


THE MOROCCAN CENTRAL ATLAS VALLEYS AND RANGES

MOUNTAIN, COUNTRY AND VALLEY HIKES

NICE 'N EASY PRIVATE ONE DAY ANY DAY HIKES FROM FES

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY:- GRADE ONE  WALKING MOSTLY ON PATHS AT LOWER LEVELS, SOMETIMES ROCKY, SELDOM FLAT, FOR ABOUT BETWEEN 3-6 HOURS EACH DAY. GOOD TRAINERS WOULD DO, BUT TAKE BOOTS IF YOU ARE USED TO THEM. FOR ANYONE WHO LEADS A REASONABLY ACTIVE LIFE. HIKING ALWAYS INVOLVES SOME EFFORT. CLEARLY THERE ARE MANY DIFFERING FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DIFFICULTY OF A PARTICULAR HIKE, INCLUDING LENGTH OF DAY, TERRAIN, ALTITUDE AND WEATHER CONDITIONS. SINCE THESE FACTORS ARE NECESSARILY VARIABLE, ANY SYSTEM OF GRADES CAN ONLY PROVIDE A GENERAL INDICATION. WE HAVE TRIED TO MAKE OUR SYSTEM AS CLEAR AS POSSIBLE, BUT IT CANNOT ACCOUNT FOR PERSONAL ABILITIES OR EXPERIENCE.

THE MIDDLE ATLAS CEDAR FORESTS

OBTAFES05 6 HOURS' HIKING. Departure from Fes at around **8.30** in the morning for an exciting **2hours'** drive towards the south



and the foothills of the Middle Atlas Ranges After some 30 minutes, we arrive at the small 1920s French-built hill station of Immouzèr Du Kandar (1220m), perched on the limestone edge of the Saïss Plateau. Here we'll pass by the ruined kasbah of the Aït Seghrouchen, its the little medina and troglodyte cave homes, to continue on to Ifrane (1650m). Ifrane, singular "Ifri", is the Tamazight Berber word for grottos. We shall stop for a short visit of this squeaky-clean Moroccan pseudo-Swiss town, with its slanted, russet-tiled roofs hidden amidst a forest of short cedar, which trees cannot grow below 1600m, dominated by a hotel and King Hassan II's Gothic château palace. Ifrane is mainly a winter ski resort – and a summer hideaway for rich Moroccans wishing to escape the hustle and heat of the large cities. We shall then drive up alongside the trailing edge of the Cedar Forest to the first real town in the Middle Atlas - Azrou - which in the local Tamazight Berber dialect means "rock," for, next to the mosque, is the massive outcrop from which this town takes its name. Azrou was for a long time a strategic settlement established even before the advent of the French Colonial regime to effect some form of control of the independent mountain Berber peoples. On Tuesdays there is a Souq to where the Beni M'Guild tribes of the Sanhaya Berber, renowned for their intricately-designed carpet of some 80 knots per square meter, come to trade. This tribe was the first in Morocco to carve figurines from cedar and nut woods, which woods are stored for years prior to carving. In this traditional Amazigh Berber green-tiled roofed market square village we shall start our walk by crossing the Medina to follow the Oued Sebah at the feet of the Adrar Bou Drâa (1500m) up through small stands of silver juniper and evergreen oak growing beside small waterfalls. As we hike higher straight up the slopes - and this is a tough climb for the lesser-fit - the trees become taller and thicker, the sounds of the river and the twittering of the many birds seemingly louder amidst the immense quiet of the massive trunks. We leave these upper valley slopes and, as we hike up to cross the Tizi Tioumliline (1600m), we look down on the pretty town of Azrou and catch sight of the magnificent cedar forest and the distant peaks of the Middle Atlas. An easy walk awaits us as we hike up through a forest of maple, holly, evergreen oak, hawthorn, strawberry and young cedar amidst the shrills of *seasonal migratory* rock dove, blue tits, short-toed tree creepers, Atlas flycatcher, firecrest, finches, warblers and choughs and that hammering of woodpeckers. The shelter provided by these trees gives rise to a seasonal carpet of pink peonies, blue germander, scarlet dianthus and a vibrant variety of orchids, all of which play host, in spring and summer, to a myriad of tortoiseshell and cardinal butterflies. We shall cross a small track and hike up through the thickening belt of the forest, shafts of bright sunlight piercing the vast canopy, to be greeted by the regional Barbary Apes, no real friends of this forest, as they strip off the bark and chew on the rejuvenating budding cones. You may hand-feed these creatures should you wish before we continue on, for about half an hour, to stop for our picnic and build our campfire for a cup of tea amidst these massive red trunks and the delicious odour of their resin. Once refreshed, we'll set out through this impressive forest to reputedly the oldest tree in Morocco's Middle Atlas - Gouraud's Cedar. Surrounded by other trees of the same calibre, this cedar is said to be some 800 years old, though some say the original tree of, some 980 years of age, was felled in the 1900s, yet stands, at 40 metres, the highest tree in Morocco with a girth of some 8 metres, but this, now, is completely dead. Immediately prior to World War I Colonel Gouraud was the second in command to the French regional commander General Lyautey, but why this cedar was named after him is still unclear. We shall now carry on through the cedars to some stands of oak on up to the Tizi Ougmass, where we'll enjoy a panoramic view of the



pisé homes of the Berber village of Igherm Ouadâa and surrounding wooded slopes and valleys, farms and orchards of cherry trees. We go down through fields of wheat, corn and barley to rejoin our vehicle at Azrou around **5** in the evening to take us back to the oldest of all the Imperial Cities.

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: An experienced licensed bi-lingual mountain guide throughout. **Private** round trip transportation Fes - Azrou - Fes. Light field picnic lunch. Medical and Accident Insurance. **FIELD PICNIC LUNCH:** Fresh Moroccan salad, cheese, tuna fish and/or sardines *, fruit, bread, mint tea. * If **vegetarian or vegan** please pre-advise.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: *Accommodation pre & post, nor transfers from/to Fes' airport.* Gratuity to guide and chauffeur. Any expenditure of a personal nature. Bottled or gaseous water, nor anything not specifically mentioned in the itinerary.

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IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU: Walking boots or good high trainers; hat, anorak or windcheater (seasonal); sunscreen, sunglasses; binoculars, cameras and nibbles; filled water bottle. Biscuits to feed the Barbary Apes.