


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 FLAT TRACKS WITH SOME GRADIENTS FOR ABOUT 5-6 HOURS EACH DAY. BOOTS ARE RECOMMENDED. 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.

OF CLIFFS, PLATEAU AND VALLEY OF THE APES

OBT FES06 5 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). Here we may pause for a few minutes by the kasbah for a look at the little medina and take in the pleasant Saiss Plateau and distant Fes, continuing on to the squeaky-clean Moroccan pseudo-Swiss town of Ifrane (1650m), with its slanted, russet-tiled roofs hidden amidst a forest of cedar, which cannot grow below 1600m. 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 now drive through to the first real town in the central 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 - was for a long time a strategic settlement established to effect some form of control of the independent mountain Berber peoples. On Tuesdays there is a Souq where the Beni M'Guild tribes come to trade. This particular tribe is renowned for its intricately-designed carpets. From here we continue up along a winding road to a small holiday camp from whence we set out on our moderately-easy 45 minute climb straight up through stands of evergreen holm oak, cork and juniper, passing over limestone boulders and shale until we reach some 1600m where we shall find the stands of young cedar trees alongside coves and little gorges, to the summit cliffs of Ras Kharzouza (1900m), where we shall stop on a ridge for our picnic, overlooking the verdant Tigrigra Valley, Azrou and the important Amazigh village of Aïn Leuh, with its ruined kasbah and flat-roofed houses in tiers overlooking the valley. When ready, we descend gently down the southern side of the mountain through stands of age-old cedar along a plateau scattered with seasonal peonies, asphodels, poppies and daisies, the rat-a-tat-tat of the green woodpecker, the cheep of wagtails, the trilling of the red-billed blackbird and the caw of the yellow-billed jackdaw breaking the silence. The cool shade of these species of *Cedrus Atlantica Manetti* intermingled with its cousin the juniper; holly and bracken ferns, fir trees, thyme and wheatgrass, the forest floor springy and soft to our feet, all contribute to a wonderful walk through an ecosystem now jealously protected. We may pass by the tents of the semi-nomadic Berber Essehb tribe of shepherds set amidst stands of hawthorn, holly, Montpellier maple and giant conifer as we cross the Valley of the Apes, where we'll get to see and possibly feed the Barbary (macaque) apes - *macaca sylvanus* - which patrol this area. These troops of multimale, multifemale primates feed on more than 2000 different plants and gorge themselves on the budding cones during spring. We continue on through the cedar forest until we reach reputedly the oldest tree in Morocco's Middle Atlas - Gouraud's Cedar - and quite dead! Surrounded by other trees of almost 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 still stands 40 metres high and has a girth of some 8 metres, though it is now almost 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. After some 14kms of splendid walking and remarkable photo-ops, we rejoin our awaiting minibus at around 4.30 in the evening to take us back to the Imperial City of Fes.

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

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; hats, rambler pole (optional); anorak or windcheater (seasonal); sunscreen, sunglasses; binoculars, camera, nibbles; filled water bottle; biscuits to feed the Barbary Apes.