



[SOS Travel](#) [Marrakech Services](#) [Reviews](#) [Submit Review](#) [Latest Posts](#) [About](#)

Guestblog- 'A Flat Footed Yorkshireman in the High Atlas'

SOS Travel March 14, 2018 Latest Blogs 4 Comments

This 'guest blog' has a great story attached to it which I was wanted to share with you all. I met Steve at Manchester Airport on arriving back from Marrakech, in the middle of the 'beast from the east' a couple of weeks ago! My husband and I overheard he was stranded after missing his last train home, so we asked where he needed to be and it was actually on our route back home, we offered him a lift. The only catch being he may need to de ice the car at the airport carpark, he agreed!! After a great chat about his travels trekking the High Atlas in Morocco and our time in Marrakech, plus life in general and reasonable smooth journey back to his house, he thanked us again and I cheekily asked him if he would like to write about his recent travels for my travel blog, he said he would. The moral of the story is, help each other! Enjoy his blog.

"Ibrahim has noticed something funny about your feet" said Latifa. We were less than ten minutes into our High Atlas Trek. "Just wait and see, they go better up hill than down!" I replied. Indeed I have two flat feet and I pronate badly. When I walk they go in different directions, more duck than human, according to a close Scottish friend. "How can you climb the High Atlas with those?" he said.

Well I was soon about to prove him wrong! On Feb 22 nd I was picked up at 8.30 am by taxi from my simple yet sumptuous Riad Gallery 49 in the heart of the famous Marakech Medina. Within minutes Abdul's Citroen had escaped the crowds and traffic chaos of this historic and hectic city. Most of the immediate landscape was flat semi desert and not a proper hill, never mind a mountain in sight. Then after about 20 miles, emerging slowly then filling the bright blue lit skyline and eventually the whole horizon came the jagged grey sharp triangles of rock with capped cones coated with white ice and snow, the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. I was nearing Azmiz a sizeable village and the start of my trek and bike ride. Could I walk up that I thought?!

When we reached Azmizmiz the driver turned into a plain and anonymous dirt backyard with a solid black door in a mud wall. And then a surprise... It was opened by Mohammed, this was both his home and his Riad Chez Ait Said. It was bright, beautifully decorated and scrupulously clean in traditional Moroccan style with blue mosaic tiles in geometric patterns. I had a large double room with space, a sofa and comfy bed. Everything was immaculate! Mohammed speaks at least 4 languages, Berber, Arabic, French and English. After the traditional Moroccan hospitality of mint tea and local sweets, I was eager to meet Latifa and start my trek, so Mohammed took me next door to meet her.



Latifa Asselouf, the leader of my trek, was also the owner and manager of Azmizmiz Trekking. She was serene, small, dark, full of grace, organised to a T, direct but always friendly and polite. "Let me take you round my mums house, where I live" she said. A nice personal touch I thought. I was shown round her traditional home and we said goodbye to her frail mum before I got back in the taxi. There was a short but very winding steep up hill drive to the start of the trek. My first views, were a melange of natures colours, gob-smacking and absolutely stupendous.



It took a few seconds, but I soon realised that this wasn't a landscape empty of humans. Across the other side of the valley I could make out one of many traditional Berber villages that I was to walk through on my way, made out of ancient clay, crowded and cube shaped, these mainly windowless homes looked from a distance as much nature's creation as those of man.

From nowhere on the road there appeared a tall, traditionally dressed and lean elderly grey bearded, sun bronzed, straw hatted man pulling a very heavily burdened white mule. "That's Ibrahim, our mule man" said Latifa. "Give me your rucksack, the mule can carry at least 100kg no problem!"



We descended along a broad track down and then along the side of a deep gorge, broad gravel paths. The valley had been shaped by nature, particularly impressive were the sheer sides and the valley basin, with only a stream of water now not the raging torrent of winter. This environment wasn't as barren or as empty as I first thought, after a few minutes I realised how the Berbers might survive in this remote and rocky landscape. Signs of agriculture were everywhere, particularly awe inspiring and hanging just above us were the bright strips of terrace on the mountainside.



Closer up the villages were impressive pieces of architecture, the Berber used local materials such as local stone, binded together with animal dung. Even today they were designing the ideal home for the environment, thick mighty walls of clay for insulation against both the mountain heat and cold. Close together for community and protection.



One of the great delights of the trip, on the first day was the complete absence of other tourists. However, the local people and kids in particular liked to pose for the camera!



Many of the men worked in the towns and commuted the modern way on scooters, motorbikes and taxi vans to labour in nearby towns. Most of the jobs in the countryside were done by Berber women, literally, hard back breaking toil, it was painful enough without the burden of children look after.



A great surprise was our mid-afternoon 'picnic'. I was expecting some square cut white bread sarnies and may be a bit of Moroccan hummus. However, I was more than amazed when Ibrahim lifted out a weighty butane cylinder and Latifa revealed from a tuperware container some perfect hand cut potato chips. Within seconds, they were sizzling and turning golden brown. What a delight a few moments later when she brought out some small battered fish, that she had cooked before our departure. Fish and chips in the wilds of the High Atlas. No mushy peas, but an accompaniment of courgette and aubergine mash! Just the job to replenish energy after a few hours walking.



A great spot to relax, feet out of boots cooling down mid-afternoon in the warm mountain Atlas sun, clear air with water below us and the spectacular every present white peaks in front of us.



The track disappeared and merged into an irrigation culvert, a little tricky for balance for a few minutes on my flat feet, but then it soon opened up into a marvellous plantation of stunning, bright silvery, white almond blossom.

Guestblog- 'A Flat Footed Yorkshireman in the High Atlas' 82

Development is a priority in Morocco, every village had a rainbow painted school, electricity from nearby dams was available and cheap, villages were linked by well maintained tracks and on the top of some mountains were mobile phone masts. Better reception than some places in Yorkshire!



Guestblog- 'A Flat Footed Yorkshireman in the High Atlas'

84

The Hammam, a traditional hot steam bath-house, like an oven for humans. It is a feature of Moroccan everyday life and culture and these are fuelled by local wood. They were also long lasting and robustly made.



Before the sun went down we entered a village to find our home for the night. A traditional Berber house, it was on four different levels with steep steps, most of the rooms were basic and empty. In no uncertain terms Latifa made it clear to the very perplexed residents that she needed something better or we were going! So I was fortunate enough to be given the well decorated front room, full of opulent rugs and sofas, two of which I put together to make a warm bed for the freezing winter night. The heart and soul of the house was the kitchen. Thankfully, next to the bread oven for heat. It was where the extended family of half a dozen stout, strong women, aged from 17 to 70, prepared fresh bread and

tangines of vegetable and meat for their numerous kids and the few gristled, haggard menfolk who sneaked in later.



I had done about 14 km that first day, slightly knackered, but we had done it at a nice steady pace. After a good night's sleep, under heavy blankets and sleeping bag, I was ready to leave and climb a bit more on that cold but brilliantly, blue sunlit morning of my second day. Soon the double track turned into single track and sometimes no track as Latifa and Ibrahim navigated me through winding crag and natural woodland upwards to 2000 metres!



The woods opened out to epic vistas and valleys, a lovely pallet of green, white mountain top and grey desert. Nestled in the middle was a village of crowded compact houses, this time with a bright sheen, a lovely creamy colour from the afternoon sun and reflection from the nearby mountain top.



Whilst many of the villages were hundreds of years old, they were living thriving places with new housing as well as the ancient, seemingly indestructible mud dwellings.



This was an environment free of tourists, no sight so far of any other trekkers, or walkers of any other description for 36 hours. No waste, no pollution and as we walked along most local people, especially the free and happy looking kids from schools were glad to see us. They had an idea that we were French, so there were frequent cries of “Ca va monsieur?” Latifa seemed to know nearly everyone in the mountains and the valleys and we had to refuse frequent offers of mint tea and couscous or we wouldn’t have moved on!



As we lopped along at a steady continuous pace, Latifa and I chatted about family, ourselves, culture and most of all work. That day Latifa had a spring in her step. She had just passed the written part of an exam that would give her the qualification she needed to be a government of Morocco national guide. However, she had an interview in English to follow and it was her fourth language! If she passed this interview she would realise her dream that of being a national guide for her country. In my life back in England, I am an English language teacher in Bury and from experience in more senior positions I also know a bit about interviews. Neither of us of course knew the questions, but in between stopping to take in the views and pictures we practised a lot of questions and answers.

Today the picnic was a lovely, a fried rice dish, which Latifa had prepared at 6.00 am! Ibrahim anchored the mule to a tree in the woods and I took off my socks to cool my feet in the woodland shade, we had done about 10 km. Another 8km or so until we reached the mountain refuge, our stay for the night. I was confident of making it. As we neared our destination, after about 18 km of walking, we left human habitation and agriculture behind, and the landscape became a natural wonder of spectacular, grey brown, eye gripping arid barrenness.



Atlas' 95

Guestblog- 'A Flat Footed Yorkshireman in the High

The mountain refuge was newly built. I had my own ensuite room and the shower was warm. That night Latifa hastily returned by land rover to return to Azmiz to care for her elderly mum. Fortunately, I was looked after by a mountain bike guide Samir, Latifa had organized and fixed this as part of my trek deal. It was ice cold again, but I slept okay, protected by 6 blankets and cycling long johns! There was snow outside and very little at 2,000 metres was thawing!!

Guestblog- 'A Flat Footed Yorkshireman in the High Atlas' 96

Returning was a joy, Samir and his uncle had brought along a spanking nearly new Cannondale Rush, all carbon light as a feather full suspension mountain bike. I asked for rock free, double track and that is what Samir delivered. We climbed another 500 metres and then took a spectacular 15 km descent, a twisting and turning dirt road, stopping to take in more exhilarating views of woods, valleys, mountains and now eagle like views of Berber villages. The riding was a synch, except for deep mud caused by thawing snow, a few angry sheep dogs, nervous horses and a load of fallen conifers across the road, which had the temerity to slow us down!

Guestblog- 'A Flat Footed Yorkshireman in the High Atlas' 97

In the early evening, the 'Flat Footed Yorkshireman' arrived back at Chez Ait Said in Azmiz and to an afternoon tea of waffles, mint tea and fruit. Later after my shower and a short rest, I was given a delicious Moroccan soup, followed by a veggie tagine. Latifa joined us later and we revised interview questions and techniques. The night was finished nicely at a local tea and coffee shop with Mohammed and I chewing the fat in English and French, putting the world to rights about culture, family, life, religion work and politics. Then a proper comfortable warm sleep! In the morning after another great spread of a Moroccan breakfast, my own taxi to Essasouria, again arranged by Latifa arrived. We swapped big hugs, handshakes and said our good byes!

What we did –

Ibrahim, Latifa and I walked through 2 valleys. On the first day The Anougal valley and on the second day the Ardouz valley. And the cycling, Samir and I started from Azgua and then passed through Ait Atman, Dou Ozro, Tagadirt, Air Bourd, Tizguine and finally back to Amizmiz.

What I took and needed –

A working knowledge of basic French. In my rucksac, quality walking boots, waterproof jacket

and trousers, warm jerseys, tee-shirts, cycle helmet, lycra leggings, trainers for biking.

What I didn't, but should have brought!

Sun cream, yes even in winter and a light sun-hat. My nose looked like a ripe plum at the end of the trek!

Thanks most of all to **Latifa Asselouf** my trek leader, for her impeccable planning, hard work, organisation, fixing, care and dedication. For her knowledge of people, culture and the great route. She made and delivered my perfect High Atlas experience.

[Guestblog- 'A Flat Footed Yorkshireman in the High Atlas' 98](#) [Guestblog- 'A Flat Footed Yorkshireman in the High Atlas' 99](#)

To **Ibrahim**, the laconic, everlasting, strong but wise mule man who carried our heavy load. To **Samir** who brought me back to Azmizmiz on a mountain bike. And lastly to **Mohammed** for top quality hospitality and friendship in his Riad Chez Ait Said.

Web Links

www.amizmiztrekking.com

<https://www.facebook.com/CHEZ-AIT-SAID-227090397455782/>

Post Script-


Latifa passed her interview and she is now a nationally recognised Moroccan guide, perhaps the only practising female guide in the whole of Morocco!

✦ [Air Bourd](#), [Ait Atman](#), [Amizmiz](#), [Amizmiz Trekking](#), [Anougal Valley](#), [Ardouz Valley](#), [Atlas Mountains](#), [Azgwa](#), [Berbers](#), [Chez Ait Said](#), [Dou Ozro](#), [Flat Footed Yorkshireman](#), [Guestblog](#), [Hammam](#), [High Atlas](#), [High Atlas Trek](#), [Hummus](#), [Latifa](#), [Marrakech](#), [Medina](#), [Moroccan travels](#), [Moroccan trip](#), [Morocco](#), [Red City](#), [SOS Travel UK](#), [Sostraveluk](#), [Tagadirt](#), [Tagine](#), [Tizguine](#), [Travel](#), [Travel Tips](#), [Traveler](#), [Trekking](#), [Visit morocco](#)

← 'Munching my way around Marrakech'-Restaurants!


Riad Tizwa Marrakech & Beyond →

4 thoughts on "Guestblog- 'A Flat Footed Yorkshireman in the High Atlas'"

1.  **LB - Proper Scrumptious**
March 14, 2018 at 8:55 pm

I stayed in Morocco for six weeks about four years ago, hiking the Atlas Mountains was probably one of the best things I've ever done! Such an amazing post to remind me. 😊

↩ Reply

- A.  **SOS Travel** Post author
March 18, 2018 at 7:48 pm

Thankyou!!

↩ Reply