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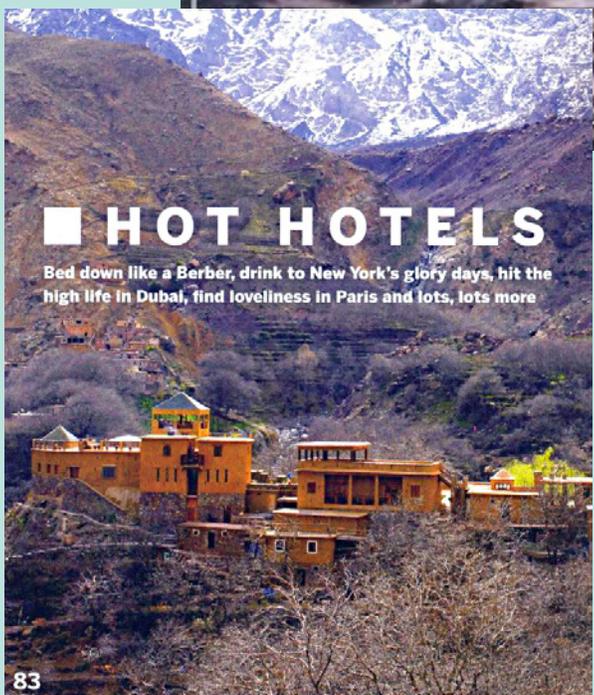
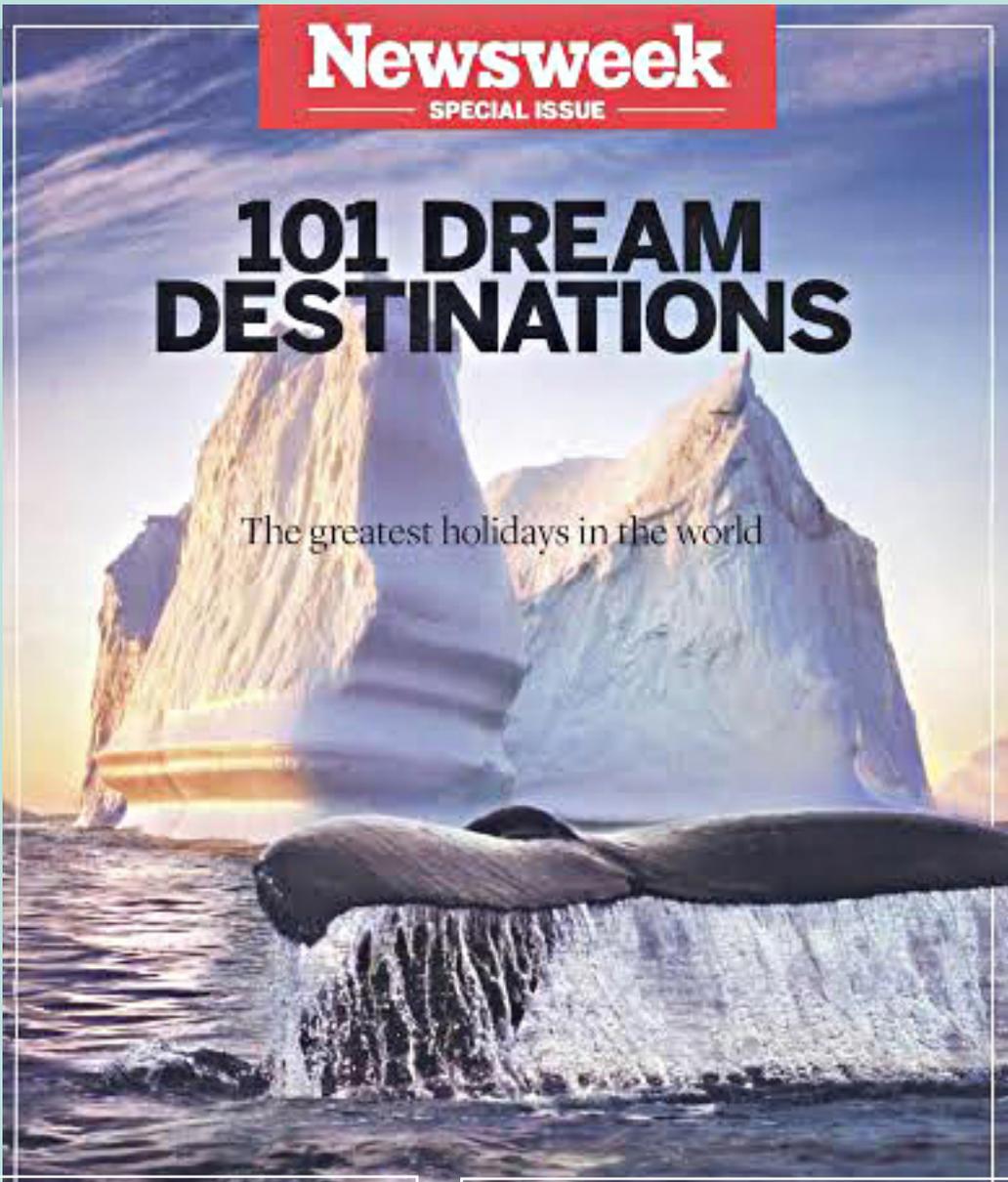


KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

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In search of a mountain breeze

Approaching the height of summer the villages of the Imlil Valley are a magnet for anyone wanting to exchange the heat of Marrakech for the cool of a mountain breeze.

It's the time for relaxing under the shade of walnut trees with a picnic or lounging in a chair on the Kasbah's roof terrace watching the occasional wispy cloud drift across the blue sky shimmering over Jbel Toubkal.

In this issue we get to the top of North Africa's highest peak with Bob Parker, who made his first ever ascent of Toubkal in the chilling snows of late March, while Nadia Butler takes us to one of her favourite places in Morocco, the Jardin Majorelle in Marrakech.

The imminent opening of EFA's fifth boarding house had the girls in cleaning mode, when they attacked their new home with big brushes and buckets of water – can you imagine any teenagers in your neighbourhood being so excited by the next big step in their education that they'd actually scrub floors!

The next time you are in the souk in Marrakech, make a visit to the tiny shop of Kamal Boukentar, unique in Morocco, where he hand-sews leather footballs (soccer balls to

American readers). On display is a rare example of a seventy-two piece model that took ten days of intricate stitching – the crown jewel of the football-makers world.

We are very pleased to be included in the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence Hall of Fame. This unique accolade is granted only to those businesses that have won the Certificate of Excellence for five years in a row.

I'd like to thank readers Nadia Butler and Bob Parker for their excellent contributions, and I hope that you will follow their example. You can contact me directly at kasbahmagazine@gmail.com to discuss your own contribution or with suggestions for future issues.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Derek Workman
Editor

...and everyone at

KASBAH DU TOUBKAL



Even the Mules give way

In the remote - and even not so remote - villages of the High Atlas Mountains, medical assistance of any kind is rarely close to hand. Because of this there have been a number of deaths over the years, particularly during childbirth, due to lack of transport to Asni, the nearest town with a maternity clinic, or on to Tahanaout or even Marrakech for more serious cases. One of the most important projects that the Association Bassins d'Imlil has instigated is the provision of an ambulance to reduce these all too avoidable mortalities. The ambulance has been a lifeline to many, particularly those in the most remote valleys who might other-wise have to wait many hours for medical assistance.

The way Abderrahim Ajdaà handles his ambulance as he tackles the hairpin bends of the rough track that zigzags precariously up from Imlil to Aremd, the highest and largest of the villages that form the Association Bassins d'Imlil, you would think he was still driving a taxi around the roads of Asni, seventeen kilometres. After eleven years driving over some of the roughest terrain in North Africa's highest mountain range, his confidence is built on experience. Every pedestrian, mule, jeep and truck gives way as the ambulance climbs the narrow road. After all, it may be someone in their family it's on its way to.

In general situations Abderrahim takes the first call. His main work is ferrying expectant mothers to the maternity clinic in Asni, or the hospitals in Tahanaout or Marrakech to give birth. One person is allowed to travel with the patient in the rear of the ambulance. The next most common is attending accidents, mainly motor accidents, where



he's often first on the scene, even before the police arrive. Abderrahim has been trained in first aid, but the ambulance has limited equipment and if he thinks the patient needs a nurse or doctor they will be taken to the clinic at Imlil.

The resident nurse, Hamid Asbayo, calls the doctor if necessary, and the patient can be treated there. If there are complications, Abderrahim makes the sixty-kilometre drive to the hospital in Marrakech.

If a helicopter is needed for a mountain rescue it lands in the dried riverbed in Aremd, the highest village in the valley, with the patient being transferred to Abderrahim's ambulance for the onward journey down the mountain to Asni or Marrakech. When the river is in flood there is nowhere for the helicopter to land, and Abderrahim

has to gather a team of villagers to bring the injured down by stretcher.

This article is taken from **REASONABLE PLANS** the story of **Kasbah du Toubkal**, its origins, its life within the community and the benefits that the Magical 5% has brought to the Imlil Valley and beyond.



Asni Clean-up Crew

With the new boarding house in Asni due to open in September, the girls, under the leadership of Head House Mother Latifa Aliza, tackle the big clean-up with brushes, buckets and big grins.



"Women tend to spend their resources on their families, prioritising things like healthcare, nutritious food, education, and all the building blocks of a thriving society."

Melinda Gates

Having more houses means more than just more girls going to school; it also means more funds are needed to keep these houses going! This is a challenge we are happy and motivated to take on. With a stronger focus on corporate funding this year, including inviting Moroccan companies to sponsor the Marrakech Atlas Etape, our wish is that companies know how to make a good investment – and that investment is in educating girls. Not only does educating girls improve family and community health, it boosts the economy too.

Our vision at EFA is that an educated girl can make better decisions for herself and her family, and participate fully and equally in society. Being at the EFA boarding houses is for most girls in this region the only way they will be able to achieve this. We see how the girls instantly flourish in our houses and achieve great results due to the nutritious meals, warm beds, plentiful learning resources and love and care from staff and volunteers.

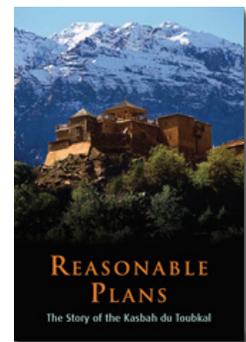
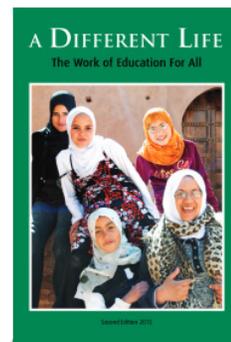
It costs 40,000 euro to cover the full running costs of one house for one year, making our target for 2015 200,000 euro. To find out how you can contribute contact Sonia Omar at sonia@efamorocco.org



On a visit by students from Saxion University in Holland to Dar Asni and Dar Ouirgane the girls enjoyed learning how to make pancakes but.....

Read ***The Road to School***, National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World's article about EFA.

You can read the full story of all these projects and more in



....they loved bouncing balloons around!



Dreams are only the plans of the reasonable

The Last *Football* maker in Morocco

Kamal Boukentar spends his days hand-sewing footballs, sat on a rush-seated chair outside his wardrobe-size workshop, La Clinique du Ballon, deep in the souks of Marrakech medina. He painstakingly sews small panels of leather together with an exactness of stitch that makes you think it has been sewn by machine. Occasionally he stops to spray the seam he is working on with water, to soften the leather and make it easier to sew. He is the only handmade leather football maker in Morocco, and, quite possibly, one of only a handful left in Africa and Europe.

When we first meet, Kamal is working on a model from the 1930s with eighteen panels. On a shelf in the shop window is the ultimate in the fine art of football making, a ball of seventy-two pieces, probably one of only two in the world, one made by Kamal, the other laboriously sewn by his father forty years earlier.

“Mohamed Boukentar, my father, started the shop in 1965, and was one of about twenty makers in the medina at the time. During the seventies my mother, Lalla Aicha, worked with him, and is the only woman ever to have hand-sewn leather footballs in Morocco. I began in 1984, when I was twelve, and it took me a week to make my first football.” He points to the ball in the window. “I can make an eighteen-piece football in one day, but that one took me ten days of solid work. It’s purely for display, to show just how intricate a ball can be, and there is no price in the world that would get me to part with it.”

Most people probably just assume that a football is made from a basic design, which goes to show how most people are completely wrong. Modern footballs are made up of thirty-two panels, but an original can be made up of ten different numbers of pieces from four to thirty-four, and each of those will have three or four different designs, around thirty different patterns in all.

As the ball comes together like a complicated inside-out puzzle, Kamal inserts the rubber bladder that

inflates the finished ball. Fortunately, he doesn’t go as far as using a pig’s bladder as they would in the early days of the game. In its natural state, the leather is pale beige, but after three carefully rubbed-on coats of olive oil, it attains the rich brown colour and muted sheen of memories of games played by men with short haircuts and knee-length baggy shorts, who didn’t feel the need to kiss and cuddle each other whenever a goal was scored.

Despite being a sporting work of art, Kamal’s footballs are never likely to see a football pitch. “Most people buy them for decoration or as gifts. But I like it when an older man buys one because it reminds him of when he played football as a boy. I’ve got an original pair of 1930s boots on display and sometimes people tell me what it was like playing in them. Heavy and uncomfortable, by the sound of it!”



La Clinique du Ballon, 14 Talâa Souk Tihane Marrakech
docballon@hotmail.fr. Tel. (+212) 0666 01 56 88

Taking care of you at the Kasbah

In this issue we introduce you to some of the staff 'behind the scenes' but who nonetheless play a very important role in ensuring your comfort at the Kasbah – Housekeeping.



Abdesslam Ait Idar

Abdesslam started working at the Kasbah as a mere slip of a lad of twenty, eleven years ago, and is one of the duo who keep your living accommodation spic-and-span. Unlike some of the staff who have a trek to get to work, Abdesslam lives in Achain the village that seems attached to the Kasbah, where he runs a small grocery shop.



Mohamed Ait Wid

Father of three children, thirty-five-year-old Mohamed is the other half of the duo, and has been working at the Kasbah for six years. When not ensuring your comfort at the Kasbah he takes care of his cherry, apple and walnut orchards around the village of Taddert.



Rachid Ouahane

When not working at the Kasbah, where he is responsible for keeping the public areas clean and tidy, twenty-two-year old Rachid is a part-time muleteer. Yet to discover the joys of wedded bliss, he is another Kasbah employee who lives, quite literally, just around the corner, in the village of Achain.

Florence of Arabia



The only thing worse than going uphill on a camel is going downhill, or at least it is if you don't count the getting on and off, or the camel standing up to begin your trek, which pales into nothing the first time the animal drops on its front knees for you to dismount. And there's the bit in the middle, the lumpen swaying as the beast plods along, following the curve of the dunes in its meandering route, where your legs begin to ache because there are no stirrups to put your feet in to give you a modicum of support and at least a faint shade of elegance. Come to think of it, there's little to recommend a camel, an animal that has all the appearance and angularity of something that has been designed by a committee – a committee that originally set out to design a horse but got slightly lost along the way. I bet Peter O'Toole had a stunt double when it came to humping along on a dromedary during the filming of Lawrence of Arabia.

Trekking Jbel Toubkal

I still find it hard to believe that in three days we achieved so much in such an unhurried and positive environment. The climb to the summit of Mount Toubkal was a life enhancing experience that will always be with me. I would recommend spending time in the very well appointed and comfortable Kasbah to anyone who is looking to gain deeper insights into what is really valuable and worth doing in this world."

Nigel Southern

Jbel Toubkal, at 4167m, North Africa's highest mountain, was seen by no European eyes until 1871, when a small scientific expedition organised by J. D. Hooker was given permission to visit the Toubkal region in the High Atlas Mountains. It was to be another fifty-two years before the Marquis de Segonzac became the first European to set foot on its summit.

The ascent of Jbel Toubkal is achievable during the summer months without specialist climbing skills. Most people who are reasonably fit and determined can achieve this goal and the views are magnificent – on a clear day you can see the Sahara.

During the winter months the summit is only accessible to those climbers with crampon and ice-axe experience. Some equipment is available from local guides but you are strongly advised to bring your own. Climbing and walking in the High Atlas requires an open mind. It is important to keep a sense of perspective and take a gentle pace. If the weather is hot it is also vital to drink plenty. It is not uncommon to find that your appetite fades at the Neltner Hut; this is quite common at this sort of altitude. If you have not walked at heights of 4000m before do not be surprised at the slow pace, which is certainly the best way to get to the top no matter how fit you are.

Reader Contributor: Bob Parker

On 26 March, 2015, Bob Parker made his first ascent of Jbel Toubkal - and came back with the tale of a lonesome hound

As I left the Kasbah with Omar, a local with twelve years' experience as a guide in the High Atlas, there was a good foot of snow in the courtyard and I began to ponder what it would be like further up the mountain, where broken cloud revealed a gorgeous blue sky.

The going wasn't too difficult to start, but as we got higher the snow became deeper, knee deep in places. The path was completely hidden so having a guide who has probably walked the route a hundred times or more was invaluable. We made steady progress, stopping at a shack-cum-café where I had the best freshly squeezed orange juice I've ever tasted.

The route to the refuge was beautiful. The cloud had cleared, leaving a brilliant blue sky but a very hot sun. I'd brought everything for cold weather but no sun hat, so despite a lot of regularly applied sun





block I could really feel the heat.

It took a little over six hours to reach the refuge and with the depth of snow making walking difficult I was exhausted. All I wanted was my bunk, but Omar had the kitchen rustle-up an omelette. Some caffeine, some water and then my sleeping bag. It was just seven-thirty as I drifted off to sleep, worrying if I could do that similar level of walk to reach the summit the next day. It had been difficult both physically and mentally.

I woke in a much better frame of mind – and more importantly, completely rested. We set off at six-thirty, with crampons fitted by Omar. What had been soft snow the previous day was now frozen - no more sinking a foot or more with the exaggerated 'lift foot out of the hole' from yesterday. Again it was a beautiful blue sky and hot sun, but a borrowed sun hat from the refuge was a marked improvement on the previous day.

Three hours later we arrived at a ridge and quite unexpectedly the most breath-taking view. The ridge fell steeply away south to reveal red-brown hillocks and desert. A few kilometres in the distance was another snow-capped mountain with more desert beyond. The clarity of the air allowed me to see for miles - what an amazing view!

Around forty minutes later, after two false summits, the steel triangular frame marking the peak of Jbel Toubkal came into view. No, I didn't run to it, but the sight certainly lifted me and made all that had gone

before very, very worthwhile indeed.

The views from the summit were tremendous; 360 degrees with nothing blocking my view. There were a dozen or so fellow trekkers who greeted us with smiles and congratulations. Also waiting for us was a lone, un-accompanied hound. Apparently owned by someone in Imlil he does the trek on his own most weeks, sleeping under a ledge at the refuge. He loves digestive biscuits and Mars bars, so take extra for Gron - my name for him.

Forty minutes at the top and we head downwards. While the trek up had been a slow one - partly to help avoid altitude sickness but also due to physical and oxygen limitations – the downhill pace picked up. Unlike the zigzag up we made a bee-line straight down. Obviously the crampons allowed us to do this, but once we reached the refuge, had lunch and ditched the crampons, it became difficult to maintain balance at this faster speed. Like the sun hat, I'd not given poles a thought. I've tried them in the past but didn't get on with them. However, in deep, soft snow and some ice they would have been a godsend.

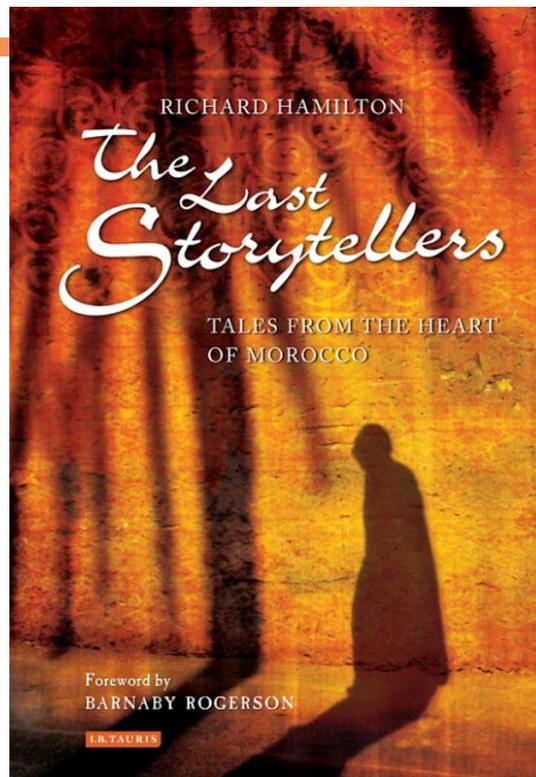
After eleven hours we arrived back at the Kasbah. So ended the longest, highest, most rewarding day trek of my life. I'm a so-so fit 57 year-old who didn't train for the trek, forgot sun hat and disregarded poles. Should you go? Yes, but do hire a guide. Do stay at the Kasbah. The rooms, the food and the hospitality are all tremendous. And do take a sun hat and poles. And a Mars bar for Gron.

When you walk through Jmaa el Fna on a regular basis you become accustomed to all the performers that give the square such a lively and special feeling; the snake charmers, gnawa musicians, the water carriers and lady-boy dancers who flash their eyes at you from behind tasselled veils. At one time you could have included storytellers in that list, but, almost unacknowledged, they are dying out, and it seems that there is only one traditional storyteller left in la Place, and even he doesn't perform on a regular basis any more.

Richard Hamilton has worked with the BBC World Service as a broadcast journalist for fifteen years, and spent a year in Rabat as their Moroccan correspondent. While he was there he travelled regularly to Marrakech and became so intrigued by the storytellers in Jmaa el Fna that he suggested to the BBC he did a programme on them. It was while he was recording the programme that he realised that within a very short space of time there would be no-one left to entertain the audiences with their fanciful tales. He kept returning to Marrakech over the next couple of years, searching in the Medina for the old storytellers, who were mostly dead or retired by then, so he could record their stories before they were lost for ever. The result was ***The Last Storytellers***.

"Marrakech is the heart and lifeblood of Morocco's storytelling tradition, and there have been storytellers gathering their audiences there for almost a thousand years. The stories from Marrakech are particularly rich because they are influenced by traditional Arabic stories from the Middle East, then there's the Berber civilisation that has filtered down to these stories, and some of them have influences from sub-Saharan Africa, so I think that's probably what makes them so rich."

These tales would once have had a huge edu-



cational, religious and moral impact on their audiences, and they can often be understood on varying levels, but as much as anything they gave the listener a short break from the realities of life.

"These are really morality tales in which the underdog, the poor, the down-trodden beggar, succeeds against the evil, rich, scheming sultan, vizier or corrupt judge, and that was very important for the original audiences of these stories because they would be poor themselves, and in their own lives they wouldn't have had any success or power

or status. So I think that was their form of escapism, a bit like modern-day cinema where people go to dream, and this is what people gathered around a storyteller for."

It's sad to know that Marrakech has all but lost a tradition going back almost a thousand years. And sadly, in these days of TV, DVD and pirate videos, once it's gone we'll never get it back. Unfortunately, we're never going to be able hear the stories Richard Hamilton gathered from the storyteller's mouth, but you can enjoy a wonderful selection of Moroccan fables in ***The Last Storytellers***.

Richard has kindly given us permission to re-print one of his stories. His book is available on amazon.co.uk



The Birth of the Sahara

As told by
Ahmed Temiicha

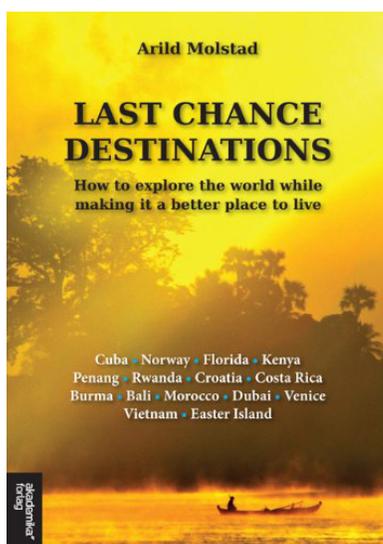
A long time ago, when the earth was very young, it was one huge garden covered in tall palm trees and perfumed jasmine, and the songs of nightingales flooded the landscape with their gentle melodies. At this time, all men were loyal, trustworthy and honest. In fact, the word 'lie' did not even exist.

But one day, someone told a lie. It was a very small lie and of no importance, but it was the end of man's childhood and the age of innocence.

So God summoned all the men on earth together and said to them, 'Each time one of you lies, I shall throw a grain of sand onto the earth.'

The men looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders and said to themselves, 'A grain of sand? What difference will that make? You can hardly see a grain of sand.'

And so lie after lie, little by little, the Sahara gradually came into existence, as God threw grains of sand onto the earth from the heavens above. But here and there the odd oasis can still be seen. These are the traces of the original garden, because not all men lie.

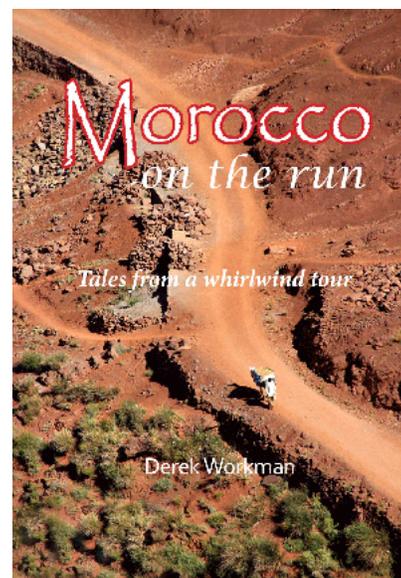


With this book Norwegian-born Arild Molstad does what too many travel writers do not: he reports not only on the enjoyment of travel, but also on the effects tourism has on the places we visit. In an intriguing look at an assortment of popular tourist destinations worldwide Molstad shows that tourism, well-directed, can actually save indigenous cultures, arts and architecture. In Morocco he makes the case for Aït-Ben-Haddou, an ancient ksar built of compacted earth mixed with water and chopped straw, which, had it not discovered a new life as a film set and tourist venue, would have crumbled into dust. But he adds a warning. "In Morocco, you'll see how tourism can help save rural villages and traditional skills that would otherwise disappear – and why it's hard to find the balance between tourist cash and local authenticity."

Last Chance Destinations – Amazon.com

Most peoples' idea of a travel journalist's life is one long round of first class travel to exotic destinations, stays in luxury hotels, cruises on the fanciest of yachts and sumptuous meals served with superb wines. This may be the case for the Bill Brysons of this world, but for the Derek Workmans, who are around 99.9% of working travel writers, the reality couldn't be more different. This light-hearted romp around Morocco was written as a daily personal anecdote on one of the few times that he actually *did* experience the journalistic 'trip of a life-time' – and a pretty hectic one it was!

Morocco on the Run is available for immediate download at Amazon.co.uk



MARRAKECH ATLAS ETAPE



2015 Review

As you wiz down the scarifying descent from Oukaïmeden on your return to Ourika the glorious views are almost enough reward for the effort you have expended in conquering the 'Ouka Monster', at 2624 metres one of the highest climbs of any etape worldwide. In this year's Marrakech Atlas Etape ninety-two riders from over two-hundred starters had the exhilaration of having their numbers marked off as they checked into the ski station, with the last of the winter's snow still sparkling on the mountain top.

Described by The Telegraph as one of the six best cyclo-sportives of 2015, the third year of the MAE provided some spectacular results with five riders coming in at under three hours, two in an incredible two hours forty minutes, for the grueling 70km ride from Marrakech to the ski resort of Oukaïmeden.

And word is spreading; not only were there teams from Casablanca and Rabat, the numbers for Moroccan riders in general were up – including the participation of riders from the national team. Flights from the UK carried more British riders than ever, and there was even a Dutch contingent. Father and son pairs, long-distance and Sunday riders, teenagers and retirees, all taking part to support Education For All, a Moroccan-based charity that provides accommodation for 180 girls from the poorest families in the remotest villages of the High Atlas Mountains, to allow them to continue their education beyond primary level.

Mike McHugo and Gareth Westacott, who originated the MAE with Saif Kovach of Argan Xtreme Sports, are quietly

pleased with the way the ride is developing " One felt there was a bit of a buzz about the whole thing," says Gareth. "More and more locals wanted to ride it, which was highlighted by the talented riders at the top end and the very good times they made. We've also seen more interest from cycling clubs, with a team from Casablanca Cycling Club and quite a big entry from the Marrakech Cycling Club, and riders who did the sixty-kilometre ride going on to do the longer sections." And not forgetting Mohamed Zine, a fourteen-year-old who is both deaf and mute, who shared the exhilaration of the ride with a big grin on his freckled face.

James Wix, of Riad Farnachi in Marrakech, completed the sixty-kilometre round trip for the first MAE in 2013, but decided to put in a bit more effort for the last two and tackle the full route. How do they compare?

"The 60 was a fun day, and I think that that's what the 60 is all about, a lot of people going out having a bit of fun, not challenging themselves too much but having a great day. The atmosphere's amazing doing the 140 with a complete mixed bunch...there was everybody and anybody doing the 140, from young Moroccans to ex-Moroccan nationals to current Moroccan nationals. It's a really hard slog, but I would say that anybody who applied themselves with a certain level of fitness could do it."

A bone-wearing bike ride might not be everyone's idea of the perfect birthday present, but Andy McCoren, a tall, fit-looking man in his sixties was amused with the idea of an intense ride in the beauty





of the High Atlas when his son, Richard, presented him with the gift of entry to the MAE, although he wasn't so sure about it as he stopped to take an energy gel nearing the sixty-four kilometre marker.

"It's tough going. It's a constant grind because there's no downhill to rest your legs a bit. I've done other etapes and you get a bit of respite in the climb, but not with this one. But you only have to look around you and see just how beautiful the landscape is, even if your head is down most of the time. I'm sure it's going to be a fabulous ride back." "And by the way," he adds, "These gels are disgusting, no matter what flavour they say they are."

Andy and Richard exemplify the spirit of the Marrakech Atlas Etape, because as father bent to the wheel to finish the arduous climb, son came steaming round a bend on his downward flight, stopped, turned his bike around and rode side-by-side with dad back up the grinding climb, adding around twelve kilometres to his own day.

James Tuffs has become a legend in the brief life of the étape mainly because of his insistence on riding a three-gear, around-town Brompton up the staggering slope to Oukaimeden for the first two events. But this year his status gained brownie points because of his sheer dogmatic approach to getting back in the saddle after an accident put him on crutches.

As he enigmatically puts it on his blog about the Etape, Tuffcall, "on my return to London [after the MAE] I got hit by a taxi – honestly, how often can you get a taxi on a Friday night in London – and broke

my pelvis in three places. On the bright side the Brompton was unscathed." Three months on crutches and another three months having to learn to walk again should have been enough deterrent, but by January he was back on wheels again, building for

A Ride for Everyone

the next trip to Marrakech, but they weren't the Brompton's wheels – they were stolen the day he dug them out of storage to begin his training regime. This time he went for something with a few gears, although it was still a folding bike, as was the tandem he bought for his first jaunt on the

etape in 2013 with his partner, Justine, but he had to resort to the Brompton when she had to cancel at the last minute. "It might just get an airing next year, though," said James, eyeing the duo who reached the top and posed for a photograph with their bike held high and the mountain as a backdrop.





Starley Primal Pro Cycling Team weren't able to participate in the 2015 Marrakech Atlas Etape but they know the ride well. Jamie Caldwell tells the tale.

Starting in Marrakech the route seems surreal. Once clear and on to the main road you suddenly see the mountain that lies ahead and it's difficult to believe at that point that you will be somewhere near the top of that in a few hours' time. Fortunately it's a nice steady start going up a gradient you would find hard to notice, helping to warm up the legs and give the opportunity to enjoy beautiful scenery and take it all in.

The main climb itself is something else. Feeling excited and ready at the bottom of it makes it very tempting to just sprint off, but you have to remember that there is 25km of climbing to go, that is over an hour of riding and especially when you're climbing up to the dizzying heights of 2600 meters. Fortunately the mountain won't let you forget just how tough it is, with markers every kilometre reminding just how long this climb is, although I am not sure if this was a good thing or a bad thing as it felt like an eternity. It really does live up to its name - the 'Ouka Monster'! Once at the top the hard work is over and gives you such a satisfying feeling. Not only have you defeated the 'Monster' but now you can enjoy the beautiful view in the gorgeous heat. The descent is not only fast, long and flowing but some of the most breath-taking views I have ever seen. Just make sure to slow up and enjoy them.

Afghanistan's women's cyclists The world's most unlikely sports team?

Perhaps the world's most unlikely sporting team, Afghanistan's women cyclists train three times a week on unused roads on a plain north of the capital, Kabul.

They set out, carrying their cycles past open sewers, from a private house with a water pump in the yard, in a mud-built back lane of the city, owned by Afghanistan's only professional cyclist, Abdul Sadiq. He began by training his daughter. And when she competed successfully abroad, he set up the team. His deputy Mariam Marjan goes around schools seeking girls who might want to compete.

Even today, after years of progress since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, she faces formidable obstacles in finding new recruits.

You can read the full story by David Lyon at [BBC News, Asia](#).



Reader Contributor: *Nadia Butler - Jardin Majorelle Blues*

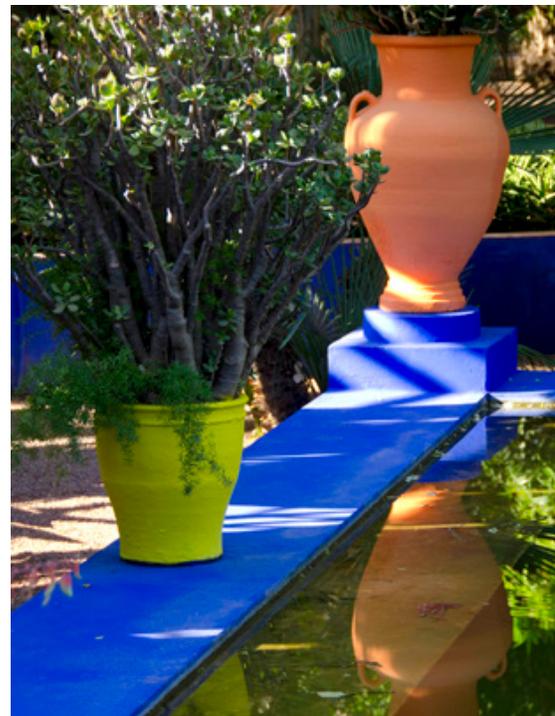
Nadia Butler's first visit to Morocco was in 1997 as a detour on a visit to Pamplona in Spain, where her husband, Paul, had been invited to run with the bulls during the famous fiesta of San Fermin. On this visit they travelled independently, visiting three of the four Imperial Cities and a handful of other 'must do' destinations. It was love at first site with the country, but it was 16 years before she saw Morocco again, on a photography expedition with National Geographic in 2013, when she really took the enigmatic country to her heart.

"I love all the crafts (this words doesn't do them justice) that are still practiced and the history behind them. Our drive to create beauty around us is one of my fascinations when I travel, and this is so evident in Morocco. And the people are remarkably warm; we visited a Berber family in a mountain village on the National Geographic trip and I wanted to stay and get to know them.

"I saw Jardin Majorelle on my first trip. I guess one

of the things I love about Morocco is how dramatic the transition is from street and public space to the private spaces, like passing through the door of a riad. Jardin Majorelle is like that. You pass from dust and almost monotone terra cotta to this fresh and brilliant space. I love its design, how every way you look you can see that the view was planned. And I was swept away by the beauty of the room the jewelry is displayed in—it was such a brilliant way to evoke the sense of the nomadic life."

You can read about Nadia Butler's visit to the Jardin Majorelle at [Reflections on Halcyon Pond](#)



The Kasbah in the Media

Los Angeles Times

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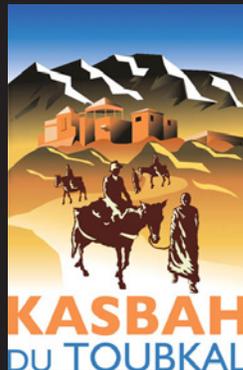
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