

The Arab Marshland in Iraq

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The Mesopotamian Marshlands in Iraq are one of the most beautiful and interested places on earth, it was described as the Garden of Eden and the cradle of civilisation.

It is a land which is famous for building floating homes on the waterways, which do not sink with the flood.



The Marshes are based in the southern areas of Iraq; they form a triangle between Basra, Amarah and Nassirya cities. The native inhabitants of the marshlands are called "Almaadan", they have built their lives around the unique ecosystem for thousands of years, fishing, rising water buffaloes for milk and cheese, and living in huts woven from marsh reeds. The Arabs, who believed their land is the place where the Bible says life began, are reputed to be descended from ancient Sumerians((4500-1900 BC).

The area is covered by 6000 miles of water , with houses and boats are made of reeds, people travel from house to house by boat which they made by themselves. People who live there still live in a native ways like bitumen- covered boats; caught fish using spears.

The Mesopotamian marshland are significant for economic, social, and biodiversity values characterized by frequency of

water flows, accumulation of nutrients and organic matter and the production of commercially important vegetation and fish, this area used to provide two-third of the fish consumed in Iraq.

It is a unique place which inhabits many kind of variety of habitats. 12000 inhabitants live in this area. Many stories have been written on this area from the Epic of Gilgamish and the story of the flood (the original

Ducks





Al Qurnah is an area north of Basra city, where the Tigris joins the Euphrates is to be the site of the legendary biblical Garden of Eden, where Adam's tree is found, it's the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

There are famous religious places ,Shrines and tombs in the area of the marshlands specially for Jewish religion , as prophet Azra's shrine lies in the triangle marshland in the middle of Qurna and Ammara region .As Izak (Thu Al Kifil) lies southern of Babylon on the river Euphrates, this shrine contains the tomb of the prophet , scientific institute and Synagogue which contains a very valuable writings of the prophets writing which explains the trips of prophet Muses for the Jewish pilgrims.

Moreover, in the marshes they discovered that this area is the richest areas in Iraq for oil, like Majnoon Island have 160 oil fields in the deep of the Tigris river marshes. In addition, it has the largest reserved oil field in the world and there are more areas that are undiscovered.

Unfortunately, the Arab marshland has witnessed a brutal destruction which has cost the country and the people living there a lot until now.

During the 1980's and 1990's

when the war was between Iraq and Iran, the area of the Arab marshland was intensified of drainage through the third river project , due to the position of the marshes in the area between the two countries and the marshes became a launch pad for attack by the Iranian armed forces, this has led to the death of this unique culture, from (UNDP) an environmental study was carried by the United Nations Environment program 2001, based on satellite images



A bridge in Halfiah

Fishing boat



from(NASA) the US space agency acclaimed that 90 percent of the marshes no longer exist and revealed the extent of the devastation of the region, the report stated that the Tigris and the Euphrates are among the most intensively dammed rivers in the world due to the construction of more than 30 large dams by Turkey, Syria and Iran which has turned off the tap to reduce the water available for downstream ecosystem and eliminated flood water that feed

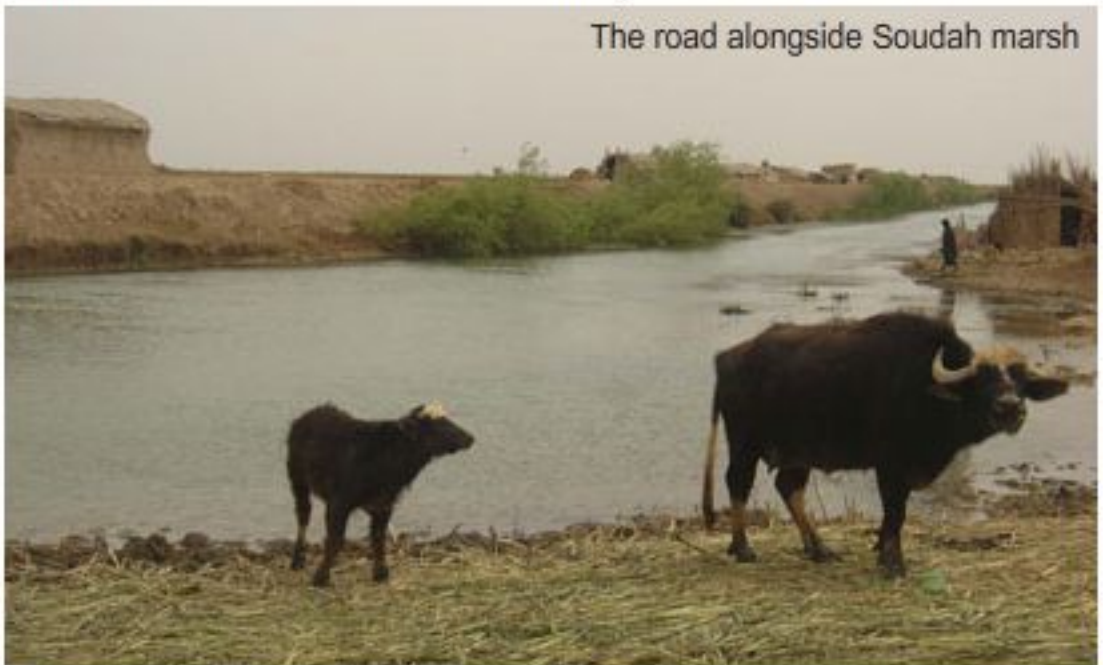
the marshland , they added that the collapse of the Marshland society present a vivid human dimension to this environmental disaster.

There is a poor quality of water, a presence of toxic materialise, and high saline soil conditions in the drained marshes this would prove their ecological restoration and doom the reestablishment of the Marsh Arab culture of fishing and agriculture. Even though, the high volume of good quality water flowing to the marshes

from the Tigris and the Euphrates in the last few years after the invasion allowed 39 percent of the former marshes to be refloated by Sep.2005 Although this does not guarantee the success of the restoration as only a part of the former marshes may be restored. However there is a survey by American Institute of Biological Science in 2006, found that a amazing rate of reestablishment of native macro invertebrates, macrophytes, fish, and birds is refolded in to the marshes.

Adam's tree is dried up and the tourist hotel is shattered and neglected, Moreover, A study conducted by Wetland Ecosystems Research group at Exeter University in 1994 called an "Environmental and Ecological study of the Marshland of Mesopotamia reviled that the marshes support a significant number of rare and endemic species and many of them are threatened, like the water Buffalo who lived in the marshes since 4000 BC and it's one of the features in this area , they added that the wetlands

The road alongside Soudah marsh



A herd of cows



encompass a mosaic of different marshland and lake unites, including open water of different depths, permanently and temporarily flooded marshes, Islands, inland deltas and two great rivers , the Tigris and the Euphrates.

The Human Right Watch revealed in 2003 that the native people of the Marshland were moved from the area as refugees abroad or internally displaced within Iraq, the population which was 250,000 people in 1991, now believed to number fewer than 40,000 in their ancestral homeland.

The Mesopotamian Marshlands are very rich area which has big potential in the tourism market in Iraq. The Iraqi authorities should understand the richness of this area and the country in general as a promising future destination, and to achieve this target, they should work together with the local and international communities to develop this area in a sustainable and reliable way so that it can be protected and preserved for future generation and to build and prosper peace in Iraq through tourism, as tourism is the bridge between nations and people to build up peace.