

In late 1968 I was sent to Barrage du Ait Adel about 50 miles east of Marrakesh in Morocco to service three Allison Torquematic transmissions, as fitted in Euclid 45 ton rear dump trucks that were being used by Strabag-Holtzman to construct a clay core/rock faced dam, and to show their mechanics how to service the rest of the fleets transmissions.

A two-week assignment that, because of the broken state of the first one stripped, extended to six weeks waiting for more parts to be shipped from Northampton by sea.

I had often thought of returning to see the finished construction and more of the country, to that end in 1970 my wife Rosie and I took our newly rebuilt Triumph T110 and Watsonian Oxford outfit down through France and Spain and across to Ceuta a Spanish free port on the Moroccan coast and then into Morocco proper. For various reasons (machine reliability/failures and shortage of cash) we ran out of time to spend more than three days in Africa before heading home.

The FIM Motocamp for 2016 was advertised as being at Ifrane in Morocco May 10,11,12th, so I decided it would be a good opportunity to try for Ait Adel again, with friends in Lisbon and a cousin near Malaga as way points the cross channel ferry was booked and rally fee paid.

6am May 1st off to Dover and down through France to a campsite at Beaumont sur Sarthe that I had used on the way to the Motocamp at Sabrosa in 2014, but I didn't expect frost in May! I don't cook while camping as the complication doesn't seem worth it, water, fruit and some nuts and on the road. After about an hour or so a fuel stop and breakfast then across the western end of the Pyrenees with some super swervery and short and long tunnels before a good fast run to Monday nights camp in a municipal site in Burgos Spain. Ham, egg, chips and a couple of beers was a good finish to day two apart from another cold night (bit of a theme starting).

After setting the satnav to Valladolid it came up with what looked like blue spaghetti getting out of Burgos and it made our own M6-A42 junction look like a cross roads, the turns are tight, numerous the signage iffy with the satnav having trouble keeping up, I was glad to get onto the main road southwest towards the Portuguese border. This time I managed to stop and take photos of the psychedelically painted life-sized bulls on the roadside that I missed last time I passed that way.

Crossing the border last time entailed putting a credit card into a machine and getting the front number plate photographed!! and charged every time you passed under a toll gantry, now there is a sign saying "foreigners" which I missed as I was passing a long truck at the entrance to the registration area so no costs on the toll roads.

Arrived in Lisbon late afternoon after 1600 miles from home, and visited friends in the north of the city and staying two nights in B&B's with the tourist thing during the day including crossing the Marco Polo bridge both ways.

I left Lisbon in bright sunshine which deteriorated rapidly to heavy rain all

the way east to Badajoz in Spain then south towards Jerez and Cadiz where campsites seemed non-existent until I spotted a taxi in a filling station, " sure go to El Puerto de Santa Maria there is a campsite in the dunes". As with most campsites I used on the trip only half of the site was being used as the season had not started but at least the restaurant and bar were open.

A sunny and warm morning and after a shower and a snack the skies darkened and heavy rain meant packing a wet tent, but the rain stopped as I left the site for the ferry from Algeciras to Ceuta, stopping at the cliff top at Tarifa for photos of the Strait of Gibraltar and Africa.

The return ferry fare worked out at £153.00 (according to the credit card statement) and boarding and tying down very similar to cross channel systems plus a cafe and lounge area. Disembarking likewise no problem. A short ride through the town to the border with Morocco and as much "help" as you like with forms and so on from the usual informal helpers, about £10.00 in tips smoothed the way somewhat. After stowing the handful of forms and finding that the TomTom didn't do Morocco I left on the road south and just before Tetuan I found that the toll booth didn't take any of the currencies that I had but a local paid the 50 pence for me. I went into town to change 50 Euros for 538 Dirham and as I got 1.28 euros for £1 it was time for some maths to check what I was being charged (about 70 Dh to the £1 ?) then off to Martil on the coast where Rosie and I stayed in 1970, the village is now a town and the beach side campsite is no more but a small site about 100 meters from the sea front was "adequate" and the restaurant I chose overlooking the sea was really good.

A Swiss couple in a camper van invited me for coffee in the morning and we chatted for over an hour before I packed up for the journey south then after managing to miss the turn for Fes carried on to Larache on the Atlantic coast where a straight forward left turn met with road closed and local detours through the town without any further signs! resulting in several very narrow lanes down to the dock area, where I found the reason for the diversions, a cycle race, until I spotted a main road (midday I need the sun straight ahead) and shortly a sign for Meknes brilliant except for Kilometers of roadworks, a few hundred meters of tarmac then 1/2 Km of gravel, ditto for 10 or 12 more times, a relief when that was over. A very polite policeman on point duty in Meknes was sure that there wasn't a campsite there or Fes so carry on to Ifrane to see if the Motocamp site was open.

Now we come to (in the last resort read the instructions). I couldn't find the site, no FIM signs anywhere, but I was a day early, I spotted a couple of Belgians on a BMW with a small trailer and followed them until they stopped in the town center and as it was early evening we decided to check into a cheap hotel for one night and continue the search in the morning.

I was up and away first and started with finding fuel which is fairly easy in foreign countries as most everyone understands you when you point at the tank and look helpless and essence? sil vous plais results in arm waving and lots of a gauche and a droite (you can tell I am a linguist!). Having filled up I spent the change on a coffee and a Twix while checking the booking details

for the Motocamp, lo and behold the optional ride out section would return to the campsite at Farah Inn, the garage man drew me a map and I was away and after a couple of false turns found the Inn.

Now things got interesting, the girls in reception new nothing about a Motocamp??, I showed them the flier that advertised the event, still no comprehension??, it is now about 1 pm and the secretariat was due to open at 2 pm. Some other people arrived and they were the secretariat!! that set the pattern for the rally, everything happened --eventually leading to the expression "ah Morocco".

I went back into town to tell the others but they had left but riding around I spotted them and two other bikes and led them to the site where the organisers were getting "organised". When the site was checked out by FIM stewards last year the temperature was between 25 and 28 degrees C, this year it was between 4 deg. overnight to low teens during the day with strong winds and periodic heavy rain.

The Farah Inn comprises a hotel, several chalet type units, three story apartment blocks and a large camping area with several shower/toilet blocks, I pitched close to one of the shower/toilet blocks and as it was quite windy anchored my tent to a handy kerbstone that was laying about and of the seventy or eighty attendees only five of us camped throughout the event, Myself, Chris Shaw a Mayflower member (AKA Onslow) and three Finns. Three Swedes put their tents up for one night but like the rest booked into either chalets or the apartments.

On Monday there was an optional bus trip to Azrou to visit a communal craft and produce centre and a fish farm with a picnic lunch, with the option to be dropped off in town or back to camp the Belgians and I went to town for a look round and a bit of shopping. In one small corner shop I waited until a customer had left and inquired if there was anywhere I could buy beer "just passed the post office there is a CTM where they sell all the alcohol varieties you could want" (it is a Muslim country but not as strict as those further east). After buying some beer we went to a hotel where we had a few rounds of local beer and a taxi ride back to the camp.

Tuesday and an "excursion in group to Lake Dait Aoua" in convoy about 12 Km where we were seated in an arab style tent on sofas with rugs on the ground and "entertained" by a local folklore group in traditional dress, male and female a kind of line dancing with drums and "singing", interesting if a bit repetitive. While waiting for lunch to arrive the Red Bull Disco started up and everyone moved away so that we could hold conversations without shouting over the din! After lunch we dispersed to make our own way back to camp, I rode round the lake and then on the way to Ifrane stopped at one of the frequent roadside sales outlets, for melons or honey or other fruit, I picked one selling "fossils" plus some terracotta pots and my interest Geodes (small hollow rocks usually spheroidal often with crystals lining the inside wall) from the dictionary.

I asked lady stall holder if she had any complete examples as the ones on show were halves, she took me into the shed where the stock was kept and showed me a whiteish one then I spotted a couple of black rocks that looked like lumps of coal and when she took off the elastic bands "wow" I blew my chances of bartering her down (I will bring them to the club room and you can have a wow moment as well).

Wednesday was a bus trip to Fes an imperial city where we had a guided tour through the medina, the oldest part of the city starting at the blue mosaic gateway at the top of the market and down through narrower and narrower alleys to visit "selected" shops and workshops where there were opportunities to buy souvenirs of locally produced stuff. A good lunch in an elaborately decorated restaurant we continued through the alleys underneath wooden scaffolding holding the buildings apart to the tanneries where the foul water and effluent used to treat the hides makes a handy handful of mint leaves a good nosegay!

A word of warning if the sight of dead animals hanging up outside butchers shops and goats heads on a counter next to the path upsets you give the medina a miss, there were very many cats with kittens scavenging around as well but few dogs. Back to my tent the FIM inflatable arch was in danger of blowing away so as there was no one else about I untied the guys and strapped it down to the ground.

Thursday, Parade of Nations and as there was no set order, Chris Shaw and I followed the lead VW Pick up and the Red Bull Mini to lead the rest of the parade into Ifrane and out to Azrou where we parked up and took refreshment in another carpeted arabish tent, mint tea and sweet delicacies of sugar and nuts, biscuits etc., photos and a ride back to Ifrane town centre for more photos with the Red Bull crew. The evening meal was followed by the prize giving in the basement disco bar where the five campers were called up to be applauded for persisting despite the weather.

Moto Camp over and time to pack up and continue south after breakfast, through Azrou again, Khenifra and arrived in Marrakesh mid afternoon to look for a campsite. I must have looked lost as a guy on a moped stopped and asked what I was looking for, camping site? Follow me, luckily he was aware that I would have trouble with the traffic and kept me in sight until he stopped and pointed across a dual carriageway to the campsite, he followed me in to collect his tip and as we had covered about 17 miles I thought Dh 100 he asked for was a fair amount (£7.50) and the campsite was Dh82 (£6.00) for two nights complete with cold showers and squat toilets!. An advantage of the site was that next door was a big filling station with a cafe and small shop so after pitching I went to see what was on the menu, "cafe grande" worked and "mange" got a tagine for Dh 57.(£4.30)

Tagines are a safe bet as they arrive almost glowing with the heat so no bugs in there, sometimes the meat is goat or lamb sometimes chicken with an assortment of veg and sauce/gravy. A chocolate bar from the shop next door and time for bed.

Saturday and off to the dam now called Barrage Moulay Youssef and as the campsite was on the Casablanca road I had to negotiate Marrakesh again and after filling up at Sidi Rhal arrived at the furthest point of the trip from home 2870 miles.

I walked around and took a few photos and noticed that the bike seemed to be standing up a bit straight on the side stand? Yes a rear tire puncture so out with the sticky string kit and 12 volt pump watched by some local kids who were on their way home from school which had been built on the site of the accommodation of the dam construction company.

A visit to the school and a chat with the director over coffee he told me that he has 700 pupils from a 20 Km radius, I left him with copies of the photos I had taken in 1968 of the construction of the dam as he thought that no one living there now had been there then and his teacher of English would begin a history of the area with the photos. Back in Marrakesh I stopped for a coffee or two in the shadow of the Koutoubia minaret at the edge of the Jemaa el Fna (the gathering place of the extinct where the severed heads of those who displeased the sultan were displayed) now a bustling market area that I avoided and went instead to the balcony restaurant of Hotel Islane for a late afternoon lunch of a chicken tagine with lemon and olives, a starter of olives and bread and dessert of almond flavored blancmange and mint tea Dh 160 (£11.90).

Sunday, pack up and head north west to Safi on the Atlantic coast, rear tyre a bit soft so I put another sticky string in to a leak alongside the first, the metal that caused the first puncture was a two pointed star shape and both points had gone through. On the sea front in Safi on a roundabout there was a 15ft model of Thor Heyerdahls papyrus boat Ra11 that he sailed across the Atlantic from Morocco to Barbados in 1970. I continued north up the coast road towards Casablanca on the top of the cliffs, in the distance I saw a man and two mules or ponies, as I got closer I realised that he was ploughing with a wooden plough between rows of sweetcorn so I stopped for a photo and tipped him Dh5 for his time. The next thing I came across was a complete contrast El Jadida the coal powered plant for a great deal of Morocco's electricity a vast area of industrial buildings pipework and conveyors. A late lunch at Lina Moon cafe in town then onwards through casablanca and Rabat and Kinetra then north east towards the ferry terminal in Ceuta. It was getting dark so I stopped in Souk-el-Arba-du-Rharb which like a lot of places with long names was quite a small town. The Societe Adil Cafe, Restaurant, Hotel had a room for Dh 120 (£9) with an evening meal for Dh57 and breakfast Dh 36.

Soon after leaving and after managing to overtake a pair of slow lorries I saw a group of people loading salt into sacks from a pile about 40 ft by 20 ft by 10 ft high I would have taken photos but the lorries were too close behind to loiter.

The cross country road towards Tetouan is quite twisty with some spectacular views and more roadside stalls selling an amazing array of terracotta pots, dishes and other containers in many sizes. Crossing the

border into Ceuta was no problem and after a ride to the cliff top to look across to Europe I went to the ferry terminal and back to Spain.

Next stop my cousins home near Malaga, I camped at Laguna Playa for the night and in the morning found that the address I had was incomplete so after getting no help from the post office (I had the PO Box No., but they wouldn't give me the phone No. or full address). I sat naved what I had got which took me to a cafe in the hills where a expat said try Arkwrights she knows everyone up here, sure enough she did and phoned them and they came and led me to their place. A couple of nights in a proper bed and good company set me up for some more motorcycling! Cousin Bobby googled a campsite near Granada and after another plate of blue spaghetti on the satnav I arrived at Las Lomas, Guejar Sierra and pitched the tent, as it was late morning I left to visit Granada and the Alhambra. There is an articulated tour bus around the city and as it is a hop-on-hop-off I used it to get to the Alhambra Palace unfortunately all the tours for the day were sold out so I had to have a coffee and cake before returning to the campsite where I had a three course meal in the restaurant, very good food and reasonably priced at 20 euros.

The Las Lomas campsite is a member of the Camping Red organisation and my next stop was another of their sites near Zaragoza, Lago Resort, Nuevalos off the beaten track on a steep hillside but with level pitches and all the facilities including a restaurant with a two course set menu for 10 euro plus drinks.

Andorra was next on the list as I hadn't been there before, to a campsite not far into the country, La Valira with a heated swimming pool, bar and restaurant on site and within walking distance of the city of Andorra la Vella. My impression of Andorra was of a steep canyon with a river running down it and buildings a couple of hundreds of yards either side. In the morning I loaded up and under threatening skies rode up the canyon to above the snow line on a fairly twisty road stopping at the top for a photo of the bike with the front wheel in the snow on a car park then zigzagging down into France after setting the satnav for Millau Bridge.

For the first time since the Motocamp the rain began and as I went higher to about 1000 Mtrs it got colder and the rain heavier and by the bridge the rain and fog combined with the wind meant I didn't really see much of the bridge or the view as the viewing area was closed, I stopped at a service area to warm up and decided that a hotel would be a good idea so into Severac le Chateau for B&B for 54.70 euros, hot shower and dry kit on the radiator.

The weather had returned to fine and sunny in the morning so I headed to another camping Red site near Auxerre, called Au Bois Joli near the village of Andryes, There was no one in the reception shed but a notice to pitch and someone would be there later in the evening! They arrived about 7 pm and as well as taking the fee offered a pizza cooking service, it would be rude not to order one so I went for the chefs special with everything on and could I have a coffee with it please, about 1/2 an hour later it was delivered to my

tent, excellent.

The French "bank holiday strike" had started and was likely to cause fuel shortages I was advised to fill up at a local supermarket, no problem there later in the day there were long queues at all the main road garages and while going cross country for smaller towns for fuel I went fifty miles the wrong way to a spelling mistake! I had tapped in a town into the satnav but spelled it wrong so when I arrived at four houses and a farm? put my glasses on and reprogrammed for the correct place. I had no real problems with fuel and as I went north the queues got shorter.

I booked into Camping du Lac Vauban at Le Quesnoy on Tuesday for two nights as I was early for my booking at Calais, I phoned my daughter as I was due to help her move house at the weekend but it was postponed for a couple of weeks so I phoned Patrick at Zedelgem to see if I could go to the Tenten Treffen on Thursday? He said yes no problem and you can come tomorrow if you like, so I sacrificed 7 euros of camp fee and at Le Quesnoy and arrived in Belgium about midday on Wednesday and walked into town for a meal with a couple of other brits who arrived at the same time. In the morning to fill time I helped set up the marquees and tents for the outside bars until Anne and Derek arrived and eventually the rest of the FRMCA crew.

There had been some concerning noises from the bike on starting for a couple of days and after the Tenten Treffen the starter sprag clutch only just survived to get me home. 4,711 miles round trip, one/two punctures (one piece of metal two holes), two wet days, some overnight rain, two questions? one answer. Given that the standard of driving in Spain is much like Italy! why didn't I see any piles of scrap?, and when in Brugge city centre with its cafes where were the pigeons? Cousin Bobby told me that the law in Spain requires that collision debris has to be cleared away within the hour, Brugge pigeons- no idea! only a few sparrows and one or two gulls.

Post script, while waiting for a new sprag clutch I used my bus pass to go to the NPAC charity AGM near Mansfield and as the local buses finish at teatime. I got a lift to the Bingham roundabout on the A46 to hitch hike down to Leicester towards home. After walking a few miles I heard a vehicle approaching from behind, stuck out the thumb, bang- knocked down sustaining a broken arm, grazes and bruises, 999, ambulance to QMC in Nott'm. Hit and run, no witnesses. I won't be doing that again.

Motorcycling in Morocco is good, I got by with a very little French, fuel is no problem, campsites variable, Tom Tom doesn't work there, most roads are good and there are some toll roads, locals friendly and helpful with no sign of terrorism, female dress varies from full coverage to crop tops and mini skirts, alcohol is available in hotels, restaurants and some discrete stores.

Bob Osborn.