was to train those coaches so they could do a better job of teaching basic, biomechanically sound shooting form.

The first five days were devoted to teaching the seventeen coaches how to shoot better. By learning an organized shooting form themselves and observing my teaching methods they should be better able to teach others. Further, we pursued a wide variety of coaching-related topics through the use of Power Point presentations, discussion and question/answer sessions. Each day also utilized several shooting periods punctuated with use of still pictures and video.

CLASSROOM SCHEDULE:

DAY ONE

STILL PICS OF EACH ARCHER AT FULL DRAW
DEFINE YOUR SHOOTING OBJECTIVE
DEFINE BACK TENSION
DEFINE FULL-DRAW-POSITION
BUILD STEPS OF COMPOUND FORM

DAY TWO

CONTINUE TWELVE FORM STEPS

WRITING PLANS OF CORRECTION
BACK TENSION INSTRUCTION
COACHING PHILOSOPHY
GOAL SETTING

DAY THREE

STEPS OF RECURVE FORM
MENTAL PREPARATION
REVIEW SHOOTING FORM STEPS
Q & A

DAY FOUR

PLANNING &
IMPLEMENTING TRAINING CYCLES
EQUIPMENT FITTING AND TUNING
TEACHING TECHNIQUES
USING VIDEO
Q & A

DAY FIVE

REVIEW FORM STEPS
TOURNAMENT PREPARATION
REVIEW PLANS OF CORRECTION
NEW FORM PICS OF EACH ARCHER
Q & A

Please understand that Day One was Sunday, August 28 and that Sunday is a work day in Israel because the Sabbath is observed from sunset on Friday evening through sunset on Saturday. So, we worked from Sunday through Thursday on the skills for coaching and teaching, and then on Friday I traveled to my first club, Beit

Haloheem in Tel Aviv, to assist the coach there, my friend and host Eric Soroker.

As I did at each club for the next seven days, I helped Eric apply the teaching techniques we had learned throughout the week. I expected each coach to work closely with me as we first took pictures and then analyzed each archer in the club. Following that, together we made a plan of correction and instructed the archer in the implementation of that plan. The club coach will have to continue this instruction on his/her own so I tried to engage them in the process as much as possible while I was there.

The real skill we worked on was the ability of the coach to “see” good form and to also “see” what needed to be improved. That “seeing” skill was based on having a sound form model in mind and that form model was the one we developed during the first week of coaches training. Without that model as a comparison suggesting changes to an archer is just guess and opinion with no biomechanical justification. Of course, I teach the model that I have developed in my book *Core Archery* and in my new DVD *Core Archery Back Tension, Defined and Demonstrated*. Learn a little anatomy plus observe and feel what the body can do easily and you’ll understand how to shoot more consistently.



I got to work with two groups of archers at the Bethlehem in Galilee club, the regular club members and the veterans group from nearby Haifa. The small building in the background housed several short-range indoor targets and stored equipment. The outdoor area was large enough to hold 30m, 50m 70m and 90m targets for FITA events. The members had really good ears and were eager to learn all they could to improve their shooting and equipment selection.



The military veterans club in Jerusalem was located in the Beit Haloheem facility and was much like a small country club. The shooting field was a nicely manicured grass lawn allowing for 50m shooting under a shaded canopy. Many of the archers had to make adaptations for various physical challenges they faced due to battle injuries. As you can see they are a very happy and energetic group and it was a privilege to work with them.



My only sight-seeing day was September 3 so my host family, Eric and Vicki, son Gal and daughter May, took me north to see the Beit She'Arim burial sight. The burial caves in this small valley in the Galilee section of Israel has many hand-dug caves dating back over 2,000 years. The soft chalk-like rock was dug out to house the coffins (sarcophagi) of a wide variety of important people.

We were able to tour inside many of the caves to see the ancient sarcophagi. Many were decorated with a variety of symbols including lions and other animals indicating the social standing of the individual. The cool temperatures inside were a welcome break from the 90 degree heat outside.

CLUB LOCATIONS:

The shooting line and equipment shed of the Beit Haloheem Club (military veterans of Tel Aviv) was in a parking lot. The shooting area had a roof overhead at the side of the parking lot while the target area was in a long walled corridor that was inaccessible

to any pedestrians. It was really a nice place to shoot short, medium and long distances to 90-meters.

Sunday, September 4, found me in Beit Lehem (Bethlehem) in the Galilee region between Haifa and Nazareth. The

club was in a small wooden structure behind the Bed and Breakfast building that I stayed in and was set up to accommodate several indoor target mats at 10 meters. Out the north side



Nazareth is an Arab city but it does contain many notable Christian churches like the Church of the Annunciation. This church is built over the ancient remains of the small house where it is believed that Mary was told that she was to give birth to Jesus. Inside, you can see the many large paintings and mosaics sent by over 80 countries to honor the Mother Mary.

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The shooting field at the Rishon LiZion Club was the location for the Israeli Target Championship and supports both the 50m compound and the 70m recurve distances. The field is part of the parkland and is used for outdoor concerts since it is shaped like a natural amphitheater.

of the clubhouse outdoor targets were setup at 30m, 50m, 70m and 90m. It was a very practical setup and the members were grateful to have such a facility. I worked with coaches Yossi Yegger, Rivka and Anatoly Sidorovsky and the regular club members for much of the day and then a group of military vets from Haifa in the evening. Some of the members traveled as much as an hour to get there.

On Monday, September 5, I traveled to Jerusalem where I met Gal Soroker, my host's son, who guided me to the Beit Haloheh Veterans Club in that city. This was really a rather lavish facility with a well manicured 50m grass shooting area and an overhead shade roof and paved shooting line. This club was for wounded vets only – a really great place to shoot and a really super bunch of guys to work with. Once again I worked with coaches Rivka and Anatoly Sidorovsky. Rivka is a former Soviet Union archery champion and her husband is a good bow technician – a great combination for the club archers to rely on.

September 6 found me back in Tel Aviv again. This time I was at the Givatayim Archery Club working with

coach Yuri Yogev. This club had only a 20 yard facility as the community field they had used previously has been taken over by the local soccer program (the archers are quite unhappy about this as you can imagine). They do have a club house with rooms for instruction which I remember using in 1999 to do some basic instructor training with my old friend and mentor Bud Fowlks.

Later that afternoon I traveled about 20 kilometers north to the Israeli Shooting Sports Training Center in Herzeliya to work with coach Maya Morag. This club has scheduled time to use one of the rifle ranges. They set up their own targets in the outdoor court yard part of the range while we used the indoor portion as a short range instruction area.

I began Wednesday's training at Rishon Le'zion with club member Guy Matzkin. From there I went to the city of Modi'in to meet Coach Shmulik Harpaz. His wife prepared a great meal for us in their home and after a short rest, Shmulik and I headed out to the nearby archery range. The range is located in a former greenhouse facility and is strictly outdoors with a shaded shooting line. We worked with some



Some of the over 60 participants at the Israeli Target Championship were military veterans. All of the vets seemed undaunted by the physical challenges they faced and competed on an equal basis with the rest of the archers.

young teens and adults until after sunset – two of the members were Arab from the Jerusalem area. Once again, everyone was great to work and talk with and very eager to learn anything that would make them shoot better.

Thursday, September 8, was the scheduled conclusion of my training visit at the Rishon Le'zion Club. I met with many of the archers and coaches that attended the previous sessions to answer any questions they might have. It was a rather casual day as I recall and a nice finish to our organized work as I got to discuss more than archery.

THE ISRAELI TARGET CHAMPIONSHIP:

The annual Israeli Target Championship was held on the last full day of my visit, September 9. This was really great for me because I got to see almost all of the student archers and the coaches I had worked with during my two week tour. It was interesting to see many of them implementing some of the corrections we had made to their form although you can't expect to get good results in the short term – it really takes months of practice until you see results. But, undaunted, many of the archers proceeded anyway knowing that their changes wouldn't produce



My host, Eric (white hat) is calling arrow values while his son, Gal (dark hat) is recording the scores on the score cards. Gal visited me here in the US in August of 2010 in order to get some help with his shooting and to earn a coaching certificate. He was my host for the day I was in Jerusalem and he gave me a tour of Hebrew University where he is currently earning his masters degree.



The shooting line is under a row of shade trees and provides a great place to either shoot or spectate. I got to see my new friends from my two-week stay put themselves through the paces of a major tournament. It was a great finish to my trip.

better results for some time. They will see those higher scores later in the winter at the Israeli Indoor Championship tournament.

The tournament followed the FITA format with a qualifying round at 70m for recurve and 50m for compound. Based on those results the top qualifiers began their shoot-off for the medals. I got to watch and chat with my new friends and at the end I got to present some of the awards to the top finishers. It was a great day.

EQUIPMENT:

I saw all the newest bows and arrows in Israel - the internet makes it possible for anyone, anywhere to order the new stuff. The problem for most countries like Israel is the cost. Not only do you have to contend with shipping you must pay import taxes your home country charges - in Israel this adds about 30 percent. And, sometimes, you have to wait for weeks for your equipment to clear local customs inspectors. My Israeli friends pay about \$75 each for Easton X-10 arrows!

You can't walk into an archery shop and look at new and used bows on the show rack - there aren't any archery shops in Israel. None! The Israeli archers rely on sharing used bows and buying new from outside distributors and retailers. When they

get to the USA they try to visit a good archery shop just to experience the feeling of being surrounded by racks of new bows.

I know that some of the archers order from firms like Lancaster Archery, in the USA. Others order from European distributors and retailers. My friend and host, Eric Soroker, is a dealer for several manufacturers/distributors so he can sell to his countrymen. While I was there I helped him get set up as a Carbon Express dealer and as distributor for my own books and DVDs. Regardless, the wait for many products is much too long and the cost too high, which naturally hampers the growth of the sport.

The major problem they face is what to do when a new bow arrives and it doesn't fit properly? Getting the parts needed to make alterations to a bow is time consuming, costly and frustrating.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE:

Unlike the USA, Israel is greatly influenced by archery events in the European and Middle Eastern countries. That's to be expected since those are their closest competitors. My Israeli friends and students gauge their training schedule by what events are taking place near them and also the FITA World Championship events.

We watched with great interest the internet videos of several world events looking for and finding good shooting form exhibited by the top archers. We also found some form issues that could be improved, discussed why and how to do it. Here in the US most of us mark our schedule by what's happening in our county or state and are totally disconnected from the rest of the world of archery it seems.



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CONCLUSION:

This was my fifth trip to Israel. I traveled there in '98, '99, 2000 and 2001 to coach at the Keshet Eilon Master Violin School held each summer at Kibutz Eilon in the northern Galilee region. That's where I met Eric and many other archers as they, too, were assisting with the school. I coached the young violinists every afternoon in the sports hall as part of their optional physical training. The local archers who assisted with the school I was able to coach each morning.

I missed getting back to Israel for ten years so I looked forward to the chance to teach their coaches and renew some of my old friendships and make new ones. The old Pennsylvania "Dutch" saying comes to mind: Make new friends, keep the old, the one is silver and the other gold! I added greatly to my treasure of silver and gold this trip.

I know there are many small

countries in Europe and the Middle East that are in need of coaches training. Several groups of international coaches traveled to the Easton/NFAA Training Center in Yankton, SD, in October and November through a program offered by the IFAA. I helped instruct the October group and video of that instruction was used for the November group. George Ryals and M.J. Rogers were able to teach at both sessions. The question is "What comes next?" How do we get the coaches training needed to those who need it? There's a lot to be done and we've just started.

I'm happy we got started! We'll learn from here, make a better plan, design better curriculum and help the international archery community develop better teaching/coaching techniques. And so, by working together my friends, we will help archers around the world shoot better!

Keep well, shoot better! *Larry*

EDITOR'S NOTE: Larry Wise is also available to conduct one and two day CoreArchery Academies on shooting form. Personalized coaching is now available on-line via Skype, and video clips of Larry offering bowhunting tips can be seen on the bowhunting.net website.

Larry has completed his new DVD titled Core Archery BackTension: Defined and Demonstrated. The DVD is available at www.larrywise.com for \$19.95.

Checkout past articles by Larry Wise at the twin web sites of *ArrowTrade*. High speed internet users can find more than three years of complete back issues at arrowtrademag.com. If you're using a dial-up connection with slower speeds, you can still download all of Larry's coaching and tuning articles as pdf files at the alternate web site, arrowtrademagazine.com. ←

Viewpoint of an Israeli Coach

Archery in Israel, while not exactly in its infancy, is still limited in scope (fewer than 200 registered archers in the entire country), and most archers, on both competitive and recreational levels, shoot target recurve. For that reason, and also since bow hunting is illegal in Israel, compound shooting is considered (among recurve archers, of course) an easier option, fit for the few broken-down and over-the hill recurvers, or simply for people who like shooting a bow but can't afford the training hours necessary to achieve real scores in recurve - with all the usual jokes about "bows with training wheels" and the like. Therefore, compound coaching suffers accordingly (out of the dozen coaches active in the country, just a couple know anything about compound, and even that primarily on the nuts-and-bolts level). Considering all this, a training seminar for coaches held by a world-renown authority such as Larry Wise, was in many ways a revelation for us.

I, personally, had switched over to compound just a month or so before Larry's arrival, after having shot recurve for almost 10 years. Not surprisingly, I didn't know the first thing about it, and was a little apprehensive about what seemed to be an entirely new set of challenges. To my great relief, Larry immediately made us see that certain unalienable truths are valid for both types of bows -namely, back tension shooting which comes naturally to a recurver, is just as vital for compound (if you want to shoot it well consistently, that is). So, instead of getting into some obscure points of aiming or whatnot, Larry took us right back to the basics - archer's T, basic stance, drawing sequence, full-draw position, all while maintaining proper back tension - and everything clicked into place. A week later, I shot my first 50 meter competition with a compound, getting 303 and 308 points per set.

Larry didn't just work with us coaches, he made a point of visiting each club and checking out every athlete we had to offer, whatever their category, age or shooting level. He helped us examine each one's shooting sequence in detail after having shot them with his camera from different angles, offering helpful suggestions and making adjustments. Nothing fancy - mostly, back-to-basics (at least at my club - our guys and girls didn't have many bad habits to unlearn!) - but his keen and experienced eye, together with the "pro from Dover" authority, made all the difference.

If I were to name the main insight that I have gained from Larry's seminar, it would be the basic set of skills that serve as a common ground for all archers, whatever discipline they may adhere to. I try to implement this lesson in a very specific way at my club: I put all beginners, kids and adults alike (including those who come to me with new compounds that have tickled their fancy on some web page), on a strict diet of instinctive recurve. The rationale behind it is that every archer, in order to shoot consistently, must learn the same basic skills of bow-archer interaction - balanced stance, bow-arm pointing, back-tension draw, in-line release and follow-through - to the point where they become second nature, before they get even a rudimentary aiming aid, or pick up a compound. This way they have a rock-solid foundation to build on in the future.

Thank you again, Larry - and hope to see you in a year or two, to check up on our progress!
Yuri Yogev, Coach, "21st Century Archery", Givatayim, Israel