

Wild camping  
was a bit nippy  
at times



A welcome  
break from the  
canvas setup

group gathered at 9.00 am for a supermarket run and petrol top up, and then it was back on the motorway south towards Agadir (our honeymoon destination a mere 33 years earlier).

A few hours after lunch we turned off the motorway and into the Anti-Atlas Mountains – the oldest mountain range in Morocco. As night approached and with very little in the way of options for a secluded wild camp, Russ found a flat rocky area just off the road a few kilometres south of the amazing castle at Tizourgane. We had now covered 360 km since leaving Marrakech on very good even roads.

This area is not a common tourist spot, so it hardly came as a surprise when we received a visit from the local authorities. They were nervous about our security and insisted that we moved closer to their village, but as we had already setup camp they decided to provide onsite security instead. After some negotiations money was exchanged and everyone was happy as we spent the night at our impromptu campsite with a small group of soldiers close by keeping watch.

It turns out that January in the Anti-Atlas is quite nippy, and it felt freezing in the back of our Defender although I'm sure it was really 4 or 5 degrees C. Unfortunately we didn't have cold weather sleeping bags so multiple layers of blankets and jackets were put to good use.

**DAY 3:** I was up before dawn the next morning and joined Chris by the campfire, which was still burning. As soon as there was enough light we took a jog up the nearest hill to see the view. Unfortunately by the time I was back Penny was up and about and I was already behind on my chores. Having not wild camped in the Defender for a few years it was hard to remember how everything packed together again, all of which conspired against us and meant we were the last to leave.

The day kicked off with a 50 km drive south down pleasant roads to Tafraoute for fuel and food. Four kilometres south of Agard we left the main road to follow signs to the Painted Rocks. I was expecting a tourist trap with coffee, fridge magnets and souvenir tee shirts, but instead we found a collection of enormous granite rocks that had been painted bright colours. In 2006 the government brought in 180 tonnes of paint and Jean Vêrame, a Belgian artist, and this was the result. After a few obligatory snaps we had a bite to eat and continued on our way south.

As we moved further down the valley, the roads degenerated into gravel tracks between villages, although compared to the gorge, which takes you through Vallee d'Ait Mansour it was civilised. Stretching for some 10 km, the surrounding valley has abundance of water with lush vegetation featuring palm groves, almond and olive trees. It took us three hours to navigate the rocky dried-up riverbed!

By now the sun was rapidly fading as we barrelled along a super smooth highway just north of Icht. In true recce-style the team in the lead car were scanning their guidebooks for a reasonable place to park for the night. As luck would have it they found the excellent Borj Biramane campsite. As well as offering plenty of space for parking and camping the Borj had a fine selection of rooms complete with private bathrooms (and the best hot shower we had) and air conditioning, and a restaurant where half of our group congregated for dinner. It gave us a nice opportunity to hear some of the back-stories of our fellow adventurers. Due to the tough dry river section we covered just 170 km today.

**DAY 4:** We drove south through Icht then on to the N12 for 100 km to stock up on fuel and food at the market town of Assa. We then drove a further 30 km south on the R103

