

John and Betsy go South!

July 2008

1.07.08 Day of relaxing

Heinz came over to my site at 10^o clock and we spent a quiet day at this lovely camping site” Berber de la Montagne”. What does quiet mean? Betsy needed attention after that horror- trip! I fixed the flat tyre with special seal for tubeless tyres. The roof carrier which had moved slightly to the rear and just about would made itself independent, had to be put into its position again. What a mess in the kitchen! The Nescafé’s lid opened and all the coffee was scattered all over the show. (And Erika arranged it so nicely)



To lighten up my spirit, Esmael, an employee at the camp, offered me a sweetened peppermint tea.

2.07.08 Drive to Marrakech

The scenery from Gorges du Dadès to Marrakech was unbelievable. The steep cliffs, the narrow road wound along steep abysses was breathtaking. Heinz once more had real difficulties to manoeuvre his camper around the bends.





The continuation of our trip led us over a few passes in the Atlas region without bigger problems to Marrakech, where we stayed for a few days. Oh, I nearly forgot about the overloaded donkeys and the truck with its cows on it.



3.07.08-5.07.08 MARRAKECH

This town offers a lot, slowly but surely I am over satiated (blasé) wandering through Medinas and so forth....

There are sights which are worthwhile mentioning:

La Kontoubia- This mosque is impressive and nearly Marrakech's trade mark.



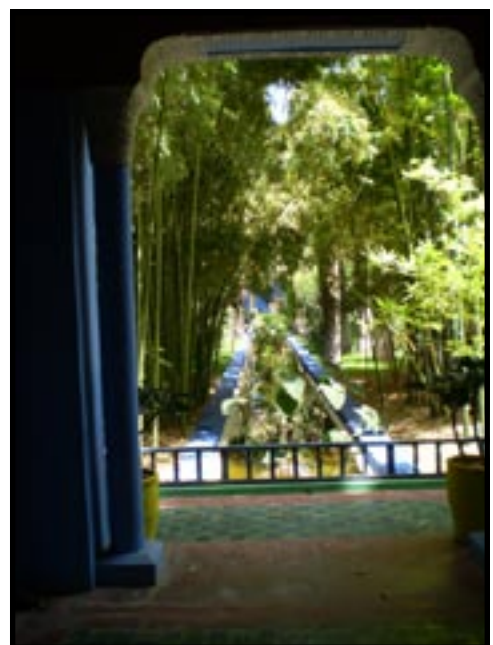
The station is also very special.



Avenue Mohamed VI



Jardin Majorelle. The park had been laid out by a Frenchman between 1919 until his death in 1962. It's fantastic. He tried to collect plants from all over the world to give the park a special out look. It is peaceful here and one nearly forgets that one is in fact in Africa.



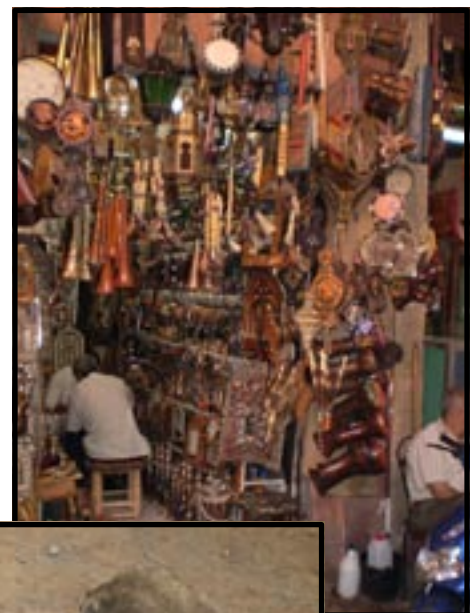
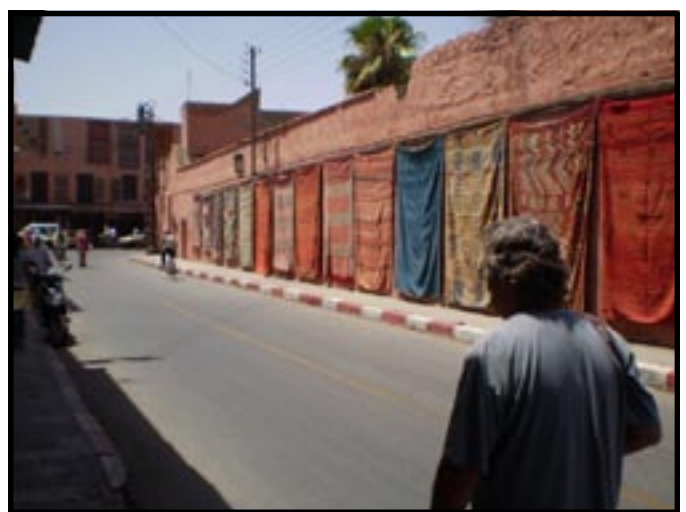
La Menura. It's situated a bit in the outer suburb but one gets a view right up to the mosque Koutoubia, because of the bee- line Avenue. The monument is placed in the middle of olive trees which are watered through clever trenches. Its source comes from a big ditch.



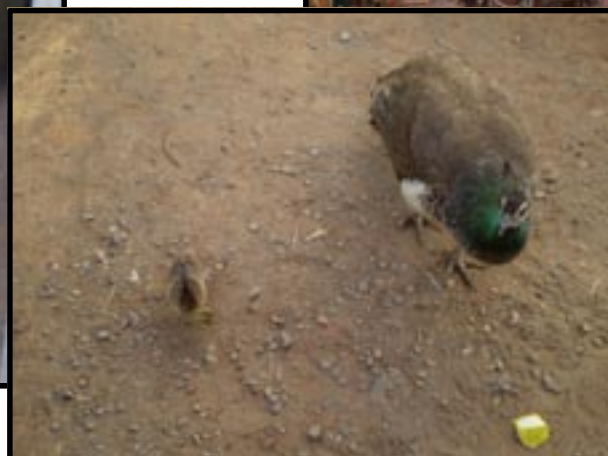
The Palais Royal: Sorry we couldn't visit it. A photo of the wall is all what I can offer.



Medina: Their entrances are always astonishing. Here a few pictures:



Some pictures taken at the camping site, inclusive pets, for a change not only cats but also a peacock family.



6.07.08 Drive to Cascades d'Ouzoud

During our journey there, we came across several “donkey markets”, donkeys are very important for transporting goods.



”Cascades” are in this case waterfalls. And how! The water falls over two levels, 110 meters to the lowest point. At the moment there is only little water which brings its unique solitude to a better expression. Sorry but my camera couldn't catch the falls in one go!



A few hundred years ago, olive trees were planted in this region, all around the waterfalls, which still carry fruits. The irrigation is strictly controlled (regulated) Families, who are designated to harvest its fruit, are individually marked with a colour code for a certain tree.



7.07.08 Journey to Rabat

While driving to Rabat I spotted a lake which gave me the feeling I was back in Switzerland. It turned out to be a reservoir which is used to produce electricity for the area and also for the plains productivity.



A few more passes in the Atlas region to overcome. Heinz struggled quite a bit “scraping” the bends.



What a relief it was when we sighted the sea after 6 hours. Last time I saw the sea was 3 1/2 weeks ago in Ceuta.

A beautiful sun- set over the Atlantic finished off that day.

There is only one reason of visiting Rabat. We have to get the Visas for Mauretaniien and Senegal.



9.07.08 – 20.07.08

From Rabat to Casablanca along the Atlantic to West- Sahara

As I mentioned it in my last commentary visiting Rabat was just a must of organizing the Visa for Mauretania. We settled that in 24 hours. On top off it the camping site turned out to be a big disappointment, loud music until very late. We were glad to be on the move again in the early morning after.

Casablanca, our next destination wasn't a long distance away and the town presented itself not of big interest to look at. I still had to get the Visa for Senegal though, so, if I wanted it or not, I had to visit the center.

Here an example how the traffic rolls in town.



On our way South, a "Ente"(duck) Dechvaud crossed our path (Hello Sabine).

There is nothing much going on at the moment!!!
So why not do a short Quiz:

Here a few questions:

What kind of food is that? What is it called?



Solution:

“Tagine”, it’s a dish which can be served with fish, beef, chicken or be enjoyed by itself as a vegetarian dish. It tastes great though.

What’s happened here?



Solution:

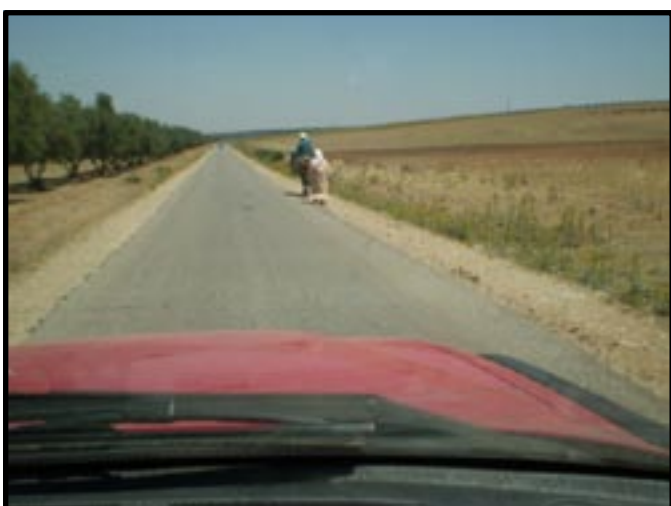
It is too hot to wear the “cros”

What is the matter here?



Solution:

One of the original “cros” got lost, I only could get a copy at the market for Fr. 4.50 a pair.



What do you think is wrong here?

Solution:

Not at all a gentleman, is he? He sits on the donkey’s back and his wife trots behind (loiters)

Are there crocodiles in the desert?



Solution:
Yes, here is the proof!

Will it hold or will it not?

Solution:
It didn't, an expert had to solve
the problem.



Who are missing here?



Solution:
The women, they have to work
at home and are not allowed in
restaurants.

An important message for "Landrover" fans!

Two guys meet who are driving a land- rover. What do they talk about?
The problems they are having with the vehicles.

Two guys touring in their Mitsubishi. What do they talk about?
They talk about road maps.

A couple in a land- rover arrive at the campsite. What are their first movements?
She takes out the cooking utensils, He takes out the toolbox.

Drive South along the Atlantic.

Here are still some impressions of the drive along the beautiful coastline which shall bring us eventually to the South:

Qualidia:

Magnificent beach front with its fisherman. To my sentiment the Atlantic is 5 degrees too cold, I therefore renounced having a swim spontaneously.



Essaouira:

A very nice, small town with a beautiful Medina, fishing harbour and long beaches. The wind blew quite strongly what the surfers preferred, not me as a fact!





Heinz bought two fish (Dorades) at the harbour which we grilled later at the camp. It was a delicacy.



The landscape along the coast is rather poor, nothing much to look at, except a few goats which cross ones way.





In the North of Agadir we spotted a camping site which earns about 5 stars. It doesn't happen very often in Morocco that you come across such a wonderful place. The main reason in stopping there, was, the washing facilities (clothes). It was about time and worthwhile because I accumulated quite a lot of dirty clothes in the last 4 or more weeks!!!!

Camping near a town enabled us to have part of the luxury like strolling at the beachfront, eating out at a restaurant etc. etc.

In 1960, this town was completely destroyed by an earthquake. Thousands of people were dead. Today, one can't see any vestige of that disaster. Astonishing, one realises there aren't any old buildings around.

It showed to be a great opportunity to drive on a piste once more, because our journey to the South led along the well-known "Fort Bon Jeriff".



The usual Welcome tea was waiting for us on our return from the sandy piste.

It is really amazing what was built into the sand on the border to the Sahara. The jewel, a swimming pool, I dare took a picture of it in not giving you any idea we had a holiday resort here.



19.07.08

Visit of a small, arabian colony.

After a comforting night in that luxury lodging, Heinz meant, an extreme piste with a night out in the open would be very exiting. We left the tarred road at Tan Tan behind us and no sooner we were on a piste, which actually would do the purpose for a mountain track rather.



At appearing of a few Arabic houses, the fun ended, full stop! A steep slope looked to be too dangerous for Heinz's LKW, so we stayed with the Arabs which turned out to be a wonderful meeting for both sides. These people live in a poor region surrounded by a flock of sheep and goats, but they are very friendly and seem happy.



They were so curious and wanted to see everything. Heinz's satellite telephone had its turn. He allowed the women to phone their relatives and friends, because there isn't a reception out there for a cell. Seeing the happy faces and the smiles of these women made Heinz forget about the higher telephone account he'll get eventually!!! Of course they also wanted to have a glance at the inside of his truck. That night I didn't sleep well at all. The wind blew so strong that I was frightened I would be blown away with the tent and all! Although it didn't matter, we had a super time with the Arabs it was a special experience in all!

20.07.08

Drive back to Tan Tan

Driving back to Tan Tan occurred as planned and we had a peaceful night directly at the beachfront. Tan Tan is our last station before we cross the border to West Sahara.

It is time to summarize the stay in Morocco:

Morocco offers a lot for the tourists. The landscapes vary from desert to green meadows to high mountains. The European influx exists peacefully next to the Arabic. The Islam is strongly lived by approximately 99% of its inhabitants who are Muslims.

I visited several places of which I was told worthwhile seeing it (Thanks to friends)

Some updates: Morocco

--Kilometers driven	4800
--Stay (days)	35
--Breakdowns	2 (flat tyres)
--Accidents	none (Moroccans are very bad drivers though, and pedestrians have no rights whatsoever)

Bye Bye Morocco - Hello West Sahara

21.07.08 – 25.07.08

West Sahara: Or better said what is left of it!?

At the beginning of my trip I told myself not to go into politics or make any other critical remarks! But I still want to illustrate the situation of West Africa. This is important because, I, myself, even thought that West Sahara was independent, but that is not the case. Since Spain has withdrawn in the 60s, the Moroccans and the Mauretians made a claim on the territory. Mauritania, although dropped the claims and for several years now, Morocco is ruling that region. Today, West Africa is very much integrated and most probably it will be a part of Morocco in a few years. There isn't a border between the two states.

Drive along the coast:

In a period of 4 days we did 500km, all along the coastline.

Here a concised dialogue:

The country is very poor (actually, we are right at the border of Sahara)





Entrance to Laayoune: The gateways are very big (pompous). What is so special at this entrance, are, the maroccanian flags which are in great numbers visible.



During our tour, South, we camped at a beachfront. There was no one else in sight, we were just the two of us.



In Dakhla we had the impression we still were in Morocco some how (that is how far integration has come already)

Crossing the border: At the customs Guerguarat to Mauretania it took us ages to get through (4 hours) It looked more like an entry to a country (than an exit) with all the inspections of the car and the controlling of the papers. We had to wait in the hot sun (in the open air) Lucky, the entry to Mauretania didn't take long (1/2 hour)

Bye, bye West Africa - Hello Mauretania

25.07.08

Mauretania, Camp in Nouâdhibon

I already have given you the information about the „Entry“ to Mauretania in the previous travelogue. It happened very quickly and distorted only little palm-oil. The land has still a breath of the Sahara and indicates itself very dry and stipulates to be hardly fertile, because rainfalls are a scarcity (rareness) in this region.

In a small town, called Nouâdhibon, not far from the customs, we decided to enter a camping site. We were very tired after the long procedure at the customs office and didn't want to travel a long distance anymore. I have to admit, the sight of this town was really depressing. The mess was written all over this town and beggars description. Unfortunately I can't let you have part in picturesque way, because my camera was stolen (more about it later)

26.07.08

Drive to the capital of Mauretania, Nouakchott.

It was actually our intention to do the 400km distance in one day. As we filled up petrol on our way, Heinz had the glorious idea to camp in the desert once more. Only a short run later we found a lovely spot, about 100km away from Nouakchott. We set up our camp, surrounded by high sand dunes, at 500meters off the main road. I love these nights true to nature, far from loud music and bright city lights, just peace and the natural whispers...

The next day brought us passed a changeable countryside, at times with magnificent sand dunes or what you call "Tafelbergen" (table mountains) which are testifying the "Erosion" over more than thousand of years where at times a stabile surface stayed intact.

Looking out for the known camping site Auberge Sahara was no problem thanks to Emmi (GPS). Here we decided to stay for a few days, first of all they provided entry to the Internet and secondly we had to organize the Visa for Mali.

27.07.08- 28.07.08

Nouakchott

The capital of Mauretania has approximately 800'000 inhabitants. It spread its roots there when the land became independent in 1960 only. They also ignored the shortage of water in that region, so they have to bring the water from far by big Trucks loaded with the needed element (all in all about ten thousand water tanks a day). At present a pipeline is being laid which should enable the water to flow over a 250km distance to the town.

We had a tiny surprise coming our way the next morning. We were in town at the consulate of Mali, exactly at 9°clock (which is the hours of opening) to get the Visa. An attendant welcomed us at the door and did ask us what we would like so early in the morning. Little did we know that Mauretania is one hour in rear, so according to their time we were too early. There was time for us to wander around in town, although there wasn't any "delicacy" to be seen, except the usual mosques!

Our passports were provided with the Visa by 11°clock.

29.07.08

Exit to Senegal

If one reads in the guide-book about leaving Mauretania, you'll be warned about the customs in Rosso. One can avoid it by crossing a dam at Diamma. Unfortunately that specific day, the dam unpassable, and so we landed eventually in Rosso. Already before we came to the customs lots of so called, "good assistants" were encircling us from all sides. They make their living by asking for their fare! From experiences it is just about impossible to get across the borders in a respectable time without a guide. The biggest problems are, that one has to encounter 4 different offices in completing various forms which are very difficult to fill out. One has to be very careful to choose somewhat a truth worthy assistant to enable some body's Entry or Exit without being overcharged! Having been agitated and quite stressed, I forgot to lock my Betsy. About 5 minutes later, I had to notice that my camera which was placed on the co- seat was gone. I had it covered, although thieves are known where to look for things, I guess!!!! I had some loud words with the frontier police and told them about the loss, but to no avail, it must have fallen on deaf ears somehow. The camera is and stays lost, what's worse, there won't be any pictures which I took in Mauretania. I did take 3 pictures with my other camera which I can present to you. After four hours of waiting we crossed the river to Senegal where we relatively didn't have any problems. Each one of us had to pay 100 Euro.



Concluding remarks about Mauretania:

Mauretania has been the very first land in “Black Africa”. I personally was quite disappointed what I experienced (not only what the customs were concerned). The towns and villages are very dirty and filthy, scattered by indefinable garbage all over the show. Many cars which are still on the road are dreadful and dangerous to its drivers and any human being!, and their driving style is horrendous.

We are looking forward to visiting Senegal next. It’s praised to be a nice and tourist friendly land, so it says!!!!

Till next time!!!