Morocco 1990

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I spent several months in winter/spring 1990 exploring some of the lesser-known ranges of the Atlas mountains: the Jbel el Kest in the Anti Atlas, Jbel Siroua (Sirwa), and many of the highest peaks of the western Atlas – Imaradene, Wajir and Askawn on the Tichka Plateau and Tinergwet above Taroudant. With two days of rain this was a contrast to the UK's remorseless bad weather, and it is the availability of almost unlimited rock-climbing or alpine-type ascents, of long traverses above 3000m, or demanding but grand trekking *in our winter* which I feel needs to be emphasized. Because of the availability of English-language guides the Toubkal region is busy, albeit with little effort at originality, new routes etc, while these many, equally fine, areas lie fallow. The Moroccans are waking to the fact of the alpine delights they hold, so there is an added incentive to go *now*, before too much becomes organized and the priceless heritage of a thousand-year-old way of life disappears.

We were able to test some of the people as well as places recommended in the Morocco Notes of the last *AJ*, and I heartily endorse these. We made a week-long trek taking in the summit of remote Jbel Siroua (Sirwa) and Ahmed, from the Auberge Souktana at Taliouine, organized the mules and tents – and gave us superb *cuisine* each night. With three British and three Berbers it was a closely-knit group and most enjoyable. We camped each night in sites of character and walked through some remarkable landscapes, with fields of saffron, Morocco's one cliff-village, gorges and conglomerate pinnacles, kasbahs, and a last day of memorable mud! Highly recommended for fit parties.

We then used Aziz, from Taroudant, to explore the western end of the Atlas. He favours using local houses/food/mules etc, an interesting contrast. In March the Tichka Plateau was snowbound and Aziz's main task was to organize *camionette* (pick-up) transport into the hills via Tigouga and then mules to help us reach the snowy heights. We bivouacked on the plateau and climbed several peaks on its rim, the plateau in reality being the upper *valley* of the Oued Nfis. Both rims drop with dramatic steepness on the outside, and many of the crests would offer days at a stretch of snowy alpine-style traversing, all at 3000m or above. Imaradene (Tassiwt, 3351m) was the highest and best of the peaks on the northern rim, giving a long day on crampons – wishing for skis! We descended into the exquisitely beautiful Medlawa valley, crossed to Imoulas further west and, with mules and then packing, got in a position for Tinergwet (3551m), the highest in the area, the horned peak so well seen from Taroudant.

North of the Nfis and the Tizi n' Test (pass) road from Taroudant to

Marrakech lie Igdat (3616m) and Erdouz (3579m), the highest peaks west of the Toubkal massif. These were climbed by taking mules from Imlil, crossing the Tizi Mzic, Tizi n' Ouarhou and Tizi n' Iguidi (splendid country) to reach Ijoukak, then up the Nfis to the confluence of Nfis and Ougdempt. The latter gave a grand approach route and then the ridge east of Igdat was crossed to descend to the Nfis via Tifni. An account of this trip should be in the *SMC Journal* for 1991.

Imouzzer, an exciting morning ride up in the hills from Agadir, is famed for its waterfalls, honey festival and delightful hotel. This year we followed a *piste* eastwards and, with one bivvy *en route*, walked out to the Agadir–Marrakech road – an excellent warm-up trip, or coda before flying home.

In February, with another friend, I managed to spend several days climbing the highest summits of the Jbel el Kest range, the best of the Anti Atlas above Tafraoute and the Ameln valley. Rock ridges and faces abound, none climbed, and a marvellous lure at that time of year.

Well east, on the south side of the Central Atlas, the Todra and Dades gorges offer sheer walls which are remarkably accessible, yet seldom climbed. Morocco, the nearest country with such a contrasting culture, peoples and climate, deserves to be far better known. The above were all climbed in the period February–June. By June the plains are desert hot, so summer is not a good period to visit. October–November is practicable, but the landscape is burnt up and the glory of the snow and the vivid greens and blossoms of spring are absent. So, if you want a real winter break, here is the place to go. After 25 years of doing just that, I find it more alluring than ever. I am very happy to pass on practical information, addresses, details of maps, etc. Contact (SAE please) 21 Carlin Craig, Kinghorn, Fife KY3 9RX (0592–890422).

New books:

I have seen two new publications, both covering the Bou Goumez/M'Goun area. The first is a well-illustrated account of personal travels by a regular visitor, Odette Bernezat: *Hommes et Vallées du Haut-Atlas*. Editions Glenet, BP177, 38008 Grenoble-Cedex, France (98FF). The second is a 94pp, colour-illustrated, well-mapped guide to a selection of multi-day treks, *Randonnées Pédestres dans le Massif du Mgoun* 1990. Published in Morocco. (Copy in AC Library.)