

Sara Hull World Challenge Morocco Trip 2023

Introduction

In July 2023 I went on a World Challenge trip to Morocco along with nine other students from The Priory School, Hitchin. I had been looking forward to this for a long time and spent many months raising money for the cost of the trip.

The Rands Educational Foundation was kind enough to give me a generous grant to help with my fundraising and this short report is to describe what a fantastic and worthwhile trip it was.



Arriving in Marrakech

We arrived during the middle of a heatwave, so as we stepped out of the airport we were hit with a hot breeze, which was a strange sensation. In the evening, after we had settled into our first hotel we wandered around the souks (markets) that were a sight to behold and full of energy. There were many fascinating sights including many different types of stalls, hissing snakes being charmed and real monkeys on people's shoulders.



Hiking to the peak of Mount Toubkal

The next day we made our way to the Atlas Mountains for our 4 day trek that would include hiking to the very top of Mount Toubkal, the tallest mountain in North Africa. It was still hot in the mountains but not as hot as it was in Marrakech.

Day 1 of the trek was a practice walk up a much smaller mountain to get us used to the terrain.

On day 2 we walked about 5 hours to the base camp we would stay at for 1 night before climbing to the peak. We climbed up steadily and took breaks every so often.

On day 3 we set off before sunrise to reach the summit. We made good progress to start with and were able to pass a few other groups that had set off before us. As we got closer to the top we found it harder going which was most likely due to the high altitude of about 4,000m. It was amazing to be at the top of the mountain and I felt a great sense of achievement as I looked down at the fantastic view around me. As we descended the going got easier as we became less affected by the altitude.



Day 4 was one last day of trekking back down and off the mountain. Towards the end of the journey I twisted my ankle and wasn't able to keep up with the other members of my team. Instead of falling further behind I was encouraged to ride down the last

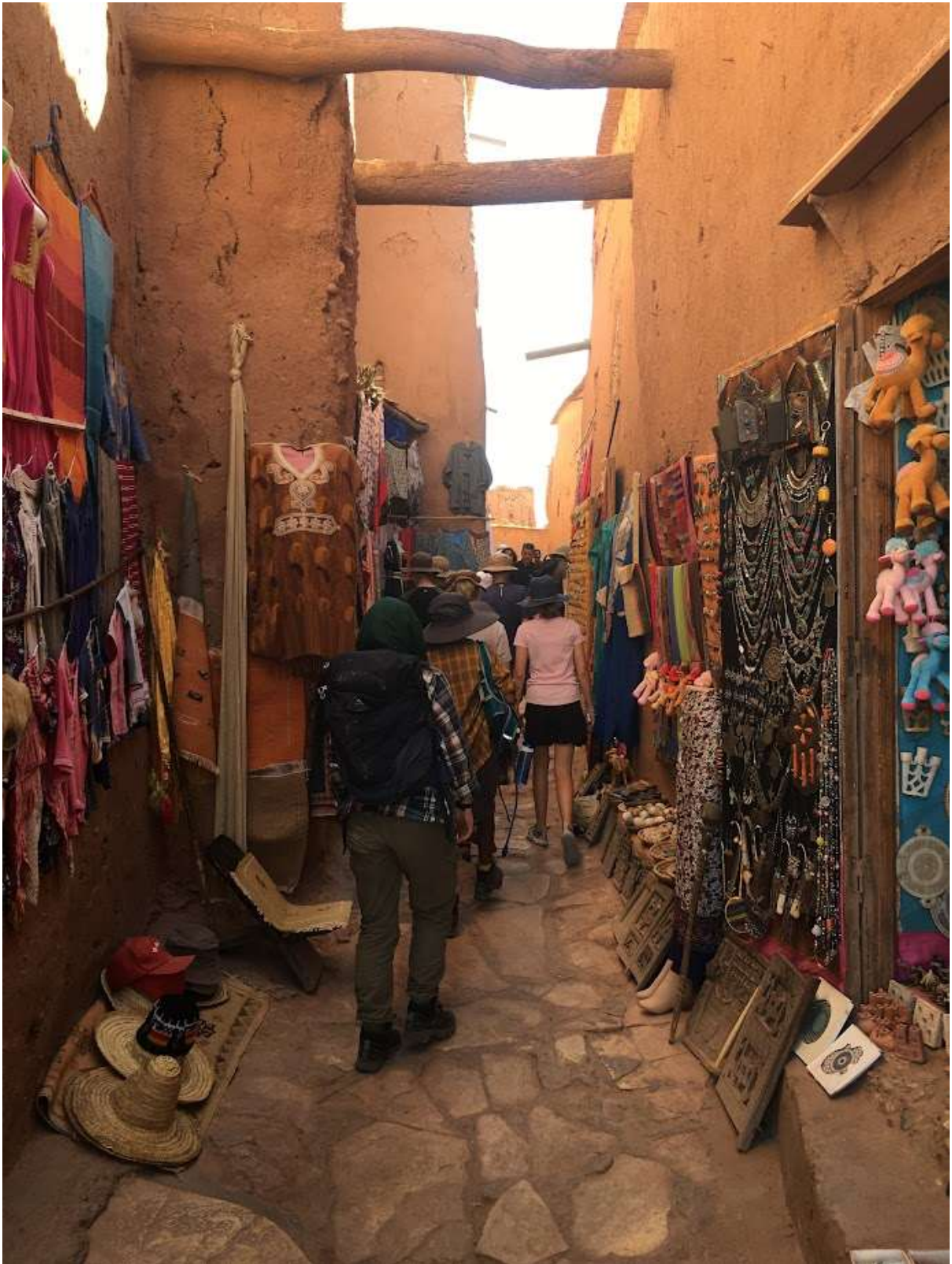
20 minutes or so on one of the mules that was accompanying us. Although it was great to ride on the mule and rest my ankle, it was slightly disconcerting as the mule lurched along narrow mountain paths next to steep drops. Fortunately, there was no lasting injury and it did not impact the rest of my trip.

Helping a community initiative in Ouarzazate

We travelled from the Atlas Mountains to the town of Ouarzazate where we spent several days working in a school. We worked in the gardens planting trees and shrubs. It was still very hot so we had to take it in turns to go outside and to have a break and cool down. We also worked in the classrooms scrubbing graffiti off desks. We worked as a team to try and get as much work done as possible in the heat.



When we were not working on this project, we were able to explore the town and some highlights of this included a meal at our host's house and a trip to a swimming pool to cool down. We also went on an afternoon adventure to a nearby settlement on a hill.



Essaouira

After being at the project, we travelled to a small port city called Essaouira. Since it was on the coast it was pleasantly cool with a warm breeze. The architecture there was quite Mediterranean looking and it had many busy market alleys. We spent most of our time there in the streets looking at stalls. There were many interesting products being sold and exotic looking fruits and plants. As you walked up the main street you could smell the spicy aroma of fresh food and the soothing fragrance of incense for sale. We were able to haggle for items that we bought which was a very fun and satisfying experience. Most of the stall owners were very friendly and keen to chat.



One evening, I was able to pick where we would go out for dinner. Many of the restaurants in Morocco served western food. However I chose to eat at a small authentic Moroccan restaurant. It was a delightful, traditionally decorated, small dining room with art and sculptures. That evening they were playing traditional Moroccan, live music. It was a very peaceful yet exciting atmosphere and everyone enjoyed their food.

Back to Marrakech

We arrived back at Marrakech for our last day where we stayed at the same hotel we stayed at on the first night. It was extremely hot during the day since we were back in the city, however in the evening, once it had cooled down, we went out into the vast souks. We had our last meal in Morocco and then walked around the crowded market listening to people singing, shouting and playing a variety of instruments. The streets were filled with stalls, people and animals. After we made our way back to the hotel for one last night in Morocco. And before we knew it we were on the plane back home again.



Overall it was an incredible experience and one I will never forget. I made so many wonderful memories with some of my closest friends and I am so glad I got the opportunity to go on the trip. I am also extremely thankful to the Rands Educational Foundation for their grant which made a big difference to my fundraising. I will never forget it.