

# THE MOROCCAN VOLCANIC RANGES

## MOUNTAIN COUNTRY HIKES

### ANY DAY DEPARTURES



Lunar landscape, rocky canyons, stony valleys, stark peaks, ruined kasbahs; an area of the Moroccan Mountains slowly becoming better known to serious ramblers. Hours of simply nothing, no trees, no people, but barren, striated mountains, sudden canyons, table volcanic plateaux and rock towers. A year- round wilderness challenge for those seeking something off-the-beaten track to Jbel Saghro, or Sarhro – the 'Dry Mountain'.

#### LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY:-GRADE TWO TO THREE



BETWEEN MODERATE AND SOMETIME STRENUOUS. GOOD BOOTS ESSENTIAL. YOU NEED TO BE REASONABLY CONFIDENT OF YOUR FITNESS AND ENDURANCE LEVELS, PREFERABLY HAVING HAD PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE OF TREKKING ON EASY ANGLED SLOPES AND AN OCCASIONAL DIFFICULT DAY WITH VARIATIONS OF CLIMATE. SUPPORT TEAM. PĒRHAPS BEST VISITED BETWEEN **OCTOBER TO MID-JUNE** AS THE LATER SUMMER MONTHS COULD BE TOO HOT FOR SOME AND RUNNING WATER IS SCARCE. 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.

## MOROCCO'S 'BADLANDS' - THE VOLCANIC JBEL SARHRO REGION

### NO SUMMIT CLIMB

6DAYS/5 NIGHTS    OBTD502m

**DAY 1: MARRAKECH - OUARZAZATE - DADES VALLEY - AÏT YOUL.** Departure at around 8 o'clock from your hotel or riad



across the Haouz Plain and an exhilarating drive up the twisting bends of the road over the Western High Atlas of the Glaoua Country, passing through the Berber villages of Aït Barqa and Taddert, up through the spectacular Tizi n'Tichka (2260m) - and hold on to your hats, for the winding road takes us through the highest mountain pass in Morocco - then gently down alongside the Assif Imini, through the 'Beau Geste' city of Ouarzazate and a stop for our picnic lunch in a small restaurant just outside of the city. We now set off towards the east towards (Qlâa't) El Kelaât des M'gouna - "The Village Of The Rose" in English - and the beautiful, harsh and dramatic gorge of the Dadès Valley. On our way through this magnificent Valley, the "Valley of the Roses", through lands once trodden by Alexander the Great and his invading armies, we travel along what is a vast flood plain whose southern horizon is blocked by the sun-blasted Anti Atlas Mountains and to the north by the jagged High Atlas mountain ranges. On the edges of the verdant palmeraie of Skoura, one-time capital of Moulay Ismaïl, the nearby river reflecting the intense blue of the sky, the brilliant green of the palmeraies and the red earth, we shall stop to photograph one of two magnificent kasbahs of singular beauty ('kasbah' translates to 'tighernit' in the language of the Berber) - Amerhidl - surrounded by rose bushes (and whose image is to found printed on the current 50 dirham bank note). Continuing along further east we come face to face with an imposing set of kasbahs blending harmoniously with the environment, yet all in various stages of ruin, all shouting out their last defiant cries against the eroding desert winds. 20kms further on we enter the valley full of rose bush plantations and palmeraies, magnificent Berber villages and more kasbahs, the Jbel Saghro (2332m) - the last high rocky barrier before the Moroccan Hamada - to our right, Jbel M'Goun (4071m) - the second highest peak in the Maghreb to our left - until we reach the large village of (Qlâa't) El Kelaât des M'gouna (1433m), where roses are grown to be sold and their essences distilled to make the rose water so favoured by the Berber people. From here we carry on to the Berber village of Aït Youl where, after a total of some 7 hours driving with photo-ops, we shall spend the night in a Berber House and dine midst the bare brown and purple surrounds of the Kasbah n'Aït Youl, the not-too-distant gaunt broken black-red volcanic peaks and limestone pinnacles of Jbel Sarhro as a background. **LD.**



**DAY 2: AÏT YOUL - ANO N'IGHDAD.** A Berber breakfast amidst the cliffs and our 6 hour hike south along the Ouamane n'Ighdad



and across the Ououchene Plateau to the Assif lmi n'Ououchene, which we shall follow across the stark, arid plain, dotted with the sand-blasted hills, the occasional isolated almond tree and, with luck, to see some small herds of Edmi gazelle or Addax antelope, until we arrive at a small well in the semi-desert where we shall stop after our steady 3 hour hike for our field picnic. From here we continue south-wards near strangely-shaped, naked, colourful cliffs until we come to the middle of nowhere region known as Aqqa Agoulzi n'Oughioul and the surprise of small fields of Ano Ighdad (Ano in Berber means "well"), where we shall stop for our overnight dinner and bivouac. This area is known by nature- lovers for its seasonal sand grouse, desert lark, eagle owl, courser and falcon. **BLD.**



**DAY 3: ANO N'IGHDAD - ANO N'ELMERSSE - TAGMOUT - ASSAKA N'AÏT OUAZZINE.** Breakfast tucked away and camp



struck we set off on today's 6hour hike on by the oued and up to the sand-blasted Tizi n'Elmersse (1500m) to descend to the Assif n'Elmersse, back up to the desolate Elmersse Plateau passing by the well and little palmeraie at Ano n'Elmersse, on down these stony and wild slopes to traverse the Tizi n'Tagmout (1624m) to carry on down past the copper mines at Tagmout to the Tagmout Plateau where we shall stop for our field picnic. On now to the east through the increasingly desolate area alongside the escarpments of Adrar Amgroud (2260m) to the Berber hamlet of Assaka n'Aït Ouazzine, where, at 1584m, we stop for the night for our welcome dinner and bivouac site set near fields of corn, barley and stands of Barbary fig and almond trees. A gentle

reminder, it gets cold at nights in the winter months in this almost lunar landscape of sun-blasted, volcanic tableland, so please be prepared. **BLD.**



**DAY 4: ASSAKA N'AÏT OUAZZINE - TAJALAJT - TIFDOUSSINE.** After a leisurely breakfast, we strike out up along the dry river



bed between glass-like rocks and boulders, on through the remote hamlets of Akerkour, Berqiq and then of Tigniza (not to be found on any topographical map), through pastureland and the occasional rock hut of the Aït Attar tribe of nomadic shepherds and up to the village of Tajalajt (1332m) for our field picnic. We're off again, now to trek along the dry river bed to pass near Maghabout Moulay Houssine and up the Tassghdelte n'Ssi El Haj Plateau to the isolated hamlet of Tifdoussine for our dinner and overnight bivouac in an awesome silence amidst clumps of broom, gorse and thyme This region belongs to the fiercely-independent, semi-nomadic Aït Atta Berber tribe of shepherds, scratch farmers and fodder-gatherers who herd their sheep and goats to unplotted wells and isolated, hidden pastures, taking with them on camelback their black felt

and goatskin tents. **BLD.**



**DAY 5: TIFDOUSSINE - HAMDOUR VALLEY - HAMDOUR - N'KOOB:** Our final breakfast in this remarkable and relatively still-



untreked region before striking off for 2 hours down the Tifdoussine Valley to picnic en-route at the crossroads of this valley and that of Hamdour in a small palmeraie (oasis) amidst stands of henna trees. It is here that most of the henna, so beloved by Moroccan women to line their eyes and paint fascinating designs on the hands, feet and ankles. On now through the Tizi n'Hamdour offering yet another awesome panoramic view of the surrounds and down to the village of Hamdour, thence on down further south alongside the N'Koob River, through small palmeraias and rocky escarpments to arrive in the late afternoon at our bivouac site for this final night in the Valley of N'Koob next to the oasis and fields of henna. Whilst our evening meal is being prepared, we may visit the nearby old kasbah of N'Koob. **BLD.**



**DAY 6: N'KOOB - OUARZAZATE - KSAR AIT BEN HADDOU - MARRAKECH:** This morning, after breakfast, we board our



vehicle at **07:30** to take us west alongside the Oued Ousraï to the village of Tansikht, here to join the Drâa Valley north via Agdz and its kasbah, over the sinuous Tizi n'Tiniffit to Ouarzazate, here to visit the nearby kasbah Taourirt of the former caïd (meaning "master" or "leader,") and later the possession of El Haj T'hami el Mezouari el Glaoui (1879-1956), the last ruling family of the south (the 'Lord of the Atlas') and a strong contender for control over Morocco who had this palace built in Ouarzazate - but never lived there. Once Pasha of Marrakech from 1912 to 1956, he allied himself to the French in Morocco during the Protectorate and conspired with them in the overthrow of the king Sultan Mohammed V, grandfather of the actual king of Morocco. Until the second half of the 20th century, Moroccan society was in a state of feudalism very close to that which pertained in Europe during medieval times. At the top was the sultan, who held the two positions of king (temporal ruler) and imam (spiritual leader). His court, or central government (Makhzen), was headed by a Grand Vizier. The next tier of government was provided by a large number of Pashas (from the Persian *padshah*, literally: Viceroy and caïds (the equivalent of European dukes, barons etc) whose responsibilities were to collect taxes and keep order, to which ends they often kept private armies. Under them were the mass of ordinary commoners whose responsibilities were to pay taxes, obey their local master and provide him with troops when necessary. In the autumn of 1893, the then ruling Sultan Moulay Hassan and his army were crossing the High Atlas

Mountains after a tax-gathering expedition when they were caught in a blizzard. They were rescued by Si Madani and T'hami and the grateful Sultan bestowed on Si Madani *caïdats* from Tafilalet to the Souss Valleys. In addition, he presented the Glaoua arsenal with a working 77-mm Krupp cannon, the only such weapon in Morocco outside the imperial army, which the Glaoua army used to subdue rival warlords and which is located still outside the kasbah's walls. We now set forth towards the north alongside the Oued Ouarzazate via the Assif Ounila Valley to the magnificently exotic Kasbah and Ksour of Aït Ben Haddou, declared, and rightly so, a World Heritage Site. Here we alight from our vehicle to visit these various kasbahs, so closely-knit that they appear to be but one complete building, backed up against the looming mountain in a stretch of unforgiving Hamada. The thick, high, sheer, elaborately decorated pisé walls, stepped-up housing, turreted, crenulated ramparts, and balustrades and arched 'babs' are a sight not to be missed. One of the more spectacular sights in the Atlas ranges, set upon a rock above a reed-strewn assif, commanding the area for miles around, this kasbah controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s. We shall take a light lunch at the Riad Dar Mouna on the opposite side of the oued offering a magnificent view of the kasbah and surrounding area before continuing on up into the High Atlas Mountains and the exhilarating hairpin bends to alight at the top of the Tizi n'Tichka (2260m) for lunch with a vista dominated by peaks of some 2500+m. Onwards, now, via Aït Ourir Taddert (1650m) and down across the Glaoua Plains to our hotel in Marrakech arriving there in the late afternoon and the end of a rare and fascinating journey into Morocco's Badlands. **BL.**

**OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE:** Private round trip transportation from your hotel or riad in Marrakech to trailheads and return to the hotel or riad or airport in Marrakech. An experienced English-speaking licensed mountain guide throughout. Tents and undermats; cook and equipment; all meals and accommodation as detailed; mules and muleteer/cook. Medical and Accident Insurance. Clients are always requested to check their own personal travel insurance to see if any adrenaline activities are precluded.

**OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE:** Accommodation pre & post, nor transfers from/to Marrakech's' airport. Gratuities to guide/cook/muleteers. Personal gear. 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:** Stout mountain walking boots; change of socks, sleeping bag (3-4 seasons); rucksack, windcheater or duvet jacket (seasonal); lip balm; LED head lamp or torch with batteries (optional); earmuffs, ski cap or balaclava, slickers, thermal underwear, gloves (all seasonal Nov-Apr); filled water bottle (bottled water or water purification drops - usually iodine); rambler pole(s); penknife - do not pack in hand baggage for flights; personal toiletries and towels; hygienic 'Wipes'; insect repellent; sunscreen, nibbles (muesli or dried fruit) drinking chocolate if preferred. Extra toilet rolls and a trowel would come in quite handy.

N.B: Meals during the hike are normally:-  
Breakfast - mint tea, coffee, chocolate powder, milk, bread, butter, jam, cheese, cereals.  
Picnic lunch - fresh Moroccan salad, cheese, tinned tuna fish\*, mint tea, bread.  
Dinner - Tagine (chicken or mutton\*), couscous or spaghetti rotated according to the duration of the trek; bread, coffee, mint tea, cake, fruit. \* Those vegetarians or vegans amongst us need to pre-advise at time of reservation.

