

BEYOND

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OH SWEET SNOW!
When shall we meet again?

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Walid Jumblat opens fire on
growing urbanism

Watch Bernard Khoury fight the
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To bee or not to bee!
The disappearance of these insects
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The gems we weren't told about

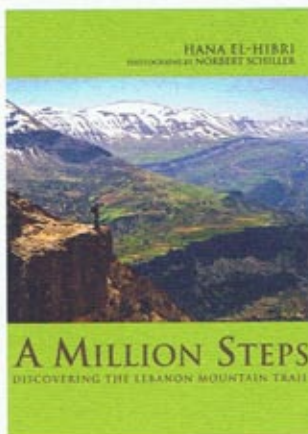
– Author of *A Million Steps* narrates an awe-inspiring story about her journey to Lebanon's rocky edges.

Photographs courtesy of HANA EL-HIBRI

Her eyes well up. Describing transgressions committed against nature – atrocities that she witnessed while crossing the Lebanon Mountain Trail (LMT) – is taxing on her soul. But her face changes the instant she recalls coming across beauty beyond belief along the 440-km trail, stretching from Kobayat in the North to Marjayoun in the South. A hiker who embarked on expeditions into areas as magnificent as Yosemite Park in the U.S., Hana El-Hibri could not believe that there are regions in Lebanon that measure up to the grandeur of North American natural wonders. Equally elating is the discovery of over 30 native wild orchid species.

It was in 2009 that Hibri joined a group of six people on a walkthrough across the LMT to explore it for the first time. Her aim was to chronicle this one-month journey, accompanied by photographer Norbert Schiller, in her book *A Million Steps – Discovering the Lebanon Mountain Trail*. **The book not only illuminates the rarely seen natural riches of Lebanon, but also sheds light on the colorful people inhabiting the villages through which the trail cuts.**

"You encounter a wide spectrum of people belonging to different cultures along the trail and this is what makes it so special – you learn about their lives, folklore, cuisine, and heritage," she explains with enthusiasm. "Discovering Lebanon on foot is totally different than what one might expect. The whole area is not only breathtaking. The people are also so



hospitable, generous, and beautiful." What also makes the LMT so unique, she says, is that it connects existing footpaths, which have been there for centuries. Hibri likens the experience to walking on history and encountering pieces of Lebanon's heritage every single day. "An olive press, a Roman temple, and a Phoenician tomb are what you might stumble upon and this is utterly romantic," she maintains. "And there are the Hadrian inscriptions in different places stating a decree by the Roman emperor that prohibited the cutting down of cedar, juniper, and pine trees."

But her voyage was not only about discovering that Lebanon is rich in varying landscapes, biodiversity, wildlife, and cultures. Hibri also came to understand the plight of villagers in terms of poor infrastructure and means of support. The experience made her reflect on potential solutions for empowering them so that reverting to harming the environment or abandoning their villages no longer become an option.

Hibri believes that through ecotourism, which could be a sustainable source of income, villagers can realize the importance of conserving their natural surroundings and hang on to their roots. Consequently, activities like chopping off trees or establishing quarries would come to a halt. And she hopes that by showing us how beautiful and diverse our country is, we would all see to it that we preserve the environment for future generations – each of us contributing in his/her own way. ❁



