

St. David's (North Africa) Project



The entrance to "St. David's House" Taroudant, Morocco



Welcome

The surrounding country



St David's Day 1st March 1994

Now that we have a team in the field in the Atlas Mountains region of Southern Morocco there is a opportunity to illustrate the activities which have been selected for the students during their five months residential stay.

There are now eleven students in Taroudant, two post graduates giving thought to their next stage in life, three going to Cambridge colleges, two to colleges at London, two to Reading, one to Bangor to read English and Theology and one to Leeds University.

We have had enormous assistance from His Excellency, The Moroccan Ambassador in London, The British Ambassador in Rabat, and, in particular, His Excellency, The Governor of Taroudant Province who represents His Majesty King Hassan II.

There has also been such a hospitable welcome from both the leading Agricultural and Veterinary College in Morocco as well as the Ministry of Agriculture Development Agency that we have more volunteer/study projects than we have students. We are now, therefore, considering the opening of a second house for young men and a third, possibly for young women.

We are also very grateful for the support we have had from families and friends of the participating students, The Mercers' Company in the City of London, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Eli Lilly and Company, The Bedford Technical College and the British Jesuit Alumni/ae.

We also thank, once again, the generosity of the Friends of St David's who, under the patronage of the Rt. Hon. The Lord Crickhowell, have met the full cost of producing this news booklet.

TAROUDANT

The traditional house we are occupying is within the completely walled City of Taroudant which is set in the Souss River Valley about eighty km (50 miles) inland from the warm Atlantic Coast and between the High Atlas and Anti Atlas mountains of Southern Morocco.

We have an enclosed garden of orange trees and herbs. On the first floor we have a mud terrace overlooking our neighbours houses and, in turn, are overlooked by some of the 10,000 ft mountain peaks which are snow capped in January and February.

We are able to provide beds for twelve people. For the first few weeks we eat here together in a modest refectory which is also the classroom and, in the evening, the video/chess and other amusements room.

Whilst we have a Moroccan house steward (who is also an informal 'street cred' advisor to the students) **everybody** takes turns with the household and cooking responsibilities. At the end of the first month all but one team are staying away with usually two students on each project. There is always one team working on a project in the City and they are also expected to help run the house with the guidance of the house steward under the responsibility of the British Warden/Language Tutor and her husband who live nearby also within the City walls.

During the initial in-house period there are formal intensive French, Arabic, and Berber lessons (as well as on-going discussions on Islamic culture in Morocco). In-house projects during this initial period are designed for students to practice their language skills by needing to discuss their projects with craftsmen, shopkeepers and others in the City.

We have had donated a selection of mountain bikes of varying quality. They have proved to be extremely useful both in getting around in the tiny narrow streets and in being able to allow the students to 'stretch' outside the walls and into the hills. As a result we don't always have to move as one large group in our rather conspicuous County Land Rover. More donations of road worthy mountain bikes would be **very welcome**.

Outside the City ramparts



One of the gates into the City and one of the horse drawn taxis



Out and about on the mountain bikes

A few kilometres from the City



ACTIVITIES

The rotation of students is proving a challenge as everyone both wants to try each of the projects but is loathe to leave the one they are enjoying.

Our hosts would also prefer longer assignments than we can provide if there is to be a rotation. This will develop. If we increasingly have agricultural and veterinary projects forming the major proportion of our work then we will allocate to those for longer assignments such students who are going on to study (or have already studied) such subjects.

In any event we are trying to keep week-ends free either for gathering at the house in Taroudant (for the use of European bathrooms (!) as well as exchanging news and experiences) or elsewhere such as the Atlantic coast where we also have the use of a small house. It makes a good base for fishing, surfing and swimming. We do expect participants to be both bike riders as well as competent swimmers. Full driving licences are useful.

We also ensure that those wishing to attend a Sunday church service are able to do so either in Agadir (at a church run by priests from the Society of African Missionaries), or at our small local chapel in Taroudant. There we have a Dominican priest, very ecumenical services and the support of the three teaching and nursing sisters whose life long profile work in this Moslem community has done so much good for inter-religious tolerance.

Despite the clean beautiful simplicity of our City and the surrounding countryside we do also have a luxury hotel in the City. They have generously donated the free use of their two swimming pools for half of our group at any one time. There are also municipal tennis courts in the town, several 'boule' pits and endless informal football pitches. Our first team of students have proved a gallant, if heavily defeated, football team as everyone has played even those who have never touched a football before, and are much happier behind a clarinet or chess board. Arriving as a group of eleven it was immediately assumed by our hosts that we were a football team out for winter training! Teaching chess to some of the Moroccan students in town has been almost too great a success. We have had a tough time holding our own!

Membership of the British Society for Moroccan Studies (an inter University organisation with strong Moroccan participation and support) which is automatically inclusive for each student had been a useful introduction with pre-departure lectures in London.



Fishing boats for calamari



A drive in the country

THE CHURCH

Although it is a British Catholic Educational Charity which has organised and supported this project it has little bearing on the selection of students and no relevance on the type of voluntary work and other activities which are selected for students. The Christian Church in Morocco is free to practice its religion but we have **no** agenda or desire to discuss such matters with our hosts or friends and neighbours in Morocco. This needs to be firmly understood by donors and participants.

Our activities are, however, already having a relatively strong effect, on both sides, in providing a better understanding and tolerance of how we each live our lives with our own codes of morality and religious beliefs.

Several of the visiting British students now, for example, are choosing to observe the month long Moslem Fast of Ramadan, although there is no requirement for them to do so.

CURRENT PLACEMENTS DURING FEBRUARY 1994

The CARITAS School

This placement is with Mr Lahcen Baddi who is paid as a teacher by CARITAS (the Catholic Development Agency) at Madrassa Al Qods, Ain Saddaq near Oulad Teima in Taroudant Province. The Students stay with Mr Baddi and his very hospitable family. The voluntary work experience for our first two students, James Whitburn and Robert Hadfield has been repairing a pair of windmill generators, and remounting them (no easy task - each generator is over 11ft high) and in repairing some old water pumps. The next group have been asked to re-plaster and repaint the CARITAS school canteen where 60 children from low income families are give a hot meal each day. The living conditions are simple but clean and comfortable with magnificent mountain views. Mr Baddi, a devout Moslem, and his family are ideal hosts - our students really do live as part of the household and have to speak French, Arabic or Berber to be understood. Mr Baddi is also giving serious lessons in Arabic every evening. This is a school about 45 km from Taroudant. In return for this fine hospitality and instruction we are donating two sets of heavy duty batteries for their electrical system at a cost likely to be equivalent to about £600.

Institut Agronomique & Veterinaire Hassan II

The magnificent welcome given to us by everyone we have met at the Institut, both at the major college some 60 km from Taroudant and in Rabat, has led to many more offers of placements than we currently have students. The first scheme where we have Shiraz Lalani and Martin Torrents dels Prats is a strawberry farm part aided and staffed by the Institut as well as by newly arrived European investing partners. It is about 6 km from the tiny fishing village of Tifnit, 40km south of Agadir. There is no mains electricity or water and both students must shop and cook for themselves.

Bamboo Furniture - Ulrich Rolf's Project - The Convent

This project is for the students who remain in the house at Taroudant. They go out each day for their voluntary work experience to a small family run bamboo furniture business just outside the city walls. They keep more or less to Moroccan working hours and are being taught all aspects of this age-old craft with a view to the students then teaching the same skill to some young blind and visually impaired Moroccan children in the City. We may also help the family owners of the business export some product for the students to sell in Europe. In thanks for the tuition we are to donate some new British high strength secateurs for cutting the bamboo. At the moment we have Stephen Walmsley, Christopher Franke and Ben Rogers on this and they have made good progress in spite of cut hands in the early days. At the same time as this team is in Taroudant they will also be helping with Ulrich Rolf's CARITAS feeding and educational scheme - except during Ramadan. We also continue to assist the Sisters with the heavy gardening tasks around the church. They are hard task masters!



The bamboo project

O.R.M.V.A. Projects

This is the Office Regional Mise en Valeur Agronomique and is the division of the Ministry of Agriculture dedicated to improving the general standards of agriculture both by irrigation, reclamation and reforestry as well as by educating farm workers and subsistence farmers in farm management. As with the Institut at Ait Melloul we have been offered more experience placements than we have students. The one we have taken is at:

OULAD ABDELLAH, a small community up a piste road at the foot of the High Atlas mountains, some 25km south-east of Taroudant along the Quarzazate road. It was a piece of scrubland being farmed at below-subsistence level by a community of 49 families. Then in 1980 O.R.M.V.A. stepped in and cleared the land, irrigated it with an up-to-date irrigation system from the dam, divided up the old land into 8 parcels of 5.65 hectares and gave it back to the community to be run as a co-operative, with a manager, school teacher and agricultural technician provided in the package. It has been very successful, and is a stunning example of how the Islamic way of life and the co-operative

system of farming work together. Our two students there are David Salisbury and Paul McConnell, who are living with the Treasurer of the Reforme Agraire Co-operative Oulad Abdellah, and his family, sharing a room with the treasurer's son and another unspecified family member in a very simple house, bathing in the household's private 'hamam' or sharing the wash-tap with a multitude of giant toads. The hospitality is quite overwhelming and they are learning how a simple and very rural community in the 'bled' works, to the extent that they have learned to drive a donkey and cart, to milk by hand and to eat with only their right hands. They are attending the primary school to learn Arabic script, much to the amusement of the children, and have to speak a foreign language all the time - no-one understands a word of English. The placement is so successful that they don't want to leave, but have asked to stay on for Ramadan.

DOMAINE RAFFI. This opportunity was introduced to us by the Divisional Director of O.R.M.V.A. as being a very good example of the best sort of land management in the Souss valley. The farm lies at the head of the valley, nestling between the two mountain ranges of the High Atlas and the Anti-Atlas, just below the point where they appear to join, some 40km from Taroudant along the Quarzazate road at a small village called OULAD BERRHIL. It is the furthest point inland in Morocco where bananas are grown. It has 40 head of dairy cattle, wheat, barley and maize as well as oranges, tangerines and clementines, and it is self sufficient in cattle forage in terms of clover and lucerne. It makes the ideal placement for Oliver Chapman and Alastair Neal who are both going to Reading University, as it combines all their interests - farming, land management, geography, geology, ornithology and wildlife, and of course hill and mountain walking. The son of the owner, and the brains behind the business, is teaching them the necessary technical French vocabulary, as well as giving them Arabic and Islamic cultural lessons. Oliver is able to be safely diabetic, as the owner also suffers from diabetes.

At the Orphanage in Taroudant



A children's handicapped centre

Lunch



THE FUTURE

Students are expected to provide a regular analysis of their time so that their activities are effectively monitored and a summary can be certified at the end of their stay.

Several students have expressed the wish already that their stay was longer than the initial five months. We may, therefore, provide a future opportunity for participants on the shorter September to November course to extend (after a Christmas period break of their choice) their stay to joining a January to July (rather than June) visit to Taroudant.

Clearly this will incur higher costs and may require greater sponsorship.

At the end of each visit we plan to host a short evening conference in Morocco when our students will present in French (or even Arabic) short summaries of their activities and the benefits that have arisen. It will also allow us to say thank you to so many people in Morocco who are helping to make this project such a success.

If logistically possible, we would hope to repeat such an event (but in English!) later in the year following the group's return to the UK.

In the Sahara



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