

**Fountain Gully
Afella (4045m)
Morocco High Atlas**



Morocco Winter Atlas 2011

An expedition to explore and climb technical new routes in Morocco's Atlas Mountains.

Abstract

Towards the end of January 2011 Olly Metherell, Andy Stokes-Rees and James Mehigan undertook a trip into the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco.

The high Atlas still has a lot to offer climbers in search of new routes and surprisingly there remain areas close to the popular summit of Toubkal that offers potential for exploration.

Access to the areas mentioned in this report is fast. You can be climbing ice in Morocco within 24 hours of leaving the UK.

The weather in Morocco is normally variable and the weather prior to the trip can affect the ice build up and climbing conditions considerably. This year the weather was unsettled prior to our expedition with a fall of snow the weekend before we began climbing. While we were in Morocco we enjoyed excellent weather. The walk up to the Nelter refuge below Toubkal helped with our acclimatisation before we set off on our attempt at Fountain Gully. We made an initial attempt on the 2nd January and the route was climbed (note: we did not continue the climb to the summit of Afella) on the 3rd January.

Report written by Oliver Metherell.

The compiler of this report and the members of the expedition agree that all or part of it may be copied for the purpose of private research.

For further information contact:

Oliver Metherell

07799 033759

Email: northstar161@gmail.com

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Expedition Members

The expedition was comprised of the following members and was supported by the Mountaineering Council of Scotland.

Andy Stokes-Rees, British-Canadian
Oliver Metherell, British
James Mehigan, Irish

Introduction

This season was Andy Stokes-Rees's third trip to Morocco and it follows in the footsteps of previous trips where several exciting objectives have been climbed. There is, as yet, no official guidebook to Moroccan winter climbs with the exception of the Spanish Atlas climbing guidebook which contains details of most of the easier routes in this area as well as a couple of more technical climbs. There is still considerable scope for new routing in this area; especially away from the more popular areas. These are rarely visited in winter.

Arrival

Upon arrival in Marrakesh will find yourself at the international airport, which is located on the outskirts of Lima. Immigration and customs is usually a formality. Make sure you use a registered taxi to take you into the centre of Lima, ask to see his ID card. You should pay around 50-70 Dh for this journey.

Money:

Cash dollars, euros and sterling can be changed at the airport. Make sure all your \$ bills are in perfect condition.

Accommodation:

There is a wide range of hotels and hostels in Marrakesh, including the legendary Hotel Alli on Square Gemma El Favall. However; since you will be doing a considerable amount of shopping in Marrakesh (there are a number of supermarkets available). It is wise to find somewhere that a taxi can access (the Souk and most areas of central Marrakesh are pedestrian-only. We stayed in the Souk. This was very atmospheric; but it was necessary to hire a manned trolley for our food and equipment.

Food & Cooking:

As you would imagine restaurants serving most types of food can be found in Marrakesh however in smaller towns expect the less variety. The roadhead town of Imlil has only the most basic supplies although we were able to hire a belay plate there. It was possible to find blue calor cylinders in Marrakesh but we could not find white gas or coleman fuel.

Getting about

Taxis to Imlil cost around 300Dh. From here it is necessary to hire donkeys to get to the Nelter refuge. Although it is possible to organise this yourself, the services of an agent (we used Atlas Walkers) can save a lot of time and hassle.

<http://www.atlaswalkers.com/>

Safety and Culture

Morocco is a relatively safe place. It is a Muslim country and cultural norms are different to what some westerners usually expect.

Fountain Gully

On arrival at Imlil we walked by foot to Around (one of the settlements based around Imlil that is nearest to the Nelter hut) we noticed that there was some snow and with there being some doubt on the part of our hosts about the possibility to for mules to make it all the way up the nelter refuge, we decided to have a rest day to allow the snow to clear.

On the 1st January we walked with our hosts to the Nelter hut. We were able to take ponies and mules to within 2km of the hut and we then portered the kit to the Nelter (3120m).

On the 2nd we made an attempt on the route. After a failed attempt by Olly on the second technical pitch; Andy made good progress. By about midday there was no longer sun on the route. The cold was getting worse so we decided to retreat, leaving the ropes in place for an attempt the following day. On the 3rd July we were back on the route. Andy forced the second pitch at about Scottish VI/VII and then Olly led the second pitch which gave steep ice climbing at about Scottish VII (aided). The third pitch gave us more exciting climbing and we abseiled off at the top. The ice at the top of the gully was poor so we abseiled using a rock gear (now in situ).

Fountain Gully

Scottish ED1, VI/VII, A1, WI5, 250m

- 1. 80m, 55 degrees, Pass a rock band via a snow / ice passage to a snow slope and belay at the entrance of a corner.*
- 2. 40m, VS4c, In situ peg. A 20m snow/ice ramp to a short, steep 10m rock step. Initially a chimney climb with good protection and a piton at the crux. Leave chimney at its steepest point by stepping right to gain the snow patch above.*
- 3. 45m, WI5, A ramp leads to a vertical section entering a deep gully with rock on the left hand side. Belay on a rock ledge on the left hand side.*
- 4. 25m Scottish IV. Continue up narrow gully. The pitch finishes at a snow patch. In situ abseil stance. At the time of the first ascent the upper ice section had significant pressurised water below the surface.*



Videos

Fountain Gully: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTlu1U57Oho>

Morocco winter alpine: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHUMhNGH0bM>

Conclusion

I had known about the possibilities in Morocco for winter climbing for some time. We had the good fortune to experience excellent weather and so were able to see just how much the Winter Atlas Mountains could offer the adventurous climber looking for unclimbed objectives which are accessible, relatively free from objective danger and not technically desperate.

All in all I guess our expedition was a success and we certainly had an exciting time on the route.

The Atlas in winter is a beautiful mountain range and still relatively free from red tape. If you are prepared to look for them, new route possibilities abound on every medium, and they are major lines and not just filling in gaps.

Thanks

Thanks to The Mountaineering Council of Scotland, Buff, Montane, Chromefire, Crux, Creation Editor and The Business for supporting this expedition.

Fountain Gully

The route takes the ice line to the left of this picture. (First half of the route not visible in this picture).





