

Message from Morocco – “Don’t forget about us”

Following the devastating earthquake in Morocco, a Scotswoman who lives there has asked us to pass on the message: “Please come and visit Morocco. Do not take us off your travel list.”

Alice Hunter Morrison is an Edinburgh-born and educated adventurer who lives in the High Atlas Mountains in Morocco near to where the earthquake struck recently with such devastating effect.

I spoke to her on the phone one evening when she had just got home and was hungry. After foolishly asking if we could do a video call – to which she answered – “it’s dark”, the situation became a little easier to comprehend – but not entirely. It is difficult to understand the reality of living in a remote area where there is now no power unless you are actually there.

Alice explained she had just spent a few days cycling and travelling around the area to see what had happened. She had only just got back to the tiny village where she lives and to her home – which survived intact.

She said: “Many Scots have come to Morocco, and I think they find that they enjoy it, that they can understand the place. The Atlas Mountains where I live have great similarities to The Highlands. I would say the sense of humour of the Moroccan

people is very similar to the Scots. So don't take us off your travel list – there are direct flights from Edinburgh. Please come and visit, please come as tourists. The Moroccans love tourists and they love guests.

“This is a terrible time for them but the infrastructure is still here. The help is getting out and what they will really need to rebuild is of course a vibrant economy. And tourism is a really, really important part of that. I live in a tiny village but it's a hiking centre and all my friends are guides and they want people to come.

“So don't take Morocco off your list. Don't cancel your trips. Please do come. I think that's that is the message that certainly my Moroccan friends would like me to give.”

While help is getting through, Alice acknowledged it is hard and she knows that Morocco and news of the earthquake will fall from the news agenda very quickly.

Although some 3,000 people have died and more than 5,600 people have been injured in the 8 September magnitude 6.8 earthquake, thankfully no-one in Alice's compound in Imlil was injured or killed. Everyone had to evacuate including a 100-year-old blind man who is part of the family. No buildings in the compound were demolished, but almost all have cracks in them. The first night was spent sheltering in her car in the car park with a cool bag on her head to keep warm. She said: “Some of the men went for blankets and water. In this society the Berber men care for the women and I felt very cared for.”



A scene of devastation near the epicentre of the earthquake in Morocco. PHOTO Alice Morrison

She continued: “If you imagine the Highlands, and the very small crofting communities spread all around them it is the logistics of getting to those communities that is the difficulty.

“I have walked right across these mountains and some places are a two day walk from the nearest road. And they are tiny. They may only have three families in what we might call a hamlet. And we don’t know what has happened to them. Google satellite maps is a brilliant help and we have had helicopters coming and and flying over, but I think in these small villages it’s not that there aren’t enough people and enough aid and enough help. It’s just that getting to them is so difficult. I hope that will happen now.”

After an earthquake the norm is that there are aftershocks. And Alice confirmed that had happened in her area. She said:

“We’ve had lots of little aftershocks but they have been small. I live in a family compound and the family members are not sleeping here. They are too scared because their houses have got cracks in them. My house is a modern one and is built of concrete blocks – which I used to hate. Now I like it because there are no cracks and it’s completely fine. So I will actually sleep in my house for the first time tonight. Now that the initial shock has worn off we all want to go home., of course we do.

“And what about those poor people that don’t have a home now, or that their home is so cracked, they’re frightened to go in it. And the kids are all traumatised so they won’t sleep in their own beds. These are longer term problems. Winter is coming. It’s already cold at night, it’s just gonna get colder and colder. The world’s eyes will turn away from Morocco probably tomorrow or the next day, but there is all that work to be done. So how you can help is either give to The British Moroccan Society through their GoFundMe page, or come and visit. We would love to have you here.

“We don’t need volunteers to come to Morocco, as all that will happen is that people without the correct skills will clog up the roads. The government is on it, and when they need help they will ask for it. Our problem is logistical and it’s best solved by the people here who live in the mountains. We don’t need secondhand clothes or things like that but do donate as people will have to rebuild their houses and winter is coming.”

The United Nations has said that around 300,000 people are probably affected by the disaster while UNICEF estimates that number probably includes 100,000 children.

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/british-moroccan-society-earthquake-appeal>

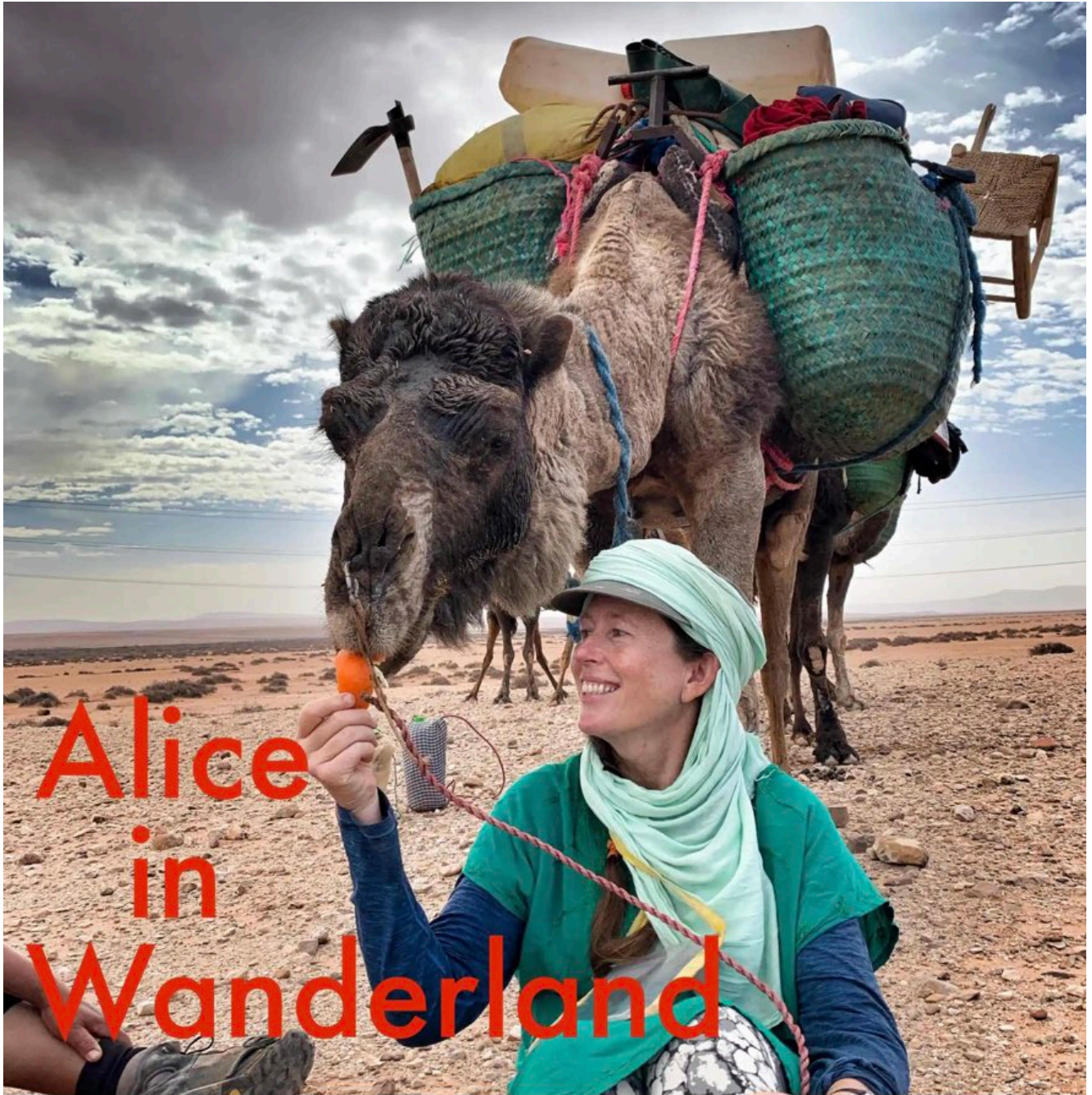


Atlas Mountain guides already out and clearing the paths up Toubkal so visitors can return PHOTO Alice Morrison
On the most recent episode of her podcast, Alice in Wonderland which she has recorded with podcasting partner and producer,

Vic Phillipson since 2019 when Alice had just walked the length of the River Drag in Morocco. She was about to take on a three month long, 2,000 mile trek in the Sahara with her six camels (most of which have Scottish names) and three Berber guides.

In the recent episode recorded after the earthquake, she said that the experience was terrifying and that she had immediately thought she was going to die.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALICE MORRISON.



Alice
in
Wonderland