TOUR CODE

XAT

ADVENTURESABROAD

MOROCCO HIGH ATLAS TREK

featuring Jebel Toubkal

16 days

Updated 04/11/2011

Day 1 *Arrive in Marrakech*

Today we arrive in Marrakech and transfer to our hotel.

Overnight in Marrakech. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Marrakech - Beni Mallal*

This morning we travel to Beni Mallal through spectacular forested gorges with ancient kasbahs dotting rocky promontories, and spend the night in this provincial town.

Overnight in Beni Mallal. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Beni Mellal - Tabant*

This morning we will drive up a steeply ascending road to Azilal where we are met by our 4WD vehicles and our trekking crew. From Azilal, we will drive to the point almost where the road ends. We are now on th northern flanks of the High Atlas, a region of scattered Berber villages, one of which we stay in this night. Immediately to the south of us is the 3700 m (12,300 feet) high massifs of Jebel Azourki and Jebel Ouoalzat. We aim to camp in the village of Tabant in the general area of Ait Bougmaz.

Trekking in Morocco is neither burdensome nor uncomfortable. We provide mules to carry your baggage and all the equipment, so the walks are unencumbered. Professional Berber guides who are proud of their beautiful country, allow plenty of time en route and provide comfortable camps each evening with staff to provide the touches that make "roughing it" an enjoyable experience. No previous experience is needed.

Overnight at our campsite/Berber home near Tabant. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Atlas Trek*

We hike through the Berber villages of Ait Bougoumez Valley and meander through remote villages and meet many local people who pursue a traditional lifestyle.

Today we hike over the Tizi n'Ait Imi Pass , 2606 m (9,512 feet) and then descend to M'Goun River Valley. We continue to follow the M'Goun River, camping at Tihremt Ait Hamed at approximately 2180 m (7,200 feet).

Overnight in the Atlas Mountains. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Imi Nirhkt*

We hike in the narrow canyons of the spectacular M'Goun Gorges towards the mountains. The twisting M'Goun River slices through breathtaking rose-coloured cliffs and creates lush valleys of fragrant roses and hedgerowed plots. The sacred painted canyons of M'Goun, accessible only by mule or on foot, whose heights in some areas close off the sun, compares spectacularly to our great canyons in the West.

Overnight camp. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Tiranimine*

We hike through villages near Issoumar, following the M'Goun River, which is bordered with oleander trees and lots of wild roses (blooming in May). We continue to our camp at Tiranimine (1789 m / 5,904 feet)--four to five hours hiking.

Overnight camp. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Issoumer*

We hike through villages near Issoumar following the M'Goun River.

Overnight camp. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Ouarzazate*

This morning is free to explore on your own. In the afternoon we head to the town of El Kelaa M'Gouna in the valley of the Dades River. From here we will drive a short distance west to the major central Moroccon town of Ouarzazate.

A provincial capital, Ouarzazate, is based upon a collection of older Ksour to which the French added an attractively Beau Geste settlement to support their garrison stationed in the fort overlooking the town and valley. The Draa River winds beside the town and, in very recent years, the completion of a dam a short way upstream, creating a serene lake, has brought a wholly new prosperity based upon agricultural expansion throughout the region.

Overnight in Ouarzazate. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Ouarzazate - Amsouzzert*

This morning we drive about 5 hrs to the Kasbah-like village of Amsouzzert (1740 m / 5740 ft) on the southern flanks of the Jebel Toubkal. The valley of the Draa and the scattered southerly oases are the home of a curious people called the Haratin (also found along much the same latitude across Algeria and are numerous in the Libyan Fezzan.) They are not organized in tribes; they own no hereditary lands, but have traditionally worked the lands of others, sometimes in a form of vassalage. Poverty made them a source of slaves, for it was a charity to buy a distressed person's child (incidentally ensuring its future well-being since slaves were, however menially employed, cared for all their lives).

The Haratin blood group is shared by nobody else in the pre-Sahara -- a fact that has contributed to the suggestion that they represent the survivors of the original population of the desert, those herders of the savannahs and agriculturalists of the age of better weather over all the Saharan desolation. Haratin freemen have, for centuries, monopolized the water-

selling trade in Morocco's cities.

Berbers inhabit most of trans-Atlas Morocco. Peaceful modern conditions have gone some way to break down strict tribal divisions though fractions of various tribes still inhabit this or that area or village. Here and there, Arab tribes settled among the Berbers along with fairly frequent settlements of Sherifian families, usually living in lone ksour. Respect for their holy descent and their baraka (spirit) allowed them to subsist, and sometimes to mediate, among their warring neighbours. There are also small colonies of Jews (who may be native Berbers converted to Judaism in the early centuries of the Christian era). They are usually metalworkers and gunsmiths though some are mountain farmers. The population of the modern townships is often mixed, Haratin usually predominating since they are the least firmly rooted of peoples in the region.

Overnight in Amsouzzart. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Lake Ifni - Trek*

We leave civilization behind and wander into the upland meadows where only shepherds tend their flocks -- we picnic en route. We trek about three hours to the village of Imhilene from where we continue to Lake Ifni (2286 m / 7,544 feet), an exceptionally deep lake with a few scattered shepherd huts on its shores. We will camp at a location just beyond the lake at the foot of the Tizi n'Ouanoums Pass.

Overnight camp. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *The Toubkal Hut*

We now follow a mule trail over the Tizi n'Ouanoums Pass (3777 m / 12,464 feet), with its spectacular views. This is another fairly strenuous day, with about four to five hours hiking and we steadily gain altitude to the to the Toubkal Hut (3180 m / 10,496 feet) along a well-marked trail--mules will carry all the gear. We walk up beautiful river valleys flanked by desert mountains and pass through several small villages. The Toubkal Hut is a simple mountain refuge located in a grand mountain setting. Depending upon our arrival time we will either stay in simple dormitory style accommodation inside the refuge or camp near the hut.

Overnight camp. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Toubkal*

We get an early start for the optional hike to the summit of Toubkal (4143 m / 13,671 feet). It takes four to six hours for a fit hiker to reach the top and stand on the summit of North Africa. The trail is quite steep and strenuous through scree and rocks, and no technical skills are needed. Here we have sweeping views of the desert to the south and the green valleys leading to Marrakech to the north. We descend back to the Toubkal hut. The ascent and descent is a total of approximately nine hours hiking.

Please note: Hikers on the spring trips may well encounter snowfields (snow will be much reduced or absent on autumn trips). The Toubkal climb is optional; those electing not to climb can relax and explore the valley around the Toubkal Hut refuge.

Overnight camp. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Toubkal - Imlil*

this morning we walk down to Imlil in the Atlas Mountains. Imlil, one of the most verdant valleys in the Atlas, with walnut and almond trees and a variety of other crops, is a lively rural community. A few souvenir shops have opened along the main road, but the life of the villages still has a rhythm of its own. In this region, the slopes of the mountains drop away to valleys and streams, and there are often small Berber villages terraced on the valley sides. The houses in these villages are stacked on top of each other, appearing almost as though they have grown out of the rocky slopes. The Berbers in the High Atlas have their own distinct culture and traditions; they are the oldest established inhabitants of Morocco and have never adopted a totally orthodox version of Islam. Their language, Tachelhait, bears no resemblance to the Arabic language, and their music, dance and architecture are unique. Until the 1920s and '30s, the Atlas way of life was essentially feudal, based upon control of the major mountain passes, and their kasbahs were used for the purpose of defending the community. An hour's walk through the villages, where we'll stop for some mint tea in a Berber house, brings us to our campsite at 6,000 feet.

Overnight in Imlil. Accommodation in a simple lodge. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Imlil - Marrakech*

We leave early for our drive to Marrakech--"the Pearl of the South". The city was founded in the 11th century and is one of Morocco's oldest and most beautiful cities. With the mountains of the High Atlas in the distance, the city is replete with pink Moorish-style buildings and gorgeous gardens.

Overnight Marrakech. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Marrakech*

We will explore this mysterious walled city and be overwhelmed by its sights, sounds and smells.

We visit the Saadian Necropolis, lying at the back of the Casbah Mosque, this royal graveyard was discovered in 1917 by Marshal Lyauty's (a French governor) curiosity. The entrance, which does not pass through the mosque, was made for him. For this reason we follow a path round the main construction of the mosque and the high wall built to surround the cemetery by the Saadis. Here in this sunny corner shaded by a few trees and dignified by the two restrained buildings suggests happiness rather than sorrow. The Moorish sense of balance between plain surfaces and decorated, an almost saccharine richness of texture contrasted with flatness--exuberance sternly disciplined; a masterly restraint bending to a deep joy in colour--can be seen here at its most refined.

Late this afternoon, we enjoy the circus of entertainment of Marrakech's famous square, Djemma El Fna--full of snake charmers, fire eaters, and entertainment of every kind, a veritable scene out of The Thousand and One Nights. The name 'Djemma El Fna' probably gets its meaning from the ruins of a mosque shown standing to the west square's end on old sketch maps of the town. Tonight we will enjoy our evening meal looking down over the excitement that takes place here every night.

Overnight in Marrakech. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Depart*

Today we depart from Marrakech.

Meal plan: Breakfast.