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A MILLION STEPS

Lebanon's natural beauty is known throughout the world, even earning it the name "the Switzerland of the Middle East." Travelers from all over come to Lebanon to ski down the famous slopes of Faraya, photograph the ancient Roman ruins in Baalbek or swim in the serene Mediterranean Sea.

But Hana El Hibri's debut release, *A Million Steps – Discovering the Lebanon Mountain Trail*, takes those interested in adventure and discovery on a journey to a little-before-seen world, a side of Lebanon that cannot be reached by car or plane but simply just by walking.

In April 2009, El Hibri was among the first group of hikers to walk the entirety of the Lebanon Mountain Trail (LMT) from north to south, a 440km path winding through the Lebanese Mountains. The thru-walk's mission was to bring awareness to Lebanon's environmental and rural issues as well as push for legislation that protects the land and its species. Their trek quickly gained international attention, and El Hibri decided to continue the call for ecological conservation, writing what would one day soon become *A Million Steps*.





El Hibri's vivid descriptions bring the splendor of the LMT to life. The trail holds a rich diversity she explores with a hiker's intimate perspective, appreciating each element of nature like an individual piece of art. She notes the wide range of animal and plant species on the LMT—from marigolds to poppies, junipers to cedars, storks to goats and much more. She also explores the full spectrum of scenic views, walking down the banks of rivers, climbing up the steep slopes of mountains, strolling through grassy plains. The vast history she notices is also startling, with ancient ruins from the Phoenicians and the Romans dotting the trail.

But her journey is about the beauty not only in nature but also in the people along the LMT. Passing through

75 villages, El Hibri and her team are treated to true Lebanese hospitality. The book contains intimate portraits of some of the villagers who welcome the hikers into their homes and share their food and stories. El Hibri gains a deep sense of heritage, as she stays with families of all confessions, professions, political associations and personalities. Regardless of their tradition, the villagers all share the true Lebanese trait of warmth and generosity, and they add an unexpected but poignant aspect to El Hibri's story.

With text accompanied by the stunning photography of Norbert Schiller, *A Million Steps* is a vibrant and touching journey that reveals the true beauty of Lebanon and its people, one step at a time.

About the Contributors

Hana El Hibri

Hana El Hibri began her mountaineering career with a 30-day expedition in Wyoming, and her writing career on a 30-day trek in Lebanon. In the 30 years in between, she has had three children, lived in four countries, and hiked in five different mountain ranges (the American Rockies, the Alps, the Pyrenees, Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Lebanon).

Norbert Schiller

Norbert Schiller, an American-born Austrian, has been one of the most prolific news photographers in Middle East for the last three decades. His main work has been with AP, AFP, EPA, UPI, Getty Images, Der Spiegel and the New York Times. His books include *Arak* and *Mezze*:



The Taste of Lebanon, Wines of Lebanon – which won the Gourmand Award for best New World Wine Book 2005 – Spectacular Egypt, and Be Thou There, The Holy Family’s Journey in Egypt. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota with his Lebanese wife and two children.

Text by Hana El Hibri, Photography by Norbert Schiller

