

before we dived off the tarmac on to gravel tracks. Several hours of dusty driving later the map showed we had passed out of Morocco and into the disputed territory of Western Sahara. As the sun began to fade we chose a small group of trees for our campsite and settled down for the evening. We knew we were well and truly in the desert when a large herd of camels wandered past at sunset. It wasn't so cold on our second wild camp and we were certainly more organised this time. After food the group sat around the blazing campfire and chatted. We had driven 300 km today.

DAY 5: A few kilometres of sandy track driving south from our wild camp took us out of the desert and back into rocky mountain passes. After 50 km of mountains the track descended into a very photogenic 10 km stretch of hard sand that was totally flat. Eventually we joined the main N14 road for a 100 km drive east until we reached the R101. Once again the guidebooks came to our rescue and found us a campsite just before the village of Sis Ahmed Laaroussi. The main building had a secure walled compound for the cars and a restaurant. Once again we took the private room option although this time it turned out to be a fully carpeted Berber tent. The site had a toilet block with questionable facilities – in that there were individual showers but the hot water was from a large pan on a gas stove. The owners were super friendly though and the sheer volume of excellent food that they presented to us was overwhelming. We had driven 200 km today.

DAY 6: We drove south to the city of Samara for more fuel and food, and then after a couple of kilometres on the N14 we turned off on to desert tracks and drove for almost 100 km passing within 10 km of the Mauritania border. From there it was another 100 km in a southeasterly direction across the N5 and back out into nothingness. As night approached we began the hunt for a bivouac site. With nothing around except for sand and gravel, we eventually headed for a tiny group of trees we had spotted on the horizon. It turned out to be five widely spaced skinny trees. Heaven only knows how they were growing. There had obviously been some fighting here in the past as we found large calibre corroded empty gun cartridges scattered around.

As the sun went down in the desert the stars and Milky Way began to appear on steroids. With no light pollution from civilisation it made for a truly spectacular sight. I was so inspired I unloaded my camera tripod and spent a considerable amount of time after dinner taking long exposure photos of the night sky.

DAY 7: The next day we continued into the featureless desert and reached our furthest point south before turning east and heading for the coast some 200 km away. After a few hours of flat terrain a line of sand dunes blocked our way. This trip was not intended to be a hardcore dunes fest and we certainly did not have the time for prolonged sand rescues so Russ took a course through the dunes rather than over them. Once out of the dunes we were back to flat sand and gravel as far as the eye could see. As luck would have it in this wilderness, we came across a group of officials from a local wildlife reserve. Once they had confirmed our identity they were super helpful and via a chain of official 4x4s they lead us all the way to the city of Boujdour, our planned destination on the coast.

Our campsite was a purpose-built walled compound on the edge of the city. It was the only development in an empty



The tracks were a great test for the Land Rovers



The night's sky minus light pollution

