

## 6.11.2016 Assa

We want to drive further into the South of Morocco and visit the Western Sahara. Evidently, the drive down there is not very exciting and rather monotone, but at least the capital Laayoune we want to see as we will not be back near here anytime soon. The Western Sahara had been annexed by Morocco 1976, previously it was under Spanish colonial rule. Under international law, the status of the Western Sahara is still disputed until today; there is quite some tension behind the scenes, but tourists should be safe.



The rain is catching up with us, there are several thunderstorms and heavy rain is pouring down on us. At least we get a free car wash and our Unimog looks pretty clean again.



It is a good day to cover some distance and we drive approximately 230km via Tahala, Ifrane Atlas Saghir and Fask to Assa. At the entrance to Assa we are asked again for a 'fiche', then we continue on a broad avenue into town. We notice that some efforts have been made to revamp this town, but unfortunately only a few palm trees have survived. Meanwhile, Assa is a bit run down and consist supposedly of mainly military personnel. As soon as we drive into the town the first mob of begging children is running towards us.



We are just stowing away our food shopping, when a young man with an Enduro cross bike approaches us asking for help. Marjin, who is from Belgium, has a friend

who got stuck with his BMW motorbike and is now looking for a suitable 4x4 car which is able to pull out that bike. We gather our GPS equipment and try to establish where his friend got stuck exactly. It looks like the bike is trapped in a river bed more than 100 km away! After this heavy rainfall the tracks have turned into mud slides and all rivers are very high. Also, it is late and will be dark very soon, there is not much we can do for a rescue still today. We accompany Marjin to ask the Gendarmerie Royale for help. After two hours of lengthy discussion, the police chief himself appears and ends the debate. Nothing will be done anymore tonight, it is pitch dark, we do not exactly know where the bike is stuck and even the local police will not be able to manage a rescue under such conditions, their risk to get stuck as well is high...

Marjin, who was hired by the tour operator as a support guide, feels responsible and decides to continue searching with another friend who is on his way to Assa. As we can't help any further we just stay for the night in front of the police station. Hopefully something can be done for that chap caught out there, if not today then tomorrow...

### **7.11.2016 Labouriat**

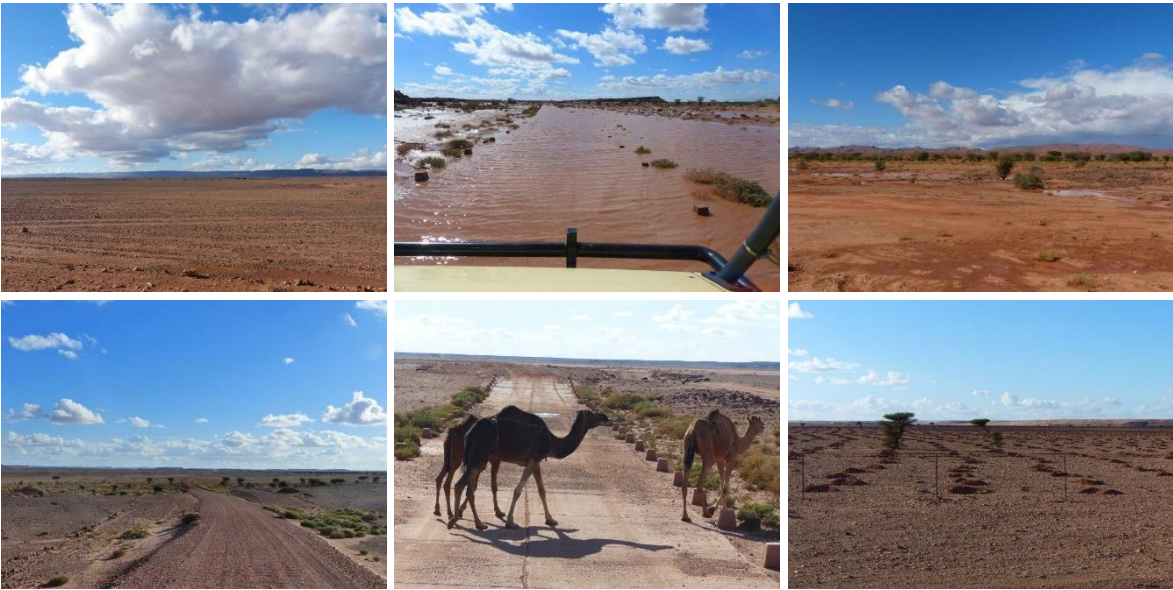
First thing we drive to the only fuel station in Assa, to fill up for the long track we are planning to drive down South. Unfortunately, the electronic system of one of the fuel pumps has been damaged by the rain and the other fuel pump is empty. While we refill our freshwater tank we see the fuel truck arriving and while we have a coffee the technician who is supposed to repair the fuel pump arrives.

Luckily we didn't get any fuel immediately, because all of a sudden Marjin turns up at the fuel station and we get an update of the evolving situation with the lost biker. He was still looking for the biker yesterday night for a few hours and has been to the police station already this morning. While he is talking, a man approaches us, who was yesterday also at the police station. He informs us, that the biker has survived the night. A nomad was sent out, found the stranded biker and brought him some food. However, the biker preferred to stay with his stuck BMW bike and slept next to it under the stars. A rescue team is being set up and the biker won't need to stay a second night out in the desert. It turns out that the biker deviated from the planned route, his mates left him out there all by himself although this is supposed to be an organized tour... We couldn't grasp the full extent of this story until the very end, but at least it had a good ending.



We continue our way, find the turn off to Labouriat and realize that this road is not marked in our GPS system. But the track is well developed and quite wide so we make good progress.

Even some wild life crosses our track. This Gecko we almost rolled over, but it hardly moved. The dromedaries are unimpressed anyways and don't take much notice of our presence.



Labouriat appears on the horizon. Immediately all the children come running towards us which means we will not stop here and continue right through the village. Here the children not only play separated by gender they also beg separately. First the boys come running then the girls...



It is getting late and we drive just a few kilometers behind the village – far enough that nobody will follow us – and hide behind a hillside. Luckily we remain undiscovered by anyone.

### 8.11.2016 M'Sied

We believe that we are on the right track to Smara, but quickly learn that this is not the case. A Bedouin truck driver stops us and asks – almost like all other truck drivers – for cigarettes. From him we learn, that we are on the piste to Tan Tan. Did we miss the turn off, maybe there was another track behind Labouriat? We were sure that there was no other piste turning off..



Although this did not go according to plan it is not a major issue. We drive until M'Sied and turn off shortly before the city onto another track heading Southwest. Twice we have to negotiate some critical sections where we have to search for the track and find it in the river bed...





We discover some gigantic water storage bags, in which they store the valuable wet from the recent rains. These bags are as high a person – the black dot in the middle of the photo is a human being!

This is a long track and soon the sun will set. For the night we just stop where we are in the middle of nowhere. Looks like we will not be in the way of anyone here. Our only neighbors are a few dromedaries a few hundred meters away.



### 9.11.2016 Akhfennir

The Dromedaries we saw yesterday evening are visiting us in the morning and we watch them a little while before we hit the road.



We follow vast plains which span until the horizon. In between, we lose sight of the track especially in moments when we think to have everything under control and our attention lingers. Quite a few tracks are dead-end tracks or turn into the wrong direction, so we have to stay focused and always concentrate. There is not a dull moment.



Our GPS system tells us that we have already briefly crossed into the Western Sahara area. Finally, we hit the tared road R101 and unintentionally bypass the military check point, which is now about 2 km behind us. On this road, the first fuel stations with cheap (because tax free) fuel are to be found. Morocco tries to settle more people into the Western Sahara area and therefore the government grants quite a few subsidies, i.e. on fuel, to make this area more attractive.



From here it is still about 80 km on tarred road to Akhfennir, where we will reach the Moroccan Atlantic coast. The village is a bit dusty and windy and there is not much happening here, so we decide to drive to our planned camp site for tonight at the lagoon Sebkhna Naila located in the Khnifiss National Park.

According to our guide book it is allowed to camp for a small fee on the carpark near the military outpost and fishing huts. Unfortunately, this not possible anymore. A local fisherman who only speaks Spanish tells us that we should just drive 500 m further down a track and should be able to stay there overnight. We follow his advice and enjoy a wonderful view of the lagoon.

The many small and pinkish „dots“ we see in the far turn out to be actually Flamingos!



**10.11.2016 Tarfaya**



We are just ready to leave when three soldiers from the nearby military post visit us and inform us that we are not allowed to camp here. One is only allowed to park here until 6 pm, then you have to leave. No matter if our travel guide book describes this as an overnight campsite, camping is now not allowed anymore. At least they did not chase us away yesterday evening, or maybe the leader just came to work this morning?

We follow the steep and spectacular coastline South as our goal for today is the city of Tarfaya. Driving on the road one can hardly imagine how steep the vertical drop offs of the cost line are.







The entire coastline is covered with military posts every 1 km apart. These square shaped little houses are each staffed with 1 - 2 soldiers. Later we learn that they have to guard the coast against smuggling, as just off this coastline lay the Canary Islands.

After about 50 km we reach Tarfaya, which was named Cap Juby in earlier days. Sand dunes are covering the road and have to be cleared constantly with a front wheel loader, just like with snow in winter conditions.

In Tarfaya, Antoine de Saint-Exupery, author of the „Little Prince“, had been stationed from 1927 to 28 as head of the little airport. Before taking this position he was working as a pilot for the airline ‚Latecoere‘ and flew airmail from Casablanca to Dhakar. History says, that he started writing on the Little Price while being stationed in Tarfaya.

On the beach in front of Tarfaya are the remains of the castle ‚Casa Mar‘ in the middle of the water. It was built in the 1880s by the British.



In September 2004 a small museum opened in Tarfaya dedicated to the life of Antoine de Saint- Exupery. The „ Association Friends of Tarfaya“ is meeting here once a year in November for three days to also commemorate Saint-Exupery. By chance we visit the museum when the commemoration meeting is in full swing. Instead of having to pay entrance fee, we are treated with left overs of the lunch buffet; mint tea, cookies and banana milk.



As we are still hungry, we drive to the main road to look for a restaurant. One restaurant looks very busy and we decide to try the local delicacy almost everyone else has ordered. We only understand that the dish is something with lamb and

notice that it comes with chick peas. The owner asks us several times if we really want that dish...well, why not? The dish does taste a bit strange and we can find odd pieces, black and a bit hairy. We better ask another time and the guy on the neighboring table speaks better French, he explains us that this dish is „Pieds de Mutton“ – SHEEP HOOF! Well, it did taste like sheep hoof could possibly taste... Enough experiments, we rather stick to the fried fish we also ordered.



We drive about 6 km out of town back to the beach, where some fisherman put up their tents. It's a group of Moroccan friends who come here once a year since years to go fishing together. They reckon it is no problem to stay here overnight and we set up our camp not far from theirs. As it is very windy we put up our wind protecting tarp below the Unimog for the first time. If the fishing is good we may stay for another day... The fishermen are very friendly and give us four of their fish for dinner. In return, we bring them a bottle of wine, which they unfortunately decline. They do not drink alcohol, only Berber Whiskey which is local slang for peppermint tea.



As soon as Werner is back from his fishing trip, we see a torch light coming flickering towards us in the dark. Indeed, there is a knock on our door. Two soldiers inform us, that it is forbidden to camp here. To our argument that other fishermen are camping here, too, they just answer casually "Oh, they are Moroccans". What a twisted logic. We have no other choice than to break down our camp - which we this time have set up quite well - and have to drive into the city in the dark. This all is for "our own safety" - as we have heard so many times now in Morocco.

It's indeed funny, during our trip to Iceland, they chased us out of the cities and villages and in Morocco they prefer us in the middle of the city, where we can camp right on the main square. We park 'for our own safety' directly in front of the local police station and remain undisturbed for the evening.