



## Trek to the Mgoun Massif Morocco – August 2008

### Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> Aug

#### Day 1

Having arrived home late from my family holiday in Cornwall on the Saturday I switch on my computer to pick up my email. I have an email from Richard informing me he will pick me up at 8:30 am. Fortunately I had packed all my trekking gear 2 weeks earlier before I went away.

Spot on 8:30 am, Richard arrives and we only just manage to get my gear on board. I am concerned that I can only see Sue, Amanda and John in the car and ask what has happened to Martin when suddenly his head pops up amongst the pile of bags in the back of the car! He is virtually buried. We have an uneventful drive to Gatwick apart from being cut up badly by a baggage trolley driver.



We take a few pictures outside the airport to commemorate Joggy Bears 1<sup>st</sup> overseas trip before checking in. We are early as our flight is not until 1:00 pm and the team have breakfast before going through to the departure lounge. We eventually board and commence our 3 hour flight into Marrakech. The route takes us directly over the island of Jersey which I recognise having holidayed their many times. We then fly down the coast of Portugal and cross into North Africa and

are soon landing. We meet Aziz, our guide and head off to our hotel. The hotel is basic but adequate for our needs as we were only there for the one night before moving on. After a wash and brush up it was down to reception to meet the rest of the trekkers and get a brief from Aziz. There are 16 of us booked on the trek that we are to get to know well over the next few days. Following the briefing we head off by foot into the centre of Marrakech for a quick look round and dinner.

Well what can you say about Marrakech? I have never seen anything like it, absolute madness, the noise, smoke, snake charmers, acrobats, water sellers and much much more. We pass the 12<sup>th</sup> century Mosque and are informed it holds 80,000 people! And crossing the road, we are told it is best to close you eyes and just walk, the cars will drive round you. It works, ask Martin. Eventually we arrive at a restaurant and sample our 1<sup>st</sup> mint tea of the holiday, the food is OK and we eventually wander back to the hotel and prepare for our early start on Monday.



## Monday 18<sup>th</sup> Aug

### Day 2

We leave the bustle of Marrakech in 3 robust 4x4s on route to Imelghas where we will stay the night in a Gite before starting our trek on Tuesday. Our route takes us via Azilal where we stop for a short break. Before reaching Azilal we pass a very sad and distressing accident. It appeared that a woman carrying a child had been involved in traffic accident, I only saw the woman lying in the road but others saw the covered body of the child. Very sad indeed. Shortly after leaving Azilal my driver (I am in a different 4x4 to the rest of the joggers) pulls over and puts a back brace on. I stupidly feel sorry for him thinking he has a bad back, but no, he is just preparing for the considerable deterioration in the road surface that is about to come.

A little later we pull off the road by a small stream for a picnic. At this point the 4x4 that Richard and Sue are in miss the turning and go missing for 20 minutes before eventually turning back and finding us but not before we have to send out another car to look for them. Unfortunately the car that goes looking for them goes in the wrong direction. Eventually we are all back together and enjoy our picnic by the stream. It sounds very idyllic and it



was but the poverty was becoming apparent as we moved further into the foothills of the High Atlas. Just up stream of us was a small family knocking seven bells out of their washing and drying it on the rocks. Things do not take long to dry out here as we were soon to find out.



We continue our journey into Imelghas and now the roads are just dust, Amanda is grateful to be sitting in the middle seat so that she could not see the shear drops that we were getting very close to as we wound our way up various hair pin bends.

We arrive at the Gite and take all our gear inside and say goodbye to our drivers. If we thought the hotel was basic then the Gite was even more basic. It did however have cold showers that were free, or apparently so. For a payment of 10 Dirham you could have a hot shower. I had a cold shower but the proprietor still wanted payment. There were two showers and Sue and Richards had just got themselves covered in soap when he turned the water off! Funny to see Sue wrapped in a towel and covered in soap complaining to have the water put back on.

Before supper Mohamed takes us for a tour of the village. Mohamed was Aziz' assistant and would be tail end Charlie on our trek to ensure no one got left behind. (Some of us got to know him very well in the days to come). Towards the end of the walk around the village we came across a large group of youngsters playing football. Some idiot suggested we muster up a team and give them a game. After a quick debate we decided we can make up a team of 9 from the trekkers. The idiot (me) then walks onto the pitch and throws down the challenge, England via Morocco 1<sup>st</sup> to 3 goals. We get off to a flyer and go 2 goals up and are coasting but in true English fashion throw our lead away when we concede 2 quick goals. A tense finish sees us win the match 3-2. Ware Joggers made up one third of the team with me Richard and our hero Martin who scored 2 of our 3 goals. That night many of us slept under the stars on the roof of the Gite. I did not have the best of nights what with barking dogs, cockerels and local women having a row, not to mention the local Mosque bellowing out at 5 in the morning. One other strange sight to mention was that most of the mud clad houses had satellite television dishes. We were later to find out that this village was one of the most affluent in the whole High Atlas due to the constant supply of water that they are blessed with. This enables them to grow apples which are very expensive in Morocco.

## **Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> Aug**

### **Day 3**

We are up early and place all our overnight gear outside for our 10 mules to transport onto our 1st wild camp site. We are advised we would not be able to get mineral water for 3 days and would need to take a minimum of 9 litres with us unless we were drinking treated water. Of the 6 jogger only John drank treated water. So we were off. Before leaving we are each issued with one roll of toilet paper and a lighter. The toilet paper is for obvious reasons and the lighters were to burn the soiled paper. Have I managed to put you off yet?



We begin by crossing the fertile Bou Goumez Valley and friendly Berber farmers. Leaving the valley we ascend Jebel Tafenfent to 2,513m then follow an undulating path through a forest of old Holm Oak trees before we arrive at our wild camp in the valley of alt Bouilli. Sounds easy but believe me it was not. I was so shattered at the end of the day that I had to lay down for over an hour before I could muster enough energy to assist in putting the tents up. We became very strung out on what was a 12 hour trek of which we were walking for 10 hours. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> and last to arrive at camp spanned nearly an hour. I had become ill with Deli Belly on route and I think it was this that drained me so badly.

I continued to suffer for the remainder of the trek as did Martin, Amanda and Richard. We renamed this complaint "Atlas Arse" or AA for short. I can't remember much more about this day apart from one incident I am told I must not leave out of this story. Having had one of my numerous toilet breaks I accidentally set fire to a bush, these bushes contain some sort of oil and quickly develops into a large fire. Mohamed runs back and puts the fire out with his bottled water. I am more careful in future.....

We also catch our one and only view of a Golden Eagle soaring high above on this day.

John and I are sharing a tent and John again decides to sleep under the stars leaving me with the tent to myself.

### **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> Aug**

#### **Day 4**

We leave the Alt Bouilli valley and head South-East up along a river towards Rhougelt village where we stop for mint tea in one of the villagers houses. This is another long day and Martin and Amanda are suffering today with the dreaded AA. Martin is also starting to develop some horrid blisters. We eventually arrive at camp and look forward to the short day we are promised tomorrow. This camp site was particularly spectacular as we camp under Juniper trees with yet more amazing views.

### **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> Aug**

#### **Day 5**

We continue our ascent up to the Tarkeddid plateau at 2900m. This was a really enjoyable day as not only were the views spectacular but we were only on our feet for about 6 hours. On arrival our muleteers had already pitched out tents and we were able to laze around the refuge and purchase coke and more water.

There were also toilets and showers available. We were the only group camping at the refuge apart from a couple camping a few hundred metres away down by the stream. We did not know at the time but Mohamed went down and told them to move their tent as they were camped on the flood plain and flash floods were very common. They wisely re-pitched their tent a few metres up the slope. Within an hour of arriving it came, the 1<sup>st</sup> rain we had seen, actually it was mostly large hail and we all scattered for our tents. Little did John and I know what was going on outside our tent as we sheltered for about 30 minutes. A new stream had developed and was running directly through a number of our tents. The muleteers were out in force trying to build dams and re-direct the flow, away from the tents. Eventually the rain stopped and the stream in the valley where the couple were camped had increased from less than 2 feet wide to around 40 feet. The couple re-camped a second time! Within hours the stream was back to its original level, just as well as we were due to cross it next morning in the dark.



## Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug

### Day 6

Yesterday's short day was to enable us to prepare ourselves for the attempt on the summit today. We were warned that this would be a hard day walking for over an hour in darkness with head torches and climbing for 5 hours a total of nearly 1,100 metres to the summit at 4,068 meters. This would then be followed by a 5 hour descent. An option of circumnavigating the summit and following the muleteers was also on offer, This was by no means an easy option as anyone choosing this route would need to keep up with mules. Martin, Amanda and Richard who were all suffering with AA and blisters, chose the later option and waved the rest of us off in the early hours.

We started off at an ultra slow pace as we steadily climbed off the plateau and began the ascent. We were warned that we would experience a significant temperature drop and they were not kidding. Gloves, woolly hats, fleeces and waterproofs were the order of the day. Prior to this it had been shirtsleeves and shorts all the way.



Eventually we reach a huge crater where the path has been cut into the slope. Not a place to be if you suffer from vertigo and one of the girls in our party gets really spooked by this section. She soon gets over this once we arrive at the ridge. Now it gets really cold as the wind sweeps across the ridge.



The views are now breathtaking and the gentle climb along the ridge to the summit takes us another 2 hours. Up until this point we have only met 2 other trekkers in the 4 days we have been in the mountains. Trekkers are appearing in numbers for the first time. However, when we reach the summit we have the place to ourselves. A couple do turn up shortly after us and take some photographs of the group for us.



We then start our descent which is to be 1,600 metres.

We shortly arrive at a very steep and long scree slope that we had been warned about. Aziz our guide had told us we could go Moroccan style skiing down the slope if we wished. A few of us did and I got to the bottom in hysterics it was so much fun. Not everyone's idea of fun however and one or two have to be helped down the slope by the guides. The group now split up as we travelled at various paces back to camp. Then the rain started in the mid afternoon but was not a



problem as we were back in the Moroccan heat again and soon dried out. With about an hours walking remaining to camp Sue and I became isolated from the rest of the group. We ambled back into camp at our own speed admiring the spectacle that surrounded us. Richard, Martin and Amanda were already in camp and were there to give us a really warm welcome.

Their day had by no means been an easy option as the pace set by the muleteers was relentless and they had to keep up as they had no guide.

That night we were treated to a special meal. I should point out that our meals had been excellent all through the trek but today was even better. This was followed by fruit salad and camomile tea. I can't remember which day it was that the chef cooked doughnuts but these were fabulous and as Martin was unwell on this day and John had fallen asleep in the tent I ate their share, delicious.

Nearby to the camp site was a nomad school, this was no more than a tent and Sean (fellow Trekker) and I left a few packs of pens with them that we had taken with us as gifts for the children.

As this was our last day at camp we took a few picture of the entire group and handed over the monies we had collected as a tip for the muleteers and the chef. John Butch, as our elder statesman, was called upon to make the speech with Aziz doing the interpreting into their native Berber language. John gave a great speech but Aziz struggled with interpreting the phrase "and the girls really appreciate the giant todger of the white mule". We eventually got the meaning over and they thought this was really amusing. I do not think they had met anyone quite like John before!

## **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug**

### **Day 7**

After breaking camp for the last time we walk down a river bed to the valley of Amougr before we start zig zagging up to the pass of Alt Imi at 2,900 metres. We then start the descent back to the Gite in the Bou Gourmez valley. Another long day and we stop for a picnic in the grounds of the chef's orchard. It starts to rain but only for a brief spell.



We then spend an hour or so in a market village where a few souvenirs and gifts are purchased

We finally arrive back at the Gite late afternoon, exhausted but really pleased with our efforts. Mohamed cooks in the Gite and we actually had chips plus the usual goat and an array of salads.

We were afraid that the local children would be waiting for a re-match of our football match but fortunately for us they were not. We would not have been able to put up much opposition the state of tiredness we were all in.

After a well earned (and required) shower a few of us played cards before turning in for the night. A few of us again slept on the roof and this time no number of wild dogs or cockerels could keep me awake.

## **Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> Aug**

### **Day 8**

We make an early start and re-join our 4x4s on the long journey back to Marrakech. The 6 joggers are all in the same 4x4 this time. We again stop in Azilal and go into the market to purchase a few bits for lunch. Freshly baked bread from the bakers, lots of fruit and a few crisps are just the job.

We then move on to the cascades at d'Ouzoud to eat our lunch. It is a long walk down but is worth the effort. The walk back up is really hot and we make several stops to catch our breath.



We eventually get back to the hotel and see everything in a different light to that of a week back. The hotel now appears the lap of luxury and before long most of us were in or around the pool drinking cold soft drinks. (no beer in the hotel).

The rest of the day is left free for us to explore the vibrant city of Marrakech which like many North African cities is divided into two distinct parts, the Gueliz (or modern French built city) and the Medina, the old city. That evening the 6 of us walk the short distance to where some pony and traps are for hire. We try to negotiate the price for a 1 hour ride around Marrakech that would leave us by the town square. After much bartering we settle on a price and set off. We encounter our only piece of road rage as our driver curses everyone that comes near us. After an hour we have had enough and get out near the square and each go our own way to buy gifts and get fleeced in the Souks. We have arranged to meet back at 8:15 pm. I really enjoyed walking about alone and bartering for various bits and pieces. However, I was no match for the traders and am sure I, like many others was well and truly done up like a kipper. We eventually get back together and trade stories before again bartering for 2 cabs to get us back to the hotel. We fail to negotiate a non rip off price and start to walk when a cabby approaches as and offers us a lift in a "Grand" cab that will carry us all for a reasonable fare. We agree and follow him to what is no more than a large car (an old merc I think). 3 in the front and 4 in back is very cosy but it is only for 5 minutes. We drop of all our gifts and souvenirs and head out for dinner. The 1<sup>st</sup> restaurant we try does not sell alcohol so we move on and we eventually find a very nice restaurant that does and settle down for what was a fabulous meal followed by pancakes or ice cream. We were very proud that by the time we left the restaurant, in true joggers fashion, we had drunk them dry of all the beer they had.

**Monday 25<sup>th</sup> Aug**  
**Day 9**

An early breakfast at 6:00 am as our flight was at 8:36 am. Then off to the airport for our flight home. Our trip home is uneventful and we are soon all back home safely.

It has to be said that most of us found this a really strenuous trek but as 4 of us were new to trekking we had no means of comparing it to anything. John did say it was the hardest trek he had ever done and Sue said it was more difficult than her previous trek in the Himalayas.

For me this was the trip of a life time, I have never experienced anything like it, Marrakech, the Berber people, the incredible sights and the sheer physical exhaustion.

I will defiantly be back for more next year, where are we going?

PS we had a little wager on the way home as to what was the collective weight loss by the six of us who were on the trip. After everyone reported back the week after our return I can report a total weight loss of 51 pound, amazing....

PSS there were numerous other stories I could have included in this report but un-fortunately the censors have told me to remove them

