

Impressive desert landscape of Western Sahara



T WAS the Sunday before Christmas 2019, when all through the house the subject of conversation was... Desert Racing. Our son, Chris, was spending Christmas with us before heading to North Africa as part of the organisation team for the Africa Eco Race, an answer to the cancellation of 2008 Dakar Rally. It's the same story every year, we dream of the rally then watch the daily reports from the comfort of our living room – we did complete the race in the RAID category one year but that's another story (which you can read about in a future issue).

This year, in desperation for some adventure, I picked up my latest Land Rover Monthly and opened it up in the events section just to see if anything interesting was going on, when 'Morocco – Ardventures, Overland Adventure Western Sahara' caught my eye.

I made contact with the company and it emerged that the trip was a recce for a potential new tour in Western Sahara, on the northwest coast of Africa. As with any recce details were a little thin and subject to change on the day, which sounded good to us. Even better the Marrakech Marathon was taking place just two days after the recce finished, so we planned to add this onto the end of our trip.

I presented my findings to the head of finance, planning and logistics – Penny my wife, and a plan quickly took on a life of its own. We would catch a ferry to Tangier, meet Ardventures the following day at the port, and overland with them until they passed Marrakech on their way north. At that moment we would divert into town, spend a few days with a friend and then move out to an apartment near the start for the marathon race. After a couple of recovery days

we would head north to the capital, Rabat, before taking a scenic drive to Tangier and return home on the ferry.

While Penny researched ferries and hotels I took a look at the car, our 2014 Land Rover Defender 110. We had bought it standard in 2016 and converted it into a desert camping car of sorts. By the end of 2017 it had done well over 12,000 km of off-roading, including the aforementioned Africa Eco Race, seven day Carta Rallye GPS challenge, plus several other trips in the Moroccan dunes. In 2018 life took a different turn and it had been mostly sat in the garage up until this point, although it did clock up 4000 km on the 2019 Adriatic Adventure classic car rally when our 1970 MGB GT failed to make the cut and our Defender was called in. Except for a major power steering fluid leak the car was in good health. Further investigation revealed the power steering box had taken on the characteristics of a sieve and with our local Land Rover dealer unable to fit the part for three weeks (two weeks after we needed to depart!), I decided to source and fit it myself.

DAY ONE: Less than four weeks after that fateful find in LRM we found ourselves driving into the Tangier Med ferry terminal car park looking for a group of British 4x4s. As we live on the Mediterranean coast we skipped their Spain section and joined them at the port.

We discovered them huddled around the ATM, loading up on Moroccan currency, together with jolly fellow Yorkshireman Russ Dykes, Director of Ardventures. He quickly introduced us to everyone before we headed south in convoy on the motorway.

Having found the trip in a Land Rover magazine I was a little surprised to see the only other carrier of the green oval besides us was a Discovery. A Jeep, two Toyotas and three Ford Rangers made up the rest of the group; perhaps we could show them the light!

We spent the first day on the mostly empty motorways of northern Morocco driving nearly 700 km south to Marrakech. Western Sahara is over 1000 km south of Tangier, as the stork flies, so the initial plan was to move south as quickly as possible. The day ended at the magnificent Relais de Marrakech campsite a few kilometres north of the city. As our cars rolled into the wooded camping area Penny immediately began checking the availability of rooms. We had decided early on in the planning that camping in the Defender was totally acceptable but should be avoided if possible. The Relais is a super-civilised site with rooms, a restaurant and even a pool. We didn't see many of our team that evening as I think most took taxis to sample the Marrakech nightlife; we joined a small group in the restaurant before retiring early.

DAY 2: We were up with the sun when it rose at a civilised 8.00 am for a hearty breakfast overlooking the pool. The full



Being a recce maps and guide books were a must