

KASBAH DU TOUBKAL



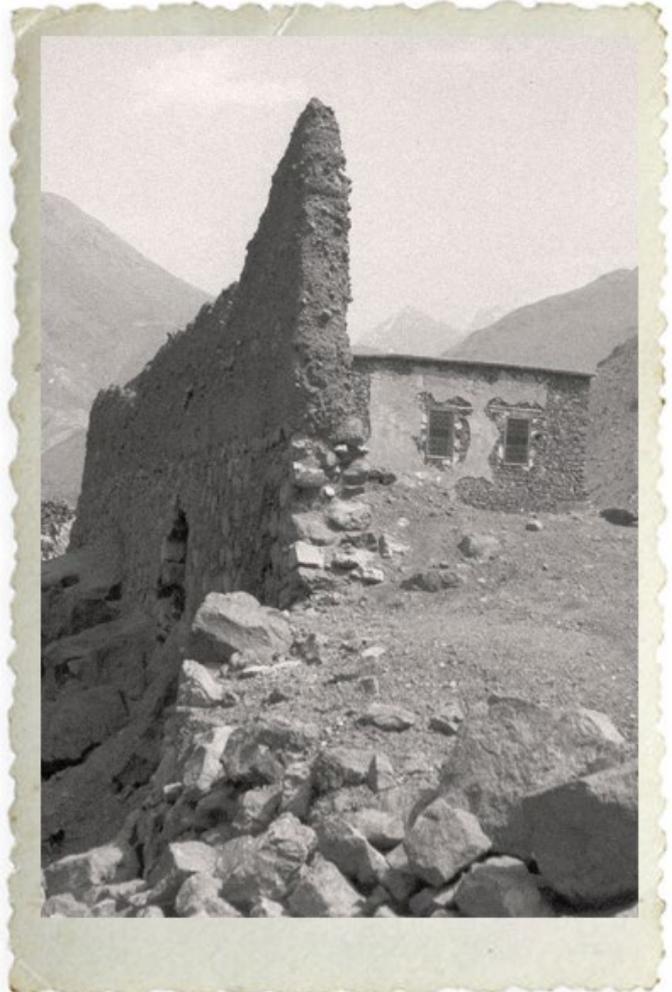
Spring has arrived in the High Atlas...

... and there's still snow on the peaks of Jbel Toubkal that glistens against the clear blue sky. Life has settled back into its normal, relaxed rhythm; invigorating treks, meals on the Kasbah's terraces and a steaming hammam to ease aching bones. Okay, that's enough marketing speak!

You will have read in the last newsletter about the funds we are raising to buy a new and much-needed ambulance to serve the communities of the Imlil Valley and surrounding area, as well as supply a life-line for the – thankfully – very rare occasion visitors to the region need medical aid. As part of our fund raising effort, Mike McHugo tackles a bike ride he first did twenty years ago to raise funds for the village hammam, a 1,000km bike ride from Tangiers to Imlil – you can even join him on the last leg of Marrakech to Imlil if you happen to be in the area on the 7th April. By the time you read this, Mike will be well on his way, and you can catch up with his adventure below.



A postcard stamped 1951 labelled
Kasba vers Imlil



What was left of the original
Kasbah around the same time

ONE MORE FOR THE ROAD

Mike McHugo tackles his second 1,000 km bike ride through Morocco, twenty years on from the first. This time it's to raise money for a new mountain ambulance for the Imlil Valley

It's 520kms from Tangiers to Imlil as the crow flies, wafting through thermals, letting the winds carry it along. It will be a bit different for Mike McHugo though, when he leaves Tangiers on March 28th to cycle to Imlil in the High Atlas Mountains. He'll cover around 1,000 kms, up steep mountains, down long valleys with the only source of power being his legs and, with a bit of luck, a fair following wind.

For someone who in the last year has been given the all clear from cancer, scrambled over the rubble to escape the collapse of the Kasbah's restaurant during Morocco's devastating earthquake in September 2023 then, after ensuring all staff and guests were safe, did a fast sixty kilometer bike ride to Marrakech – at one point hauling his bike over a mound of rocks that blocked the road – to find out what the situation was, and discovering that five of the six Education For All boarding houses had been so badly damaged they had to be demolished, taking the charity he started with a group of friends, and is still very much close to his heart, back, if not to square one, at least square four or five. So why the bike ride?

"I did it twenty years ago with a friend, Allen Hogan, to celebrate my fiftieth birthday and to raise money for the village hammam in Imlil, thinking that, you know, when you reach fifty you're beginning to get old. I suppose when I was fifty, I kind of thought I might have twenty years of good health left, and made a joke to Allen that I might do it

again when I'm seventy. This is my seventieth year and I'm still active so I thought well, I better just get on and do it."

Last time he did it he had the company of a friend, but this time he's solo with a vehicle backup, more for the bike's than Mike's sake.

"There's obviously a lowland route that you could take, but it would be very boring so I'm going to go through the mountains, then up into the Middle Atlas Mountains, and down to Marrakesh. So yes, it's a mountain ride with plenty of hills. I haven't done anything major for a while so it'll be challenging for sure, especially if I try to do it in the ten days or so I'm hoping for. A hundred kilometers a day, I would like to think I could average that, but I might not. Yeah, that's challenging for a guy of my age. I've not ridden a lot recently, so I will need to get fit almost on the trip."

Mike had thought of doing the ride anyway and it coincided with the Kasbah and the Association des Bassins d'Imlil raising funds to buy a much needed new ambulance. The idea seemed to gel nicely; the communities of the Imlil valley need a new mountain ambulance; Mike will be riding through mountains.

"I thought, well, have it almost as your last fundraiser and try and raise a bit of money. So I thought what the hell, okay."

Mike plans to be in Marrakech around the 7th of April. Anyone who is in the area at the time is welcome to join him on the last leg to Imlil. Send an email to the link to be advised of where to meet.



The first time around – a mere 50 years old



Twenty years on and still going strong



A 1,000 kilometre saunter

If you would like to contribute to Mike's 1,000km bike ride to raise funds for a new mountain ambulance, click [HERE](#).

Or contact him at mike@discover.ltd.uk for more information.



A Long Road Ahead - 5 days in

On 28th March, the General Directorate of Meteorology (DMN) in Morocco announced that heavy thundery rainfall between 90 to 130 millimeters was expected in several provinces in Northern Morocco, including Tetouan and Chefchaouen. There was no need to tell Mike McHugo, he was in the middle of it, legs pumping to get him through the Rif Mountains on the first leg of his solo bike ride.

Blue skies with dark clouds seemed gave confused weather signals as Mike set off from Tetouan on day one, a slight change from his original departure point of Tangiers, but a couple of hours in, it soon became clear that storm god Zeus was having a bad hair day. "The first day was the hardest day cycling I've done in the wind and the rain. I thought I'd be lucky to do fifty but I did sixty-nine on day one. It's slow cycling and it's pretty grim at times. It takes it out of you, the wind slows you up because you are using energy to keep warm. On day one there was an unbelievable headwind. It's the worst a cyclist can have, especially when you're by yourself because you can't slipstream anybody. It could be worse, but not much worse."

Day two saw eighty kilometres pass by, with about five-and-a-half-hours in the saddle each day. By day three he settled into his stride.

"Now I'm holding up pretty well, my backside's sort of alright. You notice it a bit more each day and then it'll wear off. We had a basic room in Chefchouan and we camped in a sort of service area on the second night, but they're pretty basic. They had a toilet, but no showers. Camping in the rain isn't a great fun idea, but there you go," he says philosophically.



The journey begins - at Marseille Airport in torrential rain

Heavy rain, strong headwinds, kilometre after kilometre of mountain cycling – not exactly a pleasant jaunt, but as Ramadan in Morocco runs until the 10th of April, Mike admits it probably wasn't the best time to do the ride.

"You have to behave as if you're in a place with no shops because no cafes or restaurants are open during the day. It sort of makes it less enjoyable because you can't stop for a coffee in a cafe, but it means you keep



Setting off from Tetaoun under heavy skies



Zeus has a bad hair day



A tempting glimmer of blue in the far distance

going. I'm being looked after very well by Rachid Ait Braim, one of the Kasbah's drivers who's driving the support vehicle. Without him it would be nigh on impossible, I'd have to carry all my food and stuff."



Have I passed Meknes already!



Without Rachid it would be nigh on impossible



The Middle Atlas calls

By day five Mike is over half-way through the ride, 'the worst half', he says given, the terrible weather he's been fighting. With four-hundred kilometres under his belt, he faces seven hours in the saddle to reach Khenifra as he heads into the Middle Atlas. "Today is the first day without wind. It's still a bit rainy, but it's the first day of reasonable cycling. It's quite cold, so I'm having to wrap up, but I've got the kit, and I'm confident I'll be in Marrakech by Friday." Mike suddenly realises that it's almost exactly twenty years to the day since he did the ride on exactly the same route. He hadn't planned it that way, it was just one of those strange quirks of fate, So have things changed since two decades ago?

"Well, some bits, the towns are obviously much wealthier and better, that's noticeable. We're in the Middle Atlas now and in the really rural areas the basic level of agriculture is pretty similar. It hasn't changed much."

The day ends 114 km later, not bad for an 'old man' of 70, and as Mike prepares for the next stretch, his thoughts drift to something other than rainy tents and punishing winds. "This is the longest I've been without a glass of wine for a while. I'm looking forward to one when I get to Imlil."

And don't forget to click on the Go Fund Me link above to help Mike raise funds for an ambulance.

euronews. 'World's first off-road solar SUV' just drove across Morocco powered only by the sun'

While Mike McHugo is doing his 1,000 kilometre bike ride solely by pedal-power, a team of students from Eindhoven University of Technology covered the same distance in what is described as "the world's first off-road solar-powered vehicle". Events manager for the team, Thieme Bosman, said solar-powered vehicles such as Stella Terra could help connect remote areas "where roads are less developed and energy grids are not as reliable," and assist with emergency aid and deliveries. The khaki-green SUV uses solar panels on its sloping roof to charge its electric battery, meaning it can drive long distances powered entirely by the sun.



Kasbah Kitchen



A Moroccan meal is a very communal affair, often beginning with a variety of salads, both cooked and uncooked. Unlike the orderly laid out rings of sliced vegetables found on a European plate, a cold Moroccan salad is usually served in a bowl with finely diced cucumber, green pepper, onions and tomatoe, liberally sprinkled with olive oil and chopped coriander. From there on the meal might include *zaalouk*, made with aubergines, tomatoes, garlic olive oil and spices, *chakchouka*, eggs poached in a sauce of tomatoes, chili peppers eaten with chunks of Moroccan bread - at the Kasbah, freshly made

by Fatima at her outdoor oven. *Bissara*, *harira*, flavoursome soups; tajines of meat or fish, often flavoured with dried fruit and nuts such as prunes, apricots, and almonds, and carefully guarded blends of spices. And, of course, couscous, with a base of semolina (granules of durum wheat) over which a stew is spooned. Curiously enough, given their supposed gourmand appetites, the third favourite meal of French people in their home country. You may not eat *en famille* at the Kasbah, but the food you are served will have the same rich, home-cooked flavours you would find in any Moroccan home.

Click on the logo to read more reviews



Kasbah Du Toubkal Restaurant

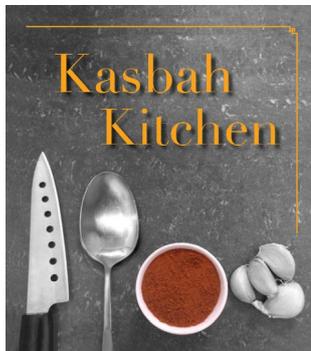
●●●●● 116 reviews | #1 of 8 Restaurants in Imilil

Dinner was the best meal we had in our stay weeks in Morocco. Lemon chicken cooked superbly.

We loved the tajines and the apple tart was a triumph of pastry cooking.



Excellent Kitchen the best I tasted the ten days in Morocco



Click on the cover for your free Kasbah recipe book



The food is great. The homemade bread is fantastic and the entrees were plentiful and delicious, made from local ingredients.



Trumpet Voluntary

We know it's not British to blow your own trumpet, but we're also told not to hide your light under a bushel. So we've decided to let others blow our trumpet for us!

Magical experience - a must do!

We have traveled extensively all over the world, and may have just found our new favorite place. It is an absolutely magical place to stay. From the welcome when you arrive – the hike with the mules is just plain fun – it is five-star.... I'd give it 10 if I could. We stayed in the apartment, with breath-taking views of the valley, a crazy great fireplace, heated floors, everything you could need in the kitchen. Hearing the echoing call to prayer in the valley is absolutely spiritual. We took advantage of the hammam after a day of trekking; fantastic! This was a wonderfully unique experience that cannot be reproduced. We cannot wait to come back!

James O

Incredible mountain retreat.

The room was very comfortable and cosy, and the food was absolutely delicious. There wasn't a menu, so they bring out your food when you arrive, and both evenings it was excellent, all whilst on a beautiful terrace overlooking the stunning mountains. Perfect for a week-long trekking trip or a couple of days in the mountains away from Marrakech.

Macka1993

A gem of a boutique hotel in the high Atlas

A special place in a beautiful valley. The kasbah is clean and rustic with delicious food and thoughtful touches like Berber slippers in the rooms. It's ringed by mountains, an oasis of almond and cherry trees. We did a trek to the mountain lodge the kasbah owns and stayed overnight. A wonderful experience moving back to the rhythms of a different age. A shout out to our thoughtful and kind guide Mohammed Aziam who could not have been more patient! if you like nature of the most extraordinary sort, go! Also the Kasbah is run on genuinely ethical lines with a portion of takings going to the local community.

tastetaker

All quotes taken from Tripadvisor



The New York Times

Marrakech seven years on

On February 2, 2017, the New York Times published 36 Hours in Marrakesh, an article by Seth Sherwood; screenwriter, director, designer, and producer as well as a prolific travel writer whose work draws you in to the alleys and backwaters of his chosen destination, as well as the fancy, the high-life and esoteric. Seven years and six days later, on February 8, 2024, he returns with an update. Some of his earlier recommendations have gone, with newer openings taking their place. Combine both to show you the best, and discover a vibrant city of colour, life and Moroccan energy.



2017



2024



Visited Travel App:
Marrakech Among 25 Best
Wonders of the World to Visit



Morocco Welcomed
Nearly One Million
Tourists in January



Marrakesh Ranks as
4th Best Action-Packed
Retreat for Travelers in
2024



**Ryanair's Unveils \$1.4 Billion
Investment in Morocco for
Summer 2024**

The company announced plans to launch
11 internal routes, as part of its expansion
to Morocco's domestic market.



**Marrakech Leads African Cities
as Top Business Travel Destination**

*(Click on the image or
logo for full story.)*

Travelling Morocco as a Solo Woman

Travelling in Morocco as a single woman was once considered a tricky business. But times change, and these days it's not just the likes of Edith Wharton, author of *In Morocco*, who can enjoy the adventure of this charismatic country. Four women travellers tell you how to make the most of your solo trip



In our July 2021 issue, Aine Donnellan, a Swedish travel writer, wrote about travelling Morocco as a solo woman, preferring it to her home country.

'Ninety-eight percent of the people I encounter on a daily basis smile at me. I would argue that the same statistics ring true in my home country, but in reverse. Though many believe getting mugged or murdered to be the biggest danger of solo-travel, the most commonly faced issue is loneliness. And if loneliness, which kills more people than does a poor diet, is the biggest threat, how come no one questions a solo-trip through Scandinavia? Travelling solo through Sweden would be much more of an isolating experience, with locals avoiding eye contact and small talk at all cost. Instead, the welcoming culture of Morocco has made me feel at ease, it has made me feel connected. That is the narrative I would like to promote, the one of a country which welcomes its guests with unparalleled hospitality. And on a personal level, I'd much rather live in connected caution than in separated safety.'



British woman finishes gruelling Sahara race
Vanessa Ruck was hit by a car while cycling in 2014. Seven years of recovery followed, requiring her to face seven surgical procedures, before she discovered motorcycles. In February this year she completed the gruelling 6,000km 2024 Africa Eco Race from Nador in Morocco across the Sahara desert to Lac Rose in Dakar, Senegal. "I'm absolutely shattered" she said at the end of the race. I don't think every single muscle in my body, and my brain, have ever been this tired." As well as taking part in races, she visits schools to inspire young girls to take part in different sports.

