

JBEL SARHRO, MOROCCO

A THIRST FOR STARK BEAUTY

A two-week trekking meet, 5th-19th April 2016

Leader: Mick Borroff

Introduction

Having been on the very enjoyable YRC meet to Taфраoute in the Anti-Atlas in 2009, I was keen to return to Morocco. I was originally thinking of another similar week based at a hotel where we could go off on day trips walking, scrambling and climbing, but could not identify another immediately attractive location.

A trek in the mountains of the Atlas or Jbel Sirwa in April appealed, but would be complicated by late snow, so I looked further afield on Google Earth and came across a number of intriguing images taken in the Jbel Sarhro (Sarhro means drought or thirst). Having read a copy of Alan Palmer's guidebook "Moroccan Atlas - The Trekking Guide", I decided to reach out to him to help me refine a two week route across the Sarhro's starkly beautiful landscape. Alan proved to be very knowledgeable and most helpful, so I chose to use the services of his trekking company *Trek in Morocco* to arrange our trip.

The Jbel Sarhro is a little trekked area on the south side of the Atlas Mountains which enjoys a dry and hot climate year round. 2016 had been a dry year with just one day of rain since last October – hence its name!

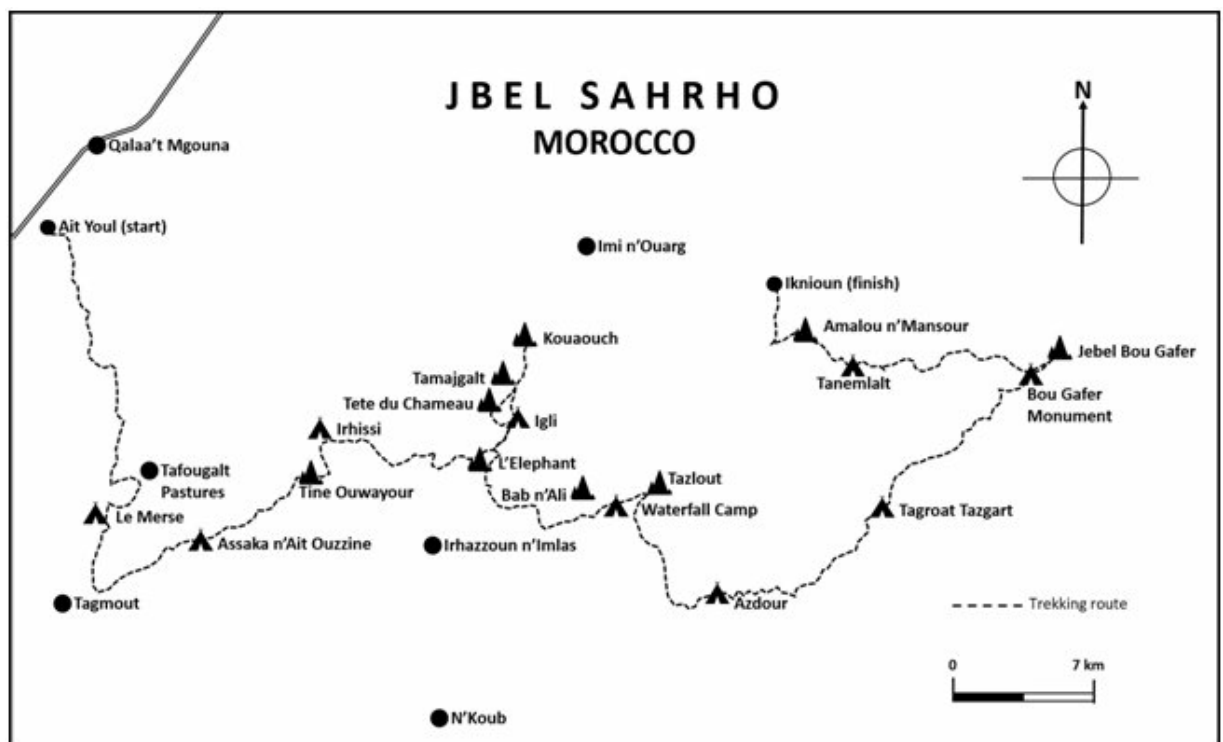
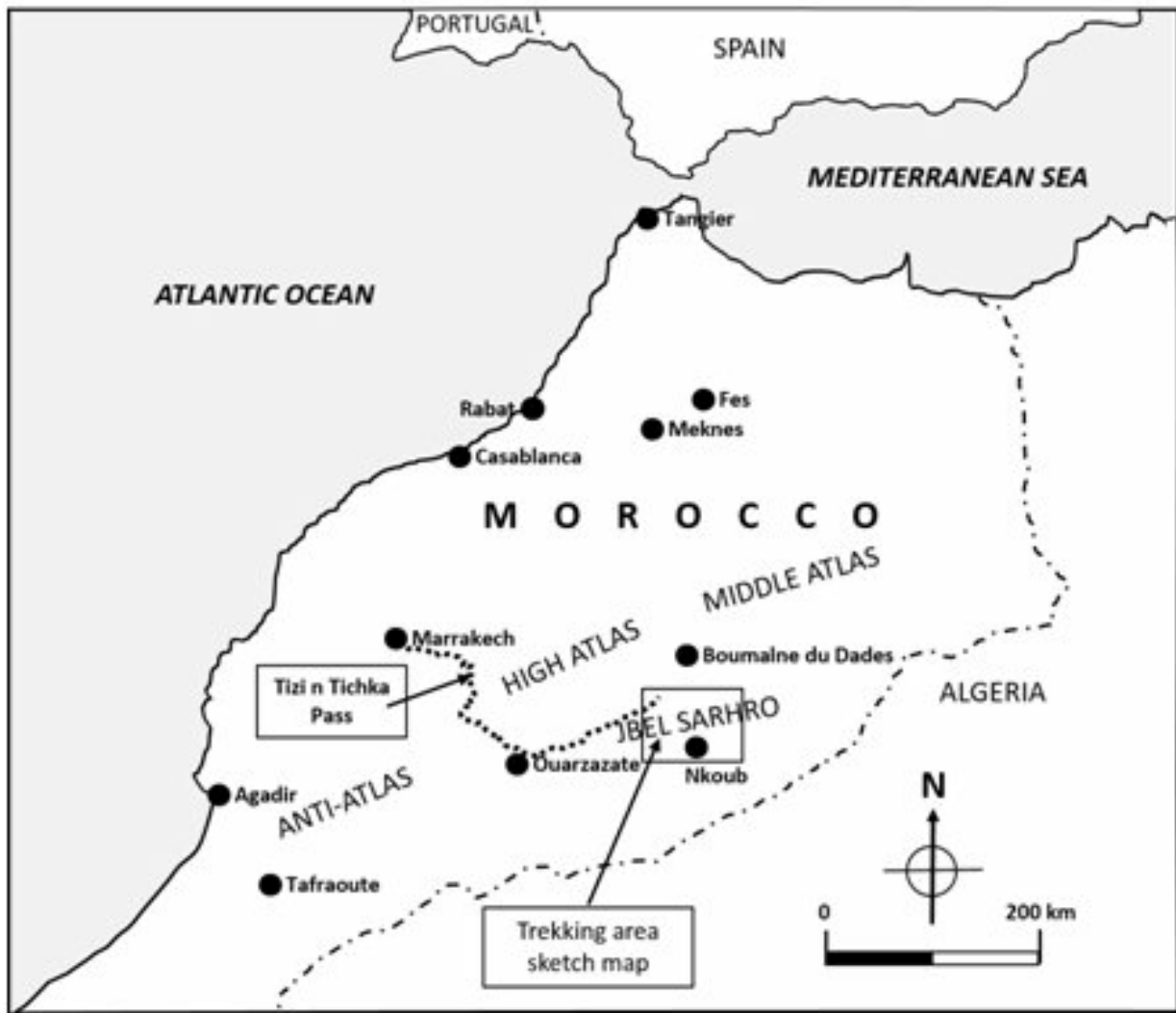
A number of trekking routes are possible in the Sarhro and our chosen route linked several of these to take in various scrambling objectives as well close encounters with the area's gorges and spectacular rock formations.

Alan suggested that we use the services of Lhoussain Oufkir, a qualified mountain guide from Boumalne du Dades who he had trekked with before. We found Lhoussain to be a warm and likeable individual who was always smiling! His deep knowledge of the region and evident respect for the Sarhro's Amazigh people enriched our visit, together with his insights into national and regional politics, past history and current affairs. His remarkable multilingual skills facilitated our communications and engagement with the Berber nomads whom we met and our five local Amazigh muleteers.

Each muleteer brought his own mule – they were all in good condition and received considerate treatment throughout the trek.

Our cook Hamid was from Marrakech and together with Mohammad, one of the muleteers, prepared consistently appetising and plentiful food which was enjoyed by all. Some 200 flat breads and 80kg of vegetables were consumed supplemented with a goat, a few chickens, eggs and tinned fish - mackerel, sardines and tuna! The latter was simply labelled "*Isobel*" in marked contrast with our Euro labelling! This was washed down by gallons of mint tea, which was drunk at every opportunity. Water was obtained from local wells and the occasional spring and was purified by a variety of systems.

These all worked as the group stayed healthy with an absence of gastrointestinal upsets.



Participants

Mick Borroff, Peter Chadwick, Barry Dover, Richard Dover, Paul Dover, Bill Gibbs, David Hick, Janelle Humphreys (guest), Michael Smith and Richard Taylor.

Our itinerary was as follows:

Summary

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Tue 5 April | Arrive in Marrakech |
| Wed | Transfer over the Tizi n'Tichka to the Valley of the Roses |
| Thu | Ait Youl - Tafoughalt Pastures - Le Merse |
| Fri | Le Merse - Assaka n'Ait Ouzzine |
| Sat | Assaka n'Ait Ouzzine - Tine Ouwayour summit - Irhissi |
| Sun | Irhissi - Igli |
| Mon | Igli - Kouaouch summit - Tamajgalt summit - Igli |
| Tue 12 | Igli - Tadawt n'Tablah - Bab n'Ali - Waterfall Camp |
| Wed | Waterfall Camp - Tazlout - Azdour |
| Thu | Azdour - Tagroat Tazgart |
| Fri | Tagroat Tazgart - Jbel Bou Gafer summit - Bou Gafer Monument |
| Sat | Bou Gafer Monument - Tanemlalt |
| Sun | Tanemlalt - Amalou n' Mansour summit - Iknioun - Valley of the Roses |
| Mon | Transfer to Marrakech via Ait Ben Haddou and Telouet |
| Tue 19 | Sightseeing in Marrakech and depart |

Detailed Itinerary

5th April

We arrived in Marrakech and were transported to our hotel by Jamal Imerhane, Alan's local agent. The Riad Bahia is situated in the Mellah (the old Jewish quarter of the city) and we arrived in time to meet our mountain guide Lhoussain and enjoy a mixture of vegetarian starters and a chicken tagine in the hotel before going to bed at around midnight.

6th April

Lhoussain and Hamid joined us for the 6 hour minibus transfer over the snow-capped Atlas Mountains via the Tizi n'Tichka pass, with the road in the process of being comprehensively upgraded. There were a number of police speed traps as we passed through the villages *en route* – their police use the same technology as ours! We stayed in the very pleasant Kasbah Agoulzi in the Valley of the Roses (the Mgoun valley), so-called as pink Persian roses are grown as a crop to be distilled to produce rose oil, rose essence and rose water etc.

7th April

A local Mercedes minibus appeared at the hotel first thing in the morning which had done some 740,000 km if the clock was to be believed! After stopping in Qalaa't Mgouna to pick up a mountain of flatbreads, eggs, some lamb and 50kg of vegetables, this transported us together with a large pile of tents, foam mats and other foodstuffs to the village of Ait Youl (1385m), the start of our trek. Here we met the five muleteers, who had camped out overnight with their animals.

Leaving them to weigh and equitably divide the loads between their mules, we started walking at about 9.45am and began getting used to the heat as we walked south across the dry plain on footpaths and small tracks.

Mohamed's mule was used for taking the food and kitchen equipment for our lunch stops whilst the other muleteers continued to set up the camp. Espying "lunch mule" next to a suitably shady spot was always a welcome sight!

After mint tea, our midday meal consisted of a huge plate of freshly prepared finely chopped salad vegetables and tinned fish accompanied by flat breads and pasta or rice and a spicy lentil-based sauce, followed by fruit and more mint tea. Lunch was timed to avoid the hottest part of the day and allowed a short siesta if required. This set the pattern for the remainder of the trek, except for two days where we carried packed lunches to be eaten on the summits.

Approaching the Tafoughalt pass, some of the group bought scarves and trinkets from a squatting lady sat next to the well in the hope of passing trade. This was the first of many such opportunities! Often Berber children raced out of their adobe houses or herders came over armed with blue plastic bags of intricately made but gaudy trinkets to tempt any passing trekkers and boost their families' incomes.

Just below the col itself Mick, Peter, Barry, Richard T, Michael and Dave decided to take the side-trip up to see the Tafoughalt Pastures (1950m), an upland grassy meadow used by Berber nomads to graze their sheep and goats. One black roofed tent was spotted on a ridge, but the only Berbers we encountered were a lady and her children living in a small stone-built house who invited us to join them for a glass of mint tea, which was prepared outside over a camping gas stove. Plates of dried dates and almonds were then produced. This was the first of several examples of genuine Berber hospitality in the mountains which elicited our thanks. (This report uses the more familiar term Berbers to describe this ethnic group, but they refer to themselves as Amazighs).

We descended from the pastures to re-join the main track and soon found our cluster of tents huddling round the well at Le Merse (1924m). A typical dinner of lentil soup and bread, lamb tagine and an apple was taken in a large tent whilst sat on sleeping mats on the ground. The four corner (pole) positions were much sought after to provide welcome back support!

8th April

We breakfasted early on bread, jams, honey, Nutella and processed cheeses washed down with copious tea, coffee or hot chocolate. This proved to be the usual menu for trek breakfasts. We were sometimes offered a thin 'porridge' which once a suitable quantity of jam and salt had been added, was quite tasty. A varied day of walking started with an ascent to the Tizi n'Tagmout col (and down towards Tagmout village where a mobile phone signal could be picked up. We passed a grove of newly planted almond trees to reach a watershed marked with the ancient graves of warriors from the Ait Seddrat and Ait 'Atta tribes.

A descent along a dry river eventually led to a spring and the welcome sight of lunch mule. Our meal taken on a shady ledge above the stream and was enjoyed with a chorus of croaking frogs and sightings of a few brown leeches and a small black water snake.

Suitably refreshed, we continued above the river gorge with good views east to the peaks of Tine Ouwayour and Amalou n'Mansour, passing a ruined kasbah (citadel) *en route* to our camp (1592m) on the football pitch belonging to Assaka n'Ait Ouzzine village. The local children turned out in force to watch the goings on in camp and eventually treated us to a stone-throwing competition, with tin cans regularly jumping in the air – one can see just how local goatherds get their accuracy in pitching stones!

9th April

This was another very varied day which started with a walk through the village then along the dry streambed towards the flat-topped peak of Tine Ouwayour (place of the moon). On the map and on Google Earth, the upside down heart-shaped mountain is unmistakable. Our plan was to ascend it using the major gully penetrating cliffs along the southern flank. Lhousain had never been up it before so when we met a Berber guarding her large flock of black goats, he asked her if it 'went'.

We then met her son who offered to show us the way – he said he often went up to the summit to get a mobile phone signal so he could contact relatives in N’Koub and get shopping sent to the nearest roadhead by taxi to be collected!

The grassy plateau on top of Tine Ouwayour (2117m) was a distinct contrast to the surrounding countryside and after trying to find the highest point, we carefully descended the steep eastern flank for a well-earned lunch. After our meal we passed another Ait ‘Atta cemetery to reach the start of the rocky Irhissi gorge and descended it to reach a crumbling adobe agadir (fortified granary), overlooked by our camp (1630m) on a terrace underneath some almond trees. All took advantage of the nearby spring to have a good wash before dinner.

10th April

After shaking most of the earwigs out of our luggage and rucksacks (the remainder appeared regularly over the next few days), we set off along the dry riverbed, then climbed up to a traverse and a new piste put in by some Berber prospectors. We passed a trial digging with copper green and cobalt blue colours in the excavated rocks.

Lunch was taken just before the hamlet of Bitche, then another ascent to a col where we could see the massive and appropriately named L’Elephant rock. This was passed with stunning views along serried ridges of eroded pinnacles. A short descent brought us to our camp at Igli (1704m), close to a Berber’s gite with a small shop and the possibility of hot showers for £1!

Hamid provided us with afternoon mint tea with popcorn and biscuits. Water was drawn from the huge well and a local boy was assisted with the filling of his family’s water bottles and the subsequent loading of his donkey to take them back home.

11th April

Paul, Bill and Janelle took advantage of the optional rest day at Igli camp, whilst the rest of us set off early with Lhoussain to climb up beside the impressive cliffs of Tassigdelt Tamajgalt to the Tizi Igli pass and on to the scrambling ascent leading to the twin cairns on Jbel Kouaouch (2592m) where we stopped for lunch. Fantastic views ranged from the snow-capped Atlas Mountains to the north, while to the south, the twin towers of Bab n’Ali beckoned beyond the Tete du Chameau (camel’s head) and sight of the witch’s hat of Tazlout to the southeast.

On the way back to Igli, Mick, Richard and Michael decided to see if Tamajgalt (2246m) could be ascended and found a good scramble on clean rock at the top of a gulley above the path to Abide that led to the summit plateau. A descent was made down pathless terrain beside the Tete du Chameau back to camp and a warm shower, followed by goat tagine and chips. A Dutch trekking group were camped in the gite’s compound, the only other trekkers we met.

12th April

The Igli well had been pumped dry the previous evening to irrigate the surrounding crops and we had to wait for a refill overnight to replenish our water bottles after breakfast. Lhoussain had arranged for a local woman to bake us a supply of fresh flatbreads in exchange for the remainder of the large bag of flour. The flatbreads were baked on hot pebbles in an earth oven.

Another spectacular day of walking lay in store. First up was a close encounter with L’Elephant before heading southeast into the Tadawt n’Tablah with its amazing rock scenery. Pinnacles were everywhere with views from a col (1708m) to the impressive twin teeth of Bab n’Ali held to be the ‘Jewel of the Sarhro’. We could see a nomad’s camp not far away but then encountered a family of Berbers on their three week transhumance journey north to the Atlas. The sight of a young boy tied onto a donkey led by his mother with a kid goat lashed into a side pannier was unforgettable.

After reaching Bab n'Ali, we stopped for lunch under a palm tree. After our meal, we headed east reaching the bottom of the Oufarar Gorge. This was an alternative route from Igli, so we walked and scrambled the almost dry gorge upstream for about an hour to enjoy the frogs, toads and the different rock scenery. Back at the entrance of the gorge we headed over to another gite beside a major piste to enjoy a coke. Paul and Richard had camped there on a previous visit in a 4x4.

A short walk took us to Waterfall Camp (1358m) nicely situated beside a virtually dry streambed issuing from a box canyon containing two waterfalls both having moss covered tufa screens. We had another goat tagine for dinner!

13th April

Paul and Janelle accompanied the mules from Waterfall Camp to Azdour, whilst the rest of us contemplated ascending the shapely volcanic cone of Tazlout (1803m). Lhoussain had not been up this, so he again consulted with local Berbers about the best route. Having been assured that it was doable, we ascended to the lower rock band on the NW side before finding a shallow gulley to climb. A second rock band was scrambled and a traverse under the cliffs above led to the wide central gulley between the twin peaks. A delightful scramble up a clean volcanic ridge was followed by some, whilst others kept to the gulley. Both routes led to the summit cairn bespattered with guano to find more excellent views. The return descent down the steep loose terrain was mostly uneventful. At the base of the last scramble, Bill pulled on a rock without making the customary solidity check and fell, fortunately sustaining only minor grazes to his head and legs, which were soon cleaned up.

Lunch mule was further away than Lhoussain expected, but Hamid had chosen a lovely shady spot for our meal. Later, in Azdour village, we were invited to visit Lhoussain's female cousin and her family to take tea, biscuits and nuts and to sample her home-made bread – all pronounced delicious. We sat on cushions on home-made rugs over carpets in an airy room. Lhoussain washed our hands following Berber custom and tradition – we felt very privileged to be there.

Azdour was also the last opportunity to buy anything from a village shop before camping just outside the settlement (1237m). The last of the goat was enjoyed for dinner!

14th April

After a late breakfast we walked away from Azdour village beside another dry riverbed with much evidence of irrigation using wells and water pumps powered by a variety of engines, all inspected by Barry as our chief engineer.

We stopped for lunch in a shady grove of almond trees and soon some local Berbers appeared with a plate of lamb tagine which we had to try. There were lots of kids around speaking French and some doing the family's washing – tramping the clothes in soapy water in the bottom of a cut-down oil drum or washing socks in a bucket. Both clothes and kids soon dried in the warm sun.

In the heat of mid-afternoon, three were walking along a broad track when David spotted a largeish lizard some 15m away running flat out towards them along the middle of the piste. Michael saw it and noticed a thumb-thick Schokari sand racer snake closely pursuing the lizard and gaining on it slightly. Lhoussain having turned round to see what we were commenting on, at the shout of "Snake! Behind you!" leapt to one side. The snake was moving so fast (~2m/s) it appeared to skim over the surface. The lizard might have mistaken us for trees and a potential escape route, so Michael then backed rapidly off the track to the left, keeping an eye on the still advancing venomous snake. He stumbled over a rock and fell. This movement may have disabused the lizard for it fortunately veered off to the other side of the track. The two reptiles disappeared into a loose pile of rocks still at full speed. The outcome was unobservable!

Later in the afternoon, we climbed up over a ridge close to two volcanic formations known locally as the shoulder blade and the wrist. Between them lay the col of the elbow to be crossed in the morning. Our camp (1690m) at Tagroat Tazgart (red throat) was close to a well beside a palm tree. On the slope opposite was a remarkably shaped lone tree, sculpted into a green umbrella by pollarding for firewood above and goat-browsing below.

15th April

After an early breakfast in anticipation of a long day, the “elbow” col was soon reached, then down and up over another one which eventually led us to lunch mule beside some trees in the valley bottom. Again some local Berbers appeared with some food for our party, but this time it was lamb couscous. A couple of ladies appeared with bags of colourful scarfs, etc. and waited patiently until we had finished eating before displaying all their wares prior to some bartering mediated by Lhousain.

Another climb to a col revealed the ruin of a military fort, part of the 1933 colonial French campaign against the remaining Ait 'Atta warriors besieged in their mountain stronghold of Jbel Bou Gafer. The descent on the other side led to our camp (1708m) on a terrace just above the French-erected Bou Gafer Monument to their fallen soldiers. This was the only place on the whole trek where fragments of green glass were seen – presumably pieces of eighty-year old French wine bottles.

Following afternoon tea, we set off to ascend one of the summits of the Jbel Bou Gafer massif by the steep path from the monument to a col. After a scrambling ascent to the summit (1918m), we were rewarded with extensive views to the High Atlas with a newly reduced capping of snow to the north and Algeria to the south. The Bou Gafer massif has three principal summits and the top we climbed was found not to be the highest, but we were out of time to try one of the other two! Several pieces of shrapnel were found lying close to the path on the hillside before returning to camp, evidence of past shelling and bombing by the French forces.

16th April

We set off after breakfast along the piste that descends from the Bou Gafer monument and gradually ascended towards a distant col on a path. Over the col the lunch mule awaited next to an almond and oleander grove dripping with sap after an aphid attack.

Later, we met another family of Berbers with a large flock of sheep and goats on their transhumance journey north to the Atlas who had been walking with their ten donkeys for twelve days with another eight to go. Passing yet another Berber camp, we picked up an old French military road and made rapid progress to our camp (2088m) just outside Tanemlalt village.

Hamid had procured some chicken from Iknoune which had been brought to Tanemlalt village by taxi and collected by the muleteers. He was busy preparing some flat paratha-like breads to go with the tagine - all cooked on two camping gas burners! After dinner, the crew entertained us with the traditional Berber love song of the deities “Hirro n'Wirro” accompanied by Mohammad on a tin flute. We responded with a rendition of “On Ilkley Moor Baht'at”!

17th April

Our last day on the hill began with an early start to avoid the heat. After team photographs had been taken and warmly thanking our five muleteers who would be heading for home after the equipment had been dropped in Iknoune, we began our climb up Amalou n'Mansour, the Sarhro's highest summit at 2711m. Three different walking or scrambling ascent lines were taken which converged at the summit with its communications mast.

After eating our packed lunch perched on the helicopter pad, we followed the ridge westwards to the head of the Great Gulley and down a very well graded zig-zag mule track to roadhead at the small

town of Iknoune (1925m) for a celebratory non-alcoholic cold drink with Lhoussain, sat outside the appropriately named Café Restaurant Nomades.

A local minibus took us to Boumalne du Dades and a then second one to the Kasbah Itran, our hotel for the night back in the Valley of the Roses. This very pleasant hotel is richly decorated with Berber rugs and artefacts which overlooks a huge crumbling kasbah and we enjoyed an excellent dinner on the terrace, serenaded by the croaking of frogs from the river below as we ate.

18th April

We transferred back to Marrakech by minibus but this time taking the old caravan route below the Tizi n'Tichka to visit a couple of historical sites. We hired a guide to show us round the extraordinary UNESCO listed ksar (fortified town) of Ait Ben Haddou with its typical earthen construction towering over the river. After lunch, we continued to Telouet to visit the unusual nineteenth century Glaoui kasbah with its amazing carved ceilings, alabaster fretwork, ornately painted window shutters and mosaic-tiled walls and floors.

Then over the Tizi n'Tichka and back to the Riad Bahia in Marrakech for a shower and a quick change of clothes. Then out for a lovely Moroccan dinner with Lhoussain and a couple of Janelle's relatives washed down with a few local beers at La Fassia restaurant in Gueliz – Marrakech's new town, to celebrate a fantastic trek in the Sarhro.

19th April

Our last day was spent sightseeing in Marrakech before our late flights home to the UK, with few of our group getting into their beds at home before four in the morning!

Planning and GPS Use

Detailed route planning was carried out using the GPS co-ordinates provided in Alan Palmer's guide book to locate key landscape features and camp sites in the Sarhro. These were loaded into Google Earth (GE) and a linking route plotted over path and track features visible on the ground in satellite images. This annotated route, together with waypoints, escape routes, possible variants, side trips and scrambling objectives was then made available to team members as a GE KMZ file. GE was also used to estimate the distance, cumulative ascent and descent for each day of the route and timing estimates generated for information using Naismith's rule.

The plotted routes and waypoints were also converted into a GPX file so they could be loaded onto GPS devices for navigation if needed. This included several escape routes. 1-50k and 1-100k mapping dating back to the 1970s were also used. Several members of our party carried GPS devices during the trek and our actual GPS tracks are available on request as GPX files, covering our journey which was measured as 203km and 8236m of ascent.

Glimpses of the Lives of the Berbers

We observed many local Berbers in the Sahrho leading what we perceived to be traditional lifestyles both in and out of the village environment. We met families making their annual transhumance journeys with a string of donkeys to carry their possessions on journey of several weeks to their traditional summer pastures in the foot hills of the High Atlas. Others remained in the villages, with their animals and many were occupied in tending to their crops and managing irrigation water pumped from wells along the dry river beds. We saw ladies grinding henna to a powder in a pestle and mortar for tattooing. Machine-free washing of clothes was the norm and washing boards were still in use. Mains electricity was being supplied to the major villages augmented by solar panels was seen on a small scale. Cooking with bottled gas was now the norm.

We encountered numerous Berber family groups on the hill carefully managing their flocks of sheep and goats by the judicious use of stones to redirect strays and bring them down towards the village at the end of the day.

The dress code was mixed with younger male Berbers often choosing Western clothes, whilst most women were seen in colourful traditional dress. Traditional values of hospitality to travellers were observed on several occasions, as already noted above.

Efforts to educate their children were evident with several new primary schools having been built in the villages and secondary schools in the larger towns. Once banned, the Amazigh language is now being taught to young Berbers alongside French and Arabic.

Bou Gafer

In February 1933, the massif of Jbel Bou Gafer was the site of intensive military action by the French and their local allies, as they sought to crush the resistance of the Ait 'Atta tribe who were the last to violently oppose the occupying forces and who had withdrawn to their mountain stronghold of Bou Gafer.

The Ait 'Atta warriors accompanied by their families are thought to have originally totalled around 7,000 (including some 500 armed fighters) and their flocks to number some 20,000 head.

Deploying morally questionable siege tactics and having vastly superior numbers, the French surrounded the massif and subjected it to fierce bombardment from the air and numerous artillery positions on the ground. Any tribespeople approaching water sources were simply machine-gunned. The French forces efforts to storm the mountain were fiercely resisted and they sustained as many as 3,500 casualties.

After a month of slaughter, some 2,000 Ait 'Atta had died along with 90% of their flocks. The French realised that the Ait 'Atta were not going to capitulate and perhaps discomfited by the slaughter of non-combatants, eventually agreed generous negotiated surrender terms with Hassou Ba Salem, the Ait 'Atta leader.

The French subsequently set up a monument to their fallen with a plaque inscribed: "*A la Mémoire des Officiers, Sous-Officiers, Caporaux, Soldats, Goumiers et Partisans des Groupes Mobiles du Confins de Marraksch Tombés Glorieusement Dans les Durs Combats du Djebel Sagho*".

Unsurprisingly, this metal plaque is now absent!

Transport idiosyncrasies

Morocco maintains an ancient and modern approach to transport. At one end, modern air conditioned vehicles abound and the main roads are pretty good. School buses were used to transport poultry and after the local markets, cows travelled on lorry roofs above their new owners. In the souk, handcarts were still very useful as we found when our baggage needed transporting a couple of km to the hotel after the minibus driver could not work out how to get there on our return journey. Mules and donkeys still played very useful roles in the villages away from the road network and some locals used low power motorbikes to get about on the pistes.

With two weeks, we had the opportunity to sample some of Sarhro's best trails and make a number of scrambling ascents, some of them we believe to be the first by an English party, with plenty of scope for more. Day time temperatures were in the high twenties and three-season sleeping bags were more than adequate overnight.

Bird list

Michael Smith, Bill Gibbs and Peter Chadwick were our principal birders and prepared the following list of sightings:

- * Mallard - *Anas platyrhynchos*
- * Barbary partridge - *Alectoris barbara*
- * Cattle egret - *Bubulcus ibis*
- * Little egret - *Egretta garzetta*
- * Grey heron - *Ardea cinerea*
- * European White Stork - *Ciconia ciconia*
- * Montagu's harrier - *Circus pygargus*
- * Common buzzard - *Buteo buteo*
- * Mediterranean gull - *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*
- * Rock pigeon - *Columba livia*
- * Collared dove - *Streptopelia decaocto*
- * Turtle dove - *Streptopelia turtur*
- * European scops owl - *Otus scops*
- * Common swift - *Apus apus*
- * Pallid swift - *Apus pallidus*
- * European bee-eater - *Merops apiaster*
- * Hoopoe - *Upupa epops*
- * Hoopoe lark - *Alaemon alaudipes*
- * Bar-tailed lark - *Ammomanes cinctura*
- * Crested lark - *Galerida cristata*
- * Thekla lark - *Galerida theklae*
- * Eurasian skylark - *Alauda arvensis*
- * Temminck's lark - *Eremophila bilopha*
- * Barn swallow - *Hirundo rustica*
- * Common house martin - *Delichon urbicum*
- * White wagtail - *Motacilla alba*
- * Common Bulbul - *Pycnonotus barbatus*
- * Eurasian Wren - *Troglodytes troglodytes*
- * Blackbird - *Turdus merula*
- * Song thrush - *Turdus philomelos*
- * Common chiffchaff - *Phylloscopus collybita*
- * Common whitethroat - *Sylvia communis*
- * Sardinian warbler - *Sylvia melanocephala*
- * Robin - *Erithacus rubecula*
- * Desert wheatear - *Oenanthe deserti*
- * Red-rumped wheatear - *Oenanthe moesta*
- * Mourning wheatear - *Oenanthe halophila*
- * Black wheatear - *Oenanthe leucura*
- * Blue rock thrush - *Monticola solitaries*
- * African blue tit - *Cyanistes teneriffae*
- * Woodchat shrike - *Lanius senator*
- * Eurasian magpie - *Pica pica*
- * Maghreb magpie - *Pica pica mauritanica*
- * Yellow-billed cough - *Pyrhocorax graculus*
- * Eurasian jackdaw - *Corvus monedula*
- * Common raven - *Corvus corax*
- * European Starling - *Sturnus vulgaris*
- * House sparrow - *Passer domesticus*
- * Desert sparrow - *Passer simplex*
- * Common chaffinch - *Fringilla coelebs*
- * European serin - *Serinus serinus*
- * European greenfinch - *Chloris chloris*
- * European goldfinch - *Carduelis carduelis*
- * Trumpeter finch - *Bucanetes githaginea*
- * Cirl bunting - *Emberiza cirlus*
- * Rock bunting - *Emberiza cia*
- * House bunting - *Emberiza sahari*

The team





Drawing and purifying water
at Igli well



Conclusion

The Jebel Sarhro was a very interesting place to visit. As Wikipedia correctly states “*the desolation of the harsh landscapes of the massive dry mountains with the many areas of bare rock and the austere, lunar beauty does not leave anyone unimpressed*”. They could have added monolithic rock towers, basalt columns, flat-topped mesas, serried ranks of pinnacles, river gorges and unexpected oases of green to this description.

Flights to Marrakech were inexpensive and members arrived from Australia, Manchester and Bristol.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Alan Palmer at Trek in Morocco Ltd for help with planning and his agent Jamal Imerhane in Marrakech for local organisation. Especial thanks must go to Lhoussain Oufkir, an outstanding local guide whose comprehensive knowledge of the Sarhro, excellent route finding and language skills greatly enriched our visit. Also thanks to our cook Hamid for his consistently good food and the five Sarhro muleteers: Mohamed and his brother Zaid, Rashid, Brahim and his brother Yedir - their mules and handling were a credit to them. All can be warmly recommended to any future visitors.

Further Sources of Information

Moroccan Atlas – The Trekking Guide 2nd Edn. Alan Palmer. Trailblazer Publications, 2014.

Trekking in the Atlas Mountains. Karl Smith. Cicerone Press, Milnthorpe, 2010.

Trek in Morocco <http://www.trekinmorocco.co.uk/> (e-mail alan@trekinmorocco.co.uk)

Mountain guide Lhoussain Oufkir <https://moutainguide.wordpress.com/> (e-mail lhoussainoufkir@gmail.com)

Les combats du Bou Gafer (in French)

<http://www.ouarzazate-1928-1956.fr/jebel-sagho/combats-du-bou-gafer.html>

French military rule in Morocco: colonialism and its consequences. Moshe Gershovich. Frank Cass Publishers, Abingdon, 2000.

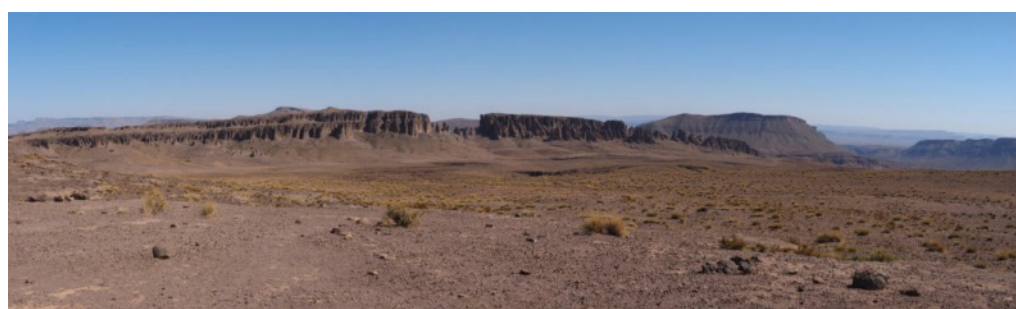
JPEG images of old (1970s) 1:50k and 1:100k IGN maps of Morocco can currently be downloaded from: <http://jemecasseausoleil.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/cartes-du-maroc.html> and <http://www.geojamal.com/2014/04/cartes-topographiques-maroc-50000.html>



Berber camp
Tadawt
n'Tablah.



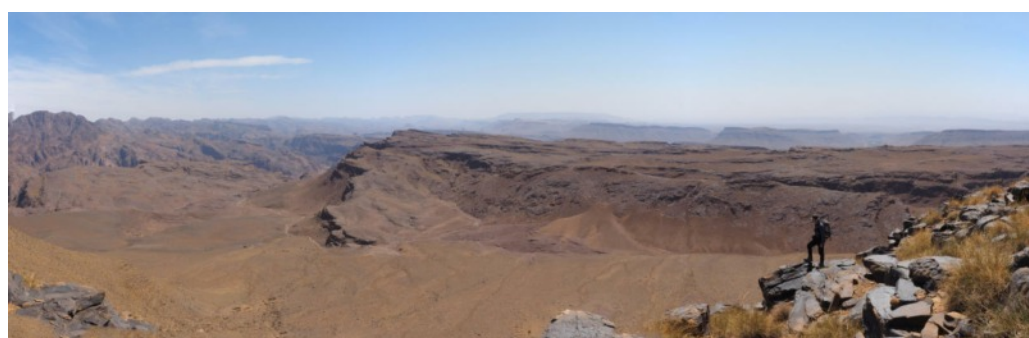
Camels' Head
and cliffs of
Tassigdelt
Tamajgalt



Tadawt
n'Tablah
Massif



Tanemlalt
Camp



View from
Tine
Ouwayour



Ancient kasbah
at Itran



Tassigdelt cliffs

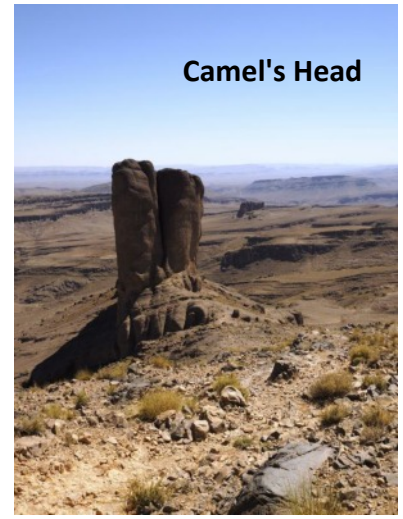


Elephant Rock with
Tazlout behind

Irhissi Agadir



Tazlout (left) and approaching Tazlout summit



Camp at Irhissi Agadir

Tadawt n'Tablah pinnacles



A typical lunch



Transport





Irhissi Agadir



Irhissi Gorge



Heading south from Le Merse