

MANCA 2015

LAND CRUISE MOROCCO HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS

The overnight train from Tangier to Marrakech on a full June moon is a magical ride. In the early morning, as she approached Marrakech the morning fog in the low hills cast a mystical spell over the ancient land. From Marrakech you can make a number of side trips to some incredible places. The High Atlas Mountains are just a couple of hours away but the road follows a treacherous route. Many Morocco highways are very well built, fast and safe. The rocky road to Oukaimeden (2850m) is not. But first a great train ride.

TANGIER TO MARRAKECH - Choo! Choo! Choo! All aboard!



EARLY MORNING FOG ON THE TRACKS TO MARRAKECH

Sunrise on the hills approaching Marrakech.





A mesa rises above the low fog on the dry wheat farms.

The rear carriage provides a great view at sunrise of the plains. The High Atlas will create a great contrast with this rolling terrain.



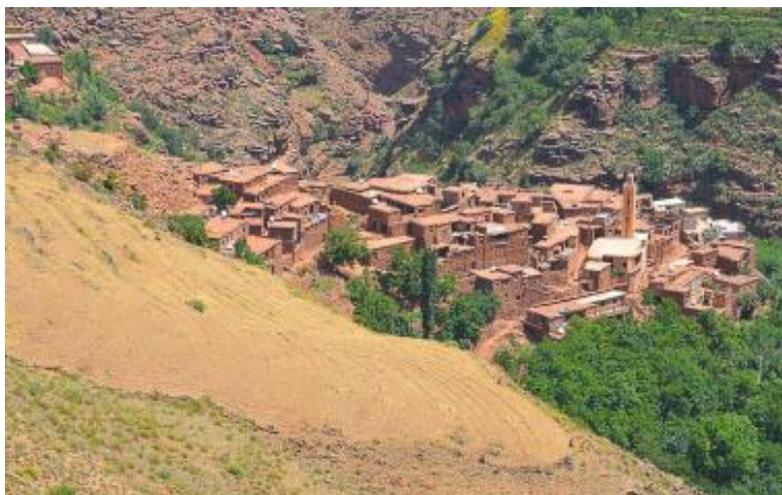
He arrives right on time in Marrakech at 8.30am

THE ROCKY ROAD TO OUKAIMEDEN HIGH ATLAS

Private drivers are a great deal in Morocco. You arrange the price before you leave and then return at your leisure, fixing an approximate time for the whole day. On this precipitous route it was good to have an experienced, cautious, driver who knew the road well.

The High Atlas Mountains are south of Marrakech. The road follows a steep river valley then climbs to a high plateau with a ski resort at the top.

Farmers work every available patch of land along the steep river valley. The women and men both work the farms.



Hamlets and farms cling to the mountainsides. The winter barley has already been harvested.

The steep climb to the High Atlas passes many small farms and villages. They take great care of the land, the fruit and nut trees and their livestock. The winter snows feed the river for the spring growing season. Bottom left a new orchard has been planted.



Our proud driver views the steep ravines and tiny hamlets perched on the steep river valley sides. Terraces create more arable land, prevent hillside erosion of the valuable soil and retain moisture.

On very steep ravines the farmers have worked hard to make a living. You can just see aqueducts on the bottom left. Is it possible the Greek farmers could reclaim their rocky land and make it productive as it was a few thousand years ago?



AT THE TOP OF NORTH AFRICA

The road finally levels out to a beautiful summer grassy field alive with insects, flowers and bird life. The Oukaimeden Ski Resort had one chalet open for a cold beer; a rare event during Ramadan. A great pleasure to have a cold one at over 8,000 feet!



The Oukaimeden Ski Resort. You can see a higher chair lift on the ridge.

High Atlas Mountains. Let's go ski-
better sit down first! "Asseyez-Vous"





View to the ski resort and lifts.

I am told this is a “desert wheatear”.
Confirmation would be nice to have.



Mating time for the high altitude
dragonflies; all paired up and in a row!
A well organized flock!

High altitude yellow butterfly and bee.



Butterfly and spider at high altitude Oukaimeden. I think the spider is having lunch!

Mid-summer alpine flowers



A SHORT WALK TO THE SPECTACULAR LOOK OUT

From the chalet you can walk to the lookout which will most certainly take your breath away! From here you can view the highest peaks, some still spotted with snow hiding from the burning sun in steep north facing ravines.



The highest peaks of the High Atlas. Jebel Toubkal is the highest one on the far left horizon 4167m.

Beautiful colours of blues, greens and reds paint the endless peaks and valleys.



Steep ravines with snows in the distant highest peaks.

Looking south over The High Atlas.



We were almost blown away by 60k winds from the south blasting up and over the ridge. It was hard to stand up and hold the camera still enough for the shot. How lucky to arrive just as these workers were installing a new information plaque.



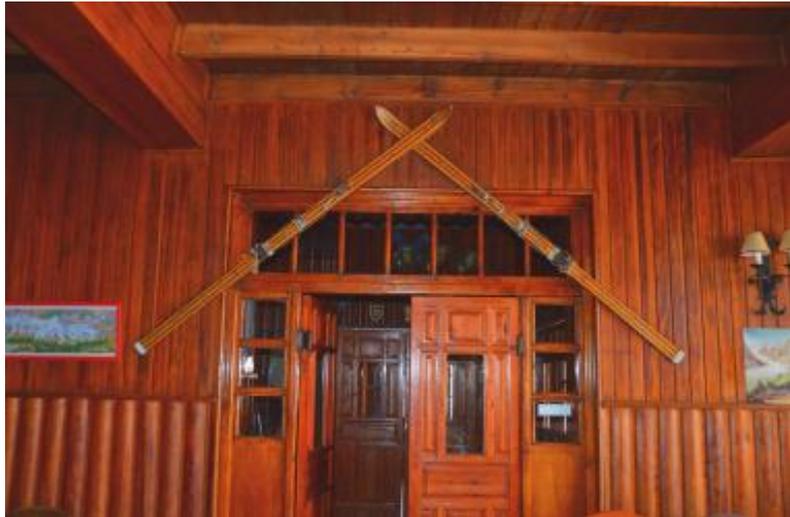
Workers install a new information plaque showing the highest peaks.

Still in the packing but you can see the highest peak on the left: Jbel Toubkal 4167m "The Roof of North Africa".



Erosion produces strange rock patterns at the high altitudes. Extreme cold and heat break down the rocks. I called this rock : "Turtle Rock"!

Time for a cold Flag Moroccan beer in the chalet before the ride down the mountain.



From the top it is a faster return to Marrakech. The road joins the Ourika Valley I visited last year and then the flat road crosses the plains to the busy life of Marrakech.



The Ourika River valley heading North to Marrakech leaving the foothills of The High Atlas behind.

Finally; a chance to catch up as the east wind “Levante” cloud hanging over The Rock, postpones a photo shoot. Tomorrow the wind switches to the west, the air will clear, so time for a ramble around The Rock.

Queensway Marina

Gibraltar, August 3 2015