

MARRAKESH EXPRESS

in association with

ENCOUNTER OVERLAND



A report of LUYC's expedition to Southern Morocco

July — August 1980

Foreword

The Report of this expedition (London Union's fourth) is different to previous ones. The English may not be as good, but what it lacks in the finer points of grammar and spelling it makes up in the honest, frank and sometimes zany comments from the youngsters themselves!

Excerpts have been taken from their diaries, and rather than have a "blow by blow" account on a daily basis, the excerpts do not run in strict order, although they are interspersed with a few dates. The difficulty in producing a report with dates for each happening is that we had a number of breakdowns in Morocco, and as a result, the expedition was split up into three parts. "Brian" bus was stuck in Tangier for six days, and this resulted in them taking a different route, and swapping buses with "Batbus" members at Marrakesh in order for them to visit the desert regions. This will explain why, when the main expedition was ascending Djebel Toubkal (14,000 ft) the diary entries for "Brian" are entered here, as they were *en route* to Zagora at that time.

As always, our vehicles were given fond sou-briquets, viz:

BRIAN	Austin 420FG	14 seats
SKYLARK	Bedford 4x6	28 seats
BATBUS	Ford Transit LWB	13 seats
ZIGGY	Ford Transit LWB	12 seats

This did result in some consternation and alarm just before we left, as "Brian" bus needed a new engine, and a casual comment that we were having problems with Brian, and was undergoing a heart transplant but would be at County Hall for departure, had an astounding impact on some staff and members who were asking in hushed tones "Who's Brian?", "Will he really be fit to go after major surgery?", etc. For this prodigious feat of mechanical skill, we owe a deep debt of gratitude to the Directors and mechanics of *Encounter Overland Limited*, who provided their services free and who

worked round the clock to have Brian ready for departure.

Readers may be forgiven if they think that they have stumbled onto another episode of "Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy"! Diaries often refer to the myriad of stars, shooting stars and meteorites. Sleeping under the stars in the crystal clear air of the desert night makes one immediately aware of the magnitude of the universe and rather than to count sheep in getting to sleep, it was a case of counting shooting stars!

London Union is grateful to all the sponsors of the expedition, without whose help it would never have taken place . . .

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There were sixty-three members from our clubs, and was a joint venture with Surrey Youth Service, who had fifty-five members; eight vehicles in all, making it the largest overland expedition ever to leave Great Britain. Of the London members, thirty-eight per cent were girls, and lends strength to our argument that we are for mixed activities, and such philosophies don't mitigate against girls taking part; that this sort of exercise appeals to the girls' sense of adventure and excitement as well as the boys.

—GEORGE BANKS,

Principal Field Officer & Expedition Leader.

July 19, 1980 — Departure Day!

... "Went to Crayford Youth Centre for send-off. Got there to find that *BRIAN* was going to be late, so we missed the County Hall 'do'. Eventually left about 2.15 p.m. and having packed, proceeded with haste to Folkestone." ...

... "Ferry sailed at about 5.30-ish, quite a rough crossing and some folks certainly knew it, not me tho'!! Disembarked at about 8 p.m. Me navigating to campsite for the nite. Pouring with rain, nearly ran out of diesel, arrived last at camp spot at Blangy—tents up and to bed." ...

... "By eight o'clock on Saturday, July 19, 1980 the whole group was at club with Mark and Nick loading the roof rack of the Minibus in the pouring rain. The lady Mayor of Richmond, Mrs Norah Millar, arrived to bid us *Bon Voyage*. After presenting her with some flowers, we left club to go to County Hall. Here all the London group of the expedition met up—over sixty other members and leaders with whom we had spent many training sessions during the previous eight months. We had an official send-off from the Chairman of the GLC, Mr Brook-Partridge. Everyone had a little tear. We were on our way to Morocco!" ...

... "The crossing from Folkestone was quite choppy and a few of our group couldn't stomach it. We landed in France at 8 p.m.—we had now been joined by the Surrey half of the expedition and became the largest-ever peace-time group of this kind to make such a journey. There were eight large vehicles and over 120 people." ...

Boulogne Arrival

... "We arrived in Boulogne at about 9.00 p.m. and continued to drive until we reached a campspot just at Abbeyville. We had a bit of trouble with our trailer on the way to Abbeyville as it came unhitched but it was still connected to the Sky-Lark (which was our name for the Encounter Overland truck). When we arrived at the spot we had to put out tents up in the dark which was hard enough but what made it even harder was that it poured with rain." ...

1st Night — Abbeville

... "The very first night was, perhaps, the most memorable (miserable). It was pouring with rain, after a rather rough crossing over the channel, most of us just wanted to stay snoozing in the van. We all thought George was raving mad when he told us to pitch our tents on a boggy patch of land just off a main road, by the light of the van's headlights! To

make matters worse, it was discovered that Tony had used the girls' tent-pole as a roof rack support. Consequently it broke and we were left with a tent which let in water by the cupful (and by the end of the trip, by the bucketful). Well, enough said about the first night." ...

Sunday, July 20

... We got up at 8.00 a.m., and it was still raining (there's me thinking I was going to get a tan). We squeezed as much water out of our tents and sleeping bags as possible as they were completely soaked. Then we took them down and brought them over to the trailer to be packed. (Boy was I glad that I wasn't on Packing Duty). We had to cook breakfast inside the Sky Lark because of the rain." ...

July 20, 1980

... "Woke at 6 a.m. Still raining. Tent very wet. Ditto for me and most others, I think! No brekky. Packed and left. Stopped in a village for b'fast at 9.15. Sos & chips at café—managed to get Frenchies to understand my version of their language." ...

... "Had lunch by roadside and dried our tents, sleeping bags, etc. Drove on thru' afternoon.

Early Impressions

... "When we arrived at Folkestone everything seemed to be happiness and light, except for the weather, of course. As everybody knew each other on the bus or so they thought, everybody was happy and content putting on their normal false personalities—as everybody does—to try and impress everybody else. Now after a few hard days travelling, and deplorable weather, spirits began to get a little thin. Firstly people began to argue. Mainly because the false impression they gave on the first few days had become slightly corrupt. And the rest of the bus were beginning to realise, that some of the people who were great fun to be with in England, were not so great at 6.30 to 7.00 in the morning in Central France." ...

First Nights

... "After the first night spent attempting to remain afloat in our tents the second was a great improvement. We were on a campsite at Parthenay, in France. Whilst exploring I came across what I thought was a shower of midgets due to the peculiar position of the water spray, however, further

investigations proved me wrong and in fact it was actually a toilet." . . .

. . . "After attempting to make ourselves look respectable in wet jeans and Kagools splashed with stewed steak—our tea—we invaded a bar which was full of pin-ball machines which made many feel at home. The drink was reasonably cheap, the thought of getting up at six o'clock kept most sober." . . .

Monday, July 21

. . . "Called at 6.20 a.m. (5.20 a.m. English time.) Tent soaked with dew. Used another tent this time. Breakfast: beans, bread and tea. The bus will have a flavour to savour by midday." . . .

. . . "While everyone else was having a great water fight in the back, me and Pauline were discussing world religions with Jeff whom we suspect is Buddha!" . . .

. . . "A bit of a well-overdue blow-up occurred between me and . . . My fault. Must try to stop picking her up on small things—but she offers such silly suggestions. OK now." . . .

July 23

. . . "Up at 7 a.m., felt rather tired, not surprisingly! Had a cup of coffee, packed up and on the road at 8. Stopped at a lake mid-morning for a swim, very refreshing in the heat. Stayed a couple of hours. Drove through Madrid. Talk about bad drivers, surprised we got thru' in one piece!" . . .

. . . "Stopped for a late lunch at a bar south of Madrid. Very dusty, the heat really stifling. Left at 3.30-ish. Stopped for drinks at what we presumed was a bar at around 5.30. However, what with beer at about 150 ptas (£1.00 approx.) a small bottle, dark, moodily lighting, etc., etc. we soon realised we were in a brothel! Had to leave, shame! Almost lost the girls there too, (shame!!). Left and stopped at a real bar about an hour later." . . .

. . . "Stopped for nite at Santa Elena, had a talk about group responsibilities due to slight argumentative situation on board *Brian* at the time. Kipped down at 11 p.m., early start tomorrow." . . .

Granada — Entry to Morocco

. . . "We left early today as we had to cover a lot of miles. Stopped in Granada to go to the bank and shop for lunch. On the road again to Marbella, where we had a lovely swim in the Mediterranean and then

on to a beautiful camp site at Estepona. We had a smashing meal here in a real Spanish restaurant and I had paella for the first time. It wasn't bad. I went for a midnight swim and then took my sleeping bag down to the beach to sleep. We got up at 5.30 a.m. the next morning to get to Algeciras for the 9 a.m. ferry to Tangier. The crossing was much smoother and dolphins were swimming alongside the boat for some of the day. When we arrived in the port of Tangier, the sea was covered in psychedelic jelly fish." . . .

. . . "We had quite a traumatic entry into North Africa. We had been warned that the authorities might be rather concerned at the size of our expedition, but we did not really expect to have the vehicle virtually strip-searched! One 'kindly' customs officer decided that our particular bus looked interesting and demanded we empty the roof-rack. Not content, he then went through all the stores and most most intrigued with the numerous tins of Tate & Lyle syrup we had ready for the mountain climb. He even took the lid off one tin, dipped his finger and finally decided it wasn't 'kif-kif' or suchlike and we could go after all! So, after four very hot, anxious hours in the boiling sun, we were allowed to start our journey into Morocco." . . .

An Amazing Day — July 26

. . . "Come on, get up", demanded George as he tipped us all out of our sleeping bags. There were the usually early morning complaints and cries of "where are my shoes?" and "has anyone got a loo roll?" . . .

. . . "It was still pitch dark which made packing the tents away and loading the bus quite a problem, but we were fairly disciplined by now so we coped okay." . . .

6.30 a.m.

. . . "Finished! The Batbus was ready to go! Due to possible problems involving the Encounter Overland bus entering Morocco, all the gear had been given to the transits and *Brian* bus in exchange for a few passengers. It was a fair swap. Three guys and myself for 150 hot dog sausages, four tins of luncheon meat, two tins of marmalade, a dozen packets of Weetabix and a few kilos of soya pork and beef! One by one the vehicles left the Estopona campsite we had infested for the last couple of days. It was a good journey with the luxury of being able to stretch my legs out in the big bus. Several people slept on the way but those who stayed awake were treated to a marvellous sight of the sun rising through the picturesque Spanish coastal hills. There was excitement in the air as we arrived at Algeciras at

at 8.00 a.m. for the 9 o'clock ferry to take us across the Straits of Gibraltar.

9.45 a.m.

... "We've set sail for Africa! A three-hour trip was in store for us. Everyone was beginning to feel the strain a bit and many people fell asleep on the boat, often waking up to find George had been filming them. A couple of hours later we caught our first glimpse of Morocco and the white-washed buildings of Tangiers." ...

1.00 p.m.

... "We had hardly put foot on Moroccan soil when we were approached and had our first taste of being hassled by the Moroccans. "Hello, my friend, are you English? Let me show you round the Medina. My brother has a shop there where you can buy real leather wallets for 25 dirhams." We waited for two hours while the buses were searched but within the two-hour time difference it meant it was still only 1 o'clock. We finally left the harbour for the famous "camping Tingis". Everyone was hanging out of the Encounter Overland bus to see the sights." ...

1.30 p.m.

... "Camping Tingis was a very pleasant site with tropical vegetation and the luxury of a swimming pool. We quickly set up the tent and unloaded the bus then there was a mad rush for the pool. Splish, splash, splash, etc., etc." ...

5.00 p.m.

... "George held a group meeting. One of the blokes from the *Brian* bus had fallen asleep and one of the girls had written "wally" on his forehead. He was unaware of this, of course, and for about five minutes seventy-five people were creased up with laughter. After the hysteria had died down George gave us the arrangements for the evening." ...

6.30 p.m.

... "George drove us down to the Tangier Medina and dropped us off at the Socco Grand and said "stay on that corner and no-one move". As soon as we got off the bus we were surrounded by dozens of people trying to sell ornaments, especially bongos and also trying to push hashish onto us. It was quite an experience. We were there during Ramadan which meant that during the day life is very slow but as the sun sets the place bursts into life. After parking the *Bathus* George led us into the Medina along the Rue de Grande Mosque and pointed out a few café-cum-restaurants where we could get a meal for about eight

or nine dirhams (about a quid). I joined a few people from the Encounter Overland bus and we went into a café and straightaway soup was brought to us. We asked to see the menu. Basically we had a choice between cous-cous (the national dish) and steak. Half of us chose cous-cous and half chose the steak. But we were promptly told that both were off today but we could have soup and stew. We thought we would go elsewhere but a big Moroccan blocked the doorway and we had to argue in French for about five minutes before he would let us out. We wandered along the narrow streets deep in the Medina and a local man came up and told us he would take us to his brother's restaurant. We eventually arrived at a doorway and followed "our friend" up a narrow staircase and along a couple of dimly-lit corridors into a luxurious restaurant with sofas, carpets and wall-hangings. The whole scene could have come straight out of a Hollywood movie. But the prices were too high for us even though they were only charging £2.50 for a three-course meal. We found a small café and most of us sampled the chicken cous-cous which was extremely good in my opinion, although judging by the comments made by the rest of the entourage I think I was in the minority. We had coffee on the balcony of another café overlooking one of the Medina streets then spent a while looking around the tiny, mysterious shops which fill the Medina and help to give it a certain character which cannot be found anywhere else in the world." ...

10.00 p.m.

... "We met back at the Grando Socco and George drove us to the European side of town and we had coffee on one of the boulevards. It was a fantastic night out and a great end to a truly memorable day." ...

July 26

... "Moroccans waving to you all the time makes you feel like royalty. The camp site was superb, swimming pool, everything. We unpacked and went for a swim." ...

Tangier — Medina

... "I don't think that I could ever forget Tangier Medina, everything about it appealed to the senses; the smell of the donkeys and the leather which was used to litter the cave-like shops with souvenirs "guaranteed genuine Berber"! The smell of manure, sweat, of dyes (used to colour the brightly-coloured kaftans which everyone seemed to wear) and the sickly smell of cous-cous and Ramadan soup which simmered in the umpteen cafés along the winding

passage ways. The sounds of salesmen haggling and displaying their goods, of the old men chanting prayers and the unlikely sound of a news broadcast emanating from a primitive-looking wireless (with signs around it claiming that the owner of the shop can do magical repairs on such sets)—the dazzling bright colours of the kaftans, slippers and carpets of the numerous souvenir shops. The atmosphere in the Medina was always electric, morning, noon or night, the hubub, bustling, wheeling and dealing and begging *is Tangier*, the beautiful mosque, crumbling walls of the kasbar and the narrow stone alley-ways seem to take a back seat, it is the atmosphere and the action which is the most vivid aspect of Tangier." . . .

. . . "It was like stepping back many centuries and seeing oneself in Bible times. When we first arrived in Morocco, I was surprised how poor most of the people were. Dark kaftans were worn to protect them from the sun, women were veiled and only their dark, piercing eyes were seen. The great poverty was the thing about the trip that I disliked most in Tangier especially there were loads of beggars at the gates of the Medina, some were mothers with babies and many were old men who were badly crippled, crying out for money." . . .

. . . "Our first two days were spent in Tangier, with a chance to do some sightseeing and get our first taste of the Arabic way of life. In the evening, we went back into town for a meal in a little restaurant amongst the bustle of a very busy market. Being Ramadan, nothing happens until after sunset. I never expected there to be so many people, I was quite frightened. We sampled cous-cous and kebabe for the first time—the food wasn't very nice, but I ate a little bit. For some, the sight of 'chicken and chips' on any Arab menu was like manna from heaven." . . .

. . . "Whilst in Tangier, everyone had the experience of shopping in the markets for the first time—we had to haggle for everything we bought, which was good fun. When we bought fruit and vegetables, you didn't have to worry about knowing the names of everything as you could choose which ones you wanted and just have them weighed. The different types of melons were lovely." . . .

. . . "We had a trip out to Hercules Caves and saw where the Atlantic meets the Mediterranean. The waves were enormous and almost knocked you over and some sampled camel-rides for 1 dirham (about 10p) for a short walk up and down a path. We left Tangier at about 5 o'clock in the evening and drove south, just in time to see a beautiful sunset over the Rif mountains. The driver of the Encounter Overland bus had found a very secluded camp-spot off the road in the valley of the River Loukos. The

boys cooked a late meal of stewed steak, beans and mash and some sat round a camp fire, drinking hot chocolate before settling into their sleeping bags for the night." . . .

. . . "I woke up about 5 a.m. to a sound of flutes playing in the hills. It got a bit spooky, so I crept back into my bed and went to sleep. The flutes were being played by the young men bringing their sheep and goats down the valley and the sound echoed around the hills." . . .

July 27

. . . "Got woken up early, 'bout down (5 a.m.) — didn't get up till 7 a.m. tho'. Had a shower and washed my hair, nice to feel clean again. Went into town to get front tyre on *Brian* fixed, also for people to change up money. Back to campsite for lunch." . . .

. . . "In afternoon, went to Caves of Hercules and then Cap Spartel, beach on Atlantic Coast. Very hot, but I didn't go in swimming—just sunbathed. One way back *Brian* broke down. . . and I hitched our way back to Tangiers then got a taxi to campsite. Set out in E.O. to meet *Brian*, met them near town, they'd run on three cylinders, one rocker now gone. Bus filled with gas—everyone was slightly choked!! Got back to camp, went into town again for meal. Went to bar on return to camp, then to bed." . . .

Moroccan Hospitality

. . . "Moroccans are generally hospitable people, but one has to be aware sometimes of this 'hospitality'. In the Medinas it is customary to bargain for goods, obviously the traders are very, very skilled in this art—the ignorant tourist means good business. We were instructed on the ways of bargaining, and most of us faired well whilst shopping. There are those who offer their services as guides, more often it will be a tour of the shops or cafés owned by their relations or friends. I remember in Fez, when unable to get transportation to the Medina, my friend, . . . and I agreed to accept a taxi offered by a Moroccan. Not only was the taxi driver his friend, but we had to pay his fare as well. Then he wanted to show us around the market. After a heated debate he left us stranded! (We were in another Medina.) Later, on our return journey to Fez I saw the same 'gentleman'. He made a gesture with his hands across his throat." . . .

Buying Presents

. . . "When we stopped in the towns we took the

opportunity of buying souvenirs and visited the local markets. This turned out to be quite an experience. The minute we went into the markets people stared at us and some made remarks which were not repeatable. We were constantly bothered by young Moroccans who wanted to be our guides. Then if we stopped to look at something we were told how great the article was and at what a bargain it was at last of all we were told the price. Then if we wanted to buy the article was and at what a bargain it was but last of "a pain in the ass". The thing that slightly annoyed me was that when I gave someone a present from Morocco and they did not like it, they did not realise the trouble that I had to go through to get the present." . . .

Berbers — Touareg

... "Our cooling-off time the next day was spent at a lake at Dayet Aaoua and after lunch we drove on towards the Middle Atlas mountains, which we could now see as mauve-tinged hills ahead of us. Along the road to Ifrane, we saw a couple of black tents a few hundred yards away from the road. These people, according to Sue were Berbers. As we approached, the children ran towards us waving. We took their photos and gave them sweets. They took us across the field towards their tents to find their parents, as we wanted to know more about their lives. As we got to the tents, a few animals like chickens and a cow appeared from inside. In a shelter made from sticks and cardboard boxes, a girl of about thirteen was cooking bread in a small clay oven. Two women appeared from one of the tents, each clutching a small child. The younger one sat down and started to breast-feed her baby. These people were extremely poor and the older woman asked if we had any clothes we could give her for the children." . . .

... "Some of us went back to the bus to see what we could find. The woman was over the moon when we presented her with them. We also gave them some money, more than they probably have in a year. We left, feeling very contented with the photos we have collected between us and them happy with our gifts. One of the girls observed that we stopped at a little place with Berbers who just live in tents—they cook in little mud stoves and keep animals. One woman still breast-fed a two-year-old and they asked for clothes, cigarettes and money." . . .

... "This unscheduled stop was one of the highlights of the expedition for many members; it gave us all a unique chance to see at first-hand how these Berbers live their nomadic way of life, with their primitive but very effective methods of cooking. We also saw one of the girls making "harira" (the thick soup made from lentils, onions and meal that is the traditional start to Moroccan meals) in an iron

cauldron over a wooden fire. In the same tent was the only man around—a very old man, wrapped almost totally in different layers of clothes, sitting cross-legged and silent with his head bowed. Unfortunately, our French was limited and we were unable to find the answers to the very many questions we longed to ask. We assumed that the other man, or men, were out in the countryside with their sheep and goats. They were very gentle, smiling people and we were sad to leave them. They contrasted with some of the very aggressive, noisy people we were later to meet in Marrakesh." . . .

Ksar es Souk

... "As we continued along this dry road, we suddenly hit a sandstorm for about 500 yards and could not see a thing through the windows at the end, the whole bus was covered in red-coloured dust. We crossed the river Ziz and entered a narrow, picturesque valley through which the river flows between two lines of tall palms. We could now see a series of fortified villages, called Ksour, which looked like giant sand-castles of beige-coloured stone surrounded by the very green palm trees. These Gorges du Ziz looked similar to the Grand Canyon in America. The river valley eventually took us into the small town of Ksar-es-Souk, where we spent two days." . . .

... "We left the camp-site for a trip out to an oasis at Meski—this natural pool was the best swim I had the whole time in Morocco. The water was freezing and fresh. This was, in fact, the 'Blue Spring of Meski' which rises in a small cave at the foot of a cliff and opens out into a large basin, forming a natural swimming pool in what is otherwise very dry, barren country. Here, too, were the usual silver-jewellery merchants. One of the girls bought a bracelet and got ripped off. This indeed was one of the most frustrating things about having to haggle for everything, you always thought you had a bargain until someone else came back with a similar article at a much cheaper price!" . . .

July 28

... "Up early again. Went into town in morning. Sent some postcards. Bought a Kaftan in the Medina. On arrival back at camp it was first decided for *Brian* occupants to go on E.O., then their driver said 'no, we couldn't'. We've got to wait for AA to fly our spare rocker arm. Others left in evening, Ziggy was last to go at 7 p.m. Had a super meal of beef bourgignon in red wine plus orange and caramel in brandy. Had a row between the boys and girls in evening. Went to bed late." . . .



With the Berbers of the Moyen Atlas

July 31

... "Sixth day at camping b----- Tingis. Helped Kev fix a bit of the engine today. The broken rocker arm had fallen into the sump so we had to take that off to get it out. Talk about a dirty job." ...

... "Couple of other note-worthy things happened today. Clive and Mike went into town, hired a car and took the girls off to meet the rest of the expedition. Having fixed the engine once Kev went to take off the rest of the broken rocker arm and dropped one of the pushrods into the engine!!! Luckily it didn't fall thry' so we could pick it out (phew!!). Went to bar in evening." ...

August 1

... "Great day today. Kev and I went into Tangier to get telex which said part would arrive 5.30 p.m. However, local taxi driver informed us of a British parts garage and took us there and we managed to get a new rocker arm!! (If we'd known about this, we could've been gone on Monday or Tuesday) Back to Camp, fixed *Brian*, had a swim and packed up. Left at 3 p.m. Stopped for a meal at 5.45 in Souk el Arba du Rharb, done about 100 miles." ...

... "Got to Casablanca at about 11. Great diffi-

culty finding the road to Marrakesh. Kipped for nite at 11.40." ...

Expedition Food

... "For many of us who had not been camping before, expedition food came as a bit of a shock to the system! Although we had all had a hand in planning our menus, it was not until we got around to preparing and eating them did we realise quite what it was all about. Most of the food we took with us was canned or dried and during our preparation we had transferred it to labelled plastic containers. Little did we realise that the labels would get wet, peel off, and lead to great confusion over what was inside; dried milk or instant mash, for example!! This was not funny when we were dying for a cup of tea at 5.30 p.m." ...

... "Most of our lunches were taken by the side of the road; we were usually pressed for time so a 'military style' operation went into action with one of us lighting the stove, another filling the kettle, and various other people opening cans of meat and preparing the salad. Occasionally we bought fresh eggs or cheese in the local market and villages to supplement our rations. More often, however, it was the devastating choice between luncheon meat or corned beef. For those that didn't particularly enjoy either,

lunch was often a dull affair, brightened by some local fruit or canes. The peaches and melons in Spair were absolutely delicious and very refreshing as it got hotter and hotter." . . .

. . . Evening meals were slightly more varied, we especially remember one night in Spain when the boys were elected to cook us a curry! There was one problem in leaving them completely to it—they forgot to do any rice!! But everyone voted the curry as being very good—George even had second-helpings—and some of *Brian* bus joined in too! Most of the time we really enjoyed our meals; usually we were so starving by dinner time that we scoffed it down! We never really got used to how long it took to cook certain things on camping gaz stoves. One evening we were all starving and looking forward to our meal, but had to wait over an hour for our potatoes to cook. Eventually, we could wait no longer and sat down to a rock-hard dinner!" . . .

. . . "Towards the end of our stay in Morocco, we were beginning to miss home-cooked puddings! . . . suggested that she cook us some custard, to have with some fruit cane. Although the saucepan got well and truly burnt, we all agreed that it was the best pudding of the whole trip!" . . .

Catching-Up

. . . "After four days stranded in Tangier with a

break down in the *Brian* bus, we finally received news that me and my four friends were to be taken by a hired car to catch up with the rest of the expedition and join their *Encounter Overland* truck in Marrakesh. They had taken the route, Tangier, Fez, Marrakesh, but we were taking the quicker route, Tangier, Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakesh." . . .

. . . "We started off at 2.00 p.m. on Thursday afternoon. Our bear essentials in the boot and the four of us sat sunburned (from a previous walk on Tangier beach) in the back of the car. . . . and . . . in the front taking turns at driving. We stopped at 6 p.m. to have a big meal in a restaurant (that was our last meal until 10 a.m. the next day cos . . . forgot to pack the milk for the breakfast). We went on travelling non-stop (except for fuel) until 11.30 p.m. We stopped at a camp spot beside what we found out later to be a major motorway. We went to sleep relying only on ourselves to wake up at 4.00 a.m. I woke at 4.30 and called everyone. We packed up our sleeping bags. It was pitch dark still and we were on the road at 5.00. We stopped at a café at 10.00 a.m. and travelled non-stop in the extremely hot desert sun until we reached Marrakesh. Our once cold fizzy drinks were like hot tea in no time at all. We had to have the windows open and air coming through the window was like putting a hot hairdryer up to your skin, when it hit you. The view we had was of a dry, red, brown bowl of dust and boulders." . . .



In the Todra Gorges

... "When we met some of the expeditions at Ksar es Souk we were exhausted and dying to have a swim in the swimming pool where they were. But we could not because we were told the E.O. bus left two hours earlier as it was slower than the other lighter bushes and could not be driven in the night. So full of disappointment we set off again and came to a cross roads where Pauline and I had to wait to see if the E.O. bus came past while the rest rode to the oasis. The sun was pouring down on us but we had plenty of lotion to stop us burning. They came back in about ten minutes and we went on for another half-hour. We finally met the bus at the camp site where they were all busy lazing around gathering their strength for the long drive later that evening. We did not even have time for a swim. Just some dry bread and jam and tea. We were off on the road again in Encounter Overland." ...

Getting Up

... "For half of the trip I have had to sleep in a torn sleeping bag, the reason being that one morning I was asked to get up by one of the leaders, I layed in my sleeping bag for a few minutes to wake myself up properly when one of the leaders had a fit and begun to pull me out of my bag. The bag was completely ripped plus I had cold water poured over my head. Getting up in the morning at 5 a.m. was an experience I found very hard." ...

Moroccan Hospitality

... "Moroccans are a nation of people that are unsurpassed in their friendliness and hospitality towards foreign visitors to their country, some even make it a full-time occupation of theirs to ensure that you go home laden with presents, to offer their services as guides, to escort any un-accompanied females (commonly known as 'Fatima') and converse with you very proficiently in the English language when they are told their services are not required." ...

... "The Moroccan people are a very proud and patriotic nation, although during the tourist season some part-time begging whilst out doing the shopping appears to be a favourite pastime as well as boosting the family's economy. Their hospitality extends to such an extent that on one occasion a poverty-stricken female invited members of the party into her home for traditionally made mint tea and collected a tariff of one dirham per glass as her satisfied customers rose to leave." ...

... "A meeting with the Moroccan people is truly an unforgettable experience." ...

Todra

... "We left the next morning to drive west for the first time. It was a very long, straight road that was cloudy and misty in the hot sun. The majority of the villages we saw there still fortified, being surrounded by high walls and gates, but the houses were now grey and white instead of dark red of the Ziz valley. The people were now wearing black, voluminous robes instead of the white and brown we had previously seen and the women's had brightly coloured patterns down the back. We stopped at Tinerhir to do our shopping and then journeyed along the Gorges du Todra for lunch and an afternoon rest." ...

... "We had to cross a ford to get to our picnic spot. It was quite deep in the middle and *Batbus* got stuck on its first crossing. *Ziggy*, the Richmond bus, just sailed through to choruses of "boring, boring" from the onlookers. The Todra gorges closed in us between impressively high, vertical cliffs with the valley floor only thirty feet wide; we followed the river along until we reached a small café. We drank delicious, refreshing mint tea in a shady room full of huge cushions, brightly patterned in traditional Berber style." ...

Driving to Imlil

... "Back to the site for lunch before leaving for Imlil, a tiny village at the base of Djebel Toubkal, the highest mountain in North Africa—yes we were now leaving the heat of Marrakesh to drive south into the High Atlas mountains and to the objectives of our expedition. Firstly, to climb this very high mountain 14,000 feet high and secondly, to live with the Berbers in Imlil and carry out a sociological survey of the village. Full of expectation, we drove across the Haoux plain to Tahannaout and then began the long, slow climb through the Moulay Gorge to Asni for a drink stop. Here at last we could see the high peaks of the Atlas before us. The good metalled road gave way to a dirt road, getting narrower all the time with a steady climb along the very green Mizane river valley. The Richmond minibus handled all this with ease, but not so for all the others. We stopped a mile down the track from Imlil as *Brian* bus had boiled over and whilst waiting with them, we could look around the valley and see that the land was well cultivated in terraces up the sides of the hills and two children passed us with a small herd of cows. Some decided to get some practice for the climb by walking the remainder of the way to Imlil." ...

August 3

"It's a really great experience being up here, higher than you could even be on land in Britain.

Stars, millions of them above you and little dots of light around the mountains; the sound of crickets, it's just fantastic." . . .

August 4

. . . "Woke up at 5.30 before the sun had risen to the sound of cockerels doing their thing all over the mountains. We got up at 5.45, packed up, had breakfast and said goodbye to this marvellous place and made our way to the desert." . . .

. . . "After that we got on the road to Zagora where at 6.30 we stopped for the night at a little oasis where we cooked and lit a fire. We went to bed at about 9 p.m. but layed awake looking at myriads of stars, more stars than we'd ever seen or probably would ever see again." . . .

August 5

. . . "Stopped off and fried an egg on a boulder as it's so hot. It was a very windy spot and it had started raining a bit. We spent some time trying to weigh down the tarpaulin. It was almost like an 8-man hang glider." . . .

. . . "One morning while we were sleeping we were suddenly awoken by some rather loud swearing and we woke up to find that xxxx one of the members of our bus had been pushed down a cliff by one of the leaders. There was a big argument and xxxx hurt his arm and was very upset because he thought it was a stupid thing to do. It did not really matter much because he gets on everybody's nerves anyway. All day xxxx and xxxx did not talk which is not really all that unusual, anyway now I have finished writing what I was supposed to write I will stop because my arm is aching." . . .

"The tourists were the main source of income for the people of Imlil—mostly for the cafés and guides. Despite the constant stream of visitors to Imlil there were no signs of European manners or dress—they didn't even sell filtered cigarettes!" . . .

The Climb of Mount Djebel Toubkal

. . . "We arrived at Imlil to be very warmly greeted by the villagers. We didn't hang about getting things done as those of us who would be attempting Toubkal wanted plenty of sleep as we would have to be up at 5 a.m. the next morning. Being only a tiny village, there was nowhere to camp so we just got the sleeping bags down and slept on the flat roofs of the café buildings. 5 a.m. came very fast and half asleep, we got things ready for when the guides and mules

arrived at 5.15 a.m." . . .

. . . "We had the choice to climb the mountain or stay and study the village. Although on several occasions, I really regretted the choice, I'm very glad now that I climbed the highest mountain in North Africa." . . .

. . . "Our expedition leader, George Banks, from the London Union of Youth Clubs, had visited Imlil many times and knew the mountain and villagers very well. We had a chance to see how shrewd one needs to be with the guides when trying to negotiate the fee for their services and the mules. In limited French, we had to get their agreement to a basic fee of 60Dh. per man and mule (about £7.) with an extra 40Dh. if they did the job well and stayed on the mountain all night with the group rather than come down early for Ramadan, as they had in some previous years! They nodded and smiled in agreement." . . .

. . . "We packed the mules with the tent, cookers and food and set off on the long hike to the half-way stage at Neltner. After six hours of painful walking I got there and decided I would leave the summit for those daft enough. After all, I was an hour and a half behind. After a welcome cup of soup, I changed my mind and said to myself I would make it." . . .

. . . "The first part of the climb took about four hours up a long, winding path to where we would camp. There we had lunch and then the ones who wanted to go to the top set off for the hard part of the climb. After not feeling too well in the morning, I recovered and decided to attempt it to the summit. It was very steep and we had to climb over big boulders, which made a change from the path we'd followed so far." . . .

. . . "At about 1.30 p.m. we set off. It wasn't as far as the first half but it was twice as steep. I stuck right behind the guide all the way and was rewarded by getting nice long rests when we stopped to let the others catch up. Everyone was smiling when we reached the first of the snow, for they could fill their water bottles with cold, fresh clean water. From then on it got hard as we were all tired and cold. The four of us that had stayed with the guide were nearing the summit now and we quickened the pace to try to be the first, but the guide stopped us and the five of us joined hands and ran to the top. The wind was very cold and we sheltered amongst the rocks, waiting for the rest of the party. The view was marvellous. I could see the Sahara Desert and the peaks of the surrounding mountains. When the whole of the party got there, we all sat together and sang *Land of Hope and Glory*." . . .

. . . After a few rests and our Golden Syrup rations

we reached the top—eventually. It was dull and snowing, but we could make out the sand dunes of the Sahara Desert below us in the distance. After reaching the top with difficulty towards the end, as I felt giddy and couldn't breathe very well, I thought the way down would be easier but to me it seemed much worse." . . .

The Descent from Djebel Toubkal

. . . "We started on the descent, and I got the knack quickly—the best way was to turn sideways and just keep jumping. I finally got to the base camp at 6.30 p.m. very tired and aching all over. Those who hadn't tried the second half had prepared dinner for the rest, which consisted of a spoon of soya beef, a spoon of Smash and a spoon of mixed veg. All of a sudden, the skies opened and it poured. Those that were down off the mountain piled into the tent that has been put up by those who chose to stay at the base camp. . . . had taken rather longer than me to come down and was still some 600 ft up the mountain in the pouring rain and dark. Both guides had returned now and a very annoyed George Banks sent one of them back to bring the girls down. They finally got down, soaking wet, annoyed and cold and went straight into a tent to try to get some sleep. We hadn't taken enough tents with us and there were as many as six in some of them, so sleep was definitely out." . . .

. . . "The boys immediately began tearing down the scree slopes to the promise of food. My tired legs wouldn't stand up to that, so I half fell down with some girls from the Surrey group. We got about three quarters of the way down to the camp when it got dark. There was about a dozen of us left—mostly girls and the guide had the only torch. He showed us the way down but I did think we'd be up there all night. My legs felt like jelly and I felt very tired, so it was just too much when it started raining. We eventually got down, wet, cold and exhausted and dried off a bit in a hut before going to any tent which had room. I wouldn't like to do the climb again, as it was the most frightening thing I've ever done—it was certainly unforgettable, but I'm glad to say I made it." . . .

. . . "If I had known how hard it was going to be to climb the mountain, I wouldn't have attempted it! But I did and felt a sense of achievement I had never experienced before. I felt ill and had a sense of danger." . . .

Down from Toubkal

. . . "The way down was more difficult and dangerous than the way up. Scree which we had done the

"one forward and two back" way now a twenty foot ski-slope skid ending up on the bum. Everyone was falling everywhere in a rush to get down for food and warm clothes which the Neltner stayers were supposed to get ready. It was a four-hour climb and a two-hour descent. Teresa was always on her bum and one girl was so exhausted she had to be carried down by a guide. Pauline, Teresa and me were in the back group and about half-way down the first steep hill it got very dark and began to rain. Soon we were being dragged in a chain down the steep scree and boulder slope we so carefully picked our steps on the way up. No time to stop and heal wounds. The answer was always 'come on you're alright'. For about half an hour we were being dragged through cactus, etc., in pitch darkness and hailstones. We were the only ones in shorts. After climbing a boulder and falling full body in a pit full of cactus we reached a strong stream which we had to cross. Everyone was frightened to cross, as one slip was fatal. Eventually we got up a large boulder to meet George Banks and trailed into a dry cabin." . . .

. . . "Pauline was shivering away, minding her own business when a mule bucked and gave her a kick into the throat and hip. She was well shaken, shouting 'I hope my neck's not broken!'" . . .

August 8

. . . "After the meal there was an hour's drive to one of George's camping spots, i.e. next to a railway line. Went off to bed at about 11.30." . . .

August 9

. . . "Woke up to welcome the Casablanca-quick-step with a smile." . . .

The Survey of Imlil

. . . "Woke up by the sound of cockerells crowing at 5 a.m. when everybody got up. The people going up the mountain left about 6.15 and we carried on washing-up and then cleaned out the van and washed down the windows. Then we went for a walk around the villages, which turned out to be a four-hour trek." . . .

. . . "Before leaving England, we had prepared a full survey to be completed by those staying in the village. In order to answer this in detail, it was necessary to see and find out many things about the people and their way of life. We therefore did our bargaining with one of the young men from the village and agreed a price of 40 Fh. for a 'survey' of the village. Obviously my French was not quite right, as

Mohammed our guide took this to mean a survey from afar and took us on a complete circular tour of the valley above the village. However, this proved to be most interesting and we were able to see many aspects of their way of life which would have been impossible unless we had gone out to find them." . . .

. . . "We walked up to the village school, and then on to other villages around, seeing maize, walnuts and figs being cultivated in the valleys. We saw a young girl doing her washing in a stream and Mohammed told us that girls normally marry between 16 and 18, whilst the boys are usually over 20. We went on to another village and saw houses made of clay and stone, with flat roofs made from logs and branches covered with earth. All the villages in this Mizane valley were arranged in tiers, the terrace of one often being at the ground level of the next. Whilst resting in one such village, a little boy drove his small herd of cows and goats past us and up through the narrow streets and houses, to finish up in a back-yard of one of them. An old lady also came by, with the typical diamond-shaped tattoos on her forehead and chin, and hand-spinning wool as she walked along." . . .

. . . "The women were so reserved and hid from the cameras. This we found out was to do with their religion, like in the ten commandments, you may not have any graven images. It surprised us how hard the women worked; they carried great loads on their backs, they seemed to do all the heavy work, while the men drank in the shade. We asked about this and were told that most men were farmers and all their work had finished. Once the corn had grown the women took over the cutting and carrying." . . .

. . . "Back in Imlil after the 'trek' the group sat down by the river to complete their surveys. This intrigued some of the villagers and soon a small group came round us to offer assistance. Braham, a young student at the university in Marrakesh, was able to speak French very well and a little English. With help from him and some of the older men, we were able to ascertain the following facts . . .

There was no electricity, telephones or petrol in the village; there were no buses and they had to travel by mule or the rare car, to Asni to find these.

There were only 3 tiny "shops", which were just like small cubicles, and they sold tin foods, eggs, bread, etc., but we were warned that the shopkeepers would overcharge us and so Brahim offered to do the food shopping. From the prices some of the other groups paid, it was obviously correct!

Most of the young people went to Marrakesh to work in the winter and some returned to the village in the summer when the tourists came. Many of the farmers

were self-sufficient and some were able to sell their cash-crops of maize and barley at the market in Asni.

The children go to school at 6 years of age and can stay until they are 20; most speak Arabic and French, whilst English is taught at the universities.

Local crafts included engraving on silver and copper, particularly for jewellery and daggers—we were continually shown baskets of these by the villagers and pestered to buy them.

From our own observations, we could see that the families were generally quite poor. They tended to have several children (sometimes 10) and clothes were difficult to obtain—our guides requested T-shirts or shoes as a tip, rather than money or cigarettes as we were asked for in the towns.

There was no doctor in the village and whilst staying there we were asked for pills to cure the café owner's headache, antiseptic cream for a sore on an old man's face, and also to administer an injection to a small boy—we managed the first two but declined the injection, finding it difficult to see how the boy could be prescribed such without having someone to give it to him.

They obtained water from the river and a type of irrigation had been set up, so that water was channelled into the village at various times during the day. At the end of Ramadan each evening at 7.30 p.m. two little girl twins came down to this stream to fill kettles and saucepans with water for the evening meal.

The people observed the fasting of Ramadan very strictly, but we noticed that they made sure they had enough to eat after 7.30 p.m. to adequately make-up for the day's fast—it also meant they had loud parties and discussions well into the early hours of the morning. For this reason, we often found shops and restaurants closed in the mid-morning.

We found the people of Imlil to be generally very gentle, friendly and helpful. You had to be careful of the usual type who are out to make money from tourists, but at least here even they were peaceful in their pestering and not "aggressive and pushy" as they were in Marrakesh.

Rabat

. . . "It is quite amazing what Morocco had to offer, it even has the pomp and circumstances of any self-respecting country—I am, of course, referring to the King's Palace in Rabat—with the guards dressed in their traditional regalia and the high crenulated walls of the palace. Although richly decorated, the idea of

religion, which rules all the Moroccan peoples lives, is not forgotten, in a room in the palace, priests sit and read from the *Koran* twenty-four hours a day—the room is floored with marble, so highly polished that it looks as though it has a veneer of water.” . . .

August 11

. . . “Got up late and went to Loja to rendezvous with Encounter Overland. They’re going on by themselves, which is just as well ‘cos apparently they’ve all got a bad attack of ‘you know what’.” . . .

August 11

. . . “Woken up by George at 8 a.m. after a really good night’s sleep on our orthopaedic field which reminded Mike of a dentist’s chair. We had cornflakes (makes a change) for breakfast.” . . .

. . . “On through the night to a café where we had a drink before going to another hayfield for the night. We might have arrived in the middle of a meteor storm as the sky was full of shooting stars.” . . .

Going Home — Back in Spain

. . . “Once in Spain again the travelling became slightly more gruelling because it was only five days to go until the end of the trip, and our bus was having a few problems. Eventually we had to tell the big expedition bus to go on, and we stayed in St Sebastian for a day. On the morning of the day when the bus was being fixed it wasn’t so great. George stranded us on the beach for five hours, with hardly a penny between us.” . . .

August 13

. . . “The rest of us in *Brian* went down to the beach at San Sebastian where we found *Batbus*, whose clutch had finally gone, so Ad and myself went with George, Lyn and Kev to find a garage that would do the clutch. We found one that would do it early tomorrow . . .” . . .

. . . “Mike and myself went with Monie, Chris and two Ziggyites to find a campsite for the barbecue. We found one at the top of a hill with a great view over the Pyrennees. We started getting the barbecue ready and later the others arrived.” . . .

. . . “The barbacue was ready at about 9.30 and on the menu was hamburgers, kebabs, potato salad, rice salad, lettuce, tomatoes and wine, etc. bananas in rum.” . . .

. . . “After the eating was over us *Brian* lot donned bow ties for our cabaret act: The George Song, When You Feel Sad and the Expedition Anthem. Community singing then followed, a lot of is led by George with such numbers as Ilkley Moor, the Mad Musicians of London Town, etc., etc.” . . .

. . . “At about midnight everyone decided to turn in or fall over.” . . .

August 14

. . . “We crossed into France at 7 o’clock and changed up some money; it was pouring down (raining Chats and Chiens).” . . .

. . . “Stopped off at a petrol station for some chocky bars and carried on till 11 p.m. for drink at a café. As I was navigating I couldn’t sleep so I had black coffee and optrex eyewash, (not in the same cup).” . . .

San Sebastian

. . . “The journey home through Spain and France was again an anti-climax, most people by now realising that four weeks is a long time away from home and the thought of seeing mums and dads again became very attractive! Due to one of the buses having clutch trouble, we stayed at San Sebastian for one night and took the advantage of having forty of us together in one place to have a barbecue. The barbecue in Spain was lovely with decent kebabs and different salads. One of the male leaders on the expedition turned out to be quite a “cordon bleu chef” and our boys helped him to prepare the marinated kebabs, hamburgers, salads and bananas cooked in rum. We also had a sing-song around the camp fire and heard the first renderings of the ‘Sahara ’80’ song written by the members of *Brian* bus. The next morning we saw a beautiful sunrise through the clouds drifting below us in the valley.” . . .

Camping in A Building Site

. . . “Jeff is rather an eccentric driver if ever there was one. Anyway one night after failing to find a vacant campsite, Jeff to everyone’s amazement drove onto a building site. There was a big crane, the cement mixer the lot. Everyone was horrified at this suggestion. Anyway to make things worse the truck got stuck in cement. Jeff suggested that we all twenty-four of us pushed the truck. So after revving up the engine we pushed with all our energy. But alas the truck did not move. Again we tried but again in

vain. Jeff, now getting angry said, we will try again in the morning." . . .

Getting Back

... "France, as usual, was wet but at least this time, it managed to stop when we reached our final camp-spot at the same place we had stopped on our first night out. The 'bog' didn't seem so bad this time and, for some, the meal that night was very enjoyable. 'The nicest meal we had was boeuf bourgignonne on the last night in France before coming home' . . . or was it simply that we were going home the next day??

We drove into Boulogne early the next morning, allowing time to buy some French foodstuffs and time to take home. There was no hurry, the boat didn't arrive until 1 o'clock, but then this English lady in the French supermarket said something about a 'blockade' of the ports. No, we reassured ourselves, that was just the fishermen—it wouldn't affect the ferries.

At the port of Boulogne, they said we might just make it as the blockade was due to start at 2 p.m., so we travelled on to the embarkation area. The group of seven vehicles (we found out later that the Encounter Overland bus had got through earlier that morning) was therefore lined up ready to leave; we assembled for group photographs and the *Brian* Bus group sang their Sahara 80 song for George to record for posterity . . . and then along came this customs man who said the fishermen had closed the port early and we might be stuck here for three days! The 'Bulldog' spirit rose in us all, we wouldn't stand for that, so maps were brought out, mileages calculated and currency reserves assessed—it would indeed be extremely difficult if we had to stay, so we would have to get across some way or another.

We eventually made our way to Dunkirk and after much bargaining with the authorities, managed to get on the last boat to leave the port . . . as we sailed away, we could see the fishing fleet moving in behind us to close Dunkirk. The crew was French and they didn't seem at all amused when some of the group started singing *Rule Britannia* . . . but as we crossed the Channel safely and arrived home in London very tired and relieved . . .

On Morocco

... "Morocco is a wonderful country and fourteen days is not long enough to thoroughly explore its landscape. We would have liked for example to understand more about the physical geography as

there are wonderful examples of exciting rock formations in the Atlas and Rif Mountains. The most important thing is that we know now that these things exist because we have really seen them, not just in a geography book. I think our interest was captured by the idea of different cultures and different styles of life, and by actually being in a country we can understand better why people do have markedly varying cultures. This trip is not for the weak—it is for the person who wants to find his or her inner-self." . . .

Impressions

... "The first thing that comes to mind when thinking of what to write for this report is the tiredness that we all went through on the expedition. The early morning waking followed by a bowl of cereal and straight on to the road until midday for dinner and a short rest, then back on to the road again until dark." . . .

... "Morocco was not what I expected, but I didn't know what to expect in the first place. The first impression I got of the Moroccans was that no matter how big or small they were they just wanted to make you feel small. All they wanted was your money and belongings . . ."

... "Tangiers campsite was alright while the rest of the expedition was there, but when the rest of the expedition left, the people on *Brian* got bored because they had done everything that was available at the campsite, and soon the only way to relax was to have an argument. But things were alright again as soon as we were on the road again." . . .

... "The expedition overall was very satisfactory and rewarding, once you have been home a few weeks to find out what you have been missing. But the disappointment is that a lot of the people you have met you won't see again." . . .

