



These slopes are commonly home to wild boar, that can sometimes be found hiding in the areas of dense vegetation. These rare, but dangerous creatures are a wonderful sight for the walker and you should consider yourself privileged if you encounter them. However, like any wild animal, the Boar must be treated with respect - it is notoriously ferocious, and will defend its young with surprising enthusiasm if it believes that you pose a threat. It's best to make plenty of noise as you pass through these parts, so that you don't accidentally startle a family of Boar. If you do come across them, make sure that you don't cut off their escape routes and don't get between mother and young - Stop where you are and clap your hands to alert them to your presence, then pass, giving them a wide berth and plenty of opportunity for escape.

From a navigational point of view this is the most challenging part of the whole walk, but despite an air of seriousness to our current position, it's actually very difficult to go far wrong... keep traversing up the rocks to a prominent viewpoint. After admiring one of the

finest views you're ever likely to see, turn round and you'll spot a narrow trail snaking its way up to Wild Boar Pass... and our return leg...



9 Wild Boar Pass. From the stunning viewpoint at the top of the rising leftwards traverse cut back right on a narrow path that crosses an obvious col on the skyline. This is Wild Boar Pass, and marks the start of our return journey to Amzkhssan.

Cross the pass and continue along a small path that bears left, descending gently across the hillside towards a stream at the foot of steep crags opposite.



Looking across to the High Atlas from the viewpoint beneath Wild Boar Pass.

The Amzkhssan Summits

Time: 4-6 hours

Distance: 12km

Difficulty: Moderate. There are a few steep ascents to negotiate, as well as small amounts of rough terrain. Most of the walk, however, is on reasonable trails.

Seriousness: High. This walk covers remote terrain - ensure that you have sufficient food, water, and sun protection, and make sure that you wear sturdy footwear.

Navigation: Moderate - Difficult. Whilst most of the walk follows trails there are several sections on indistinct, overgrown or nonexistent paths. Care is required with navigation on a number of occasions.

Look Out For:

Wild Boar - These reclusive animals are a rare sight around the villages, but can sometimes be seen in vegetated areas on high mountain pastures. Walk noisily to alert them of your presence and avoid startling them.

Rock Viper - This long, slender snake is occasionally sighted on the terraces and pastures in this area. If you do encounter one of these wonderful animals then calmly back away, and make your way around it, giving it a wide berth!

Waterworks - Keep your eyes open for evidence of irrigation. The local Berbers have come up with many methods to irrigate their plantations over the years, and evidence of this is visible throughout the walk.

The tremendous rocky summits south of Amzkhssan are a Mecca for rock climbers, providing high quality routes that are amongst the best in the Anti-Atlas mountains. The climbers come here for the challenge of steep Quartzite, and indeed the rock on these particular summits provides routes from the very easiest to some of the most difficult in the region. But another attraction of these intimidating spires is the scenery in which they are set... and that is what makes this walk one of the very finest on the Jebel El Kest Massif.

This magnificent outing circles the five great summits of Amzkhssan, giving up-close views of some of the region's most impressive crags.

On a clear day, however, the highlight of the excursion is the unrivalled view across the Taroudant plain to the Atlas Mountains, where Jebel Toubkal, Morocco's highest summit, can be clearly seen over 200km away, with its year-round covering of snow.

The walk starts in the tiny hamlet of *Tassila Agrd-Imoul*, which is accessed via a narrow dirt-track that turns off the main road just above Amzkshshan. This track passes beneath the attractive *Cascade D'Iffni*, which occasionally flows following periods of wet weather and is well worth a quick visit on the way. Above the waterfall the road snakes its way up to some houses nestled against the steep rocks, where there is a small parking area on the left. This is the lower Tassila Village.

1 Tassila Agrd-Imoul. Today, traditional farming methods are struggling to compete with modern society, and many of the houses in Tassila village are now second homes for the wealthy, who spend most of the year earning a living elsewhere in Morocco, or even overseas. The evidence of rural agriculture on the surrounding slopes is now mostly a reminder of times past, when the climate here was somewhat wetter than today.

Our walk starts by continuing for a short way along the track until a vague path doubles back and climbs steeply up to a shoulder above the lower village. On reaching the crest bear left up a cairned trail that leads to some ancient fields on a col.

2 Adrar Iffran. The North Face of Adrar Iffran towers over these tiny fields, soaring skyward in a series of impenetrable overhangs. This formidable wall is a wonderful sight in the evening light, when the orange rock appears to glow in the last rays of the day's sunshine. If you're starting this walk in the morning however, you'll be glad of the shade that it provides as we make our way towards the upper Tassila village. Adrar Iffran translates from Berber as '*Mountain of the Caves*', and throughout its rocky ramparts there is evidence of ancient habitation. This ranges from pre-historic cave dwellings in the crags, to more recent remains of a fortified settlement on the



summit plateau - guarded on all four sides by 300ft of vertical rock.

Cross the fields to gain a small but good path that contours along the hillside beneath Adrar Iffran, heading for the upper Tassila village.

This path runs alongside a metal pipe, that brings water from a spring high in the mountain pastures down to the houses in Tassila village.

Eventually the path regains the main track running up from the lower village. Turn right and follow it up to some deserted houses on the col.

3 Upper Tassila Village. Go to the right of these houses to gain a good path that descends towards a stream.

4 Tassila Plantations. Cross the stream at a small concrete dam and continue along the path, bearing right at a vague fork.

Old terraces cover the surrounding hillsides - evidence of the previous agriculture that was once so important to the local communities. Almond and Fig trees still grow on these terraces, but the local population no longer rely

on them for their food. Today, small amounts of locally grown produce are supplemented by products purchased outside of the valley - either at the market (souq) in Idagnidif, or shops in Agadir.

Continue along the path until you reach a prominent cairn.

5 The Atlas Cairn. On a clear day it is possible to see all the way to the Atlas Mountains from here - a distance of 200km. Jebel Toubkal, the highest point in Morocco is the highest of two prominent massifs at the southern end of the Atlas chain, and for most of the year holds a significant cover of snow.

A few metres beyond the cairn there is a junction in path - we take the right turn that doubles back up the steep slopes to our right. This steep ascent takes us to meadows on the col beneath Buzzard Crag.

The steep ascent to Buzzard Crag from the Atlas Cairn



6 Buzzard Crag. This sombre cliff stands above another collection of old fields once farmed by the local Berbers. The crag itself appears daunting, and indeed the ascent of its north face is one of the more difficult routes to have been recorded on the Amzkhssan summits.

The path here becomes rather indistinct as we pick our way through the small fields - There are some cairns to help, but they are small and sometimes hard to spot. Our route traverses beneath the crags, heading for the pass to the left of the cliffs.

At the end of the fields the path crosses a tiny seasonal stream, from where we start the ascent into the high mountain.



7 The ascent to the high pastures. Cross the small stream and climb rising ground on the other side. There is no path on this initial ascent, but the terrain is easy and the magnificent views to the East certainly make it worth the effort! We are heading for the col up to our right.

If you look carefully you will see a number of

Ascent past Buzzard Crag



small cairns perched on top of large boulders, and although they do not initially appear to mark any particular trail, the myriad of tiny tracks soon converge to a recognisable path heading upwards to the col, and the high pastures beyond.

High Pastures above Buzzard Crag



8 The High Pastures. The Berbers have been grazing goats on these mountains for hundreds of years, and this practice still continues today. During the heat of the day the herd is taken onto the mountain to graze, returning to the valley each evening when temperatures plummet below freezing. If you are here in the early part of the morning you may well see herdsmen ascending this path with mixed flocks of sheep and goats.

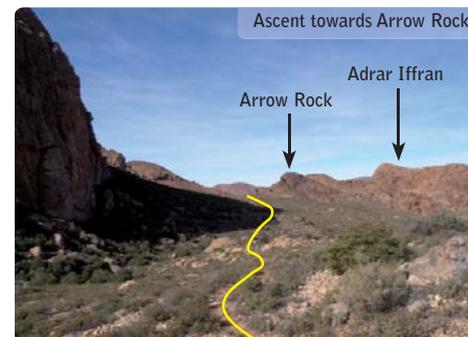
At the top of the ascent past Buzzard Crag the path trends rightwards across the pastures heading for a narrow vegetated gully, where it peters out completely. About half way up this vague gully we exit left to escape the vegetation and begin a rising traverse left over rocky ground towards Wild Boar Pass, which remains hidden from our view until the last minute.



Telephoto view to Madao from near Wild Boar Pass.

This wonderfully remote back-country is yet to see any interest from rock-climbers, and almost all of the crags and summits surrounding us as we descent from Wild Boar Pass are as yet unclimbed.

10 Wild Boar Pass to Arrow Rock. At the bottom of the gradual descent from the pass turn right onto a small path that leads us easily beneath steep crags on our left, climbing gradually towards Arrow Rock.



To the right of Arrow Rock is the rather rambling rocky summit of Adrar Iffran. Seen from this side it hardly looks like the formidable fortress that we saw from Tassila Village, and indeed it is up these slopes that the only 'easy' access to the summit plateau lies. Even here, however, the way is devious and the ancient Berbers needed to use all of their remarkable construction skills to build a path across sections of steep rock slabs. Today, the path has fallen into disrepair, but sufficient evidence remains for us to imagine villagers transporting supplies by donkey up these steep slopes to the fortified village above.

On the summit plateau ancient ruins hint at a significant settlement that no doubt enjoyed absolute security on its natural ramparts. These days, however, the only visitors are climbers, who pass through the village after an ascent of the North or West faces, using the intricate Berber path as a means of descent.

11 Beneath Adrar Asmit. From the vague col next to Arrow Rock the path swings right, descending beneath the impressive West Face of Adrar Iffran and returning to Tassila Village.

If you're short of time or energy then it's an easy 20 minute descent back to the village from here... but a better alternative is to leave the path and strike leftwards across the hillside, heading for the col between Adrar Asmit and the slabby backside of Adrar Umlil. This is a short section of pathless terrain, but navigation is simple and the ground is easy underfoot.



Adrar Asmit translates from Berber either as Mountain of the Wind, or Mountain of the Birds, and is popular with climbers who come here to enjoy some relatively mild routes in a high mountain setting.

As we reach the col between Adrar Asmit and Adrar Umlil we pick up a vague trail that becomes more prominent towards the col itself.

Behind us the West Face of Adrar Iffran has now come into full view, and one cannot help but notice a large circular cave high on the right side of the face. Dubbed 'The Eye of Allah' by western climbers this remarkable opening is actually part of a network of caves that run throughout the face, bearing evidence of prehistoric habitation. How early dwellers ever gained access to the Eye itself remains a mystery, but the most likely explanation is through tunnels within the mountain.



12 Asmit-Umlil Col. Cross the col to the right of Adrar Asmit, from where the huge crags of Adrar Aiyur come into view. From here a good path descends towards a junction in the valley below.

We are now following an ancient trade route that led from the Idagnidif region into the high valley of Afantinzar, and although the section of the track descending from the Asmit-Umlil col is rather vague, that on the opposite side of the valley can be clearly seen making its final ascent into Afantinzar, with the crags of Harram Peak on the left, and the mighty Afantinzar Peak on the right.

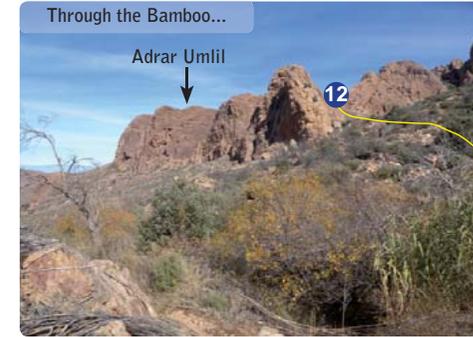


Harram is an Arabic name meaning 'Pyramid', and indeed when viewed from Afantinzar to the West this apparently minor summit appears as an impressive symmetrical triangular mountain, not unlike a giant pyramid.

13 Bamboo Plantation. At the bottom of the descent from the Asmit-Umlil Col the path reaches a small stream surrounded by verdant vegetation. From here it climbs up to the next pass and on into Afantinzar.

We, however, are looking for a tiny trail that leads off to the right and crosses back over the stream, heading down the valley back towards Tassila.

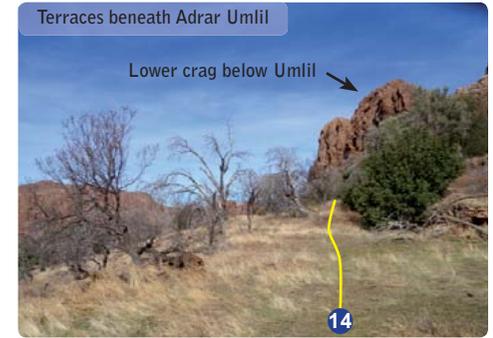
The first part of this trail is very overgrown and difficult to follow, so some care is required. Back on the East side of the stream again, however, it opens up.



As we descend along this remote valley, the five towers of Adrar Umlil unfold on our right side, their steep faces providing some of the region's most difficult rock-climbs. Adrar Umlil means 'The White Mountain', although from this aspect the reason for its name is far from obvious. In fact, it is only the northernmost of the five towers that, when viewed from Amzkhssan to the North, appears a very pale grey colour.



14 Terraces. The good path leads as far as some well-constructed terraces. At this point it becomes impossible to follow due to the advance of vegetation and the plethora of Wild Boar tracks that criss-cross the plantations.



Don't worry too much about the exact route that you take, but descend through the terraces, trending rightwards to pass close to a line of crags beneath the main face of Adrar Umlil, as shown in the photo below. At this point the path becomes briefly evident... though one more tricky section remains.



15 The descent to Tassila. From a small col beneath the lower crag below Adrar Umlil the path becomes vague again. Keep traversing, descending slightly, until the trail further down becomes evident, heading off rightwards down the slopes back towards the lower Tassila Village.

Drop down a short section of pathless hillside to regain the track, which is followed with ease back to the village, traversing rightwards and joining the road at a small bridge.

Numerous waterworks of varying ages add a final historical interest to the walk.