

## **AC Tafraout Meet, October 2016**

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This year's Anti Atlas meet took place, like last year, in early October, but headed instead to the south side of the Jebel el Kest massif. It was fitting for the Alpine Club to visit the Ameln Valley, where the first climbs in this region were done, mainly in the 90s by British teams including, amongst others, Trevor Jones, Les Brown, Joe Brown, Derek Walker, Pete Turnbull and Chris Bonington. A Claude Davies/Cicerone guidebook of 2004 recorded many of these. Now, thanks to the work of the Oxford Alpine Club and Steve Broadbent, climbers are offered more than just a line on a photograph, with a detailed choice of 1000s of climbs, from roadside crags to adventurous multi-pitch adventures with an alpine feel.

The meet numbered ten people and had eight days of climbing to enjoy, and it was proposed that for the first three days, each member climbed with a new partner. This experiment met with (mostly!) good feedback and seems only to be recommended in aiding better and faster acquaintance on a small meet where quite a few had come without a fixed partner. Thereafter the teaming up process reverted to the traditional approach. Crags too were chosen with the aim of becoming better acquainted with the area, and all the main crags in Steve Broadbent's excellent *Tafraout Pocket Guide* (Vol. 1) received visits from most parties.

Tizgut gorge was the obvious choice during the hot weather of the first days, providing shady options both morning and afternoon, and the chance to admire one of the earliest and most iconic lines in the area. Tizgut Crack was first climbed by Joe Brown in 1993 and offers a mouth-watering line up a slightly overhanging corner crack at E2. Only a shower of hailstones the size of chickpeas was to keep Helen Gibson (CC) from storming up this, and she returned the next day to complete the route (and retrieve her gear) with Morocco veteran Max Streeton. Other favourites here were Play it again Sam S, Superi HS, Tizgut Rib VS, Tizgut Corner HVS, Day of the Tentacle HVS and Egg's Reward E1. At the end of the day we met Mohammed, who invited us for tea and nibbles whilst awaiting the rest of the party. Climbing at Tizgut, 'tis good indeed.

Palm Tree Gorge is an even narrower gorge with an interesting approach past the beautiful old village of Oumsnat, with its evocative ruins. Climbs here are shaded not only by the gorge itself, but by date palms with crystal clear pools at their feet, where frogs make their home, a marvel in itself in such a dry country. The singing frogs and distant muezzin were answered by enthusiastic climbing calls from the entire group. Farouk's Fundament VS, Crocodile Dundee VS (avoiding the frogs), Original Route VS (with an excellent lay-back to finish) and Jarrad MVS all received multiple ascents, and Berber Buttress HVS provided a good opportunity for Lewis Preston to perfect the technique of avoiding rope drag through the euphorbia, the notorious rope-eating cactus.

Pinnacle Ridge on Prophet Peak at Sidi Abeljabbar was a real revelation. First climbed in January 2013 by Steve and Katja Broadbent, this 600m S was found to be well worthy of its three stars. The route ascends three large pinnacles before descending to a notch where progress is barred by an airy stride beyond an exposed finger, before a final chimney leads to the summit. The descent plummets down an

ancient Berber trail and an abseil was deemed advisable to pass some wobbly steps in the gully.

A visit to Anergui is always an absolute must, and the drive up to this remote village used to be the crux of the day with its single-track dirt road, but a new concrete road makes for a slightly easier, though still exciting approach. Significantly higher and in cooler territory than the crags in the Ameln valley, both the Upper and Lower Crags saw several ascents, with Talk Armada VS being a particular favourite. Eagle's Beak HVS on the Upper Crag is a typically sensational Bonington line and gave a wonderfully varied climb. Here there is great potential to link routes up and make a big mountain day, and Lewis Preston and David Teasdale summited Jebel el Kest via the SW Ridge and Angel's Crest, finishing with an enjoyable scramble down its West Ridge.

Difficult? Tifghalt and its Upper Crag received a couple of visits. Joe Brown's Central Chimney VS takes a pleasing steep line straight up the middle of the crag. This proved a most enjoyable outing, in spite of some loose rock, and Afternoon Wall VS is also a very worthwhile climb. After the descent, a friendly goatherd seemed unable to explain the removal of a mobile phone from one rucksack left at the bottom, pointing us in the direction of two invisible hunters with guns (vividly described in sign language), whom we chose not to follow. Hercule Poirot's services were not available, nor were the police in Tafraout very helpful.

Robin Hood Rocks in Tagmout proved to be the most popular crag with its host of climbs on compact quartzite, developed by Broadbent and the Oxford Alpine Club. Two HVS cracks stood out in particular, Websters Dictionary and By the Beard of Zeus, and also Centenary Buttress at HS. For those interested in a more alpine day, there was the photogenic Sun Ribbon Arête S, tackling the obvious Bunny Ears which stand proudly above. Here some weather was experienced – high winds and even some rain – dispelling the myth that the area enjoys uninterrupted blue skies. On the same day at Crag K in the Ameln Valley the opposite happened: sweltering conditions were experienced, and Helen and Max withdrew, though not before conquering the excellent Call to Prayers E2.

The Lion's Face, which dominates Tafraout, was neglected, seeing no climbing on this meet and given reason to maintain its grumpy scowl. But it was summited by its ancient Berber path by a roaring John Stockdale, in spite of a dicky stomach.

Besides the climbing, Tafraout is a pleasant place to spend a day off with plenty to visit. The Alpine Club did its bit to boost the local Berber trade in carpets and cosy woollen hats. The meet finished with a quiz, won by Henry Larden, who displayed excellent all round knowledge, from the Moroccan general election which was taking place as we arrived, to flora and fauna and the local climbing history. No one identified correctly the sport in which Morocco won its only medal in this year's Olympics, though Helen's answer 'donkey riding' was perhaps worth a bonus point.

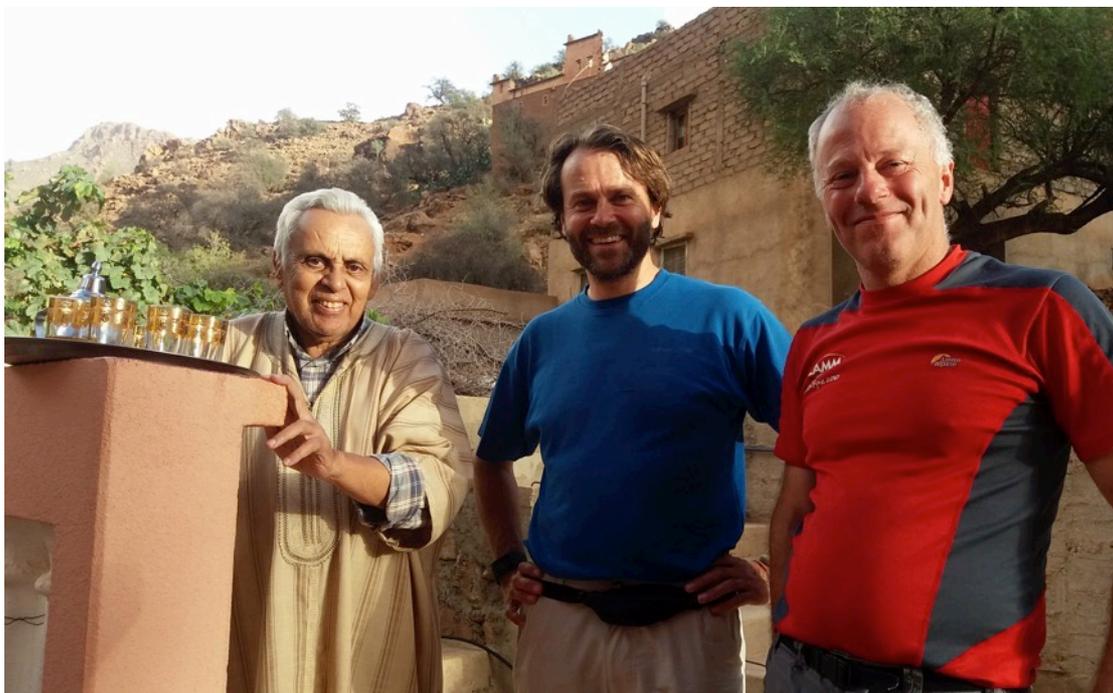
Many thanks to Mustafa and Olga at the Hotel Argana, for their welcome and tasty tagines. Plans are afoot to make this an annual meet as this is an area which demands repeated visits. It is hoped that future meets might attempt a more exploratory slant, with a desire to develop new crags.

Insha'Allah!

Meet organised by Nicholas Smith and attended by David Teasdale, Alison Stockwell, Kathy Banks, Steve Gould, Malcolm Streeton (all members) and John Stockdale, Helen Gibson, Henry Larden and Lewis Preston.



Topping out at Anergui. Climbers Max Streeton, Nicholas Smith, David Teasdale & Henry Larden



Nick and Max enjoying Tea with Mohammed at Anergui. Photo: Helen Gibson



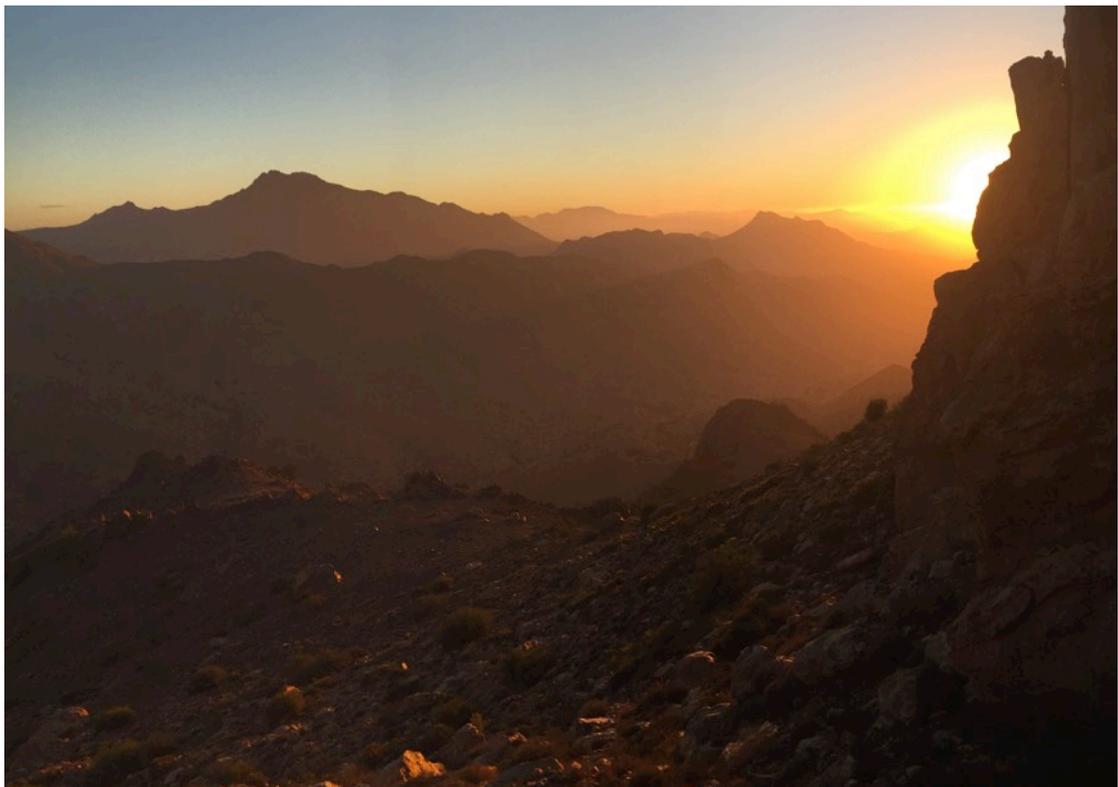
By the Beard of Zeus HVS 5a\*\*\*. Climbers Lewis Preston & John Stockdale. Photo: Henry Larden



Breakfast at Hotel Argana. Photo: Nicholas Smith



Sun Ribbon Arête S\*\*\*. Climber Henry Larden. Photo: Nicholas Smith



Sunset at Tifghalt. Photo: David Teasdale