

# KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

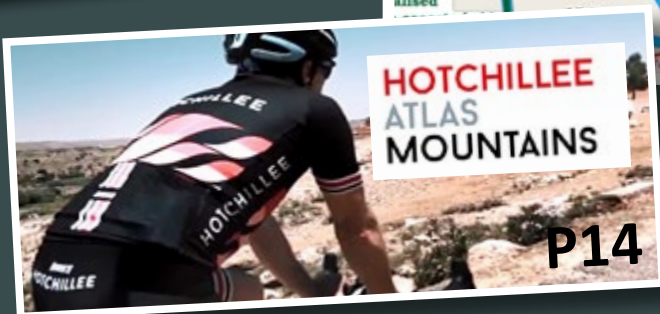
MOROCCO'S PREMIER  
MOUNTAIN RETREAT



Number Thirteen January 2018



# Contents





## Cold but Cosy

Winter has arrived and snow has settled on the top of Jbel Toulkal, but brilliant blue skies and wispy clouds create picture perfect view. While some content themselves with a couple of hours wandering through the walnut groves surrounding Imlil followed by a soak in the steamy heat of the Kasbah's private hammam before enjoying a traditional Moroccan dinner by candle-light, more hardy trekkers set off for the snowline and above.

An eventful year for Kasbah du Toubkal, Education For All and Marrakech Atlas Etape has come to an end – but there are plenty more plans for 2018!

In this, our 'lucky 13th' issue we follow a group of students on a problem-strewn ride as they take part in the 4L Trophy, described as the student Paris to Dakar Rally; take part in the traditional distillation of aromatic orange blossom water in the company of reader Marie Pickard; travel rough mountain terrain with the Imlil Valley's life-saving ambulance; welcome EFA's new Patron and discover the new routes for the next MEA, as well as joining an exciting off-road cycling adventure.

We've taken the tenth anniversary of Education For All to update *A Different Life – The Work of Education for All*, now in its third edition and fifth printing. You can download the latest version and also catch up with the girls in EFA's latest newsletter.

We hope you have a splendid Christmas and wish you all the best for a wonderful New Year. And don't forget to keep sending us your stories!

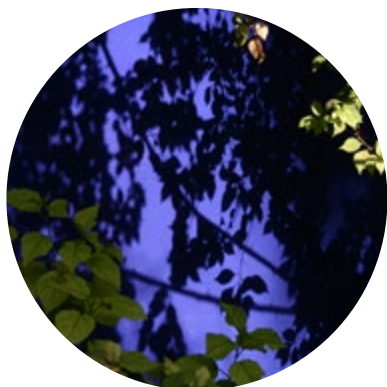
**Derek Workman**

Editor

...and everyone at

**KASBAH DU TOUBKAL**

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# L for Leather!

In 1997, six French students from the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce in Rennes, set off in three Renault 4L cars to drive through Morocco and deliver educational materials to impoverished children and schools along their route.

In 2017 the 4L Trophy, known as the student version of the Paris to Dakar Rally, celebrated its twentieth trophy, and each of the 1,450 cars, carrying two people aged between twenty and twenty-seven of fifteen different nationalities, delivered ten kilos of food and forty kilos of school materials. Over eighty tons of education was handed over to the Association Enfants du Désert, and for the first time in the rally's history, the participants also donated twenty euros per car, to help build a school.

On February 14th a group of students from the University of South Westfalia left their home in Soest, near Dortmund in Germany, to take part in the rally, driving through France, Spain, the heat of the Sahara and the bitter cold of the High Atlas Mountains in winter, to Marrakech, a round trip of seven thousand kilometres.

"It took us a year of very hard work to get the project together," Tobi Hügemann tells me. "We were split into two groups, one to raise the 36,000 euros we needed to buy the cars and pay all the expenses, and another of mechanics, who are engineering students, who spent three days a week for eight months finding the cars and then almost totally re-building them.



But we also had to work on our degrees, so it meant that we had to double up on our study time when we weren't working on the project."

With their great adventure ahead of them they set off on St. Valentine's Day, pointed in the direction of Poitiers, where the Rally officially began – but didn't even make it to France. Max Müller was driving one of the cars when the fuel pump failed. Fortunately, it was one of the spares they were carrying, so a change by the side of the road got them going again. At Poitiers, proudly displaying their official plaque with their car



number 1443, they began the first stage – only to get as far as one hundred kilometres south of Bordeaux, where this time their problems were more serious. “One of the wheel bearings went but you need special tools to do the job, which we didn’t have, so we had to call a tow truck to take us to a garage to do the repair.” A long nervous night was ahead; not only because the hotel they stayed in and the cost of the repair was eating into their limited budgets but because they had a deadline of six a.m. two days later to reach Algeciras for the specially reserved ferries to take them over the Straits of Gibraltar into Morocco.

“We barely slept that night, worried that we might not even get to the ferry, but the mechanic at the garage was great. He found some second-hand parts and worked late to get the job done. The drive through Spain was one of the most nerve-wracking I’ve ever experienced, but we got to the assembly point at Algeciras in time.” Which they shared with almost three thousand other people – and barely a toilet in site!

The adventure really began when they drove off the ferry at Tangiers, (which is probably what the cleaners on the four ferries also thought when they surveyed the results of a night without toilets for their six hundred passengers.)

“It was incredible,” comments Lukas Twittenhoff. “We were in Africa. It was such an amazing culture change, but that had been part of the adventure for us, to go somewhere so different from what we would usually experience.” But they soon discovered that Africa isn’t always hot, and the summer clothing they’d taken didn’t give them a lot of protection from the bitter desert nights or the minus ten degrees they experienced driving over the High Atlas Mountains.

“We were driving over a mountain pass and we could see cars coming toward us covered in ice,” says Max.

“A few snowflakes started to fall, and the French



drivers in front of us were terrified. They went so slowly that at one point we began to slide backwards. It was the same in the desert; we’d charge through the soft sand to keep moving while they would drive so slowly that they began to sink.” And the stalwart German team laugh at the memory of the French, who seemed to spend more time at the side of the road cooking a meal than actually driving.

Maren Rump is the only girl in the team, but played her part equally and had no problem with being the solitary female. “It was a bit strange the first time we went off-road, and I think we were all a bit nervous, but we soon got used to it, even though at times, when you were driving through a dust storm thrown up by over a thousand cars, you weren’t too sure where anyone else was around you.”

The route sidled south along the coastline from Tangiers, skirting inland above Rabat and passing through Meknes, Midelt, Erfoud, Merzouga, Tighremet and Quarzazate, before arriving at Marrakech. The nights were spent sleeping alongside their increasingly grubby Renaults, the workhorses that carried everything they needed for the eleven day rally; food, drink, sleeping bags, clothes and spare parts – and a camp chair each so as not to totally deprive themselves of a semi-civilised life.

A two-car team from the university completed the Rally in 2015, selling on their cars to this year’s team, who added two more, which will in turn be sold on to another group who will continue the new ‘tradition’ next year.

“It was a wonderful experience,” reminisces Tobi. “We worked so hard for a year, not just on the project, but also to make sure our studies didn’t suffer. But it is such an incredible event, not just for the rally itself, but for all it does to help children with their education.”





# British Ambassador Thomas Reilly on tourism in Morocco

I first came to Morocco in 1998 as a tourist. We rode in old buses which stopped in the most out-of-the-way places where men climbed on the roof and hauled sheep up by their horns. We ate in market places where snakes twirled around our feet. We fed drinks to camels on endless sandy beaches. We watched the sun set over the Atlantic and we dreamed the idyllic dreams of youth.

I was so entranced by Morocco that, I came back again in 2000. This time, we hired a car and drove all round the country – Essaouira, Marrakesh, Agadir, Chefchaouen. We got lost in mazes of endless mountain passes. We slept in tiny hostels lost at the bottom of deep valleys. We fell into streaming rivers carrying ice-cold melt-water away from the melting snow caps. We drove down roads that had no purpose. We played drums with the tribes in the desert. And we wondered that so much variety and the beauty could be present in one country - from desert and mountains, deep gorges and rich sandy beaches, to the rich cultural heritage of imperial cities, lost forts and amazing medinas. I subsequently learned that Morocco has nine sites classified as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO – my only surprise is that there are not more!

I loved every bit of my two trips – not only for the splendour of the geography and history, but also for Moroccans' strong sense of hospitality and their welcoming, tolerant and generous society - an undeniable added value for the development of any tourist industry. I never dreamed that I would have the privilege of coming back to Morocco nearly 20 years later as the British Ambassador.

And it seems that I am not alone amongst my fellow countrymen in my fascination with the natural beauty and variety of Morocco. The British association with Morocco is long. There is still a strong British community in Tangiers - which is a most attractive city - which increasing numbers of British tourists visit



for the beauty of its Old Town, its historic monuments and associations, its beaches and of course its proximity. When I visited in February this year to show my family where would be living, the Riad in which we stayed in Marrakesh was full of British tourists.

It is therefore no surprise to me to learn that Morocco is the third most popular destination for British tourists outside the EU (the first is the USA and the second is Turkey). British tourists to Moroc-

co are the third highest in number after France and Spain and spend the second highest number of nights in the country. A rough calculation suggests that British tourists contributed nearly one billion Dirhams to the Moroccan economy in the first six months of 2017.

And that very proximity is part of the attractiveness of Morocco. I flew back to the UK from Rabat in June. Four hours after the aeroplane doors closed, I was walking through the door of my house in rural Hampshire. It is that proximity, mixed with the almost limitless variation of city and countryside that Morocco offers that draws more than 610,000 British tourists here every year. But Morocco has so much more to offer and I would love to increase the number of British visitors to one million every year – an ambition shared by the Moroccan Government. Their 2020 Vision plans to double the size of the sector to reach 20 million visitors and raise the country's ranking to become one of the world's top twenty tourist destinations. There has already been much progress towards this vision - Morocco saw more than a 20% increase in international arrivals in the first half of 2017 and I am confident that this number will keep growing, especially with the increase of international flights connecting Morocco to destinations around the world.

Tourism brings direct economic benefits. It makes up over 10% of the world's GDP and nearly 20% of Morocco's GDP (by way of comparator two of the

most popular European destinations are Spain (which makes 14.2% of its GDP from tourism) and France (where the figure is 8.9%). Research indicates that people who visit another country are 13% more likely to subsequently invest in that country – multiplying the potential economic benefit. The influx of tourists generates income, creates employment and brings in all-important foreign-exchange earnings. Done correctly, tourism can promote sustainable development, improve the well-being of host communities and help protect the natural environment.

I believe that tourism is an integral part and parcel of the weft and warp of modern relations between two countries. Responsible tourism breaks down cultural barriers (both of the host country and of the tourist), opens eyes to other ways of life, throws back

the doors of opportunity and helps mutual understanding and appreciation: within the tourism sector everyone is an ambassador for their own culture - everyone has a responsibility to introduce the other to their own. So in my view, encouraging more British tourists to come to Morocco is not only good for the economic health of Morocco, but serves directly to strengthen the historic bilateral relationship between our two countries and encourages British investment in Morocco.

Tourism enriches our lives, strengthens our societies, improves economic opportunity and breaks down barriers. It serves to bind us together and remind us once more that there is much more that unites us than divides us: and that in the end is, surely, the principle role of an Ambassador.

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# Orange Blossom Special

In early March blossom starts forming in the orange groves of Morocco and a few days later it will be on sale in the souks, used in the preparation of orange blossom water to be sprinkled at every important event or even simply on the hands of guests to a Moroccan home as a sign of welcome.

Tracy Calder was invited to witness the traditional process of distillation using an ancient copper still.

Today was hot, with crystal air and bright blue sky; one of the best days Fez has seen for a while. A week or so ago the air began to fill with the scent of *zhar*; the heady aroma of orange blossom. Young boys, and occasionally their sisters and mothers, take to the streets with poles to belt the orange trees and shake loose their snowfall of dainty white blossom. Gathered in baskets, it is taken to vendors in the Medina, and for the next couple of weeks the air will be rich with the pungent bouquet as housewives swoop down to buy the basic ingredient of a scent and flavouring that permeates Moroccan culture. Taste a Moroccan pastry, and there is a fair chance that a dribble of orange blossom water has been added to the mix; visit a hammam, and the rich soaps and unguents might release a light perfume of orange; go to a celebration, particularly a wedding, and you will have your hands sprinkled with the water as a sign of welcome and good luck.

Orange blossom water is big commercial business, but many households still prepare their own – and it's a family affair. I've been invited to the Medina home of Marie Pickard, where her mother-in-law, Mama Latifa Imerda, is preparing the delicate brew, as she has done every year for the last forty-three years, since a neighbour taught her as a girl of fourteen.

Introductions over, coffee and mint tea are prepared and a plate of delicious pastries is produced. Parts of a copper still, a *katara*, are waiting to be assembled, but there is the process of mixing the orange blossom to be gone through first. I take a bite of a brioche, a mouthful of coffee, and watch.

Marie bought the blossom four days earlier and it has been wrapped in layers of cotton since then, drying enough to remove excess moisture but not enough to deplete the aromatic essence. The morning is said to be the best time to buy the blossom, before the heat of the day has had a chance to drain the heady perfume away. I pick a small flower, and when I crush it between my palms the scent isn't as intense as I







of grubby strips of cloth. The sludge is *argile*, a green clay from the Middle Atlas Mountains, known for its rejuvenation properties, which is why it is used in face packs. On this occasion it is being spread on the cloth strips before being wound around the joints of the three sections of the *katara*, and when it dries it will form a seal to stop the steam escaping. The tank begins to boil and the room hints of the aroma of oranges. Surprisingly quickly a fine stream of liquid begins to appear from the spout on the top section and Mama Latifa carefully positions a five litre plastic water bottle under the dribble. Marginally quicker than watching paint dry, I see the bottle slowly filling with liquid as the perfume hangs thicker in the air. Every few minutes the top container has to be emptied, replacing the hot water with cold, to continue the distillation. You know when the distillation is over because the aroma of oranges slowly fades. The bottles are filled and left for forty days to mature. I'd hoped to take a bottle back to England to celebrate the wedding of my son in three weeks, but it looks as though I'll have to buy a commercially produced bottle and cheat a little. But they do say it's the thought that counts.



expect it to be, so it seems that the blossom has to mature to the point of falling from the trees before it has enough essence for the distillation process to work.

Mama Fatima begins the mix. Two kilos of orange blossom will provide about five litres of perfumed water. The still is in three parts; the bottom one contains the water for the distillation, the second one the mix, and the third one is a container of cold water which has to be continually changed to create the steam that is part of the distillation process.

A thick layer of blossom is laid in the middle section of the *katara*, on top of it is placed an orange, which is then covered over with more blossom. The bottom section is filled with water, a few big handfuls of blossom, a couple of oranges and the peel of a lemon. This increases the intensity of the perfume as the liquid passes through the distillation process.

Even though the orange has been the main tree found in Arab gardens for millennia, it was only ever used to provide decoration and flavourings for food and cosmetics. Its fruit is only marginally less tear-making than sucking on a lemon.

I'm chewing my second bun when the water container is put on the burner, the middle section with the majority of the blossom set in the tight-fitting flange of the base, and the cold water section placed on top. Mama Latifa takes a handful of salt from a container and scatters it in a circle around the base of the burner. "To keep Satan away," she explains with a grin.

Daughter Fatima brings in two plastic kitchen bowls, which seem slightly out of keeping with the burnished copper of the still and abolishing the devil. In one is a murky, glutinous sludge and in the other are a pile





In many of the villages of the High Atlas Mountains medical assistance of any kind is rarely close to hand, leading to 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 Marrakech for more serious cases. One of the most important projects that the *Association Bassins d'Imlil* has instigated is providing an ambulance to reduce these all too avoidable mortalities.

After fourteen years driving over some of the roughest terrain in North Africa's highest mountain range, Abderrahim Ajdaà handles his ambulance with ease, his confidence built on experience. As it's my first trip I spend a fair bit of my time concentrating on the Moroccan flag on the dashboard and try to ignore the sheer slope of the mountainside, so close that I can't even see the edge of the road from the passenger seat. 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. We're not on a house call or emergency today, but Abderrahim is demonstrating in a practical way his daily round. The road ends at a flat area of rough ground, where the Reyara River bubbles and sparkles languidly before picking up pace on its way down into the Imlil Valley below. Across an almost non-existent ford is Armed, a village of almost two thousand souls. If a helicopter is needed for a mountain rescue, this is where it lands, with the patient being transferred to Abderrahim's ambulance for the journey down the mountain to Asni or Marrakech. But 'flat' doesn't mean 'smooth'; the uneven surface makes for a rocky and tricky landing. When the river is in flood – and



people shouldn't be on the mountain anyway – there is nowhere for the helicopter to land, and Abderrahim has to gather a team of villagers to bring the injured down by stretcher.

Abderrahim's main work is ferrying expectant mothers to the maternity clinic in Asni, or the hospitals in Tahanoute 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. Few villages in the High Atlas Mountains have access to this level of help and the ambulance serving the Imlil has been a life-line to many, particularly those in the most remote valleys who might otherwise have to wait many hours for medical assistance.





## A message from His Excellency Thomas Reilly, Her Britannic Majesty's Ambassador to Morocco



It is a real honour to be asked to be the Patron of Education For All.

I first came across EFA when my wife met a group of doctors doing a wild medicine course in Scotland. That group of doctors held a separate course at Kasbah du Toubkal early in 2017 and invited my wife, children and me to meet them there.

The dramatic pictures of the Kasbah, surrounded by the majestic Atlas mountains that we had seen on the internet did not deceive. But it was also immediately clear how hard life is in the isolated villages that adorn the slopes around the Kasbah. The paths linking the villages are steep and unforgiving.

The nearest secondary schools to Imlil, the village at the foot of the Kasbah, are seventeen kilometres away at the end of the valley; seventeen long kilometres to toil up and down every day; seventeen long kilometres to a school day of uneven length where classes are not always back-to-back; seventeen long kilometres of reasons not to go to school; seventeen long kilometres of temptation to waste our children's futures. And many of the girls have even further to travel, often beginning their trip to school over those same rough, precipitous mountain tracks before they even arrive at a serviceable road over which to continue their journey.

Education is a priority for me and for the British Government, working closely with our Moroccan partners.

Education is the basis of economic opportunity, social mobility and personal development. Without it, we will never manage to reach our true potential.

The work that Education For All does is vital in ensuring that young women are given the chance to receive an education and the opportunity to achieve their potential. The fact that so many of the girls and young women supported by EFA go on to study at university is all the proof that should be required of the impact that the initiative has had on so many young lives.

I am really excited at the chance to work with Education For All over the coming years and commend them for the incredible work they have already done to prevent so many young lives being stunted by a lack of access to the liberation that education brings.

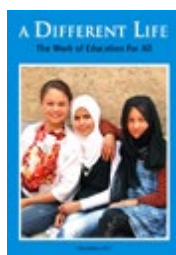
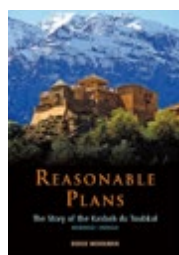
**Thomas Reilly**

*Ambassadeur Britannique au Maroc et La Mauritanie  
British Ambassador to Morocco and Mauritania*

BACK

ISSUES

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# Our thanks to everyone

To celebrate its tenth anniversary, on 1st November, 2017, Education For All hosted an evening at the Africa Center in London. Bringing together a mix of Ambassadors, donors, volunteers and

EFA friends, it was an opportunity to thank everyone for their support over the years and share some of the successes and impacts EFA enjoys, thanks to their support.

We were happy to welcome Thomas Reilly, the newly appointed British Ambassador to Morocco, who will assume the role of EFA Patron, and the Moroccan Ambassador to the UK, Abdesselam Aboudrar. Both Ambassadors confirmed their support and commitment to girls' education in rural Morocco and to the work of Education For All. PURE Life Experiences, long-term supporters and major donors of EFA, also pledged their ongoing support and their intention to significantly increase their donations for 2018.

Latifa Aliza, EFA's house mother since the beginning, spoke for all those who gave, and continue to give, their support since their original idea began to take shape, when she gave a moving speech about her ten year journey with EFA, and her gratitude to everyone who has made it possible to change the lives of so many girls from the remote rural areas she grew up in. But it isn't just the education each girl gets; thanks

to Education For All it is the knock-on effect for generations to come.

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 has seen what young girls can achieve, given the opportunity.

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

"When I see the girls' progress and personal change, I'm really proud. 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."

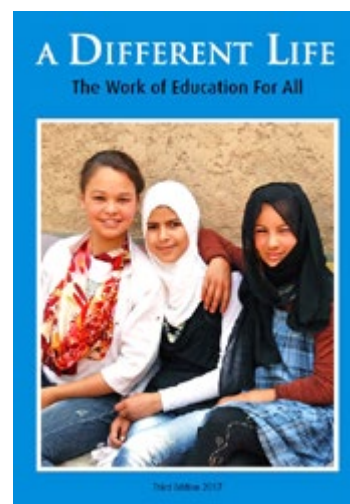


(Click on image do download newsletter)

## Ten Years On

As part of the on-going celebration of EFA's first ten years we have brought ***A Different Life – The Work of Education For All*** right up-to-date, with stories from and about the girls, their successes and achievements, a timeline of high points and a gallery of those behind the scenes who work so tirelessly to ensure that these special young ladies are given the opportunity of a life that would previously have been denied them.

To learn more about the everyday life of EFA please **visit our website.**





# MARRAKECH ATLAS ETAPE

MARRAKECH TO OUKAÏMEDEN

CHARITY BIKE RIDE IN AID OF EDUCATION FOR ALL

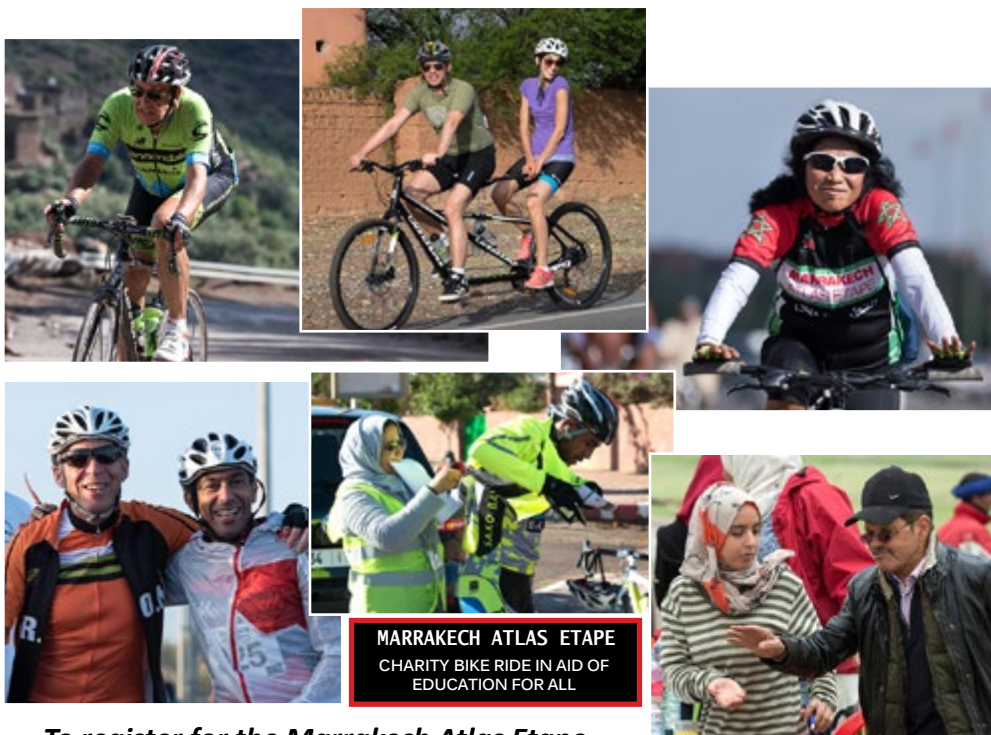
## New routes for 2018 to celebrate Royal Patronage

While the main premise of MAE is to support Education For All we are also concerned with promoting the excellent cycling in Morocco. Since receiving the Royal Patronage of King Mohammed VI and the increased support of the Moroccan authorities, we have changed the routes of this year's étape to give riders more experience of this beautiful country.

The route for the serious and recreational rider alike leaves from the southern edge of Marrakech and heads south, following a very gentle gradient with spectacular views of the snow-capped Atlas Mountains to the start of the Ourika Valley and the 30 km feed station.

At this point the routes diverge, one to conquer the 'Ouka Monster' and the shorter to continue on an undulating road to Tahanoute and the event village where, with the kind help of M. Omar Touimi, Governor of the Province D'Al Houz, we will be celebrating education and cycling at an Event Village. The full programme will be announced nearer the date, but will include local food, crafts and culture as well as plenty of places to relax and enjoy a well-earned break. The return is a fast, gentle decent to Marrakech under a police escort, a chance to exchange yarns with all the riders who have participate in the Marrakech Atlas Etape.

The 60 km and 140 km routes have been extended to 76 km and 156 km respectively, but the shorter route is still achievable by almost anybody who has reasonable fitness and wants to be involved in this event, with the bonus that you will be rewarded with glorious views of the High Atlas, not seen in previous étapes.



**To register for the Marrakech Atlas Etape**  
**click on the link above**



« My name is Kalthoum, I'm studying the baccalaureate. The MAE was so great, it's the first time that I participated in a race. I've made it to 52 km, we did not expect to make it. I hope that more girls will participate next year. And next year we will go up to Oukaïmeden, for sure! We'll just need to have better clothing to make it to the top! Thank you for giving us this chance. »



«My name is Aicha, I'll sit the baccalaureate this year. I participated in the MAE - it was an amazing and new experience, I was so excited! I made it to 52 km. When I came back to my village, everyone was surprised and did not expect me to make it. I'm proud of myself! I took my number, my medals and the flyers and I hung them up in my house, so that everyone who comes to visit us sees it. I'm the only one in my village who took part in a biking race. »





We are pleased to announce that for the 2018 Marrakech Atlas Etape we are partnering with premium UK events company HotChillee. You now have the opportunity of taking part in their 4-day adventure (HotChillee Atlas Mountains) riding the MAE as part of day one.

First, tarmac swiftly carries you from the hustle and bustle of Marrakech. You'll climb to over 2500 m in 70 km, riding the iconic Marrakech Atlas Etape. Then, leaving the peloton behind, you'll descend into the mountain village of Ouirgane, where your off-road adventure begins.

Covering approximately 60 km each day you'll ride roads, mountain trails and sinuous single-track pistes across the roof of North Africa, discovering the freedom and versatility of a gravel bike or road bike with 'fatter' tyres. You'll ride in supported groups accompanied by local guides, HotChillee Ride Captains and backup vehicles, and explore remote rural villages, hilltop settlements and mountain trails that are only accessible by bikes – and donkeys!

The event is perfect for bringing non-riding partners, who can explore the local area, enjoy 5-star spa treatments, Berber cooking courses, trekking or simply lie by the pool of luxury hotels.

Cycling Plus' John Whitney joined HotChillee on their October recce for the new event. He said, "It was a genuinely new experience – recognisably a HotChillee event, yet at the same time nothing like it at all."





# Kasbah du Toubkal in the Media

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Into the Clouds  
Trekking Mount Toubkal

abeautyfeature

Moroccan retreat authentic  
Berber hospitality.  
Hong Kong Lifestyle Webzine



CNN's Inside Africa reports on the lives of the Berber people living in the Imlil Valley. The programme also highlights the harshness of Berber life during the winter months in the High Atlas.

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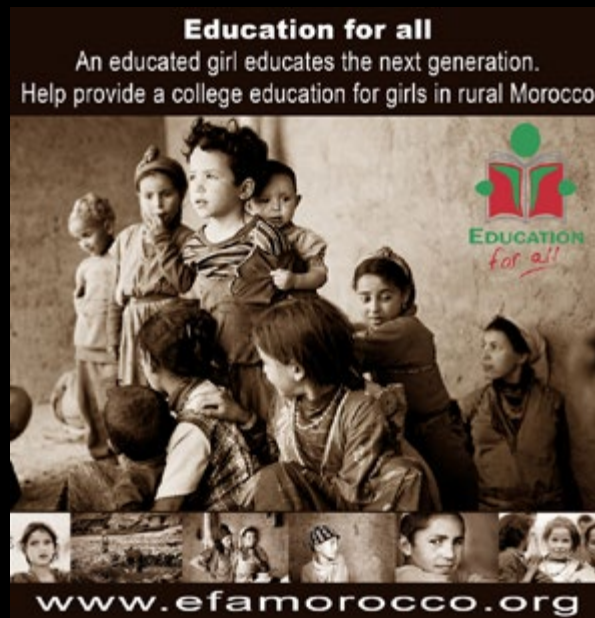
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## MARRAKECH ATLAS ETAPE

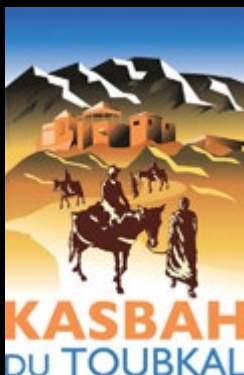
MARRAKECH TO OUKAÏMEDEN

CHARITY BIKE RIDE - SUNDAY APRIL 22 2018

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