

KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

MOROCCO'S PREMIER
MOUNTAIN RETREAT

Double Anniversary Issue

Issue Number Ten
April 2017



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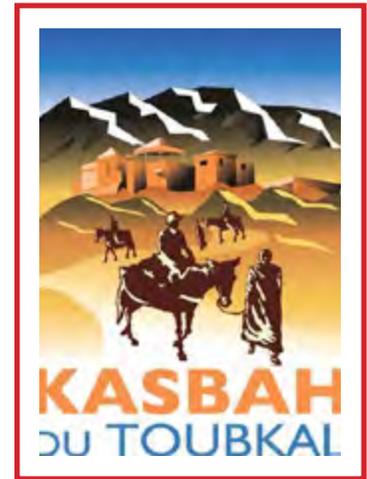
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Click on logos for more information





Double Bubble

It's always good to celebrate a special anniversary and this year we celebrate two, a decade of Education For All and five years of cycle riders putting their best wheel forward to support the charity by taking part in the Marrakech Atlas Etape.

In 2007 Education For All opened its first boarding house for girls from remote villages in the High Atlas Mountains, just over the road from the secondary school in Asni. What was meant to provide a home-from-home for thirty-six girls over three years has grown to five houses nurturing 186 eager young students, with a sixth planned for 2018. In *Ten Years On* we hear from three ladies who were there from the beginning.

To raise funds to help the girls under the care of EFA, the Marrakech Atlas Etape, now Morocco's premier annual cycle ride, sees riders tackling the Ouka Monster for the fifth consecutive year, a worthy birthday for a ride that has not only proven an

important support for the work of Education For All but has introduced many riders to the joys of cycling in Morocco, with its beautiful vistas, delicious food and the friendliness of its people. Find out more in *Onward and Upward*.

Miami may have re-discovered its Art Deco heritage, but in its heyday Casablanca outdid the American city, although little remains of its glorious heritage. *A Deco at Casablanca* takes you on a tour.

As ever, I look forward to hearing from you at

kasbahmagazine@gmail.com.

Derek Workman

Editor

...and everyone at

KASBAH DU TOUBKAL



Dreams are only the plans of the reasonable.

What's your story?

We all have a Moroccan story, whether it's an unexpected meeting in the mountains, a magical moment wandering the souks of one of the majestic Imperial Cities, something that made you laugh or even, perhaps, shed a tear. Then again it might simply be your experience of the Kasbah du Toubkal or the wondrous country that is Morocco. We'd love to hear yours. Please **send us an email** for more information.

TAKING A DECO AT CASABLANCA



Much is made of Miami and its Beach Art Deco District, and rightly so, with its restoration and preservation of some of the best of 1930s and 40s architecture (although sadly a bit too much kitsch than correct in some cases), but in its heyday Casablanca outdid the American city with the number of Art Deco buildings it had, the city a clean pre-war palette to be played with by many of France's top architects of the day.

Unfortunately you'll have to have your wits about you to spot what's left, at least with the exteriors, which have been remodelled almost to extinction. There are plenty of interiors that still retain the fripperies of fancy wrought-iron balconies, swooping stairways, brass adornments, luscious marble and lacquered wood that takes you back to the time of elegant ladies in sinuous frocks escorted by lounge lizards in smartly cut suits.

Mers Sultan is just an ordinary sort of neighbourhood near the centre of the city and not somewhere you'll find aflood with tourists, but behind the grime of decades there are still plenty of Deco gems to please the eagle-eyed. Step into the Cinema Lynx on Avenue Mers Sultan and you are cocooned in an oyster shell of blue and yellow wave-form ceiling radiating from the screen, itself covered in a deep red curtain suspended from the proscenium arch, as if you are about to watch a stage play. And if you want to finish the night in semi-seedy Deco style, slip into

nearby Bar Atomic where little has changed, other than the sawdust on the floor, since the 1940s, and bottles of beer are still chilled in the original wooden fridges.

For the full-frontal Art Deco style, Cinema Rialto is just as it was in the 1930s, albeit slightly more 'rubbed around the edges' than the day it opened, but the dear old dame, fast approaching her century, is still as popular as ever. The saucy Josephine Baker, temptress of the Parisian stage, once trod the Rialto's boards, and while the nearby restaurant Petit Poucet may also be a bit less glamorous than when Edith Piaf and author of *The Little Prince*, (and aristocrat, poet, and pioneering aviator), Antoine de St Exupéry whiled away their time there, it still has an air of faded elegance reminiscent of its glory days.

The most splendid staircase in Casablanca is said to be the wrought-iron delight at the design store Thema Maison on Houssine Ben Ali. The shop that was once a mansion built in the 1940s is now a showcase for the owner's fabric designs and the best of Indian and Moroccan artisans, but was the family home before the family fled the nest and it became the delight that you see now. After a decadent shop, the restaurant Rouget de l'Isle (just over the road down an alley of the same name) is a beautifully restored 1930s building, with the addition of being one of the top French restaurants in the city at an affordable price.





Hassan II Mosque, the largest in Morocco and seventh largest in the world, gets plenty of attention, but in its own way the Sacré-Coeur Cathedral is another fascinating work of architecture. Designed by the French architect Paul Tournon and built in 1930, it was an experiment in the decorative use of cast concrete. An enormous wedding cake of a building it clearly shows its Deco provenance, but with subtle twists to appeal to its Moroccan situation. Grandiose as it is on the outside, it's relatively modest on the inside, and though it was deconsecrated and fell into disuse after Morocco's independence in 1956, it's still a pretty piece of eye-candy if you like your Deco on a vast scale.

But really, Deco-vastness isn't what you find much of in Casablanca these days. It's more the subtle indications, the memory of loucheness in the sweep of a stairway or the curve of a door escutcheon. But it's there, sometimes hidden by decades of abandonment, but it's still there.



You can have Kasbah du Toukral's magazine dropped through your digital letterbox every quarter by clicking [HERE](#)

For back issues click on the magazines click on the covers

This is why...

Morocco



Build your own Moroccan adventure with DISCOVER LTD

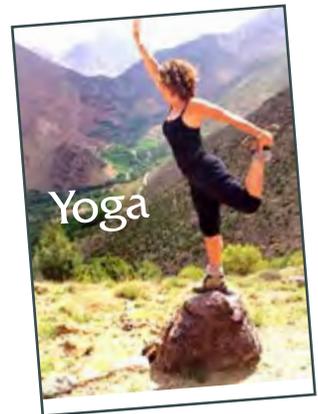
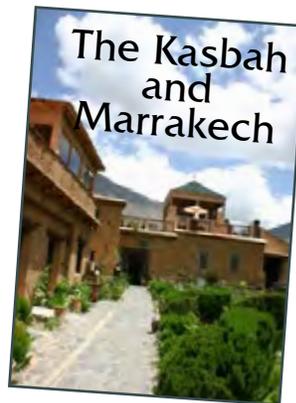
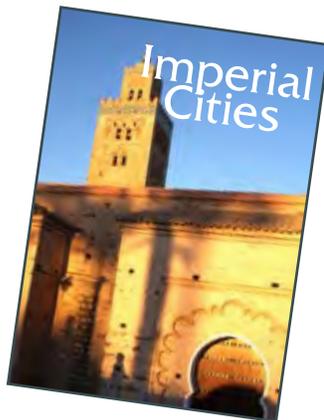
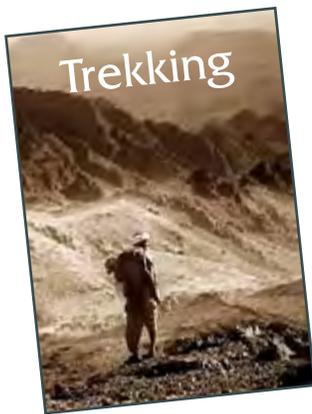


More than forty years ago Mike McHugo, Discover Ltd.'s Managing Director, arrived in Morocco, developing a passion for the country that continues to this day. Discover was created in 1978 to introduce travellers to this enigmatic country and has developed a reputation as the foremost tour company in Morocco, based on an in-depth knowledge of its culture and a genuine caring for its people.

Since the outset it has been Discover's philosophy to enhance the environment and the well-being of the

local people in a sustainable way and as an organisation works in partnership with the Moroccan people, who have contributed to the success of the business, helping to bring improvement to the lives of many.

All our trips and tours around Morocco are tailor made to suit each client's requirements and new opportunities being added regularly to allow everyone to create their own exclusive holiday. Below are some suggestions to use as a base to create your personal Moroccan Adventure. *(Click on image for information)*



Build your own holiday

The holidays above are just a few examples of those offered by Discover Limited.

To create your own, personalised Moroccan Experience please contact

Kerrie Wrigley • Email: bookings@discover.ltd.uk • Tel: +44 (0)1883 744667



Ten Years On

EDUCATION *for all*

When a group of friends got together in Marrakech a decade ago they had no fixed idea what they would do to help with the education of local children, all they knew was that they wanted to do *something*. Secondary education is available in Morocco but the major problem, especially for young girls, is how do you get that education when it can take you a day to get the nearest school and your family are in such financial straits that they are unable to afford even the basic fees to stay in state-run boarding houses? And that became the premise of **Education For All**, to give the opportunity for girls from the poorest families in the most remote villages of the High Atlas Mountains to continue their studies beyond primary school by building fully-equipped homes where parents could be sure that their children would be cared for in a safe and secure environment.

The beginnings of EFA is documented in *Different Lives: The story of Education for All*, but ten years on the idea of building a boarding house in Asni in the foothills of the High Atlas for thirty-six girls has taken on a life of its own, with five houses and 186 young ladies with access to an education and the outside world that would have been beyond their imagination a few years ago. Good planning and professional financial guardianship are important – no new home gets built until all building and equipment funds and the running costs for one full year are in place – but it is the personal memories of those who saw the early tentative steps of Education For All that tell the richer story.

Latifa Aliza was fortunate; one of only two educated girls from her village she left home when she was six years old and apart from going back for holidays she was away for sixteen years. When the search for a house mother for the first EFA boarding house in Asni

began she was the obvious choice, well-educated, knew the area and with total commitment to the girls under her care.

“I started as a house mother and now I’m the head of the house mothers, in charge of the coordination of all the houses. It’s been suggested a couple of times that I might like to spend more of my time coordinating the houses but I love to be near my girls and

I’m still the house mother at Dar Asni 1, the original house we opened in 2008 after living in rented accommodation until it was built.”

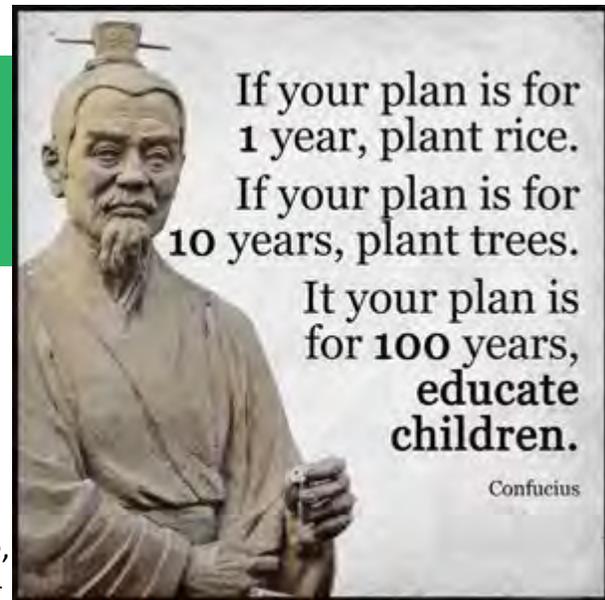
The house mother is the rock on which EFA stands but the role of volunteers is fundamental to the development of the girls under EFA’s

care. They bring not only their skills and enthusiasm to the houses but also open the eyes of young girls who might never see beyond the confines of their tiny village to a wider world.

“I first met Linda Anderson in October 2008,” recalls Latifa. “She was the first volunteer and until she arrived I was running the house like it was my home with my girls. She did a great job by helping me to organise things in the house and create new rules etc. It was a big challenge for me and a major change in the house.”

“Latifa is one of the best friends I have ever had, she’s like a sister, really,” comments Linda. “We had some tricky times at the beginning and I’m so lucky that she and the girls were so accepting of my quirks.

“My favourite memory was our first trip to the





souq. When I arrived we would get a weekly delivery of fruit and vegetables by donkey. If we needed anything during the week we would call on local men to buy them for us. Latifa did an amazing job of making the best of what she received – and we were never sure exactly what she would receive – but with so many people to feed we realised we needed a better system. Together we hatched a plan to create a menu, make a shopping list and go to the souq to buy what we needed ourselves. A very adventurous thing to do in a small Moroccan mountain town at that time.”

A year after Linda Anderson’s arrival Karima Targoui became the first volunteer to work at the newly opened second boarding house in Talat n’Yacout.

“In October 2009 I had my first meeting with the committee and Latifa, and a few weeks later I was in Dar Tinmel in Talat. It’s quite a remote village, so different from Asni and so far away. I felt like the challenge was too big for me but things changed with the arrival of Khadija, the new house mother, in January, who became my best partner in this adventure.”

After her experience in Tlat Karima went on to become the recruiter for volunteers, helping to select them and place them in the houses. “Working at Dar Tinmel I quickly understood the need for having volunteers. Beside the fact that they help the girls with their studies, the volunteers become the girls’ sister and the model to follow, so it’s a big challenge to find a good one!”

The fact that Education For All has five boarding houses bursting with studious young girls and more

going to university, with a sixth house in the planning, speaks for itself, but did those at the beginning of the adventure ten years ago ever think it would be so successful?

“I never thought that EFA would be so successful,” says Latifa, “especially as I’m from the same area and I know how the parents were reluctant to let the girls continue their studies. It was wonderful when we had the results from six different levels, from the first year of college to the baccalaureate in February 2013. I remember that I said to myself that nothing is impossible, the girls reached the last year of lycee and they had good results.”

Linda Anderson is emphatic about how important Education For All has been to the girls of the High Atlas Mountains. “When EFA began, it was an exercise in trust. The committee, Latifa, Hajj Maurice and a few brave, pioneering parents took a chance to ensure girls from remote villages had access to education. It was their humble hope that the girls would strive to succeed in their education while being nurtured in a home away from home. With five houses now full of girls and parents lining up to ask EFA to accept their daughter, EFA has certainly succeeded.

“EFA is not just about safely housing girls for the duration of their education. The work of the organisation has changed the way local people view girls and their education. Villages are asking for more EFA houses to be built, and we must continue to provide opportunities for the most remote and poorest girls so that every girl can be educated.”

It isn't just the education each girl gets, thanks to Education For All, it is the knock-on effect for generations to come.

"The girls who did not go to university started projects in their villages to educate girls and women," adds Latifa. "They also spread our message and encourage the girls to continue their studies after primary school. Some of them are married, but I'm sure that they will encourage their children to follow their studies."

Above all, though, it is how much the girls of Education for All have touched the hearts of those they come in contact with. After a decade of almost daily contact, Latifa Aliza has seen what young girls can achieve, given the opportunity.

"When I see the girls' progress and personal change, I'm really proud of what I've done. It's not only a job for me, it's a part of my life, I need to help them, touch them and make a change in their life. I'm confident for their future, they will be good women and mothers, and a good example for girls who will know that when you educate a girl you educate the next generations as well."

HIGH LIGHTS

<p>2011 EFA and Kasbah du Toubkal being invited to present to HRH Prince Charles on official visit to Morocco</p> <p>Mike McHugo</p>	<p>May 2010 Girls' school results. I was so proud of them, they progressed so much in a few months</p> <p>Karima Targouri</p>	<p>Sept 2007 Welcoming the first eight girls to a rented apartment in Asni</p> <p>Maryk Stroonsnijder</p>	<p>Oct 2008 Meeting Latifa, when I went to Dar Asni as the first EFA volunteer,</p> <p>Linda Anderson</p>	<p>April 2008 Official opening of Dar Asni 1. Meeting with many interesting volunteers engaged in EFA.</p> <p>Latifa Aliza</p>
		<p>2011 Clive Alderton, British Ambassador to Morocco, becomes patron</p> <p>Cees van den Berg</p>		<p>July 2013 The first girls obtained the baccalaureate and went to university in Marrakech</p> <p>Latifa Aliza</p>

And in between...

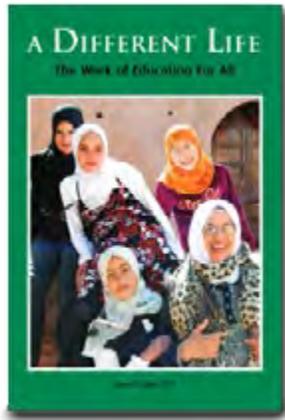
- 1st house rented, opened in Asni September 2007
- Moved to purpose built house in April 2008
- 2nd house rented, opened in Talat n'Yacout in September 2009
- 3rd house built in Ouirgane, opened September 2010
- 4th house rented Asni, opened September 2013
- 5th house rented Asni, opened September 2014.
- Moved to purpose built house September 2015
- 6th purpose built house planned for Tlat-n-Yacout, to open if state build Lycee, September 2018



Latifa Aliza and Linda Anderson



Karima Targouri



Click on the cover to read the full story of Education For All

Education For All has created a Corporate Sponsorship Programme click on the logo below to find out more



We may not individually be able to change the world but we can help to make a difference to a person's life and indirectly many more



Hear the girls themselves talk about their lives with Education for All in their own video.

Volunteers Required

Do you have at least 3 months to give to help girls in rural Morocco?

Education for All have five boarding houses for girls, three in Asni (45km from Marrakech), one in Ouirgane (60 km from Marrakech) and one in Talat n'Yacoub (100km from Marrakech).

We are seeking volunteers who would be willing to live and work in each of our houses to support the girls with their studies.

- **Your main job** will be to help the girls with their homework and give them extra French lessons.
- **You will also help** the house-mothers with their daily tasks.
- **Help EFA** to be connected with the donors.

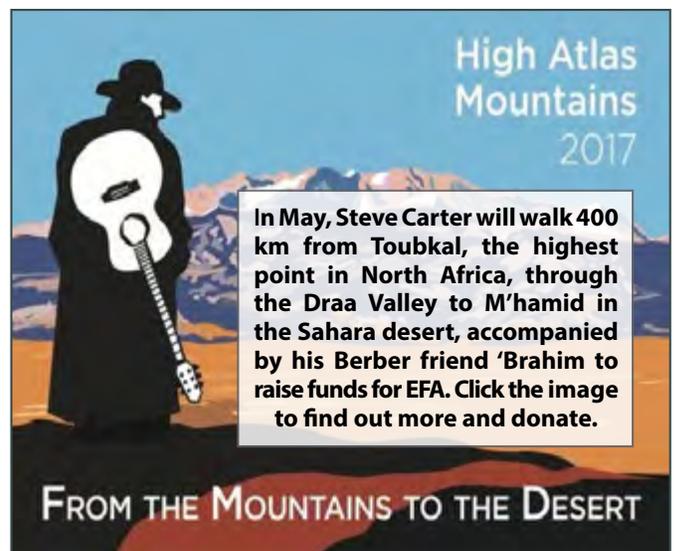
Recruiting for 2017-2018

If you are interested in volunteering to assist the girls of Education for All in Morocco, please contact: info@efamorocco.org

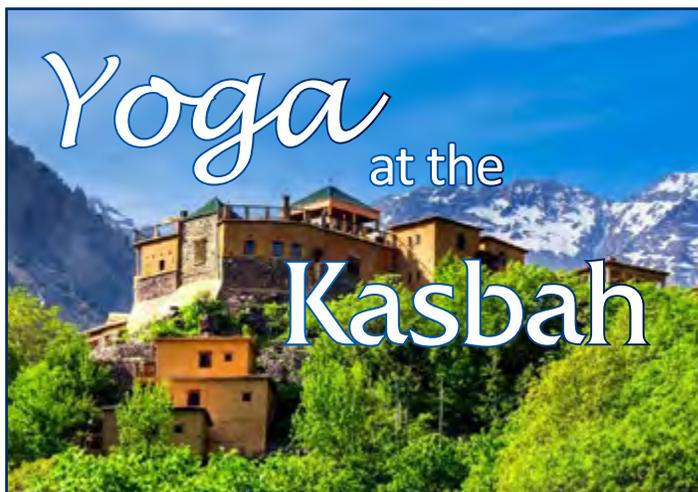


To download the latest copy of Education For All Newsletter click on the image.

It costs 40,000€ to cover the full running costs of one house for one year, making our target for 2017 300,000€, which includes the cost of the proposed sixth house. To find out how you can contribute contact Sonia Omar: sonia@efamorocco.org

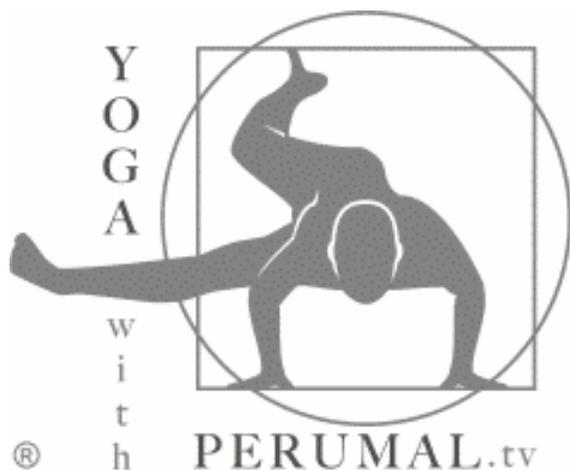


Kasbah du Toubkal has become extremely popular with instructors seeking a unique, stress-free environment for their students to fully appreciate the beauty of yoga, as much a meditation as an elegant physical exercise. With spectacular views over the villages of the Imlil Valley and with Jbel Toubkal, North Africa's highest mountain, as a backdrop, its tranquil beauty, healthy cuisine made from fresh local produce, superbly comfortable bedrooms and attentive Berber staff, the Kasbah is a haven for those seeking a peaceful location to practice yoga and yoga-related activities.



The area offers opportunities to explore local villages and take guided walks to see this stunning region. If you are an experienced walker a trek to the top of Jbel Toubkal – done in the inimitable Kasbah style – will provide memories for a life time, but whether it's a stiff trek or a saunter through the walnut groves, indulging yourself in our private hammam adds that extra touch of Moroccan magic to your stay at our Berber hospitality centre.

For 2017 we have created a programme that offers courses every month with highly regarded instructors from Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Italy, USA, UK and, of course, Morocco. Click on the link below for our full programme.

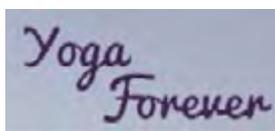


Perumal Koshy is leading four workshops at Kasbah du Toubkal in 2017. For more details click on the logo above.

You can find details of this year's full yoga programme **HERE**

Perumal Koshy, born in India, has teaching experience spanning over two decades across America, Europe and Morocco. His practice is built on a six-part underlying foundation to feel refreshed, relaxed and simultaneously energized. A progressive approach allows the student to achieve the right state of flow in order to improve mobility, breathing and circulation while strengthening muscles, tendons and ligaments, leading to genuine mental and physical wellbeing.

Perumal's yoga classes are adjusted to the physical abilities of the individual. Those participating in his classes walk away with results of calm and clarity with heightened energy.



I held my first course at the Kasbah four years ago and I've never looked back, I absolutely love it. *Fenella Lindsell*

The Kasbah is unique amongst yoga retreat locations - and there are many to compete with!

*Rosemary Harrison
and Rowna Goldman*





Onward and Upward

MARRAKECH ATLAS ETAPE

In 2009 a group of cycling friends decided to combine the beauties of the High Atlas Mountains with the semi-decadence of luxury hotels, freshly prepared lunches pasha-style and a doze on Moroccan rugs out in the wide blue yonder to break their ride, rewarded by star-filled nights, tempting traditional cuisine and excellent local wines at the end of the day. But this wasn't just a six-day

jolly for the sake of it; each rider not only had to pay his way he also had to raise a fixed sum of money to donate to Education For All – no pay, no play.

One of the riders, as well as being one of the organisers, was Gareth Westacott, and while he and side-kick Mike McHugo loved the ride and the good it did to help girls from EFA they thought they could do better.

“We were driving through Spain on the way to Morocco just before the last six-day fund raiser in April 2012 and Mike and I were thinking of ways to increase the revenue for Education for All. We had this mad idea of creating a cyclosporitive starting from Marrakech and ascending the Atlas to the ski resort at Oukaimedan, which eventually became the Marrakech Atlas Etape.

“There had never been one in Morocco before and we had no experience of organising anything of this nature so we decided to watch a stage of the Etape de Tour in the Pyrenees. We were having breakfast in a small village on the route and a lady approached us, who turned out to be the mayor, and enlisted us into the team at the feed station at the top of the col - good hands-on experience!”

When planning began in Morocco Gareth and Mike teamed up with Saif Kovach, whose family own **Argan Extreme Sports**, one of Marrakech's top cycle supply and tour companies.

“We help promote the event, provide bike support and vehicles, and hire out bikes,” says Saif. “When I was approached about helping to set up the MAE my first reaction was, “This is great!” We were wanting to do a ride like this and it I felt we were super lucky to be able to team up with these two guys.”

Now about to celebrate its fifth anniversary the organising team is well geared up for the event but even with five years of experience it's still a big job to make sure everything is ready on the day.

Gareth continues the story. “We generally arrive in Marrakech 10 days before the event which gives us

.....
: Would I go back and ride
: the Marrakech Atlas Etape
: again? One hundred per
: cent. A great event,
: super-friendly and
: extremely well organised.
: Matt Brett, Road.cc



time to organise the food and water for the feed stations, allocate numbers and carnets to entrants and generally prepare the myriad of things in readiness for the registration on Saturday. Early on Sunday, Brahim, who is indispensable, and I drive the route distributing the food and water to the feed stations then go back to base to become the 'Broom Wagon', travelling behind the slowest entrants, offering water and encouragement. There is a cut off time at 15.00 hrs to be at Oukaimaden and if anyone hasn't arrived at the top by then they are unable to make the descent because there isn't time to get back before dusk. Fortunately nobody's been in that situation yet."

Attendance at MAE has increased year-on-year and in 2015 The Telegraph named it as one of the six best cyclosporatives of the year. But despite the tough climb riders keep coming back, usually after having said 'Never again,' when they finally conquered the Ouka Monster, as the climb has become known – and not necessarily with affection. But why did they do it in the first place?

"A ride with a climb longer and steeper than that of the notorious Mt. Ventoux was a challenge that could

not be ignored," says Chris Gurney, and then adds with a grin, "Three bottles of red wine and an email from the persuasive Mike over the Christmas break might have had something to do with it, I suppose."

Chris is one of the 'Never again!' group, and yet there he is again at the starting gate waiting for the horn to blare each year.

"Every December I ask myself "Why do I keep going back?" and it comes down to the fact that the right and ability to receive an education should be available to everyone. For me, riding the etape allows me to support EFA and enables more girls to receive that all important education. On the day itself, though, with not being a natural climber and one who certainly doesn't train, the ascent is without a doubt tough but the landscape is breath-taking and the descent is simply awesome. This coupled with the amazing support team keeps me going back, and every year I am greeted as an old friend. What better way to spend a day, cycling in a great country, with great people, great landscape, and for a great cause."

A lot of press is given to the Ouka Monster element of the Marrakech Atlas Etape, but unlike other etape the MAE is totally inclusive, and with two stages of sixty and 140km everyone from the Sunday rider to the hardened professional can take part.

"One of the things I'm most proud of about the Etape is that it is totally inclusive," comments Mike



ATLAS ETAPE

www.marrakech-atlas-etape.com

McHugo. “We have men and women of all ages, nationalities and capabilities coming together on the day. A couple of years ago we had three sixteen-year-old Moroccan boys who had never done a long-distance ride get to the top at Oukaimeden, even though they had to push their bikes the last few kilometers, we’ve had a lady in her seventies do it, riders from the Moroccan professional team, families complete the shorter ride and you see riders who don’t speak each other’s language chivvying each other along. People can feel as proud of themselves that they did the sixty kilometre ride as those that completed the whole climb. But I think one of the major driving forces is that everyone who competes knows that they are helping girls who would never normally finish their education go on to bigger and better things.”

Attendance at MAE has increased year-on-year but there comes a point when its future development has to be secured. “It would be useful if we could get some sponsorship and/or a recognised and successful operator of cycling events to have input into the

MAE,” says Gareth Westacott. “But it is essential that Education For All remains the benefitting charity.”

The Marrakech Atlas Etape has proven itself as a unique ride and of enormous benefit to the girls of EFA, but there has been another important effect. “I think the MAE has brought first time riders to Morocco and has allowed them to see how great the country is,” says Saif Kovach, a comment echoed by Chris Gurney. “Definitely! In the UK, thanks to some excellent reviews, a far wider audience is aware of the possibilities and opportunities to cycle in Morocco.”

As he readies himself for the next Marrakech Atlas Etape, Chris Gurney is clear about his feelings about the climb. “The Ouka Monster is a well-earned title. It’s a challenging etape, it ranks as one of the best in the world and one that commands respect. Mention to any cyclist you have climbed the Atlas Mountains and you get a knowing nod. The Col du Tourmalet and the Alpe de Huez are two classics – but no other etape serves you a G&T at the summit, complete with ice!”



MARRAKECH ATLAS ETAPE

MARRAKECH TO OUKAÏMEDEN

CHARITY BIKE RIDE - SUNDAY 30 APRIL 2017

Register online
HERE



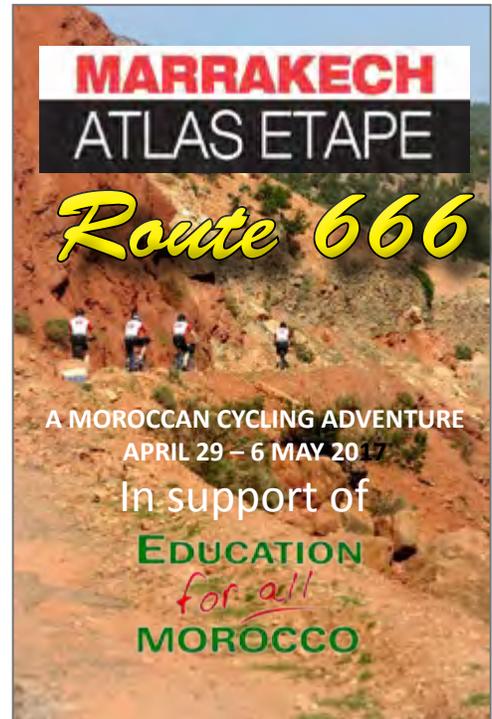
We look forward to seeing you in Marrakech on Sunday 30th April



Bicycling is the nearest approximation I know to the flight of birds. The airplane simply carries man on its back like an obedient Pegasus; it gives him no wings of his own. There are movements on a bicycle corresponding to almost all the variations in flight of the larger birds.
Louis J Halle "Spring in Washington 1947/57"

In early 2016 Trevor Rowell and Mike McHugo cycled the back-roads of the High Atlas Mountains, recapturing the adventure of their youth. They were surprised at how little had changed in some places and thought it would be a wonderful idea to introduce others to the Morocco they had discovered thirty years ago, but in a way that would benefit the Moroccan youth of today, more specifically the young girls of **Education For All**.

Route 666 repeats their ride, following on directly after the Marrakech Atlas Etape. For more information click on the image.



The Marrakech Atlas Etape is a true cyclosporitive catering for all, it's not only inclusive and friendly it's an adventure, an experience full of sights and sounds you will never forget.

Nigel Hale-Hunter,
BPM Cycling Coach



High, Ride and Handsome

Derek Workman had a vague plan that one day he'd take a long bike-ride through Morocco but somehow never got around to doing it. Until, that is, he heard about the bike ride that a group of friends made at the end of March every year in the High Atlas Mountains to raise funds for **Education For All**, a Moroccan-based charity that builds boarding houses for girls from the poorest of families in remote mountain villages. (The ride later became the Marrakech Atlas Etape). He wrote a diary about the six-day ride, and in this excerpt we find the cyclists saddling up for their first day's jaunt.

It's just after nine on a glorious Sunday morning as we set off for our first bike ride into the mountains, a blue sky hazy in the distance. Six of us, with Ahmed the driver, take the road from Marrakech, turning off after almost thirty kilometers to begin our rise into the lower slopes of the High Atlas; a group of chaps of a certain age, all tucked, in one degree of decency or another, into a set of slinky cycle kit, but all proudly wearing the Education For All red, white and black shirt, with its Moroccan star and Arab calligraphy written across our chest.

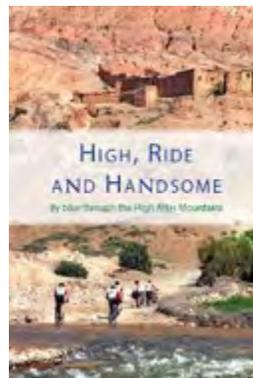
The road climbs upward to Moulay Brahim, a scattered village on a limestone plateau, where we unload our bikes from the pick-up that will shepherd us for the ride. This is our first day, so it's meant to be reasonably easy, just to warm us up. But 'easy', just like 'gentle', 'short' and 'just a couple of kilometers more' are relative terms when voiced by Mike McHugo, one of the proprietors of Kasbah du Toubkal and Discover Limited, who set up the bike ride to raise money for EFA, a charity that exists to provide houses for girls from poor homes in outlying villages to help them continue their education.

We set off, and the upland plain dips and rises, but without any extremes, mainly because we've been bussed to a departure point of over 800 metres. The countryside passes lethargically; men of all ages, from early school age to wrinkled, wizen-faced ancients, tend small flocks of sheep and goats, slowly chomping through the scrub. Heads appear at darkened doorways to silently watch these peculiar men in their figure-hugging shorts, brightly decorated shirts and strange hats ride through their village. Almost everyone we come across offers a "Bonjour. Ca va?", or "Bon courage", and a wave. Some of the braver young boys stick out their hand for a high-five and laugh as they slap our fingers.

I climb slowly from a village of no more than a cou-

ple of houses and the ubiquitous shed-cum-café selling Coca Cola and Technicolour Fanta. In the distance I see an old man wearing a straw hat with an enormous brim and a long faded grey jacket, apparently picking at a tall spiky bush. I ride closer and realize that below the spiky foliage are the legs of a donkey, hidden in the shadow of an enormous load of eucalyptus branches. As I pass I see the donkey's head sticking out the front, staring vacantly at the ground as more kindling is piled high on its back.

We arrive at Lalla Takeroust, a small town bustling with the weekly market beside an artificial lake where we're to have lunch – and I'm ready for it! The slow drag up a rough track from the main road is about all I can manage, but when we arrive we find rich Moroccan rugs and gold embroidered cushions set out under a shade tree. Brahim, our Man Friday, has been there for a couple of hours cooking lunch, and serves us freshly cooked pasta with meatballs and an enormous salad. As we kick off our shoes Ahmed brings over an ornate metal kettle and dish and pours warm water over our hands, handing us a soft white towel on which to dry them. A small dish of biscuits and a gleaming pot of mint tea is set on the table to refresh us as the final preparations for lunch are made.



High, Ride and Handsome By bike through the High Atlas Mountains

All proceeds from the sale of
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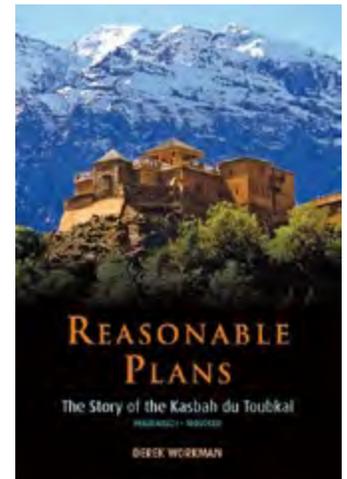


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Morocco is incredible. Everything you ever thought and so much more, it is one of those place that gets under your skin and stays there for a very long time.

If you have ever been curious about Morocco I urge you to go, especially if you have had little experience with Islamic countries and/or perhaps a little fear of them. Its safe, fascinating, and very friendly and will open your eyes to a whole other world that we are seldom shown in the western press.

Sandra Papas, December 2016



Kate: *I can't agree with you more about the friendliness and hospitality of the Moroccans we encountered during our trip in 2015. They are the most welcoming people I have come across in all my travels.*

Sandra: *They are both proud and delighted to share their country with tourists yet have largely decided not to take advantage of them. What a pleasant surprise!*

These quotes are taken from **10 Amazing Days in Magical Morocco**

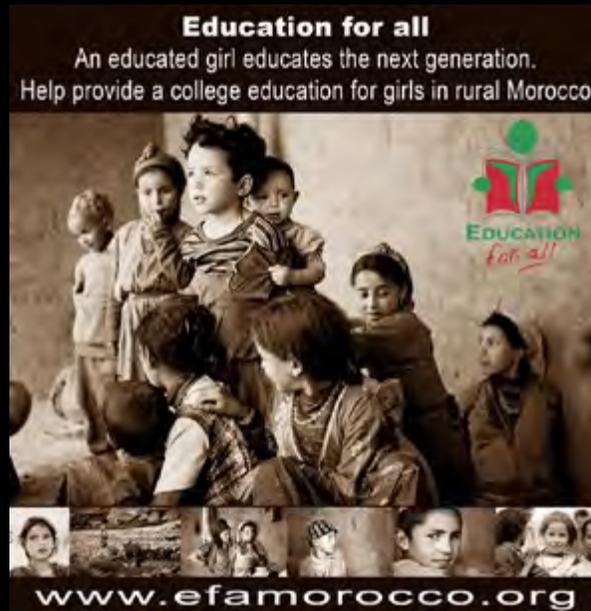
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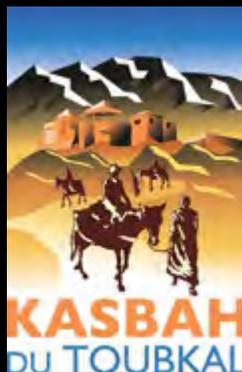
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