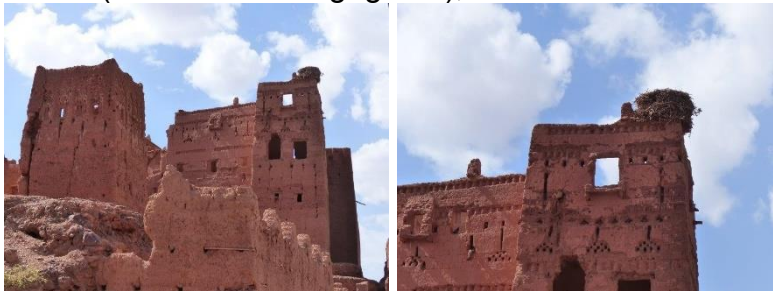


21.10.2016 Nekob

Before driving towards the Draa valley, we have a quick stop at the „Kasbah of the Storks“ („Kasbah des Cigognes“), which is located not far from our camp site.



However, we can only see one big empty nest. Most likely the storks are still on their way down here...

The road leads us over the 1860m high Tizi-n-Tiniffit pass. From the viewing platform one has a nice view of Agdz and the Draa valley. Unfortunately, today the visibility is not very good. Better also don't have a look down, over the little wall. As usual the rubbish has been just thrown over the wall – out of sight, out of mind...



Later we believe to have found the reason for the bad visibility: Large road construction work is going on, reconstructing the road past Agdz over a length of more than 30km. Each car is stirring up large dust clouds from the long gravel stretches, hence the air is filled with dust.





This area is densely populated, therefore it is rather challenging to find a place for the night in the wild. We just drive a little bit into the Draa Valley, turn East in Tansikht and continue to Nekob, where the camp site Ouadjou is supposed to be good. Only after entering we discover, that this place is a huge construction site and totally run down. The sanitary facilities are not working and we are the only guests...



There is not much happening in the small town of Nekob except for a wedding party unfortunately taking place directly behind our camp site. The loudspeakers of the wedding are blasting away traditional music very loudly. Somehow, we are not lucky when it comes to camp sites and their noise levels. We can only hold on to our sundowner lemonade on the roof of the local fuel station and wait for the party to end.

22.10.2016 Tizi-n-Tazazert

Nekob is the starting point for 4x4 trips into the mountains of the Djebel Sahro. But finding the beginning of the track is already troublesome. As usual there are many tracks to choose from and too many options to turn left or right, all unmarked, so one never knows which track leads to a dead-end.

At first there are still some villages, the road is very narrow and it's hard to pass other traffic. When a Mercedes van approaches, it feels like nearly 20 attempts, until we manage to pass each other. Due to the sloped track, both vehicles always turn to the middle of the road making it almost impossible to drive past.



We pass by the twin mountains Bab n'Ali, afterwards the track turns much worse than we expected. It takes us four hours to cover the 40 km to reach the pass saddle Tizi-n-Tazazert (2260m). As we wouldn't have made it down the other side before sunset, we decide to stay on the pass.

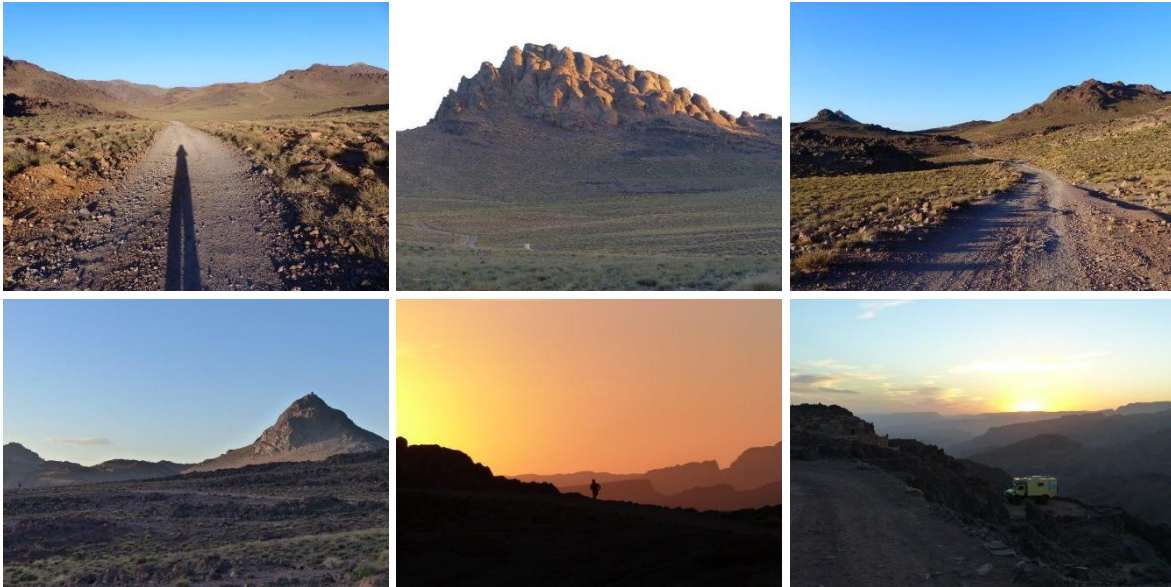


Luckily, on top of the peak at an elevation of 2300m is a camp site next to the „Gite Tizintaze“ which is run by Ibrahim and his sister Fatima. Ibrahim is happy about our unexpected visit and would have loved to chat more with us, but unfortunately our French is too limited...

Fatima is the first Moroccan to ask if she could see our Unimog from the inside and in return Ibrahim shows us around his Gite, which he built all by himself. The start was just 3 walls with roof covering 5 sqm.



The camp site is on a perfect location and we have the most stunning views from 2300 m elevation down the valley. The early stop leaves us time for a high-altitude training session and to enjoy the landscape.



23.10.2016 Tinghir

We pass through some impressive landscape northbound. At each village the children already spot us from far away and run towards the road to wave-beg at us.





Finally, we spot a small field of crocus flowers. We have read about the crocuses being cultivated here and were hoping to see a field. From the pistils of the crocus blossom the yellow saffron is harvested. It is a very labor intensive process – one gram of saffron needs the pistils of about 200 crocus flowers! In the old times saffron was as valuable as gold.



Around noon we arrive in Tinghir (or Tinerhir). We have not even left the car, yet, when the first tout is standing next to our car door, wanting to ‘help’. This „specimen“ speaks very good German and claims to live in Konstanz, he is only here on holiday, and his father works in Strasbourg. Well, normally it is the uncle who lives in Germany... But estimating that this guy is about 60 years old his father must be between 80 and 90 years of age and is still working in Strasbourg?



When we return to our car, the two tires on the back axle have very little air left and are almost flat. As we have a tire pressure control system installed – which works per axle – the bad news is that if we have a problem, both tires on one axle go flat and we do not know which tire has the problem. The good news is that Werner just has to push one button and we can re-inflate our tires quickly. We have no other choice and have to drive to the nearest camp site as we need to check the problem. Today there is a strong wind blowing and the air is filled with dust and sand, so we could have not seen much anyways if we would have continued driving.

As we take off the wheel cap we can hear the air escaping, it seems the tire pressure control system itself is the culprit. Werner is tightening the air pressure connection hose and we have a coffee to wait and see if the tire pressure is holding. In Shallah.

Indeed, the hose of the air pressure control system is to blame for our flat tires as it got loose and let air escape. Luckily we do not have another damaged tire.



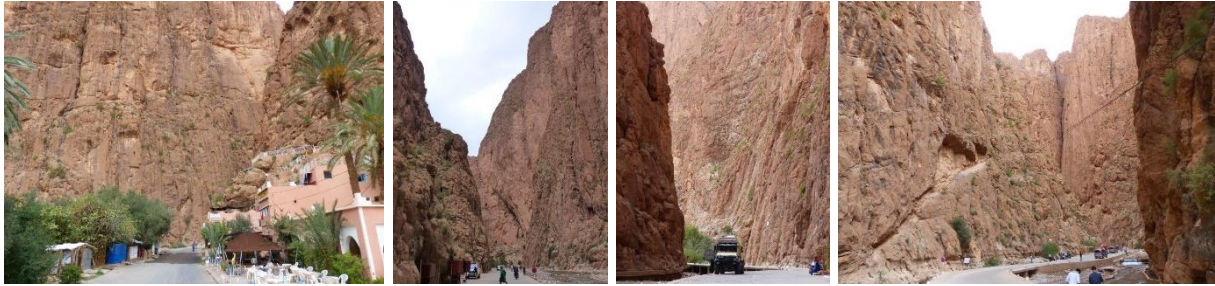
24.10.2016 Agoudal, Tizi-n-Ouano

With half a day delay, today we start our trip into the High Atlas mountain range. We hope to be able to cross the mountains before the weather turns worse. From tomorrow evening rain is forecasted and we can see the first clouds forming up.

The two gorges of the Todra and Dades rivers are two of the highlights in the High Atlas and in Morocco. We want to drive up northbound through the Todra Gorge until Agoudal and there turn into the road to the Dades Gorge going southward.



The extremely narrow Todra Gorge is truly fascinating with vertical drop offs and rock faces up to 300 m high. Most tourists only drive to this very narrow part of the gorge and then turn back because the road further up is mainly suitable for 4x4 vehicles. We continue our way and are soon afterwards again in no-man's land, hardly seeing any other cars and only a few small villages.



Shortly before Agoudal we meet a Dutch campervan and they warn us about the aggressive children in Agoudal, who have even ripped off parts of the cover panels of their campervan. They had decided to turn around and drive back, as the road got very bad and in addition it started to rain heavily... Good that we got his warning, we cancel our planned lunch break in this village and prepare our GPS system so that we can drive through Agoudal swiftly without having to stop and look for the way.

But also in the other villages prior to reaching Agoudal there are enough begging children on the road.



Meanwhile it is raining cats and dogs and we can see thunderstorms at the horizon. On the slopes of the mountains rain water is forming rivers and water falls. The streets of Agoudal have turned into small creeks and we are lucky that not many of the naughty children are playing outside in this weather. But the few kids who are outside do their job and run towards us yelling.



Not far behind Agoudal we stop for a lunchbreak and also hope that the rain would ease. Water is coming down from every mountain slope, the creeks are getting bigger.



Our break didn't help too much, soon it starts to rain again and the tracks are turning into rivers. A group of off-road bikers is passing us. They all are stressed out with red faces trying to keep their sliding heavy Enduro bikes on the muddy and slippery track. At least we are sitting comfortably in the dry Unimog.



At about 4:00 pm we reach the peak of the pass Tizi-n-Ouano at 2913m, this pass is in fact the highest drivable pass in Morocco. It is raining non-stop, the road is slippery, there is no way to make it out of here before dark. We also want to be able to see the Dades Gorge and not pass through in the dark, so we decide to stay.



25.10.2016 Tidrit (6km behind Msemrir)

All night it is raining heavily even mixed with some hail, the temperature drops to almost zero – after all we camp on the same elevation as the top of the highest mountain in Germany – Zugspitze. We are discussing if we should continue this track as planned, it is 'only' 20 km until we reach tar road. The alternative would be to turn around and drive the same way back, at least we then know the track. However the rivers we crossed yesterday are surely up quite a bit...

We decide to continue our way, leave early and soon after meet Martin with his MAN expedition truck. Like us, he had stopped yesterday afternoon at 4 pm to wait for the rain to ease and has in fact camped not too far from us. He was also worried about getting stuck in the high mountains, maybe having to wait for a few days to get back out. Unfortunately, it is too cold and windy to continue chatting and we drive on in opposite directions.



We are driving slowly along the slippery track with fatal drop offs, as something jumps in from the right crossing our track. Two larger animals are running down the slope, we are as surprised as them. First we think we saw some ibex or mouflon, later we learn that we saw the so called Barbary sheep or Aoudad. They are a native species to Northern Africa. Their habitat is the rocky semi-arid or arid desert, they can go for weeks without drinking water, surviving on dew and liquids from the plants they eat. Since they are hunted by the Tuaregs, their numbers have reduced significantly and they are listed as an endangered species. We are still in awe to have seen these two bulls, as we suddenly discover to our left the remaining herd. The two bulls obviously wanted to join up with the rest of the herd. We take our time and observe the interesting animals for a while.



Even with the low hanging clouds the landscape is impressive. The track is better than expected not too steep, at parts very muddy but not dangerously slippery. Only at some sharp turnings part of the track is swept away making the track quite narrow. Well, we are content with these conditions as we had expected much worse after so much rain.



The rivers have swollen to flood levels and the water is moving fast. We can easily pass through the rivers but the school bus is stuck. The driver has to check personally if and how to cross the river neither having 4x4 nor ground clearance. We feel sorry for him, as he is wading through the cold water. Meanwhile, all his passengers have crossed to the other side of the river already on foot.



So far so good we take every hurdle without problem and hope to be out of this soon. But it looks like we have been too optimistic... In Tidrit, 6km behind Msemrir, there is no way to go on... we are still at 2000 m elevation. The water has overflowed the bridge and swept away the ramps on both sides of the bridge. The street behind the bridge is also under water. The police is on guard, stopping all traffic and does not allow anyone to drive through. Not that someone would want to try it now anyways, we reckon.



We are forced to take a break and wait until tomorrow. The police escorts us to the parking at the local mosque. Another truck is also joining us, the poor truck driver has it certainly not as comfortable as we do. A few cars arrive, have a look at the flood levels and turn around.

Just before dark the police is erecting a road block in Moroccan style, using the fence from the nearest neighbor. They ask us if we want to stay here or drive back to Msemrir which has small shops and a café. In Tidrit there is nothing except the local mosque. But why should we move, in this rain we can't do much anyways and we feel safe here. The police even gave us their mobile phone number promising us, that we could call them any time day and night. They tell us that they will be back tomorrow morning at 9:00 am. Will we be able to continue our way tomorrow? In shallah!

