



About the Author

Based in West Lancashire, David is a keen walker, photographer and rock climber. As a frequent traveller he has followed his pursuits in over twenty countries across five continents.

After developing an interest in the mountains as a young teenager through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, David completed the Pennine Way at the age of 17. He improved his rock climbing in his thirties largely through the influence of the Fylde Mountaineering Club.

During frequent climbing visits to Morocco with the Club he became increasingly aware of the potential for walking and scrambling and in March 2015 he returned with his partner Halina to explore and document the routes in this guidebook.

WALKS AND SCRAMBLES IN THE MOROCCAN ANTI-ATLAS

by David Wood

CICERONE

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL
www.cicerone.co.uk

© David Wood 2018
First edition 2018
ISBN: 978 1 85284 809 5

Printed by KHL Printing, Singapore

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All photographs are by the author or Halina Rzadkiewicz unless otherwise stated.

Route base mapping by Oxford Alpine Club www.oxfordalpineclub.co.uk

Warning

Mountain and scrambling walking can be a dangerous activity carrying a risk of personal injury or death. It should be undertaken only by those with a full understanding of the risks and with the training and experience to evaluate them. The highest summits of the region are at a height where altitude sickness is possible although not likely. There is little or no water in the mountains so it is necessary to take what you need. While it can be hot during the day, the temperature at night can fall below 0° in the high mountains.

There is no mountain rescue service. In the event of injury your party needs to be able to manage a self rescue and possibly a considerable journey to safety.

The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/809/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

Register your book: To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at www.cicerone.co.uk.

Front cover: The first exposed section on Route 38 – The Lost World of Adad Medni in the Tanalt area.

CONTENTS

Overview map	8–9
Transport and communications	10
Map key	11
Location of routes	12–13
INTRODUCTION	15
The landscapes of the Anti-Atlas	15
Geological evolution	19
The Berbers and the Anti-Atlas	20
History and politics	22
Plants and animals	24
Local culture	27
Personal safety	28
Terrain	29
When to go	30
What to take	31
Money and entry requirements	33
Where to base yourself	34
Getting there	35
Getting around	36
Information and guides	38
Eating and drinking	38
Health and emergencies	39
Route selection and grading	41
Using this guide	45
1 TAFRAOUT	47
Route 1 Ouadou Desert Basin Walk and Scramble	50
Route 2 The Painted Rocks and Tafraout Back Country	55
Route 3 The Elephant's Trunk	59
Route 4 Napoleon's Hat and the Three Flagpoles Scramble	62
Adrar Mqorn	66
Route 5 Direct from Ayerd	67
Route 6 Traverse by Southeast Ridge	72
Route 7 The Grid Ridge Scramble	79
Route 8 Tahala Peaks Scramble and Walk	82
2 AIT MANSOUR AND THE SOUTH	89
Route 9 Afra Ridge Scramble	90

Route 10	Tasselt Walk	95
Route 11	Tizi Ridge Scramble	98
Ait Mansour		101
Route 12	Northern Skyline	101
Route 13	Southwest Rim and Summits	104
Route 14	Southeast Towers	108
3 AMELN VALLEY AND ABDELLAH CIRQUE		112
Route 15	Jebel Amagdour (Horseshoe Route)	114
Route 16	Ardrar Idekel Scramble and Walk	118
Route 17	Tizgut Ridge Scramble	122
Route 18	Above the Lion's Face	127
Route 19	Below the Lion's Face	131
Route 20	Ameln Villages Valley Traverse	134
Abdellah Cirque		143
Route 21	Abdellah Ridge Scramble and Azarhar Summit	144
Route 22	Ifefas Peak	149
Route 23	Azgour Ridge Scramble	152
Route 24	Oumsnat Peak by Dinosaur Wall West Window	156
4 JEBEL EL KEST		163
Route 25	The Summits from Tagdicht	166
Route 26	Tagdicht Skyline Scramble	172
Route 27	West Ridge Scramble and Summits from Anergui	177
Route 28	West Ridge Scramble from Afantinzar	182
Route 29	Jebel El Kest and the Ameln Summits	190
5 TASKRA AND THE NORTHEAST		209
Route 30	The Tangelochte Fortress	211
Route 31	Amzkhssan Summit	216
Route 32	Tassilla Summits	220
Route 33	Jebel Taskra and the Tizi Skyline	225
Route 34	The Targa Skyline	230
6 TANALT AND THE NORTHWEST		237
Route 35	In Search of Darth Vader	239
Route 36	Dwawj Circuit	242
Route 37	The Tirki River Valley and Potter's Cave	246
Adad Medni		250
Route 38	The Lost World of Adad Medni	251
Route 39	Tighmert Face Circular Walk	255
Route 40	Jebel Imzi and the Dragon Tree Gorges	259

7 A TRAVERSE OF THE NORTHWESTERN ANTI-ATLAS	262	
Route 41	From Ait Baha to Ait Mansour	264

Appendix A	Route summary table	271
Appendix B	Distance table	275
Appendix C	Useful contacts	276

Acknowledgements

This guidebook would not have been written without the help of many people who provided inspiration and support.

Claude Davies led the way with his 2004 Cicerone book *Climbing in the Anti-Atlas* and I am grateful for his suggestions early in this project. Other climbing book writers have provided inspiration, particularly Steve Broadbent (and the Climb Tafraout Team) who has always been willing to share ideas including the use of the OAC maps under license. For additional assistance along the way thanks go to Les Brown, Don Sargeant and Paul Donnithorne (*Moroccan Rock*), Ron Kenyon and Simon Brown.

I am very grateful to those who have provided support along the way. They include members of Fylde Mountaineering Club and in particular Martin Bennett and Alan Blackburn who invited me back to Morocco in 2010 after my 2005 trip was curtailed by unseasonably bad weather. I appreciate the help offered by Dave Cundy and especially the efforts of Steve Longworth, Tony Jackson and Roy Turner. I am grateful to the 'Cheshire cheese boys' and in particular Ron Buckley, for going to places where no-one else would.

The people of the Anti-Atlas have made this project a joy. Their hospitality is often humbling.

I would like to thank the staff of the Les Amandiers and Salama hotels and particularly Mohammed and Hassan, the barmen of the former, for keeping the beer glasses full.

Also, I am grateful to the carpet sellers (Sayeed at Maison Tuareg and Mohammed at Maison Troc) and Houssine Laroussi at Coin Nomads, for providing local information.

I am indebted to Cicerone Press for their adventurous spirit in taking on this project and to the editorial staff for their patience in responding to many questions.

Finally, I am hugely grateful to Halina Rzakiewicz for being there when the going got tough. Her dedication, assistance and companionship throughout this project has made it an exciting and memorable adventure.





Route symbols on map extracts

- route
- scramble section (various colours)
- alternative route
- link route
- start
- finish
- start/finish point
- alternative start/finish point
- alternative start point
- alternative finish point
- route direction
- waypoint
- building
- landmark
- a blue star denotes a tourist attraction

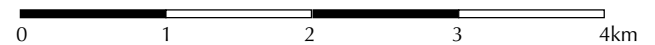
For OAC map symbols see OAC map key

GPX files

for all routes can be downloaded free at www.cicerone.co.uk/809/GPX

Key for OAC 1:50,000 map bases

ANTI-ATLAS *JEBEL EL KEST MOROCCO*

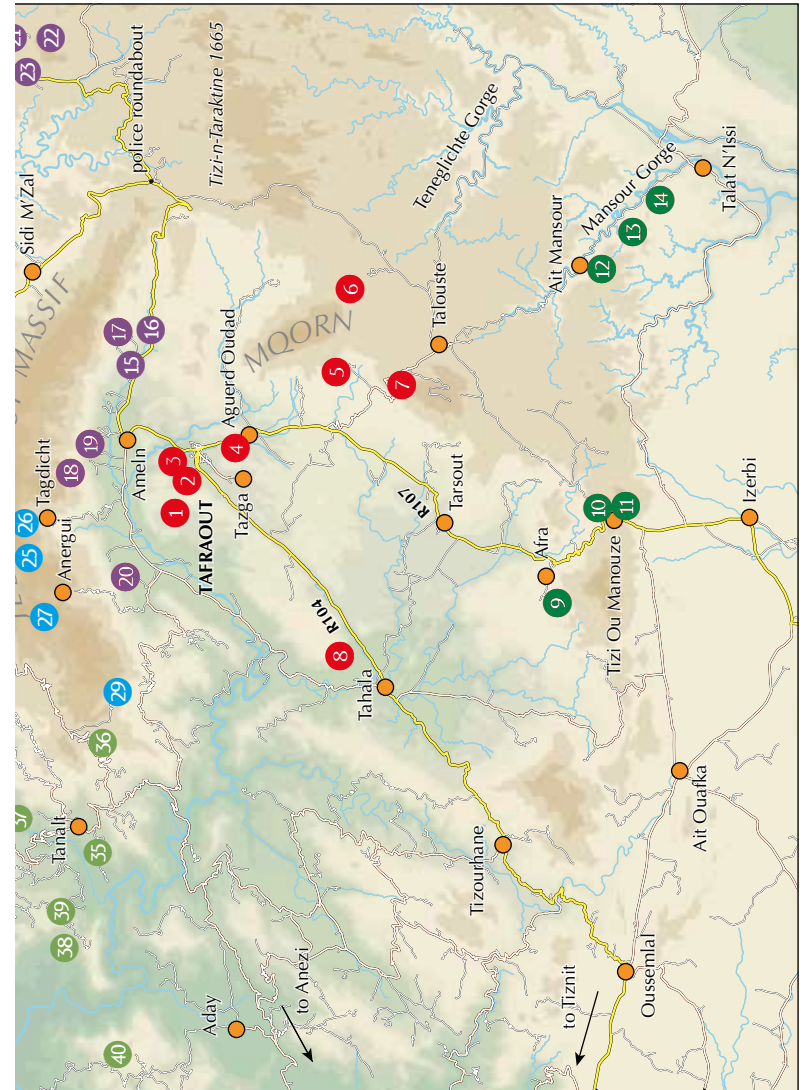
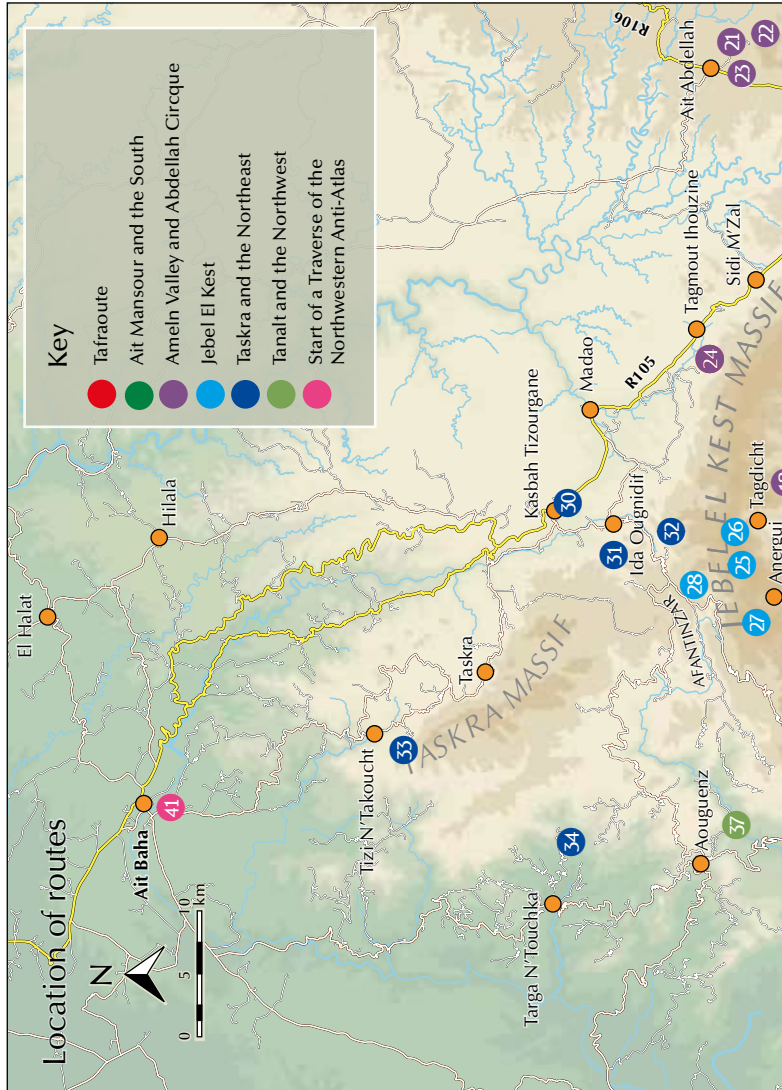


Scale 1:50 000 (2cm to 1km – 1¼ inches to 1 mile)
Spot heights derived from satellite data.

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Accommodation | Main Regional Route | Pastures / grazing land |
| Petrol | Main Road / Provincial Route | Heavy vegetation |
| Parking | Surfaced Road | Built-up area |
| | Unsurfaced or gravel (piste) road | |
| | 4WD may be required | |
| | Footpath / trail | |

GeoGraphics Cartography by GeoGraphics (UK)
Published by the Oxford Alpine Club 2016

www.oxfordalpineclub.co.uk





The iconic Lion's Face, Ameln Valley (photo: Martin Bennett)

INTRODUCTION

It is a mysterious and compelling sight...a Lion's Face so large that you can barely take in its dimensions.

Sometimes it is there, proclaiming its dominance over the sculptured and eroded rocks of the Tafraout oasis. Then, as the evening light turns from gold to a deep red, it is gone. Only shadows remain. They linger behind the pillars, towers and ridges waiting to create a remarkable silhouette for those lucky enough to be descending the Ameln Valley in the evening.

But this is only the start. Away from the Lion's gaze you can explore the deep Utah-like canyons of Ait Mansour or the ancient villages of the Ameln Valley. Behind the immensity of Jebel El Kest and the cool spring-time of Afantizar, the lost world of the Tanalt back-country awaits.

The walks and scrambles in this guide are spread over 4000km² of the western Anti-Atlas – an area as large as the UK's Lake District and Snowdonia National Parks combined. The routes described here are highly varied – some on rugged mountains, others in lush valleys, ranging from just a few kilometres to over 25km.

The Moroccan Anti-Atlas offers months of exploration for experienced walkers with a love of adventure. The ridges and highest summits provide challenges for the most experienced of scramblers. The valleys and villages

present countless opportunities for discovery for those whose experience and ambitions are more modest.

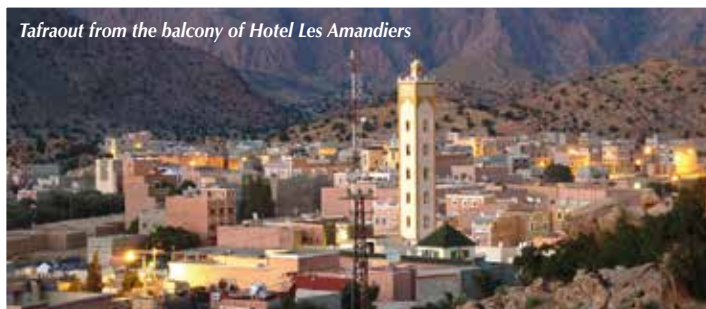
In the Anti-Atlas it is almost possible to walk at will as there are seldom any fences or boundaries except those imposed by the landscape and your approach to it. This may appeal to confident and experienced walkers and scramblers who seek alternatives to an increasingly over-protective and regulated world. With this freedom come certain risks. Some of the routes in this guide cross remote and wild territory and because there are no formal rescue facilities, you are thrown back on your own resources. This book provides guidance under the sections 'Using this guide', 'Route selection and grading', 'Health and emergencies' and 'What to take'. This will help you to plan your trip and make choices according to your (and your party's) experience and preparation.

Wherever you choose to walk or scramble in the Anti-Atlas the dramatic landscape will leave an indelible impression. Expect the unexpected.

THE LANDSCAPES OF THE ANTI-ATLAS

The sheer variety of the southern Moroccan landscape is remarkable – and nowhere is this more true than

The exposed approach to the Abdellah Ridge Scramble (Route 21) – one of the more challenging routes in this book



Tafraout from the balcony of Hotel Les Amandiers

in the Anti-Atlas. Located in southern Morocco, its mountains, valleys and plains extend over 300km northeast from the Atlantic Ocean to Jebel Sirwa (3305m). They are separated from their easterly extension – the Jebel Sahro – by the Draa Valley. The whole Anti-Atlas area is often described by the Berber term ‘Souss-Massa Draa’ but the area covered in this guide might best be regarded as the north-western Anti-Atlas.

The principal city of the area is Agadir. In the Berber language, the name translates to ‘a wall encircling a town’ but the Anti-Atlas has many such fortress-storehouses. These often complex structures were once a defining cultural element of the region and many had detailed rules about their security. Although many have fallen into disuse the remaining third are detailed in a map and book by Herbert Popp (*Les Agadirs de l’Anti-Atlas Occidental*) which can be bought in Tafraout.

The main tourist town of the area is the oasis of Tafraout. It is situated

at an altitude of some 1000m and is 150km southeast of the plains of Agadir and 100km west of the provincial town of Tiznit. The town was once the seat of French colonial rule in the region and its best-known colonial-style hotel, Les Amandiers, was established in 1959 in response to a developing interest in tourism.

Tafraout’s many weird rock formations sit in a basin among a network of generally dry rivers. These have created an extremely ravined



Natural rock features



landscape, attenuated by occasional flat zones formed by the erosion of granites and schists.

Tafraout is dominated to the southeast by the large mountain of Adrar Mqorn (2344m) and is overlooked from the north by the immense mass of Jebel El Kest (2375m). Although it is 155m lower than the far more distant and less accessible summit of Jebel Aklim, Jebel El Kest is the main attraction of the north-western Anti-Atlas. The pink quartzite massif which extends south-east of Jebel El Kest is 20km long and generally around 2000m in height. It dominates the Tafraout and the Ameln Valley and provides the basis for several routes in this book. Its summit offers panoramic views of the High Atlas and southern deserts. Water from its peaks has carved the large boulder-strewn gorges which serve the oases and

irrigation channels of the 25 villages of the Ameln Valley.

The immense gorges and mountain slopes between Tafraout and Ait Baha and across the region are flecked with millions of terraces comparable to those found in Tibet.

Outside of the mountains much of the region is a scrub desert of subtle soil colourations within which sit quartzite domes, sweeping valleys and boulder-clad gorges and ravines. Sometimes resembling a lunar landscape, the basins are sparse and in the east the denuded landscape can take on a strangely beautiful appearance as the progression of the day reveals multiple shades and saturations.

In the valleys and mountains the season and rainfall pattern dictate the base colour, with February producing the celebrated almond blossom and springtime giving birth to a profusion

of wild flowers and wild herbs. Even the desert can bloom with lavender and flowers after rain. The terrain is defined as desert by virtue of its rainfall being less than 200mm a year rather than being composed of dramatic dunes but its vast expanse – stretching to the mountains of Western Sahara – is no less awe inspiring for that.

GEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION

The geology of the Anti-Atlas range is complex and that of the western Anti-Atlas differs from that of the eastern section. Experts disagree about the extent to which tectonic plate deformations contributed to the landscape.

While much of the bedrock of the African continent was formed in the Pre-Cambrian era, the sandstones, quartzites and granites of Anti-Atlas

have been subject to much deformation and change.

The Anti-Atlas was formed in the Palaeozoic era (300–550 million years ago) when the two former continents of Gondwana and Euramerica collided. Recent evidence reveals a connection between the Anti-Atlas range and the Appalachian Mountains.

In the second stage of development the earth's crust significantly expanded, resulting in a separation of many previous continental formations. When the continents broke apart, many sedimentary basins were formed. In the western Anti-Atlas a total of up to 12km of varied clastic and shallow marine sediments were deposited. Generally the Anti-Atlas basin contains a high amount of fine-grained detrital, clay rich sediments: muddy siltstones and shales. Quartzites, sandstones and



Forces of nature shaping a Utah-like canyon (Route 12)

conglomerates form thin but continuous beds at different levels.

During the most recent stage, 65 to 2 million years ago, it is believed that what is known today as the High and Middle Atlas were uplifted as a result of the collision between Europe and North Africa at the end of the Iberian Peninsula. However, not all geologists agree what kind of plate deformation took place and whether processes deep in the earth's mantle were also responsible for the uplift.

The geological shaping of the Anti-Atlas has served its indigenous inhabitants and its latter day visitors well. The earliest inhabitants would have benefited from the sharpness of the rock which would serve as tools and to create the rock art described below. Today's visitors can enjoy the dramatic granite tors of Tafraout and the quartzite of the Ameln Valley which with its good friction lends itself well to climbing and scrambling. However, the forces of nature are still at work and it would be well to remember that the south facing red (haematite infused) quartzite, can be subject to vegetation growth and can fracture under the influence of expansion and contraction.

THE BERBERS AND THE ANTI-ATLAS

The Berbers, who are indigenous to this area and much of North Africa, have had a presence in the Anti-Atlas since at least 10,000bc. They have



Berber man wearing a traditional turban

shaped the landscape and the landscape has shaped them.

Berbers are known to each other as Imazighin or Amazigh (singular) which roughly translated means 'free' or 'noble man'. The Imazighin are mainly from the Shilha/Shili group which is made up of various subgroups including Tuareg. A small minority of the Shilha are Christians and Jews and the latter periodically visit Tafraout to re-unite themselves with their ancestral homeland. The Berbers' principal spoken language is Tamazight with a distinctive written hieroglyphic/runic type alphabet (Tifinagh). It is a very old language which has seen a resurgence of importance since its modern version, neo-tifinagh, was introduced into the school curriculum in 2003 and was adopted as the official language of Morocco in 2016.

In the villages and on the hilltops salmon-coloured and red ochre buildings – typical Berber homes – sit harmoniously in their surroundings, sometimes punctuated by large and ornate mansions owned by wealthy families who visit at holidays or during the summer.

Many of the villages are situated in the mountains near to water sources. The massive cultivation of terraces, together with the grazing of sheep and goats on the slopes and on upland pastures during summer, has created the paths which form the basis of the routes in this guide. It has also influenced the local ecosystem.

All over Africa, development has followed a pattern of urbanisation and a movement away from a rural life. Just so in the western Anti-Atlas. With

the decline of terrace farming and herding, many of the young men earn a living in Rabat or Casablanca and only return home to the mountains at weekends.

In response, regional government has invested heavily in road development and water provision. Alongside a significant upgrade of the appearance and infrastructure of Tafraout, roads have been excavated to mountain villages in a manner that would be considered ambitious in Europe and the UK. Additionally, the whole of the region has had its water supply upgraded and houses in relatively remote villages now have water meters. Some of this has its downside. The mountain bikers and archaeologists lament the destruction of the old tracks and walkers and scramblers may



Palatial family residences

have cause to regret that some of the once free roadside fonts are now dry.

HISTORY AND POLITICS

Berber history is another complex story but reveals the Imazighin as always fiercely independent. Although they traded with their neighbours, the Berbers largely avoided absorption by the Phoenicians, Carthaginians and, many centuries later, the Ottomans. Sometimes known as Mauris (Moors), they established their own kingdom of Mauretania (an area encompassing the western part of Algeria and reaching to the Atlas Mountains) in the third century BC. This kingdom was annexed to the Roman Empire in 33AD (but still ruled by a succession of Berber kings) before eventually being reunited under independent Berber rule about 600 years later.

From Mauretania to Morocco

During the 7th century, the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate ruled the region, albeit tenuously in the face of Berber resistance, until the Berber revolt of 740. Over the next 200 years or so, the foundations of modern-day Morocco were established by an Arab-Berber dynasty – the Idrisids. After 1053 Morocco was ruled by a succession of Muslim dynasties, including the Almoravid and Almohad dynasty, again led by Berber tribes. Over time, the Berbers gradually adopted Islam as Sunni Muslims, but those in the mountains held on to their traditional language and customs to varying degrees.

The Berbers (Mauris/Moors) also played a pivotal role in establishing a presence in the Iberian Peninsula. In one form or another, the Moors occupied Spain for 800 years until 1492.

Their departure was not without repercussions as a section of the Berber population took to the high seas in piracy. In a little known act, some are even believed to have hoisted their flag over Lundy Island, England, in the summer of 1625. These corsairs were identified as the ‘Salle Rovers’ from the northern estuary of Rabat.

To what extent the Berbers of the western Anti-Atlas were involved in any of this activity is unclear. The archaeologists have interpreted rock gravures which give some indications of their early history in the Anti-Atlas. The earliest engravings were thought to have started around 2500BC in southern Morocco and to have been the work of nomadic pastoralists still predominately interested in hunting. Evidence of megalithic art, in the form of engravings can be found near Tazka within walking distance from Tafraout. In distinction to gravures from other areas of the Anti-Atlas, the engravings prominently contain pictures of cattle rather than wild animals, Libyco-Berber warriors or chariots. This may suggest that the inhabitants of this region were more disposed to maintaining a living rather than adventurism.

Into the modern age

Many centuries later, during the (French) Moroccan Crisis of 1905, the British in defiance of Germany, lent tacit support to the French in their quest for control of Morocco. Following a second (Agadir)

Moroccan Crisis in 1911, French and Spanish influences were cemented in 1912 by a partition in which gave the Spanish rights over the north part of Morocco and the French authority over much of the south.

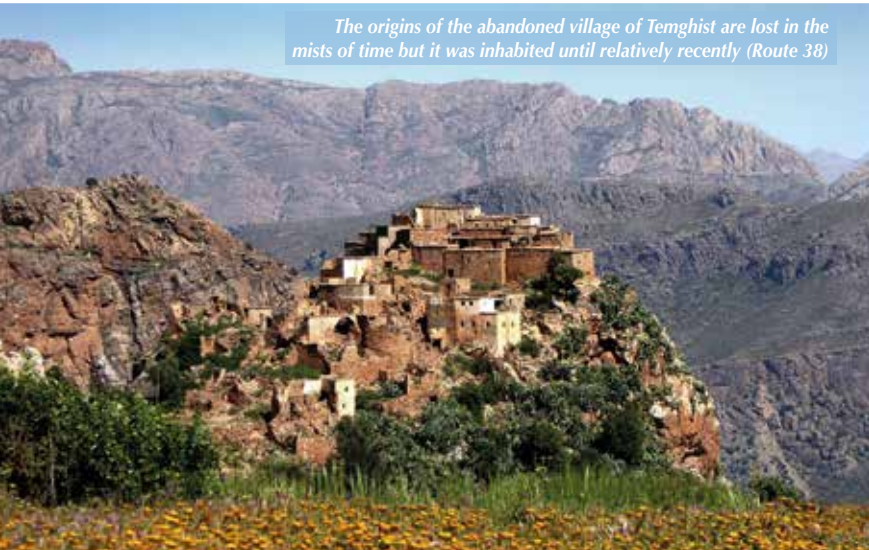
In 1956 Morocco regained independence from France. Shortly afterwards Morocco regained most of the territories previously under Spanish control with the exception of the southern coastal strip of Sidi Ifni and the Western Sahara. Both were released in 1975 but control of the latter led to conflict between Morocco and Algeria and, although diplomatic relations were restored, the issue is still not fully resolved. The enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta are still retained by Spain.

Politics and economy

Today, Morocco is a democracy ruled by a multi-party coalition with a constitutional monarchy (King Mohammed VI). There are many political groupings, some of which are represented emblematically. For example, the Birds (liberty), Tractors (modernisation) and Candles (tradition) are all active locally.

Economically the country is Africa's fifth largest economy. Morocco is rich in iron ore, lead ore, copper, silver, mercury, rock salt marble and natural gas. It is a key exporter of phosphates and invests heavily in solar energy. Its reliance on agriculture leads to its development being influenced by rainfall, as in the

The origins of the abandoned village of Temghist are lost in the mists of time but it was inhabited until relatively recently (Route 38)





drought of 2016. Within the Anti-Atlas the cultivation of the argan tree has long been a mainstay. It has given a recent impetus to the local economy through women's co-operatives focusing on the cosmetic uses of the oil. Honey production is also increasingly popular.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Plant life is not as limited as the visitor might expect considering the desert-like conditions. Some plants manage to survive on what is on offer and herbs, in particular, do well.

In springtime wild flowers can be seen in profusion especially on the Tizi and Targa escarpments. *Cistus Albidus* is prolific near Jebel El Kest. In autumn its decaying leaves can

find their way into your shoes and boots.

Herbs are abundant on the upper mountain slopes. *Lavendar Dendata* grows on the slopes of Adrar Mqorn and *Euphorbia* – a spiky six-sided fluted and courgette-like plant – is ubiquitous on sunny slopes. When the stalk is broken the plant secretes a white milky fluid which acts as an extreme irritant to skin, mouth or eyes (see 'Health and emergencies'). Elsewhere you may see *Cistus Salvifolius*, *Iris Planifolia* and a range of other plants. Date palms are common in the oases and the prickly argan tree is everywhere. The oil from its berries are used for cooking and for cosmetics. Multi-coloured bougainvillea can often be seen draped over the front of larger houses.



A selection of springtime flowers

Animals feature prominently in the life of the Anti-Atlas – both wild and domesticated. Although not as abundant as in Europe, birds are present in numbers wherever there is water and the secluded valleys echo with birdsong in the spring months. Some will shadow you on the mountain (such as crested larks on Ardrar Mqorn) and you may see eagles and other raptors higher up. Rock buntings even seem to feel comfortable taking up residence in the hotels. Elsewhere you may occasionally see wheatears, shrikes, bee eaters and partridges.

It is not uncommon to see ground squirrels and wild boar when you are out walking. Occasionally you may see gazelle but they are easily disturbed. Reptiles are the masters of disguise and will only make themselves known under certain conditions.

Co-existence between species is a common theme in the Anti-Atlas, as is a tolerance of animals which elsewhere might be seen as a nuisance. Local wisdom has it that boars keep the snakes away from town and the roaming dogs keep the boars under control. The partly feral cats see off the scorpions and as for the dogs and cats



Co-existence between species is common

together...well...it is as it always has been. It is strange how the dogs and cats appear to have picked up some of the overly relaxed attitude of Tafraout inhabitants towards the motor vehicle. It is not unusual to see dogs asleep on main roads and even cats, usually the most vigilant of animals, can be seen taking their chances.

LOCAL CULTURE

Language

Most Moroccans will speak a Moroccan/north African (Maghrebic) form of Arabic. This is principally a spoken language unlike standard Arabic, which is the language of religious instruction and is often read in newspapers and correspondence and

spoken in the main cities. In addition to Berber and Moroccan Arabic, French is widely spoken in Tafraout and many hotels and restaurants will have an English language menu or staff who speak English. Indeed some locals have taken to using the audio record facility of Google Translate to give them a translation of English. People from the south-west of the country will understand Spanish. Elsewhere, for example in the auberges of the Ameln Valley, you may be expected to communicate in French. If you are in a more remote area where the locals do not understand French it is likely that Moroccan Arabic will be understood.

If you wish to show willing and try to communicate in Tamazight, you will almost certainly need instruction as it is heavily accented.

Religion

Moroccans are in the main Sunni Muslims and follow the principles of Islam including fasting (Ramadan) and the celebration of Eide-a-fitr. In accordance with one of the five pillars of Islam they pray several times a day and the call to prayer from the mosques is a distinctive feature of daily life in the region. In the Anti-Atlas there is also a tolerance of people of other faiths.

Another of the five pillars of Islam is charity. The Anti-Atlas is relatively well-off but, as anywhere, there are pockets of deprivation and disabled people or those who have fallen on hard times may ask for money. When you are approached in rural areas (such as Ait Abdellah) by women or children asking for something consider the precedent you may be setting. If you give them money they will probably ask for money from the next person. If you give them a banana or a can of sardines they will probably eat it. Children seem to value the gift of a pen which can be bought cheaply in Tafraout.

Dress

Local women generally wear a head scarf and many married women will cover their face when meeting strangers, especially in the villages. There is no expectation that female tourists should wear any head covering. Tafraout is quite a cosmopolitan place and tourists often dress according to their inclinations. However, a degree

of discretion and modesty would not go unnoticed, particularly in the more traditional villages.

The use of zip-off shorts for walking in the countryside makes for an adaptable solution for those who can tolerate the prickly plants.

Alcohol

The vast majority of the local population do not drink alcohol. However, there is no restriction on the purchase of alcohol in the small number of hotels and restaurants that serve it in Tafraout and the Ameln Valley. As in all matters, moderation is advised in a hot climate.

PERSONAL SAFETY

One question that is often asked of visitors to Morocco is 'is it safe?' Perhaps the most honest reply is 'is anywhere safe?'

Outside the major cities and certainly in the rural environment of the Anti-Atlas, the crime rate seems to be low. Threats to the person and thefts from the person or vehicles are exceptionally rare. A very small number of the thefts of mobile phones from the unattended rucksacks of climbers have come to light and these have been attributed to opportunist thefts by young men with local knowledge.

The fear of terrorism has influenced tourism to Africa. Understandably people without knowledge of the continent may treat northern Africa as one entity.

Also, people will be aware that some Moroccan nationals have been involved in incidents outside of the country. However, the last incident in Morocco itself took place in 2012 and that was in the city environment of Marrakech. The UK Foreign Office indicates that around 600,000 British nationals visit Morocco every year and that most visits are trouble-free. The threat of terrorism is considered to be high and travellers are advised to avoid political demonstrations. However, the Foreign Office also rates the threat as high in France, Germany and Belgium and no doubt other governments would place the UK in the same category.

Whatever our instincts, we are probably more at risk in the cities and capitals of Europe than the rural environment of the Anti-Atlas. In the

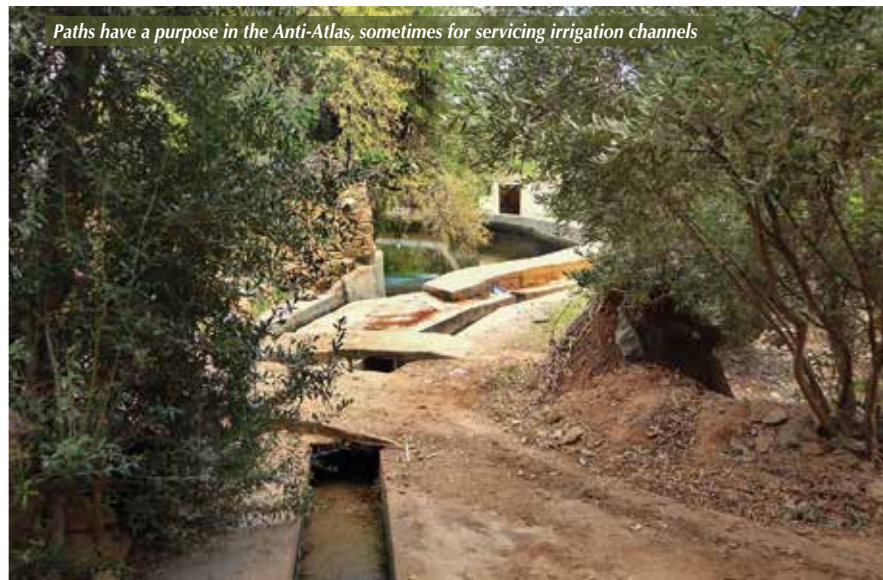
author's experience, the hills and villages of the Anti-Atlas are a safe, hassle-free and welcoming place to be.

TERRAIN

Moroccans generally do not regularly walk the hills for leisure so paths serve a purpose, usually agriculture or animal herding. Therefore, it is not unusual to have sections of walking routes which make use of partially-formed, discontinuous or fragmented paths.

There are some prickly bushes around but they seldom compare to the bramble you might find in the UK. Care is needed with low-hanging argan tree branches. Loose stones can be troublesome underfoot on the granite near Tafraout. Otherwise, although stony, a quartzite surface is

Paths have a purpose in the Anti-Atlas, sometimes for servicing irrigation channels



Waypoints (WPs) are provided in the form of six-figure grid references. These correspond to numbered paragraphs of route description. They can be used in conjunction with the Mini Maps and in particular the 1:25,000 Jebel El Kest map.

Access and parking information is also provided in a separate box.

Route descriptions are intended to give sufficient information to navigate the main elements of the route, particularly when used with the GPX files (available from the Cicerone website). However, footpaths can change and the nature of the route-finding in the region is such that minor left or right turns cannot be guaranteed with certainty. For navigation using streams, the terms left/right bank have been avoided unless clarified 'true left bank' and 'true right bank'. ('True right' and 'true left' are right and left as seen when looking in the direction of flow.) In fact, in many cases stream and watercourses will be dry outside of winter or rainfall and will appear as intermittent watercourses, known as *talats*.

Place names mentioned on the map are highlighted in bold in the route description. Beware that there is sometimes a replication of place names across areas (for example, Anamer and Tagdicht – see box).

Please note that as a result of ongoing road improvements, some of the minor roads described at the time of writing as 'unsurfaced' may in future be surfaced with concrete and the start of some footpaths may have been degraded.

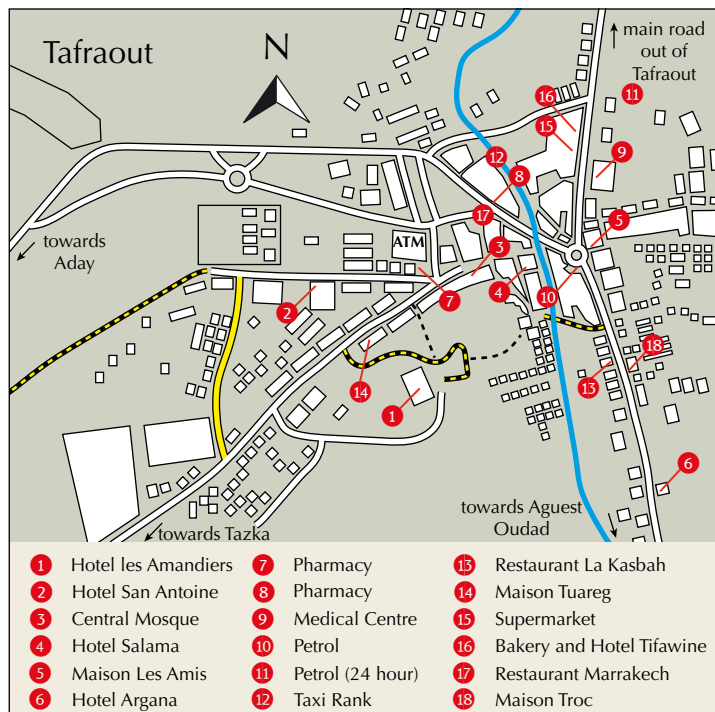
GPX tracks

GPX files are also available for all routes in this guidebook by visiting www.cicerone.co.uk/809/GPX. A GPS is an excellent aid to navigation, but you should also carry a map and compass and know how to use them. GPX files are provided in good faith, but neither the author nor the publisher accept responsibility for their accuracy. Please note that GPX information by its nature may be inaccurate, so use files with care. See www.cicerone.co.uk/809 for a short note about the causes of GPX errors.

1 TAFRAOUT



View towards the Ameln Valley from the Ouadou Basin (Route 1)



Sometimes compared to the Badlands of South Dakota, Tafraout's tagine-like granite torcs cut a stunning profile against a backlit sky. The pinnacles and domes suggest interesting views and hours of adventure.

But these seemingly diminutive granite hills hold a trap for the unwary. An optical illusion tricks the eye into thinking the hills are of little significance compared to the Ameln summits but picking a way up these hillsides in the heat can be tiring

and takes longer than you expect. Moreover the descents require care as the granite fragments into granules just like ball bearings which can lead to slips and scrapes.

As a consequence only two routes (Route 1 and Route 3) are included among these hills with suggestions for some DIY wandering for the adventurous. More amenable walking direct from Tafraout can be found to the south of the town from the showpiece village of Aguerd Oudad and nearby



Tazga. Both can be enjoyed as part of Route 2 or in their own right with exploration of the hills behind the latter and a visit to the megalithic rock carving known as the 'rock gazelle' (2km south of town, near Tazga) taking a little more time.

In contrast, Tafraout's back country provides plenty of options for exploration with several good walks and an entertaining scramble not too far from town. Some of these catch a breeze, so when the heat drapes itself around you like a blanket in the town, some

respite can be had on the higher plateaus (such as the Grid Ridge) or on the splendid Adrar Mqorn, the second highest summit in the area.

Tafraout is well placed to act as a base for all of the routes in this section. Four of the routes can be reached on foot from town and the remaining routes can be reached by mountain bike or taxi. You can get to the Tahala Hills by bus but you will need a good command of French to make sure you get the right one.

ROUTE 1

Oudou Desert Basin Walk and Scramble

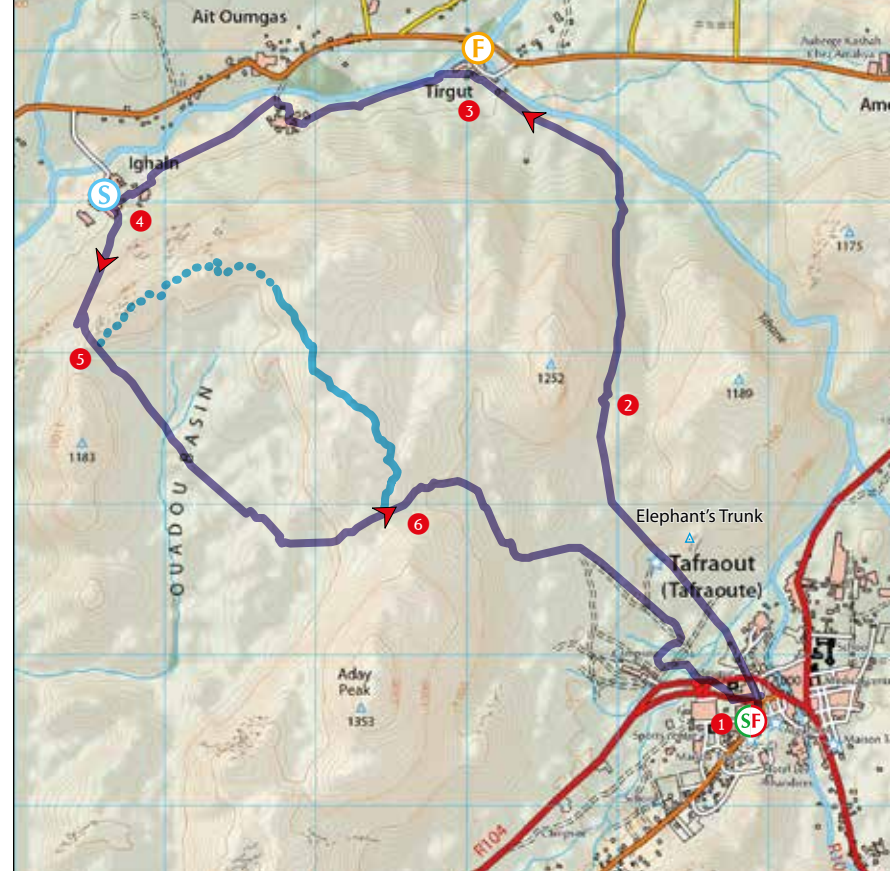
Start/finish	Maroc Telecom, Tafraout (389 147)
Alternative start	Ighaln (346 180)
Alternative finish	Tirgut (373 189)
Distance	15km; Ighaln to Tafraout 7km; Tafraout to Tirgut 4.5km
Ascent	550m; Ighaln to Tafraout 300m; Tafraout to Tirgut 90m
Descent	550m; Ighaln to Tafraout 100m; Tafraout to Tirgut 225m
Grade	Moderate with optional scramble (Grade 2); Ighaln to Tafraout Moderate
Time	6hr + 1hr for the scramble; Ighaln to Tafraout 2–3hr; Tafraout to Tirgut 225m 1hr 30min–2hr
Map	OAC4 Tafraout or OAC3 Ameln
Waypoints	(1) 389 147 (2) 379 167 (3) 370 188 (4) 346 180 (5) 345 170 (6) 365 158

Offering extensive views over Tafraout, Ameln Valley and the Lion's Face, this circular route can be split into two attractive linear walks (Taфраout to Tirgut and Ighaln to Taфраout) accessible by car or public transport. The two walks are of about the same length although most of the second half from Ighaln is steeper and involves more ascent. The walk can be shortened considerably by finishing at Tirgut.

The full circuit breaches the Taфраout skyline at its weakest point on good paths and returns across a desert basin which can be gained by relatively little effort. The first part of the walk is easy and mainly downhill, but the middle link-up section from Tirgut to Ighaln has some navigational challenges. The variant which includes a scramble follows a skyline traverse past the remains of extremely old dwellings. Take plenty of water as the Basin can get hot when there is little breeze about.

ACCESS

Maroc Telecom is on the R104 opposite the Banque Populaire in the centre of Taфраout. If you want to start from Ighaln you can get there by bus or taxi. By car turn left at Ameln junction and left again after 5.0km. Continue 0.5km to the highest part of the village next to an ornamental garden decorated with farm implements (WP4).



1 From Maroc Telecom, head north between the tented restaurant and the Banque Populaire, to cross Sharia-el-Jeish road and reach a narrow alleyway with a concrete cable post marked 3. Follow a path past a house with palm trees, over a bridge and stay left of a cemetery and The Elephant's Trunk route (Route 3). After crossing a seasonal watercourse the path bends right and joins a broadening track to a cairned col with views across the Ameln Valley. Note the hole in the rock and shelter on the left (30 min).

2 A good donkey trail leads downwards. Keep left at a junction after 10min and follow blue and white dots until you reach a small concrete wall. Here a

partially cairned path drifts leftwards and deteriorates as it passes through trees to reach a faint fork at an old argan tree and cairn near a watercourse. Take the faint right path which skirts the palmery and emerges at a walled cemetery and a large house at **Tirgut**.

For the **shorter linear walk**, finish here by following the wall around the corner to the right onto a concrete road which meets the main road at the TIRGTE sign (373 189). The bus stops a few metres west.

5 From the cemetery follow an obvious track towards a water tower keeping left towards the first of two blue plastic-clad concrete bollards. Pass by the farm and second bollard to cross the stream bed. Stay left of the stream over pathless terrain for 300m until a path can be gained above the main river bed. This passes a wall, water tower and threshing pad to a concrete ramp by the side of a large grey concrete building. Veer right and left through the village aiming for a small mosque.

Turn immediate left to follow an irrigation channel past a turreted house and onto a track which leads to a large fence surrounding a bare palmery. Pass through the gate, or, if closed, work left over faint terrace paths, and just before the small reservoir exit steeply leftwards through a gate. Climb the rocky path passing next to an ornate beige house then by the side of a large dark red house onto a new concrete road.

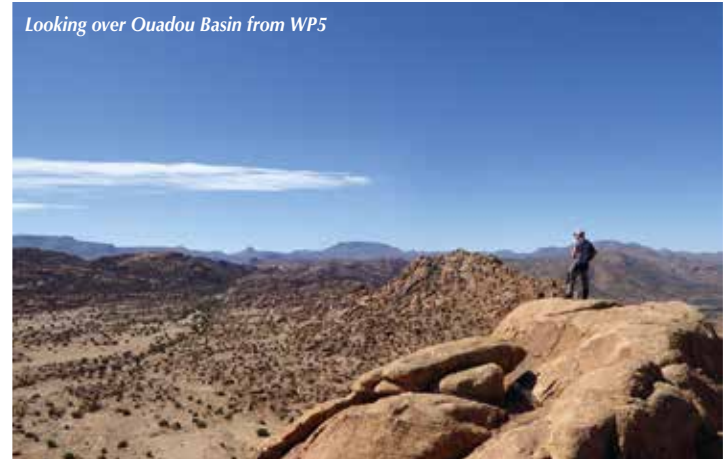
Take the concrete ramp by a red garage door and just before the road ends stay with the road as a short cut to the main path. Alternatively descend rightwards past embedded milk churns to the ornamental garden and start of the Basin route proper from the parking place at **Ighaln**.

Above the village there are some **ruins** looking skywards with a finger-like appearance. To the right of this you can see steep slabs and on the southwest skyline some prominent boulders, one of which is ear-shaped and is reached by a diagonal rising traverse.

4 From the right of the ornamental garden head up passing a green ONIP sign between houses to get onto the hillside. After 50m trend right (SSW) on a rising, partially cairned, traverse. A boulder marked with graffiti (SAD 09.2004) acts as a marker. Prominent boulders and a shelter are reached after 30min.

The walker's route continues up a wide slope for 100m to a boulder with a sloping top and turns left (E) to zig-zag upwards to a col. The scramblers' route takes a more direct approach to the col by breaking off leftwards from the shelter, up and over rock slabs.

Looking over Ouadou Basin from WP5



At the **col** take a few minutes to survey the surroundings. The scramble veers off leftwards, over rocks. To the southeast is Aday Peak with a series of hills running rightwards and to its left a ridge which intersects with a smaller series of linked hills running south to north and forming the barrier between the basin and Tafraout. This weak ridge is descended by the scrambler returning to the main route. In the background is the unmistakable profile of Adrar Mqorn. Crossing the basin to the gap at the intersection takes about one hour.

5 For the walking route follow the path rightwards then left (SE), weaving through large boulders and following cairns, but always heading directly towards the summit of **Aday Peak**. After 30min a wide track is reached. Go left (E) initially then thread right and left to pick up white dots and cairns which to follow improving paths over a shallow col towards Tafraout.

For the scramble

From the col head up the ridge to the left (E) to ascend two hills, the second one of which has some old ruins/fortifications with two natural wells. Route-finding is intricate at times. There is a series of turns around boulders and some degree of intuition is needed. However, you can avoid the really steep ground by staying on the north side. From the ruins descend easterly to the col and traverse over unmarked ground to either meet the walk route at the pass near WP6 or on the Tafraout side.



Final approach to Taфраout

6 Continue with Taфраout coming into sight. Cross a 4x4 track staying with the white dots towards the Elephant's Trunk-Sphinx. From this angle you see the Elephant's Trunk as a sphinx and maybe also some Bedouin encampments en route. Follow watercourses then aim for the mosques passing stones to pick up a track rightwards and parallel to the stream bank to the Grand Avenue (R104).

ROUTE 2

The Painted Rocks and Taфраout Back Country

Start/finish	Maroc Telecom, Taфраout (389 147)
Distance	13km
Ascent/descent	350m
Grade	Easy/Moderate
Time	4hr 30min
Map	OAC4 Taфраout
Waypoints	(1) 389 147 (2) 378 122 (3) 385 094 (4) 393 085 (5) 400 115 (6) 397 134

The Painted Rocks or Les Roches Peints (sometimes called the Blue Rocks) are usually on the list of any tourist visiting Taфраout. They are a popular 4WD or minibus destination for guides and their parties. In 1984 the rocks were given a coat of paint by the Belgian artist Jean Verame with the assistance of the Taфраout fire service using 18 tonnes of paint. The result is seen by some as a work of art and by others as an act of vandalism. The scale is considerable and it is clearly visible from miles away although the colours have now faded, despite attempts to restore some sections.

The route starts in town and takes in two interesting villages including Aguerd Oudad where, if time and scrambling ability permits, the day can be extended by including Napoleon's Hat and the Three Flagpoles scramble (Route 4). The terrain is not demanding but the heat can be intense and plenty of water and sun protection is recommended.

1 From Maroc Telecom walk up the road (SW) and right at the Atlas café to pass **Maison Tuareg** (carpet sellers), the Roches Peints Hotel and the roundabout at the entrance to **Hotel les Amandiers**. Pass a fort-like structure and stay left at the school passing some smart gated villas. Continue through the village of **Tazga** (often known as Tazka), passing the **Ancient Berber House** and on to an unsurfaced road (waymarked with green dots) in the direction of a prominent rock.

Those with an extra hour to spare could make a detour to Tazga (Tazka) to see the **rock art**. This is known as Tezekkas Gazelle but is a mouflon (form of sheep). It can be accessed by finding the mosque and taking a flat anti-clockwise track around the back of the hill towards where camper vans park.

The hills above Tazga itself are also worth exploring on a separate occasion.