

## 15.10.2016 Desert track Foum Zguid

Right at the beginning of our trip we discover a plant we have never seen before. The *Oscher* or *Calotropis procera* belongs to the species of the milkweeds. The large and round fruit (‘Apple of Sodom’) is mainly filled with air and contains the seeds. The milky exudation of the plant is toxic and can be blinding! Therefore cattle and other animals stay away from this plant, it’s not tasty anyways. Timber and bark were used by the nomads in many different ways. Where this bush grows water can be found, if not underground.



We drive through spectacular desert landscape, but on the track to Erg Chegaga we have back wind and our own dust cloud is overtaking us, forcing us to close the windows each time in a hurry.

At the horizon, again a caravan appears... How strange that the Bedouins rather walk next to the dromedaries instead of riding them.



We leave the dunes of the Erg Chegaga behind us and reach the salt-clay-plains of Lake Iriki. Here in the middle of nowhere are a few coffee shops and even a guest house. We have a coffee at the Café Titanic (sic!) – look at the ship shape of the café – but we only get instant coffee for a multiple of the usual price...

Afterwards we are lucky to come across a large herd of dromedaries.



We find a spot for the night between pretty sand dunes, relax in our chairs and think, so far from any civilization surely today no-one will pass by our camp site anymore. We almost didn't finish this sentence as a Bedouin is coming around the dune on his Docker motorbike. (Docker are made in China motorbikes and hugely popular in Morocco). He even speaks a few words English and starts to compare his pair of binoculars with ours, then his curiosity is stilled and he drives off towards his herd of dromedaries grazing at the horizon. For us there is a nice, bug free evening with full moon to enjoy.



## 16.10.2016 Foug Zguid

We pass through 'mocha' colored landscape on our way towards Foug Zguid, when suddenly Mrs. Marple und Sherlock Holmes identify clear traces of life in the desert...



At the next military check point they do not allow us to turn further South (towards the Algerian border) to circumvent a mountain range, but they point us North. Maybe our original track leads to close to the border as the relationship between Morocco and Algeria is constrained due to border disputes, the Western Sahara land conflict and more.

Soon we reach the famous Paris Dakar Rallye track which is marked with dug up heaps of soil. For approx. 25 km we follow this track, which is due to security concerns not used for the Paris Dakar rallye anymore. Funnily the Paris Dakar rallye is now taking place in South America. However, we may have not quite reached the same speed as the rallye cars used to do on this very rough track ;-)



Altogether we have to pass four military check points and slowly we are running of 'fiches'...



At the fourth check point we meet for the first-time other expedition trucks. Quite a mixed group with an Unimog, Range Rover, old Mercedes 4x4 truck and a Iveco are waiting across of the barrier.

In time for coffee we reach Foug Zguid and can refresh with a coffee and freshly squeezed orange juice from the badly corrugated track. We do not want to drive far anymore and choose the Bab Rimal camp site which even has a large swimming pool. The water is really cold and more than refreshing, but washes off all the dust we have accumulated over the last few days in the desert nicely.

Somehow, we are not so lucky, a large group of Spaniards arrive at the Hotel and they have a noisy party till well after midnight again right behind our car.



### 17.10.2016 Foug Zguid

Today we have a day off, stay at the pool, read and relax. We meet Maura and Mo from Italy/Netherlands who travel with their Magirus Deutz truck through Morocco. At noon, luckily the noisy Spaniards depart, but are soon followed by a group of French 4x4 travelers. This place has a big advantage being located so close to the beginning respective end of a long desert track.



**18.10.2016 Anti Atlas mountains, shortly before Issil**

The day starts with a power outage in the entire village and we cannot fill up our water tank anymore, as the water pump is not working. At the coffee shop in town, we cannot neither get coffee nor Wifi. So we go grocery shopping at the many different stalls, even an Everthing-made-in-China-Market has been set up at a street corner.



It is time now for the mountains and we take a track leading into the Anti Atlas. The landscape at the beginning of the gorge is impressive, even although the weather is rather muggy. The rock formations do look like marble cake dough...



Progressing further the track is becoming more and more narrow, we are passing through a village and cannot believe that this is supposed to be the track. Our heart beat is rising on several occasions, narrowly passing through houses, palm trees and cables by centimeters. The palm leaves are leaving bad scratches all along our truck.





As usual, kids come running, following us begging and this time we can't escape quickly as we have to move very slowly on these narrow tracks. We follow long, narrow serpentine with sharp 180 degree turns and the children who are climbing up the mountain in a straight line are much faster than us. They are following us for many turns...

The track is getting so narrow, steep and angled, with vertical drops of more than 200m that half of the travel group gets so scared that they prefer to walk behind the Unimog rather than sit in it leaning over the edge. As Werner can only move at maximum walking speed anyways everybody can easily follow on foot...



The track is so bad a dangerous, that that we need a full day driving instead of the assumed half day. Lastly, we take a wrong turn and are not sure about the track out as we hear a loud hissing sound.

Oh no, a flat tire! We have to change the back left tire!

We see that we are stuck before a dead-end village, Dewi is walking into the village to ask for the way, while Werner gets the gear out, but the villagers have probably very rarely contact to foreigners and hide rather than surrounding us watching or begging. This is first time we experienced such a behavior in Morocco, which is very unusual. Probably they thought the aliens have finally arrived with a UFO to get them. They inform us, that the road indeed ends here which means we have to drive back.



As we have trained changing tires at home we manage to change the 180 kg tire rather swiftly. But we do not stand on exactly even ground therefore have problems to get the flat tire up on the mountings on the back of the truck. We have to maneuver the Unimog around to get him in the right position and the tire in the right angle to fit it back on. With our last strength, we finally manage to get it back on, just before dark. As it is dark now we decide to stay here for the night, to be on those tracks in the dark would be close to suicide.

At about 8 pm we hear voices and people are walking around car, someone is calling „Madame?“. We first think, they do not want us to stay here for the night. We open the door and two men are offering us freshly baked pita bread wrapped in a cloth and still warm. We have expected anything, but not this. One of the two guys is the one Dewi had previously asked for the way out... They must have watched our 3 hours tire change ordeal and realized that we have problems with the truck. Now they have



walked up to us for 400m in the pitch dark to give us bread. We are totally impressed by such a warm hospitality especially by probably some of the poorest people in this country. They live off just a few goats, with no running water, no electricity and hardly any chance to grow any food as it is too dry, but still they give from the little they have. Luckily we can give them something in return, as we have bought a large pack of sugar cubes for exactly such occasions.

Well, the day started with a power outage...

## 19.10.2016 Taznakht

This morning we still have to climb over two more mountain passes until we are rewarded with a great view over the flats of Issil. Phew, we are really looking forward to be out of these mountains and off this really bad track soon.



We have to cross this flat, with the village of Issil located in the centre of it, then we have to find the right turn to Taznakht and the right road. The few signs are only in Arabic. However, soon we are on tarred road.

Luckily at the entrance to the town of Taznakht we discover a tire repair shop and try our luck. The tire has a 17 cm long cut to the side wall and is actually a total write off. However we can't afford and risk to continue our journey without a spare tire. Our tire dimensions are unfortunately so special that a replacement is not available in the entire country and must be ordered. We fit a tube into the originally tubeless tire and let them vulcanize two large patches onto the cut. Luckily for such emergencies we carry an inner tube fitting of our tire size. Let's hope that this patched up one will last long enough in an emergency to get us back to civilization where we find help.





As we are parked up in front of the tire repair shop the carpet seller from opposite the road comes over and starts talking to us in fluent German. What does he want? He is begging for booze! Finally we give him a can of beer just to get rid of him. His solution for not being able to walk around with a beer can in his hand: He is hiding the can in the hood of his traditional Berber gown. His movement was so smooth, he hasn't done this for the first time. It looks like his hood has smuggled already a few liters of booze.



In Taznakht we park at the large parking lot just in front of the police station. Here we are allowed to stay overnight. During the evening one after the other large container truck arrives parking all over the place, in the end we are surrounded by more than 30 trucks. It seems they also feel safest just in front of the police.



## 20.10.2016 Ouarzazate



Being surrounded by so many trucks, we fear for the worst, expecting them to be firing up their engines at 4 am on the morning. However it seems that the trucking business in Morocco is not yet as just-in-time driven as in Europe. The drivers are very relaxed, they only leave at around 9 am, one by one.

Suddenly we feel like we have taken a wrong turn and have arrived at an American filling station in Arizona in the 60ties... Well, we are still Morocco and this strange filling station means that we are getting closer to Ouarzazate. Ouarzazate has evolved into the Hollywood of Morocco; a movie production town with even two film studios (Atlas and CLA) and a film school. Movies like „Lawrence of Arabia“, „The Sheltering Sky“, „Gladiator“, „Kundun“, „The Physician“ and many more have been produced in Morocco.



Ouarzazate has a good tourist infrastructure and we can treat ourselves to a fine lunch in the „Jardine d’Arome“ – finally a high end restaurant serving Moroccan dishes. We order the “Moroccan salad selection” as a starter and this turns out to be an incredible Potpourri of 14(!) different cold and warm salads. After the starter we are not feeling hungry anymore...and the two main courses are still to come.



The camping „La Palmeraie“ – the campsite with the tightest entrance – not far out of town, is our place for the night. Here we meet Puck und Gerd from Darmstadt and spent a nice evening together with them.

