

Atlas to Sahara

Great rides

To celebrate her 50th birthday, Cycling UK's **Rebecca Armstrong** decided to cycle through Morocco's Atlas Mountains to the Sahara Desert



“ust one more like this?” My companions asked as we crested the top of another kilometre-long climb. “I’m not so sure,” I replied. We were nearing the end of our third day of cycling on a tour through the Atlas Mountains to the Sahara Desert. “Just four short, sharp climbs to the end!” Abdel, our guide, had reassured us earlier.

After setting off that day, my Garmin had led me almost immediately into the first climb: 650m and not too steep. We got to the top with little effort. “If it’s all like this, it’ll be a breeze,” I thought to myself as I went swooping down.

We were cycling on well-tarmacked, largely deserted roads through stunning mountain scenery, and it wasn’t long before the next climb was in sight. At 1,100m this was going to be tougher. It was about this time that I started to suspect that the first climb wasn’t one of the four. As Abdel joined us at the top of that third – or was it second? – a few voices called out: “Just one more?”

“No, two more!” came the response. At least it wasn’t a shock to me. With all four climbs done, there was massive sense of achievement – and just a short descent to the rural village where we would be spending the night in the most basic

accommodation you can imagine. The toilet was a hole in the ground, the shower a hosepipe.

Riverbeds and rough stuff

The trip had started in the Moroccan capital of Marrakech. We were riding from Telouet, a village in the High Atlas Mountains, outside Marrakech, across the Atlas Mountains to the Sahara Desert for a night in a Bedouin camp. Day one was arrival in Marrakech – a non-cycling day. I met the other seven members of the group and our guide for the first time: five Canadians, a fellow Brit, and the only other woman on the trip, from the Netherlands.