

1.11.2016 Asni

The UN Climate Change Conference „COP22“ is taking place in Marrakech from 7th – 18th November and the whole city is being brushed up, however only in those areas, where the official delegates will pass by. We come through the modern part of Marrakech where the rich and the expats are living. There is even a golf course where patchy grass is grown with tremendous efforts. Do they really have to have a golf course here?



We drive to Asni, only about 60km out of Marrakech and are already at an elevation of 1,200m. Asni serves as a base for trekking in the High Atlas, one can also climb the Djebel Toubkal which is the highest mountain in Morocco and of North Africa with an altitude of 4,167m.

In contrary to the information of the police man at the check point entering the city there is no campsite in Asni. Instead, we park in a residential development area where we get a glimpse of the snow covered Mount Djebel Toubkal, which is unfortunately only visible for a short while before hiding behind the clouds again.



2.11.2016 Taroudant

For the time being we cross the High Atlas for a last time. The highest peak Djebel Toubkal remains out of site and is covered by thick clouds. We drive through small villages following a river valley and come to a dammed lake which serves as catchment area for an even bigger dam which is supplying water to Marrakech. Many of the villages are in disrepair and partly abandoned.



Our next destination is the mosque of Tin Mel, the founding place of the dynasty of the Almohad Caliphate, a Berber Muslim movement. In the 12th century, under the leadership of Abd al-Mu'min, they conquered the whole of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and the Muslim part of Spain in just a few years; Marrakesh was made the capital.

This mosque was built in 1153/4, but already in 1276 it was totally destroyed. Since 1993 German architects are restoring the mosque which can be visited now.

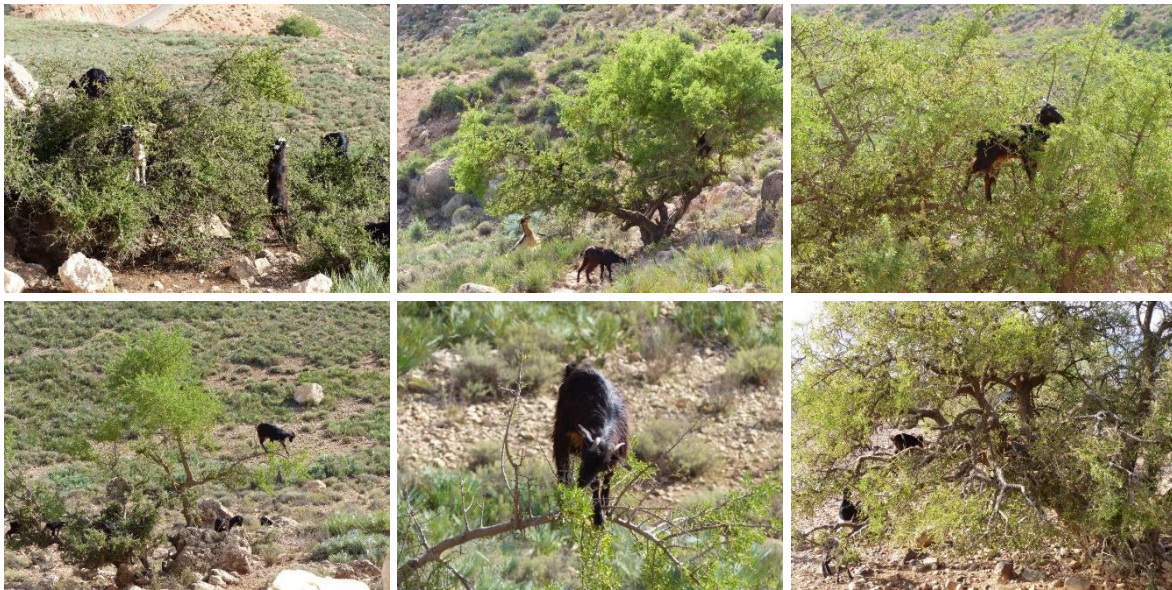


We follow the road, which leads us over the 2,100m high Tizi n'Test pass onto the Southern side of the High Atlas mountains. Over a distance of 30 km we drop down 1,600 m of elevation in many long serpentines, having always another spectacular view after each curb. On the highest point, a group of paragliders is studying the best place for a take-off into the valley below – we are happy to just look into the valley.



Suddenly, we discover for the first time the goats which are climbing the Argan trees looking for the most delicious Argan fruits and nuts. We have already heard a lot about these climbing goats as well as the Argan oil. Oil is extracted from the Argan nuts which is supposedly very healthy and is advertised heavily. Even the cosmetic industry has discovered Argan oil by now and it is a popular souvenir for tourists. Unfortunately, not every bottle of Argan oil also contains the real oil, very often it is diluted or altered...

It is unbelievable to see how the goats can keep their balance on these tiny little branches.



Our destination for today is Taroudant which we reach as planned in the late afternoon. Taroudant is the capital city of the fertile Sous plains, which are bordered by the High Atlas and the Anti Atlas. The city has a long history, was an important supply and trading center for caravans and is until today a very important agricultural hub. Taroudant has a defensive city wall, which is almost complete to this day. The city has more of the flair which we expected to find in Marrakesh. The well-preserved walls of the medina are certainly worth a visit, but in the medina one can indeed get lost very quickly. We only found two exit/entry gates to the medina, adding an almost claustrophobic feel to it.

The city is much bigger than we expected; in the evening the entire main street turns into a very long night market. The traffic, the masses of people and the noise level are mind bogging.





3.11.2016 Ait Baha, Tizourgane, Idaougnidif

Actually, we thought that we had already left the mountain passes, but via Ait Baha we are soon back into the Anti-Atlas and reach quickly an elevation of 1,200m.



There are stunning views into the mostly dry river valley, but absolutely fascinating is the Agadir “Tizourgane” which suddenly appears in front of us on the tip of a rock.

An Agadir is an old ‘storage castle’ which from the outside looks like a ‘normal’ defensive castle. Their purpose was to store valuable items, documents or the harvest of an entire village. This Agadir dates back to the 13th century and was renovated with great efforts to be converted into a hotel. Now it can even be found on Tripadvisor under ‘Kasbah Tizourgane’.





While having a cup of coffee we enjoy the view just before clouds are covering the sky again. Unfortunately, we are not allowed to stay at the car park of the Agadir for the night, but the manager recommends us to stay in Idaougnidif at the post office, which is only 6 km away. The parking in front of the post office has been recommended to us already quite a few times; it seems to be the most save place in most city.

4.11.2016 Tafraoute, Painted Rocks

Our next destination is Tafraoute; we drive from Idaougnidif to Tafraoute through the Ammel Valley, only 50 km away. Huge areas of the landscape have been terraced and show the enormous efforts made to use water most effectively. Entire mountain faces have been altered and terraced.



Close to the city of Tafraoute we visit the “Blue Rocks” created by the Belgium artist Jean Verame. In 1984 he painted several rocks over a distance of 2 km just blue. The city of Tafraoute benefits of this attraction as it draws quite some visitors, however the city itself has not much to offer.



En route to the Blue Rocks we pass by a rock formation, which was named 'Chapeau Napoleon' ("Napoleon's Hat"), because of its apparent resemblance to his hat...



Since yesterday the weather has been cloudy and rainy, therefore the blue rocks look a bit gloomy. We find a sheltered spot where we can camp for today. Since we are at the 'famous' Blue Rocks, we expected to see some other campers or tourists, but again we are all by ourselves.



5.11.2016 Blue Rocks

As this is a special day for one of the crew members, we decide to stay another night. The weather forecast for tomorrow is not very promising and we want to make good use of this sunny day to explore the rock formations. We even manage to collect some fire wood.



Afterwards we have a very private birthday BBQ, as one of us is turning 25 years old.



In the afternoon, a very young cute stray dog is visiting us, who is in a very poor condition and quite frightened. Werner tames "Blackie" with a piece of bread which he devours very quickly. After a while Blackie gets to like us and comes very close,

but unfortunately we can't take him with us, not only because he is covered with fleas all over.



The weather forecast is correct and in the evening a few thunder storms are approaching but miss us narrowly. There is lightning and thunder around us, but we stay dry and can enjoy this remarkable showpiece of nature.

