

Jewish and Arab children uncover church mosaic

• By ETGAR LEFKOVITS

A group of Jewish and Arab elementary school children are taking part in a joint archeological excavation of a Byzantine-era church uncovered in a forest in the Latrun area, the Israel Antiquities Authority announced Thursday.

The group of 120 children from the Neveh Shalom school, who are in fourth to sixth grades, are participating in the week-long community-sponsored dig.

It is being held in the forest on the edge of their community where the ruins of the fourth- to sixth-century church are located, the head of the archeological excavation Gideon Sulemani said.

Archeologists knew of the site's existence due to an archeological robbery that took place there two

decades ago, although the dig now under way is the first one carried out at the site.

During the excavation, an elaborate mosaic decorated with geometric patterns, at whose center is a cross in shades of red and black, has been uncovered, only a small part of which was previously visible.

The church included both a monastery and a bath-house, Sulemani said.

An additional room which was uncovered at the site east of the main room includes a geometric mosaic in the form of a rectangle divided into squares, with a small colorful cross in each square.

The area, near the Green Line, was used as military outpost until 1967, which resulted in much damage to the site, Sulemani said.

"It seems that the site waited 1,600 years to be uncovered until the children

came to take part in the dig," said program director Hagit Neubern.



JEWISH AND Arab children from the Neveh Shalom school work on uncovering a Byzantine-era mosaic in a forest in the Latrun area near their community. (Neveh Shalom)