

Tuesday, May 19th-Wednesday, May 20th
Mifgash with Ashkelon and traveling to the South
Written by Sam Auerbach

Tuesday afternoon, we arrived in Ashkelon and were greeted graciously by students of the Ort Afridar School, our sister school. After getting acquainted with the students through song and snacks, we went to the Ashkelon-Baltimore Park and then the National Park in Ashkelon where we prepared a cookout. We broke into three groups and divided up the responsibilities of pita, salad, and falafel preparation. While watching the sun set, we got to know one another over a dinner made even more delicious by the fact that we made it ourselves. Each of us went home with one of the students and we were greeted there by their families with even more food and enthusiasm. While the chaperones went off to stay back at the kibbutz from the night before, the students were off to the beach with their hosts.

Wednesday morning began with karaoke and a tour of the Ort Afridar School (a bit bigger than Cardin). After the tour, we painted a wall in their courtyard with the official emblem of our schools' partnership, as well as with our handprints. Led by one of their teachers, we were led in a conversation in both Hebrew and English about "identity". From examining John Lennon's *Imagine* to the book of Isaiah, we explored the separate notions of one's identity within a community, making a particular connection to our own identities as Jews.

Following lunch and a long ride into the Negev, we arrived at Ein Avdat, where we hiked up paths, stone steps, and ladders to finally reach the top and see the beautiful view. As a person who has never visited Israel, it became evident to me that all the pictures I've seen in textbooks do not do justice to the vistas as seen in person.

The hardest part of today was waving goodbye to our hosts from Ort Afridar; within one day we forged a bond with these students that we didn't expect before leaving home. Memories of the beach, making dinner, and countless pictures will be just some of the things with which we will remember our new friends.

After we said goodbye, we moved further south and arrived in Mitzpe Ramon. We began with enjoying the view from the overlook; we ate dinner, processed the last day and a half and stargazed.