

Colour supplement!

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The Team –Nat, Bill, Isaac, Sam, Lorenzo, Maria, Amy, Lisa, Zoë , Sophie, Hannah, Alicia, Olivia, Ed, Clare, Sally, Gaëlle, and Tom.

So what is World Challenge anyway?

World Challenge expeditions are personal development opportunities for young people using travel and exploration to gain different experiences of life. Students have to raise funds themselves to pay for their expedition, which is organised through their secondary school. The programme aims to foster teamwork and leadership skills through experiencing different cultures and countries as well as helping with a worthwhile community project. Expeditions are usually well off the beaten track - to find out just how far off, read on!

Our contributors

The Editors would like to thank our contributors to this World Challenge colour supplement. The words and pictures are by:

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This colour supplement was produced for Village News by Toby Davidson and edited by Colin Moore. For your regular Village News edition, please turn over.

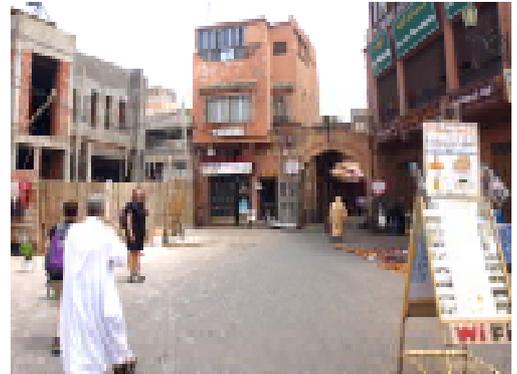
World Challenge expedition to Morocco

THIS SUMMER, we went on a World Challenge expedition to Morocco. It was to be the trip of a lifetime, the most amazing two weeks of our lives or a trip with no toilets! Sophie argued with a man with a monkey and we had several accidents. This was just on the first day.

First impressions

Our plane left England at 5 20am and arrived in Morocco 8am local time. After going through immigration and collecting our baggage, we walked out of the airport and got a first look at Marrakesh. We caught buses to our hotel.

Sophie and Lisa assigned us our rooms. We then had a very Moroccan lunch - pizza! After lunch Amy, Zoë, and our teachers Sally and Gaëlle went out to explore the square while the rest of the team rested back at the hotel. When Amy, Zoë, Sally, and Gaëlle got back from the square and souks, all of us went exploring. We managed to follow someone deeper and deeper into the souk. It was scary but also quite enjoyable. The souks were amazing and everyone was taken aback by how different it all was. Later we found a terrace restaurant and had mint tea, then back to the square to find a place for dinner. While we were waiting, Sophie managed to take a photo of the man with the monkey and he came up to our group and yelled at us. One of the snake charmers let go of the snake he was holding which headed straight towards us! At last, we found a nice restaurant for dinner and had our first taste of real Moroccan food. We were all very loud and over-excited. After everybody had eaten, we walked back through the square back to the hotel. All of us were very tired but looking forward to starting our project the next day.



Sally and Gaëlle exploring Marrakesh.



Through the market and into the souk.

Back to school Moroccan style

The project phase was to last a week. A week in which to befriend locals, improve their school, and generally have an amazing time. We arrived in the town of Ouarzazate, (home to an Indiana Jones film) after having been stuck in stuffy mini-van for about 4 hours: we could not wait to get a glimpse of our accommodation. We were soon settled in to the Hotel Baba, a traditional Moroccan hotel and after staying a night in Hotel Ali the day before, it was luxury!

We then spent the week having the time of our life. We spent every day working at the local school, which was just a quick drive away from the hotel. The week was spent improving the school, from simple jobs such as cleaning up litter, to more complicated jobs like building a wall to secure the building. Every day we played with the local children, teaching them how to skip, playing football with them and giving them the toys that we had brought from home. We also had brought over packets of loom bands, so in our breaks, and back at the hotel we made many bracelets which we gave to the children. Every child was desperate to have one, which meant we had to keep making more! Over the course of the week, we had cleared some of the litter with the help of the local children, painted two murals, and helped build a wall. One of the murals was a tree with our handprints as the leaves; the other was a collection of Moroccan animals, Arabic words and some colourful flowers and paintings. We also planted 19 trees (one each). These were mainly olive trees and we aimed to create a sustainable income for the school in future years. The school will be able to sell the produce and use the profit to buy books and toys for the children! During the days, we worked under the boiling sun, and then relaxed in the evening. We went to a beautiful swimming pool two nights and visited a traditional square for the other two. We were so pleased to have some relaxing time after working from 8am until 1pm! We collapsed into bed every night, completely exhausted from the hard day's work.

We were in Morocco during Ramadan, where the locals would fast during the day and then celebrate by breaking the fast during the evening. On our last night of the project, we spent the evening breaking fast with the community. It was fantastic to be completely immersed in the Islamic culture. First, we ate with the locals and then whilst we ate, they got up and prayed. As we watched them pray, we all prepared a small speech as a thank you. After the prayers, four of us (Sally, Ed, Lisa and Sophie) got up and spoke in front of the rest of Team Taza and some of the Ouarzazate community. Bali (the project coordinator who spent the week helping us), translated what we said into Arabic so everyone could understand. After this, three members of the community the head teacher, a local MP and a teacher thanked us for all of the work we had been done throughout the week. After all of the appreciations we presented our gifts that we had brought from home to the school. The head teacher was delighted and could not thank us enough. We then were given a glow stick each to give to every child. Again, they were thrilled with the gifts as all of the children were in fascinated and in awe of them. As we reluctantly said our goodbyes, we got onto the minibus and drove away, catching our final glimpses of the school and the children, we headed off for our last night in Hotel Baba ready for the long travel day that was waiting for us the next day.



The school showing the freshly painted murals and some of the nineteen trees planted by the team.



Lunch on the way to the school (clockwise) Bill, Mark, Lisa, Amy, Maria, Alicia, Tom, Sally, Ed, Sophie, Isaac and Clare.



The tree with hand prints as leaves.



Isaac, Maria and Clare showing the girls how to make loom bands.



Relaxing in the pool after a hard days work.

Trekking - Mount Oukaimeden and Berber villages

We managed to get lost on our way to the start of our trek. The bus drivers could not find our campsite. When we finally arrived, our guide Tarik welcomed us, and introduced us to our cook and mules men. We pitched up our tents, had dinner, and went to bed very excited about starting our trek the next day.

For the first day of the trek, we climb up Mount Oukaimeden and then back down to our campsite. It took us about 3 hours to climb up the very steep, rocky terrain with many people falling over. When we got to the top, we could take in the beautiful views of the Atlas Mountains. After a quick 20-minute break and picture stop, we climbed back down the precipice to have lunch.

The next day we walked south from Oukaimeden to Azib Amgedoul where we stayed in a *gite* in a traditional village in the valley of the mountains.

Like the day before, the scenery on the way was picturesque. The rooms in the *gite* were not particularly nice, so we slept outside on the terrace and fell asleep watching the sun go down behind the mountains. As the stars came out, Alicia pointed out all the stars and formations. It was enchanting.

The following morning after having breakfast, we set off for our longest trek. We were to walk to the village of Arg trekking through the gorgeous Imenane Valley and rural Berber villages. At one point, just before we stopped for lunch, Moroccan children asking us for money followed us. They had spotted us as we walked past their village and had run up to see whether they could get any money off us. We stopped for lunch in a little valley with a dry river running down the side. When we set off again, the landscape suddenly changed from pale soil and rock to red soil and trees. After about an hour (which was supposed to be a few minutes), we arrived at our campsite. We were a little bit disappointed by our campsite. The mules were tied up next to where we had to pitch our tents, and it really smelt. Anyway, we got on with pitching our tents. We had fun making a campfire and singing around it, as the sun went down.

On our final trek day, we departed from Arg and descended to a village called Imska. Even though we were on day four of our trek, we were still taken aback by the beauty and serenity of Morocco. Ramadan had finished the night before, so as we were walking through the villages everyone was awake and happy. People were waving at us and it was incredible to be a part of Morocco. The trek that day was not long at all and we soon arrived at our *gite*. It was very traditional with three empty rooms, one for boys, one for girls, and one for the adults. After managing to break the first shower and then everyone having shower in the owners house we had lunch. Later, we went for a walk round the village, and then relaxed until our last dinner. After dinner, we said thank you our cook and guide. We presented them with a tent each, as they had to sleep out under the stars while they were with us. They were so grateful. We were sad that our trek was over, as it meant we were nearing the end of our adventure, but at the same time looking forward to another day in Marrakesh.



Guide, Tarik, drawing in the dust to show how Berber houses are built.



Campsite at last - below Mount Oukaimeden.



Passing a Berber village perched on the side of a mountain.



The long climb up the 3262 metre Mount Oukaimeden

Back in Marrakesh

We arrived back in Marrakesh after one and a half hour journey. We were able to explore the main square by ourselves but could only go into the souks with Sally, Gaëlle and Mark. We had great fun bartering with the traders. For our last night's dinner we went to an English type restaurant and watched as the sun set over the hive of activity in the square. Gradually, most drifted back to the hotel to repack bags and get some sleep before our journey home. Only Amy, Sophie, Zoë, Gaëlle and Mark remained. They tried some cactus fruit bought from one of the stalls it had an interesting taste! Finally, everyone was back at Hotel Ali trying to get to sleep whilst hearing the never-ending buzz of the square through open windows.

Homeward bound



It's those snake charmers again! Koutoubia Mosque.



Goodbye Morocco!

Sadly, the adventure had to end. The drive to the airport was strange, and everyone had mixed emotions. There were many things about going home that we were looking forward to: seeing our families, having a hot shower with proper running water, soft towels to dry ourselves a home cooked dinner and sleeping in our own beds. We were also upset about leaving Morocco and the best adventure of our lives so far.

The plane journey was very emotional because we did not want our adventure to end. It was the last part of our journey together, and a time for us to reflect, and relive the experiences of the last two weeks and to talk about the amazing times we had together. The highlights included, having the opportunity to experience a different culture, playing hopscotch and football with the children, seeing the children and teachers' faces when they saw the finished project, and realising that we had made a difference to their lives. We will

also remember the views, as we trekked through the Atlas Mountains, and the hustle and bustle and bartering in the souks of Marrakesh. Looking back at the end of the expedition, we had achieved so much, and made many new friendships. However, we will not miss: squatting over a hole in the ground to us as a toilet, no running water and being eaten by insects, but it was all worth it! We all felt that we had developed in our time away. We became, more appreciative of the luxuries in life that we enjoy, and more considerate of others. Working as a team meant that we were more reliant and tolerant of others. We also had the opportunity to take turns in developing our leadership skills, which will help us in the future. We talked about how tough the whole expedition was, and how the children who live there must have felt, but overall how much of a brilliant opportunity it was. There was a lot of excitement as we were reunited with our families, but it was difficult to adjust over the following few days because we were missing our teammates. We are looking forward to our reunion.



Memories of the Atlas Mountains.

How it all started

We started the difficult journey about a year ago by applying for World Challenge. It was going to be the trip of a lifetime to Morocco - which it was! We were lucky enough to be drawn out of the hat, 69 people had applied for 32 places. Over the next year, we had many meetings, and formed into two separate groups (team Taza and team Fez). In preparation for the trip, we had a 'World Challenge Master Chef', a camping trip and finally, the day before we departed, a build-up day. We spent the first half of the build-up day delivering bags, discussing our excitement and generally mentally preparing for the adventure the next day. We met our World Challenge leader, Mark, or as we called him "number nineteen"! (This must be pronounced in a northern Irish accent - inside joke). We had a group meeting with him to discuss everything, from medication to safety alarms and from Marrakech to snake bites. We also had to unpack our bags for the teachers to check and we had to set up our tents as practise for the cold nights up in the Atlas Mountains. We soon became tired, hot, and desperate to go home, however Mark insisted that we carried on in the hot gym. Whilst we set up our tents, we each had individual, brief meetings to discuss our own personal details. We then went home, and had our last night with our families, filled with goodbyes, tears, but most with excitement. Finally, it was time to leave we were all so excited. We said our goodbyes with hugs and boarded the bus. As we waved goodbye the bus started moving - we were off! Lisa and Sophie were the leaders and their job was to make sure that everyone boarded the plane safely and make it to Marrakech in one piece.