

CANARY ISLANDS – MOROCCO EXPEDITION – APRIL 2024

Trevor & Carolyn Ireland

1 THE EXPEDITION

The expedition comprised two-to-three day circuits of each of Tenerife and La Palma, two of the islands in the Canary Islands group, followed by a 13-day circuit of central Morocco. Predicated on the fossil endowment of Morocco, scientific lead was provided by Assoc Prof Diego Garcia-Bellido, with Club organisation lead provided by Carol & Trevor Ireland. Apart from the exposure to Moroccan fossil occurrences and their geological context, the expedition provided insight into geological foundations of both regions, their volcanic and tectonic histories, their recent geomorphic evolution and landscapes, unique associated vegetation characteristics, climate and wildlife. The expedition timing provided opportunity to learn about modern cultural practice (Easter in Catholic Spain, Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr in Islamic Morocco) and cultural history in both regions.

2 HIGHLIGHTS – CANARY ISLANDS



Spain and the Canary islands



Tenerife and La Palma

Geo-politics lesson no.1: The Canary islands are as much a part of Spain as Tasmania is a part of Australia, with some “don’t forget us” parallels too. Geology lesson No.1: These little islands are in fact very big volcanoes – poking about 3,000 metres above the sea, but resting on seabed around 3,000 metres below – plus 6,000 metres total is almost Himalayan dimensions! Pretty much all done within the last 10 million years or so, belching lava intermittently through to modern times.

So what we experienced is modern Spain and some historic heritage and culture, superimposed on a fairly basic agricultural community, set in stunningly spectacular volcanic landforms, radical climatic contrasts built around altitude and rain shadows. 6 days around Tenerife and La Palma via mind-blowing switch-back arterial roads.

Just a few of the highlights:



Townscapes



Easter processions



A brand-new volcano and its adjacent ash-fall cover



Recent lava flows invading city margins



Wild roads climbing volcanic slopes



Canary Is. Pine *Pinus canariensis* – the only conifer in the world evolved to resprout after fire.



Volcanic Mt Tiede (3,700m) showing younger lava Flows and the remains of an intrusive dyke



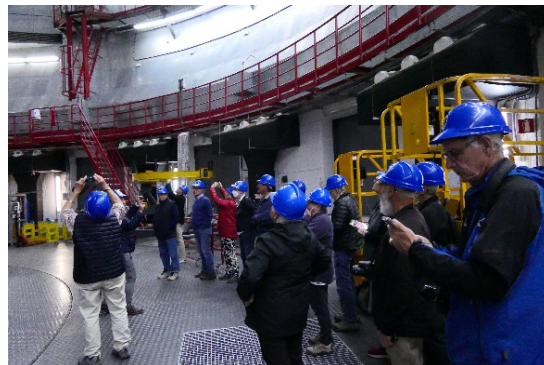
Lava flows inside the collapse caldera of the of original Mt Tiede



International observatory installations taking advantage of the 'Dark Sky' environment along the caldera crest



One of the observatory mirrors, positioned to reflect the expedition group (top left of the mirror)



Inside the Spanish ('Canarian') observatory



Lava tubes within the lave flows

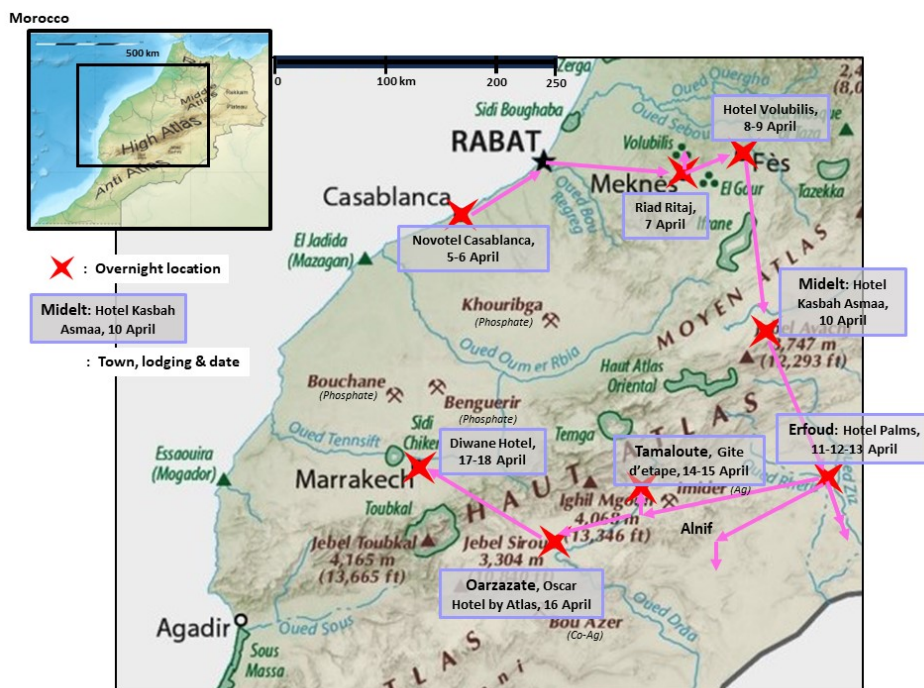


Ash-fall terrains on top of the lava flows

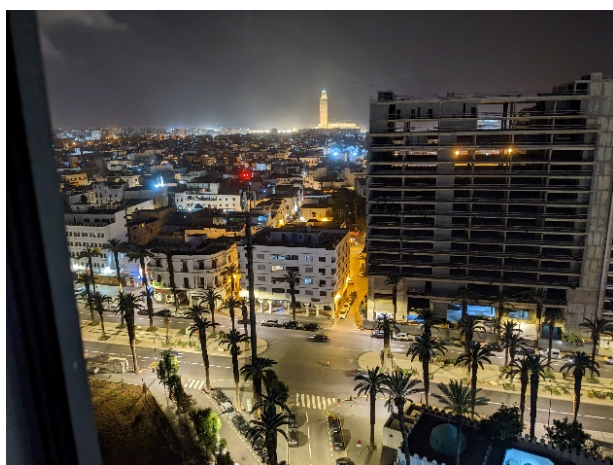
2 HIGHLIGHTS – MOROCCO

While the Canaries had been a fascinating sub-set of European nationality and geomorphological setting, the Moroccan package introduced us to multiple dimensions of a totally different Islamic world. By visiting diverse sites and cities, impressions enhanced by the insights of our tour manager Riad and specialist guides, we were exposed to aspects of Morocco's multi-faceted history and its characteristic arts and crafts, to the workings of society, religion, government and royalty. We enjoyed a lightning light-touch tourist's exposure to a very different country. With its own very different geological history and spectacular patina of mountain, desert and watered valleys. All that as background to the stunning main focus of the trip – the Moroccan fossil endowment and industry, which we had demonstrated to us and explained in brilliant detail by Diego and his associate Juan-Carlos.

Again, just a few of the highlights:



Map of our route through Morocco



Islamic landmarks, Casablanca and Rabat



Roman ruins, Volubilis;



Fine dining & ancient crafts, Fes



Camels in the Sahara dune fields;



Into the fossil fields



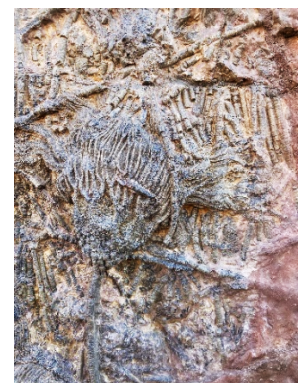
Berber camel herd watering well



Observation and collecting in the fossil fields



... and dining in the field.



Crinoid fossil material



Processing and purchase of fossil material – highly specialised Trilobites



Todra Gorge in the High Atlas; Date Palm-filled valleys; Berber dining and tajine cooking class



On to Marrakesh, crossing the High Atlas mountain range



Marrakesh -Kortobia Mosque and the Medina