

# TREKKING IN THE ANTI-ATLAS IN MOROCCO



BY

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In 2013, when a week-long trekking trip through the Anti-Atlas Mountains in Morocco was being planned, I listened attentively and thought, 'Yes – let's go for it! It's completely out of my comfort zone – but sure you only live once!'

That's what brought me to arrive at Marrakesh Airport one September day with six friends from my hiking club, to trek in the Anti-Atlas, a mountain range that extends from the Atlantic in the south-west to the Sahara in the south. We were met and welcomed cordially by our guide Nabyl. We all piled into a minibus, which took off straightaway. Our first stop was a couple of hours later in a small village to pick up our cook. Travelling through the countryside was amazing. We passed many of the vast areas used by movie companies to shoot Westerns. Our next stop was on a dust track, where we ate lunch in the shade of a rambling tree. Finally we reached our destination, where we met our muliers (mule men), many of whom had travelled for four to five days, by mule, from their homes. They had all the provisions that we required for the week. Immediately it felt as though the Western world was miles away and that we had stepped back in time. The caravan of six mules, with all our luggage and provisions, took off in biblical fashion and we followed on foot.







On arrival at a lush oasis, the muliers set up camp in the beautiful countryside. We had our own tent, and there was a communal tent for meals and meetings. After a basic shower of cold water from a basin – all of which had to be transported by the mules – we sat down for our meal. How the cook could produce such wonderful food with such basic equipment was a mystery.

We dined on delicious and beautifully-presented salads, a variety of traditional Moroccan dishes with oriental spices, and delicious cakes baked in a pressure cooker. After dinner and some fascinating story-telling of traditional Berber life, we headed off to our tents. As this was one of the least-visited areas of Morocco, the night sky was perfectly clear, and the silence all encompassing.

Before breakfast on the following mornings, we packed our sleeping bags and belongings while the muliers dismantled the tents and headed off; our cook and one mulier stayed with us. Trekking, although on stony and uneven ground, was not extremely demanding as there was no great altitude to contend with. The surface underfoot consisted mainly of granite boulders and red lava flows.

The landscape was filled with dramatic rock formations, which contrasted with spectacular palm groves and henna fields. The temperature during the day would rise to 25 degrees, but at night it would become a lot cooler. Along the way we met nomads with their sheep and goats who were travelling from the High Atlas mountains down to the Sahara, following the weather. These amazing people, who travel the same route each year, would invite us to their makeshift tents to share a drink and some dates, despite the fact that they were extremely poor.









Lunchtimes were another delight. Our cook and mulier would go on ahead to scout for a suitable location. This was usually in a clearing with plenty of shelter, and on arrival mattresses were laid out for us. A delicious lunch was prepared and then we took a siesta, thus avoiding the worst of the heat.





Duly rested, we continued through the beautiful countryside, passing crumbling kasbahs which were used by the nomads for shelter, and passing some Berber villages where the locals showered us with fresh mint or whatever they had. As visitors are rare in this area, we were happy to have small gifts of pencils or notebooks for the children.



After five or six hours of trekking, we would arrive at our destination, where the tents were already set up, and food preparation was under way. We followed the same pattern



each day, setting up camp in a different place every night – sometimes in a valley of olive groves or on a plateau among farmland. Sunrises and sunsets were sights to behold. We got a great first-hand knowledge of the Berber people and their way of life. We sampled desert bread, cooked in the earth, and heard songs and stories from centuries past. At the end of the trek, it was difficult to re-enter the twenty-first century, but the memories will nourish me for a long time to come.



Our trip was arranged through OxygenAtlas: <https://oxygenatlas.com/en>.