

AL BASRA, MOROCCO

MOROCCO

1998

“Well, how did I get here?” Back in 1997, I placed an ad in an archaeology magazine that was simply stated, “Land surveyor with keen interest in archaeology, seeks position or assignment on archaeological site.” Nancy Benco, Associate Professor at The George Washington University, telephoned me, and asked one simple question, “Would you consider going to Morocco?” Over the next year, she made all the arrangements, while I just got excited.

May 5th, Tuesday

@ 8:30 PM ~ The flights were mostly uneventful. Considering I have not flown for more than a two hour flight since 1968, one would think that I would have more to write about. The flight from Boston to Philadelphia was uneventful. I carried the EDM as one of my two carry-on bags. I met Nancy Benco in the Philadelphia airport. The flight from Philadelphia to Amsterdam was about 6 hours. I saw the Northern Lights from the air for the first time. They are more colorful and distinct than from the ground. They appear as great rising clouds of greenish-blue vapors.

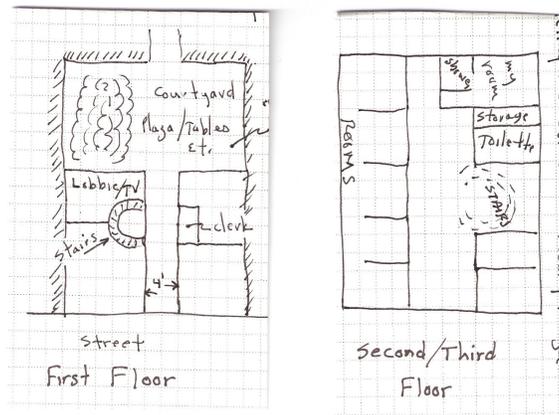
Prior to boarding the flight to Morocco in Amsterdam, there was much to-do about my EDM case at the customs desk. The agent used a cotton swab to wipe various parts of the EDM, then subjected the swab to a chemical analysis. My EDM is grey, and resembles a large camera. The EDM (electronic distance measure) is what surveyors now use to measure angles and distances. It replaced the transit, sometime in the 80s.

Somewhere over Spain, at 39,000 feet, I got the trots . That'll teach me to eat the airline food! All of the survey equipment arrived intact, with no visible damage. My personal luggage did not arrive. We were met at the airport in Casablanca, by Lt. Colonel Donald Zedler, Army Attaché with the US Embassy, and some officials from the Moroccan government. I rode with Col. Zedler to Rabat, while Nancy rode with the Moroccan officials. For some reason, Nancy & I had to walk to the Hotel Splendid, where I will be staying, briefly. Dinner was chicken, French fries, rice & peas, with mint tea. I've shaved, showered, and I am ready for bed.

May 6th, Wednesday

@ 9:45 AM ~ I've been up since about 7AM.

I am in the courtyard of the Hotel Splendid, on Charrett Street, in downtown Rabat. All the buildings on each side of the street abut each other. The hotel is four stories high. The stairway is circular with marble steps, with landings at each floor. My room is clean, and I have not seen any bugs. It has one, tall window that reaches nearly to the ceiling, with wood shutters, that open out onto the courtyard. No screen. No hot water. The room shares a 4' x 7' toilette that is accessed from the hallway.



The courtyard is about 25' square, open to the sky, with a fountain and small trees on the left side. On the right side, the tables and chairs are arranged neatly. I am sitting in the only patch of sunshine to reach into the corner.



I've had 3 cups of coffee ~ actually 3 glasses of coffee, as they serve it in small glasses that are about 1-1/2" in diameter, and about 3" high. I've also had a small pot of mint tea. The tea is made from a small amount of regular, loose leaf tea, a lot of sugar, and enough mint leaves to stuff the small, shiny, tin teapot. The tea is rather thick, not like tea that is brewed from a teabag. You get about 3 glasses of tea from one pot. (If I use the word tea, it is mint tea).

We may be here for a few days, until my suitcase arrives. There is a small cafe' across the street from the hotel. It is where I have ordered the coffee and tea. I just walk across the street, place my order, and then return to the courtyard. After about ten minutes, a waiter brings my order to me. I have not eaten breakfast yet, because I cannot communicate with anyone in the cafe', other than to order tea and coffee.

The menu, posted on the window, is in Arabic and in French.

I have tried just hanging around the patrons, and looking over their shoulder to see what they were eating. I thought maybe I could catch the cook's eye, and point to what someone was eating, as a way of ordering. But I am too self-conscious to let the cook know that I am not smart enough to know their language. There are six American archaeologists staying at the hotel. I've been hoping that I would see one come down for breakfast, so I could go to breakfast with him.

@ 10:30 AM ~ Hooray! I'm full! I had breakfast with Neil (?) from Michigan. He is about 60 years old, has a PhD. in history (?), and has spent about 20 years doing this stuff. He is a private archaeologist, as opposed to an academic archaeologist. This is his eighth season in Morocco, somewhere near Algeria. He speaks French and some Arabic. When he came down stairs, I offered to buy his breakfast, if he would order for me. I had OJ, bread, two sunny side up eggs, and more coffee. Last night, Neil's project leader, Ron Messier, ordered dinner for me. It consisted of one roasted chicken leg quarter, steamed rice with peas & olives, french-fries, and mint tea. It cost about 33 DH, which is about \$3.

@ 11:15 AM ~ I just talked with you from the Fullbright Office. Now I am sitting in the large (15' x 17') waiting room, within the Fullbright office, waiting for Nancy Benco to finish her discussions. Then we will go to the airport to check on my suitcases.

@ 9:45 PM ~ my suitcase has not been found, but is expected tomorrow. After going to the airport, we went to the "mall", where I bought underwear and toothpaste. I had carried my toothbrush inside my jacket pocket, "just in case." Lunch was a Moroccan Pizza. The rest of the day was walking, walking, walking! Back to the Fullbright office for coordination of funds and whatever last minute details Nancy needed to attend to.

Then to the car rental office, where Nancy had made prior arrangements to pick up a vehicle. She test drove a sedan, and a small station wagon type vehicle. I agreed with Nancy, that the station wagon is better suited for transporting the survey equipment and us.



9:45 continued ~ Late afternoon and evening was spent at the home of Lt. Col. Donald and Katherine Zedler, Military Attaché with the U.S. Embassy. I would guess he is about 45, and she is a bit younger. The Zedler family live in what I would describe as a "White Palace." Mrs. Zedler says, "It is "very nice". General Patten used this home while in Morocco, during WW II. From the rooftop balcony, one can see the entire city, the ocean, and the sunset. There is a constant breeze here, unlike downtown Rabat. The grounds are about 125' square, encompassed by a wall, with a steel gate. Plants, trees and ivy abound. While Nancy and Mrs. Zedler visited, I occupied myself by cleaning Nancy's transit, which she borrowed from the university. I think it had not been cleaned since last year's field season in China.

Mrs. Zedler is a wonderful hostess. She offered me a shower and a change of clothes, which I gladly accepted. While I was in the shower, she washed all of my clothes. When I finished the shower, a lasagna dinner was waiting. Lt. Col. Zedler arrived near the end of our dinner. When he arrived, I felt awkward sitting at his dinner table, in his clothes, talking to his son about soccer. Nancy had excused herself a few minutes earlier. He is a regular guy - not a stuffy military man - and very impressive in his dress blues. He had been at a formal gathering as part of his duties. Three young American women are staying at the hotel tonight. They are on their way home, after having worked for the Peace Corps, teaching English for the past two years. All is well.

MAY 7th, Thursday

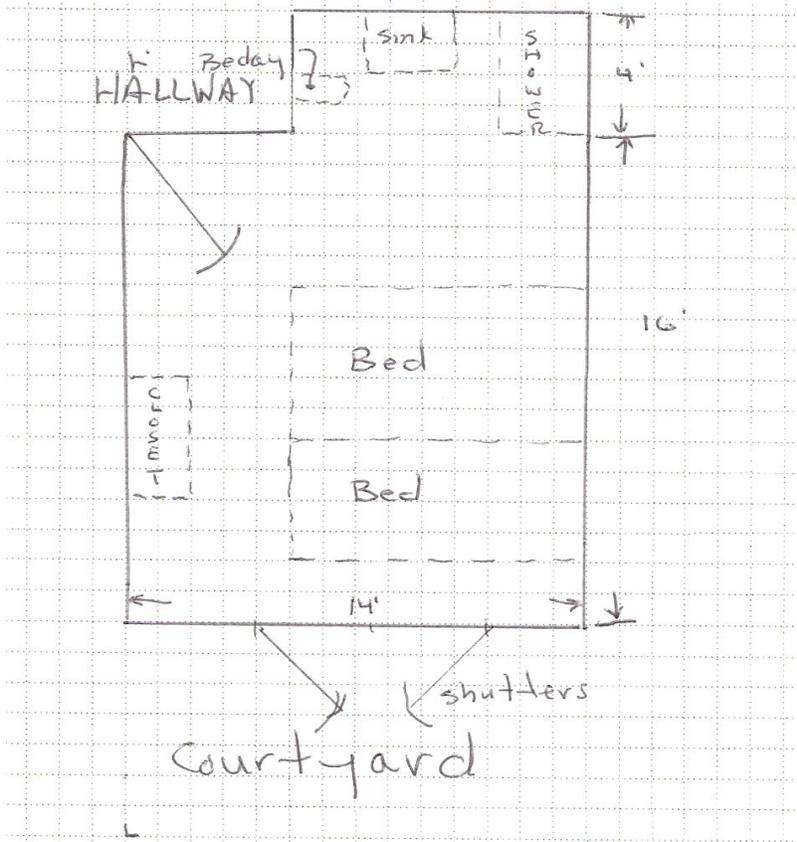
Early - not yet light ~ I've been awake for sometime now. Trying to pass the time reading "The Pioneers".

A short while ago, I heard the first call to pray. At first, it was a long way off, yet still near enough to discern the tonal changes. The calls have gotten nearer and nearer, almost like a chained song. As the calls have gotten nearer, so to has the volume increased, and blended with the more distant calls. It is as if one were inside a stone cathedral, listening to a choir. The melodious call to pray is beautiful.

I wonder if coffee is available, anywhere this early ~ I'm going to go look.

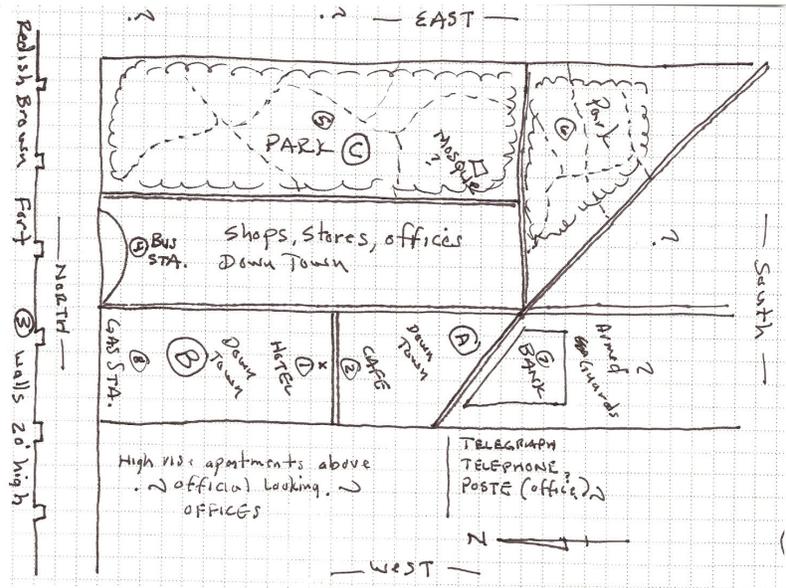
@ 4:45 AM ~ It is too early for even the gated doorway to the hotel to be open. Since I do not have a clock, I can only estimate that I've been awake for about an hour. When I went downstairs, I checked the time on the lobby clock. Two smokes left! No coffee! I can hear the sounds of running water, washing, and dressing, from the other rooms. I'll take a short nap to pass the time.

Sketch of Room 14, 2nd Floor (New has Hot & Cold water)



@ 7:10 AM ~ Out for coffee

@ 7:40 AM ~ my world has expanded "Ten-fold!" After coffee, I ventured to the street corner, and then around the block. I've found no less than 6 coffee shops. I'm going exploring for smokes, as I just finished my last one. "Nancy ~ the sport coat idea you had is great. I have room for all sorts of things, and most of the men wear one. It is sort of like a jacket to them."



The sketch above shows only the major streets. There are just too many to show all of them.

@ 9:05 AM ~ I've just returned, and I am sitting in the hotel courtyard with a pot of tea, and a new pack of "Pall Malls. I am a little out of breath, and have lower back pain. I suspect that both can be attributed to walking on city sidewalks, rather than the soft ground of the woods that I am used to. My morning walks ~ the first was from 7:10 to 7:40 around area "A"; the second was around areas "B" & "C" from 7:40 till 9:05. I bought the "sweet roll", 5 post cards, and the Pall Malls. I can't find Camels. I bought a sweet roll from one of the many cafe' along the route of my walk. The roll is about 4" across, and about 2" high. It is filled with something that looks like vanilla pudding with little bits of something mixed into it. Perhaps stringy fruit, or meat or even worms as far as I can tell.

Anyway, I'm so hungry that I don't care! Well here goes! ` Ah Ha! I bit out the center and after a few chews, I have decided that it must be tuna. Very mild tuna in a cream sauce. Tuna Casserole in a bun? Quite good actually. So much for the sweet roll idea.

@ 10:30 AM ~ I've been napping in a chair, in the sun. I feel like a warmed dog. The waiter just brought more tea.

Noonish ~ Nancy arrived; I checked out; and I am now sitting in the Fullbright office waiting for Nancy to finish discussions. When she is ready, we will go to the airport.

@ 2:30 PM ~ we are in Casaport where the movie "Casablanca" was filmed, so I've been told. It is about a one-hour train ride from Rabat.

@ 5:30 PM ~ Hooray!!!! I have my bag. Today's trip to the airport was not necessary, had I remembered yesterday that my bag was Black rather than blue! If I ever travel again, I will attach my name to the outside of the bag, in BIG BOLD LETTERS!

@ 9:45 PM ~ Back at Hotel Splendid. Nancy drove all day. We got turned around a few times, but she did a lot better than I would have.

@ 11:30 PM ~ Dinner was chicken ... just like the first day's dinner. I passed the time reading.
All is well.

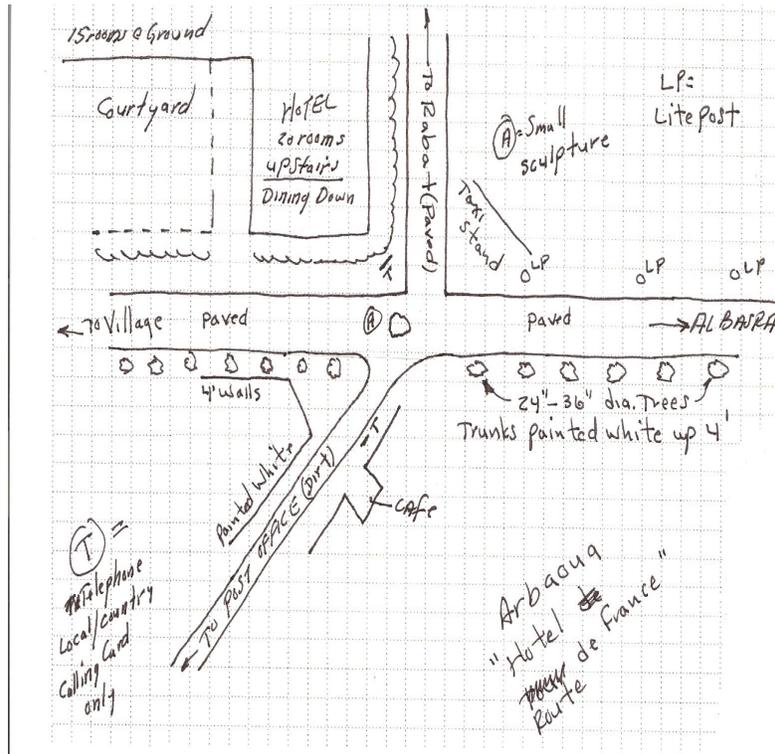
MAY 8th, Friday

@ 5:45 AM ~ I've been up for about an hour. I've showered and shaved, with hot water. Wouldn't you know it - just when I get hot water, its time to leave. I'm packed and waiting for Nancy. We are off to Arbaoua!
All is well.



MAY 9th, Saturday

@ 7 AM ~ I am in Arbaoua, sitting in my room at the Hotel Route-de-France. Arbaoua is about 125km from Rabat; about 150km from Tangier; and about 40km inland from the coast. We arrived yesterday, about 11 AM. I have postcards ready to mail, but the post office will not be open until Monday. All the major roads are paved, with speed limit signs, white lines for passing & no passing, etc.



Center of Arbaoua



My First View of Hotel



Yacine waiting for gate attendant at Hotel

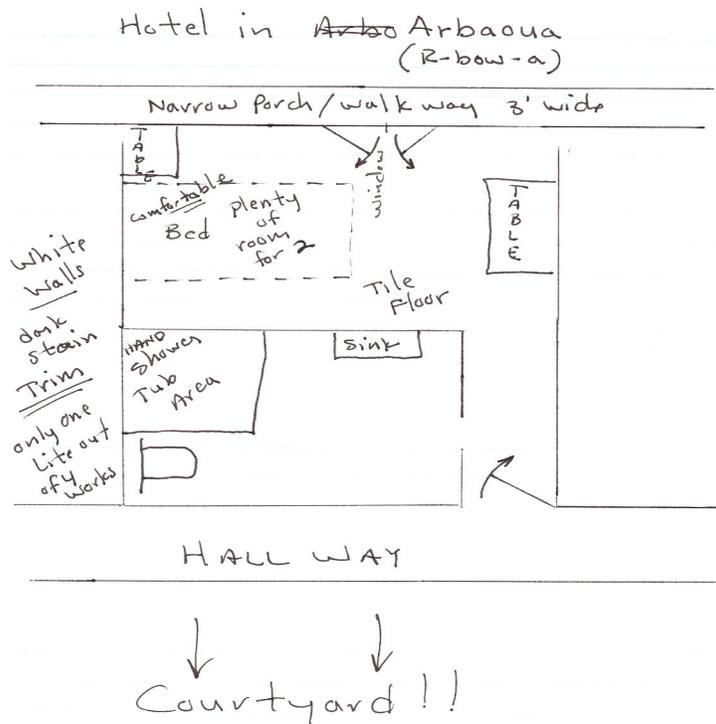


Yacine & Nancy having tea in the Hotel Courtyard

By now, you must be wondering, "Who are these people?"

Nancy Benco is the principal archaeologist, an Associate Professor at The George Washington University; she is older than I, but appears to be much younger, maybe about 48. She is a very pleasant person, with many interesting life experiences. She is a speed demon behind the wheel!

Yacine Ait Azougha is a Berber from Tata; He is 29 and single, and also a very pleasant person to work with. He is most polite and personable. He speaks fluent French (according to Nancy) and his English is good enough for easy communication and working. He was with Nancy when she picked me up at the Hotel Splendid, on the 8th. He is to be our assistant for the survey work.



The sketch above is of my room at the Hotel Route-de-France. The hotel is an old French tourist, hunting lodge. The main hotel is two-story; the first floor consists of the dining area, game room with lounge, and kitchen. The second floor is all rooms. My room is clean, relatively quiet, and of sufficient room. The bathroom is clean, in good condition, but no hot water.

On the way back from Souk El-Arba, where we had dinner this evening, we encountered a rain shower. What is most notable about the rain shower is that the wipers on the car don't work. Just imagine sharing the road with trucks, buses, cars, and slow moving donkey carts, in the dark, in the rain, without wipers!

Dinner was French fries, salad, soup, and small lamb burgers. Nancy says that they are really mutton burgers, because lambs are too valuable to kill and eat.

Sometime during our travels today and yesterday, I saw a scorpion, some stray dogs, and some mangy cats; small peaceful villages of 25 homes, clustered together, without electricity, and large dirty, noisy, cities. I've seen gendarmes, and Para-military police checkpoints, horse-drawn carts, buses, big trucks, and boys tending sheep, girls tending cows. There have been men in regular clothes, and men in jalabas;

Young women in blue jeans and tank tops and women in hajibs, and women with tattoos on their foreheads and chins. I've seen vast open spaces, without trees, and hillsides of sunflowers as far as the eyes can see. I have even had milk from a plastic bag.

All is well.



MAY 10th, Sunday

@9 AM ~ I'm sitting in the cafe' with Nancy and Yacine, having coffee. A rain shower just passed.



This is neither Nancy nor Yacine

This seems to be the only cafe' in Arbaoua. There are more tables inside. Earlier this morning, while I was sitting with my first coffee of the day, the cafe' manager noticed that I had a stuffy nose. He offered, and instructed me in the proper use of snuff. Take a small pinch, place it on the back of the hand, place a finger over one nostril, and snort in quickly and deeply! Then quickly repeat the process with the other nostril. When your eyes and nose stop running and burning, you may rejoin the conversation!

Yesterday, I tried to send a fax to you, around noontime - the line was busy. I tried about 15 minutes later - no answer. OOPS! Somebody forgot to leave the fax plugged in. Anyway, I tried.

@9:50 PM ~ I'm back at the hotel. I tried to fax you again around 4:30 your time, busy again.

We worked all day in Basra. From Arbaoua to Al-Basra is about a half hour drive, when Nancy drives, (3/4 hour if I drive).



The Wall at Al-Basra

Our first day on the job was orientation. Site orientation for me ~ what needs to be surveyed and how do we survey it in the allotted time. Survey procedure training for Nancy and Yacine ~ this is a ... this is how it is used, and this is how it is not used.

Broken bits of pottery are lying on the ground everywhere in Basra. Nancy says the pieces date back to about 900 (? BC or AD?).

I have found a stone for Jacob.



Yacine & Jim

Lunch was beside the road, under a huge tree. We each had 2 hard-boiled eggs and 1/2 loaf of French bread, that we bought at the cafe', 1 orange and bottled water.

I feel quite well, considering I've introduced one new food a day. Tonight's dinner was in Ksar El Kebir, which is about 30km n-ne. We all had French fries, salad, and sheep stew. I say sheep stew, because the lambs are too valuable for wool production to kill and eat. When the sheep are past their prime, they are slaughtered, and eaten. All in all, quite good ~ not like the old mutton that we might think of.

Still no hot water. Nancy found an old woman who lives in Arbaoua, to wash our clothes. She is quite the character. Very firm in her negotiations about the cost of doing laundry. Only a few mosquitoes at night. Not too bothersome. I saw a mayfly hatch (#18 Lt. Hendrickson) today at one of the small rivers we crossed. No fish as I suspect the water is too warm for trout, and slow moving. Thinking back to the cafe', I had seen some dead mayflies, trapped in a spider web, but hadn't given them much thought at the time.

All is well.

May 11th, Monday

@ 10 PM ~ All in all, a good day. We started the perimeter traverse today, and accomplished about half. Nancy & Yacine did well, considering this is their first time surveying. Very windy, sunny, about 65.

Lunch was taken in the shade of the wall. We each had bread, two hard-boiled eggs, and water. After we had finished our bought lunch, one of the young men, who lives within Basra, brought a home made lunch to us. One hard-boiled egg each, a 9" diameter flat bread of coarsely ground wheat flour, still warm, soft butter and thin yogurt, made from goat milk. Yacine had two glasses of the yogurt. Neither Nancy nor I had the yogurt because our American diet most likely would not tolerate the cultures.

Dinner was in Ksar El Kebir, where we had eaten previously. Yacine found a local mechanic to fix the wipers, while we ate. Soup, French fries, and ground meat. The meat was ground, mixed with spices, formed into patties, cooked, then sliced cross-wise. It was served with a sauce of mashed tomatoes and olives. Very good! And of course, we had tea and plenty of water. On the way back, I was able to post the letter that I had been writing over the past week. I also was able to fax a short message back home.

When we returned, I found my laundry, neatly folded with a hand written note for payment of 27DH, (\$3).

No hot water yet!

There are many small outdoor, sidewalk cafes. In all of them, one can buy soda, tea, or a choice between black Nescafe' and latte'. The coffee is typically served in a small glass, on a small, tin saucer, with 3 sugar cubes, and a small spoon.

All is well.

May 12th, Tuesday

@ 9 PM ~ we finished the perimeter traverse today. Lunch was bread, cheese, whole tomatoes, and a hard-boiled egg. Plenty of water and tea. Upon completion of the traverse, we went to Ksar El Kebir, found a quiet cafe' where I could transcribe the field notes onto loose-leaf sheets. I then faxed the notes to Christopher Francher, a surveyor in Salem, NH. We then went to a new cafe' for dinner, which consisted of soup, bread, French fries, and "Spanish rice" with shrimp. The soup is thick, like thin beef stew or vegetable soup. It has bits of meat, egg-drop, chickpeas, and various spices that make it slightly sweet and spicy. The Spanish rice is made of saffron yellow rice, some tomatoes, onions, and slender shrimp. Very good. Matter of fact, it may have been the best meal yet!

The coffee is quite different, from cafe' to cafe' ~ some places it is made from Nescafe', thin and bitter. Some places it is more like espresso, thick and strong. It is always served on a tin saucer, with three sugar cubes and a small spoon. The price is always the same ~ 5DH.

Trash and litter is everywhere in the city. No garbage ~ just litter. In Basra, garbage, waste, and manure are piled together. In some places it is placed around the bushes; in some places it is just in piles. Very little odor.

I have not seen a camel ~ Yacine says there are few in Morocco. Sometimes they are eaten.

The chickens run wild, everywhere in Basra.

Speaking of Camels, I've not been able to buy any. They are not to be found, anywhere. I've taken to smoking "Casa-sports", non-filtered. Twenty to the pack, for about half the cost of Pall Mall. 4DH.

I've seen miles and miles of fields. Not the flat ones you would see back home. Here, they are hillsides. The crops are various shades of green ~ from dark to nearly yellow. And the bright yellow sunflowers. Also, there are numerous groves of olive trees and of fig trees.

The light in the bathroom is fixed, but still no hot water.

All is well.

May 13, Wednesday

@ 9:15 PM ~ Rain ~ Awoke to the sound of light rain. It continued on and off through first coffee. We went to Basra anyway with hopes of working. I tried to instruct Nancy & Yacine in the basics of topographic surveying. I told them about high points and low points, top and bottom of slopes, complete with sketches and physical locations on the ground. The rain started in earnest about 10. Nancy called it a day and we returned to the hotel.

I busied myself by plotting the traverse onto a copy of an earlier map made by Dr. Redman. I wanted to see where the traverse was, relative to the physical features of Basra.



Yacine, Nancy & curious

Lunch was bought at the local village store ~ hard-boiled eggs, cheese, bread, cured black olives. I napped from about 2 till 4. Then dodged the rain to the local cafe for a coffee. Nancy and I talked about her future plans for the work at Basra. Dinner was in Ksar El Kebir. I checked the telebotique for a fax from Chris Francher, and telephoned home. Still no hot water.

All is well.

May 14th, Thursday

@9:45 PM ~ in my room ~ Still no hot water! I am washing each morning and evening by taking a sponge bath, while kneeling in the tub. The water is very cold! If the weather were hot, it would be refreshing to do so.

Nancy deposited Yacine and I in Basra to work by ourselves. She had to travel to Rabat to meet with some officials.

Lunch consisted of 1 egg, 1 tomato, 1 wedge of cheese, some black olives, and plenty of water. Tuhami brought out tea, buttermilk and millwe.



Yacine & Tuhami

We had a brief rain shower about noon. Yacine, Tuhami, I and the equipment, waited out the rain in a stone box-culvert. The culvert is about 5' wide by 4' high, made entirely from stone. There were snails, spiders, and dog poop in the culvert.

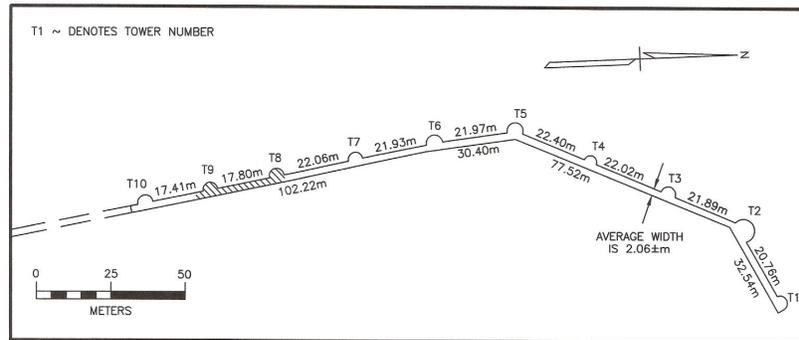
At the end of the day, Yacine flagged down a bus and we rode to Souk El Arba, a small city about 15km south of Basra. The survey equipment seemed to be the talk of the bus. Nancy met us there, where we had dinner, then returned to Arbaoua. I received my first letter from home today.

The most stressful part of the day is the ride to and from Basra. 60kph in the 40 zones, 100kph in the 60 zones! I have been riding in the back seat, and crouch down through the curves!

I fully expect us to run right off the road in each curve! If we are not killed, it will be due to God's protection.

I dropped one of the batteries today. It cracked open, and I suspect it is no longer usable. Thanks Nancy for the suggestion that I bring all three batteries. I brought an AC / DC converter with me, that I bought at Radio Shack. A good thing, because I would not be able to do the survey without it.

All will be well.



The Wall at Al-Basra

May 15, Friday

@9:30 PM ~ I was awake most of the night with the "trots"! I guess that I should not have drunk the buttermilk, as Nancy warned me about, a few days ago. A warm sunny day. We continued with the topographic survey. At one point, I had to high tail it for a secluded spot and, as a result, I've now left one of my handkerchiefs in Basra. Lunch was bread & cheese. We took numerous photographs of Basra, from a single vantage point. One of the survey field books has a listing of the observed bearing of each photo, for future reference when preparing the topographic plan, at home. Speaking of home ~

Although I am becoming accustomed to the daily routine, I am starting to look forward to home. Two more weeks to go.

Dinner was in Ksar El Kebir ~ Bread, fries, and rice with shrimp. I checked the telebotique and Chris' fax was waiting for me. He addressed the fax to "Indiana Jimmy ~ Somewhere in Africa!" The traverse computations are great! I must remember to thank him properly.

I was scratching the back of my hand today, when Aziz noticed what I was doing. He gave me a lime, cut in half, and told me to rub it on the back of my hand, each night. He says it will cure it. I found Camel Filters, in a box while in Ksar El Kebir. I just break the filters off. Much better than the Casa-ports.

Still no hot water, and now the hall light has burned out.

All will be well.



The self appointed guardian of the equipment



There is so much to see

May 16th, Saturday

@9:30 PM ~ I just finished bathing in the cold, hand-held shower, and am now enjoying a pot of tea. Today was a scorcher! Bright sun & breezy! The sweat evaporates before I am aware of sweating. I must remember to drink more water, to avoid dehydration. Each day we must buy bottled water, as the local water could cause major problems, what with the potential for waterborne parasites, etc. I was late getting up this morning. Nancy had to wake me. I had taken a melatonin last night, to help me get to sleep. The passing vehicles and the downstairs party noises kept me awake, well into the night. I've been told that this place is a drug, alcohol and gambling hangout. I've noticed a few young men playing pool in the lobby, but that is all.

The survey is progressing nicely. Breakfast consisted of two cups of coffee, as usual. Lunch was bread, cheese, one egg, and one orange, each. Dinner was salad, bread, and small beef sausages served with the tomato-olive condiment. Quite good. The sausages are about the size of a "Brown & Serve" sausage. While walking around Ksar El Kebir, I bought a small desert cookie. It is about the size of a 2" pyramid, filled with dates and almond paste, and then coated with honey. Most delicious!

I found a telebotique in Arbaoua. I was going to telephone Nancy, but remembered that she is most likely at her dad's.

All is well.

May 17th, Sunday

@9:30 PM ~ Overslept again this morning ~ took melatonin again last night. I was awake from about 3 AM till 5 AM. Bread, apricot jam and coffee for breakfast. Misc. errands in AM. I telephoned Nancy at her dad's at 6:30 AM her time ~ great to talk with her. Lunch was hard boiled eggs, black olives, cheese, bread and coke. Dinner was in Souk El Arba. Chicken breast cooked in saffron, served with sweet, tomato puree, french fries, green olives; a relish like condiment of onions, tomato, cucumber, and cilantro; a salad of boiled potatoes, cooked beets, shredded cabbage, carrots, a single tomato slice, topped with half a boiled egg. I had my boots shined for about 30DH. PTSD is acting up again ~ confusion, spacey, intruding thoughts of Vietnam, watchfulness along the highways. On the drive back from Souk El Arba to Arbaoua, at dusk, in the lowering mist-like, haziness seeing the hillside fires, is like driving my truck from the coastal plains in Qui Nhon to the hills around Pleiku in the evenings.



On the outskirts of the city, there is a salt extraction facility, next to the river. The facility consists of many 1' deep, rectangular depressions. These depressions are filled with river water, and allowed to evaporate. The salt is then collected by hand, and bagged.



May 18, Monday

@9:40 PM ~ I am back in Rabat, at the Hotel Splendid, in Room 14! After today's successful day of work, Nancy decided that we should take a couple of days off. Yacine has worn blisters on his feet from all of the walking he has done. I think we all need a break, and the survey is progressing slightly ahead of schedule. The ride to Rabat can best be described as scary! 144km of two-lane road, at speeds up to 110kph! Then another 14km of the four lanes "Auto-route."

Breakfast was three glasses of coffee and cornbread. Lunch consisted of bread, cheese, hardboiled eggs & an orange. Dinner was a chicken leg quarter, French fries, rice with sauce, tea and bread. Then I went for a stroll, black coffee and desert. I found a cafe' where they offer those pyramid cookies that I wrote about earlier. I am on my own until tomorrow at 6PM. I expect to be on my own on Wednesday, as well. I've got the trots again! All will be well.

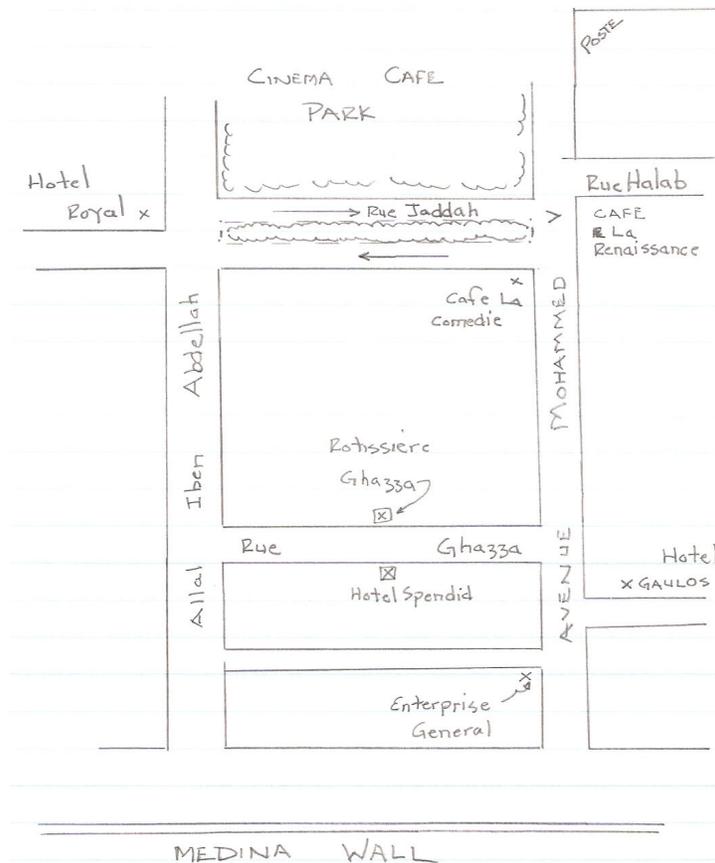
May 19, Tuesday

@1:20 PM ~ What I have done so far today ~ I had a wonderfully hot shower and shave! I've been to three different cafe's; had six glasses of coffee; eaten one coffee roll; had my boots shined; cashed a travelers check for \$100, which is about 892 DH; expressed mailed a letter to Nancy for 300DH; mailed five postcards for \$0.32 each; enjoyed a vegetarian pizza and two bottles of water for lunch; bought a pack of Pall Malls.

I am now enjoying a pot of tea in the courtyard, and hoping to see anyone who speaks English. A conversation with someone new would be nice. How did the Jesuit Priests keep their sanity, while being alone without hearing another person's voice, for years on end? I cannot even imagine being deaf ~ my thoughts would drive me crazy!

While on my "appointed rounds", I counted 15 beggars; 1 woman with a Mongoloid child on her back; 1 man without hands; 1 man without feet; about 30 policemen; 3 black & white cats; and saw more litter than I thought possible. **I need a nap!**

@8 PM ~ after my nap, I went for a round about walk ~ round about this way and round about that way! Each time I would return to the street that the hotel is on, so as not to get lost. I had chicken and soup for dinner, topped off with coffee and four cookies.



Nancy should be here soon, and then we will be off to the airport.

May 20th, Wednesday

@ 8:45 AM ~ another hot shower this morning. Light rain now. The ride to the airport in Casablanca was enjoyable. Took the 4-lane auto route down and back. The return ride was harrowing! I spent most of the time praying! Nancy, "The sign says 90KPM ~ Not 90MPH."
@ 9:30 AM ~ Sunny ~ I'm packing for the trip back to Arbaoua. This morning, Nancy tells me that I need to check out by Noon, so as not be charged for another day. Then we must wait until 5 PM to leave. I think I do not ask enough questions about future plans. "Just for today", is not always the best policy.

Late Afternoon ~ Spent most of the afternoon at the Fullbright office, reading, had pizza for lunch.

All will be well.



Rabat

May 21st, Thursday

@9:30 PM ~ we arrived in Arbaoua about 9:30 last night, after a great meal at an ocean side restaurant, somewhere.



Rather than take a chance on eating fish, which I really don't care to take a chance on in a cafe, I ordered lamb kabob, with salad, and French fries.

Today ~ Continued with the topographic survey. Lunch was eggs, bread, and cheese. One of the village men brought "rattatolie" and tea out to us, after we had finished our lunch. Tonight's dinner was in Ksar El Kebir, at our regular cafe'. Lamb patties with sauce, French fries, and a salad of potatoes, tomatoes, beets and rice. I drove back from the job site as well as to and from dinner. I am a more relaxed driver than Nancy, and she says that I am one of the few people she feels safe riding with. Still no hot water ~ but the cold hand shower felt really good, after today's hot & dusty conditions.

Bousselham Chaki



Chaki ~ during our lunch break, Nancy and Yacine were talking with one of the village men. An old man on a donkey came by, and we were told that he was the man's father. As the old man rode by, he was singing. His son explained that he was getting a little old. Shortly thereafter, the old man returned, still singing. His son commented that his father had been in the war. When I asked which war, his son replied, " World War II and Vietnam." Immediately, I turned to Yacine saying "Come ~ Come" and pulling him to his feet, took off after the old man! When we caught up with the old guy, I told Yacine to tell him that I had been in Vietnam ~ in 1967. In an instant, a light came on in Chaki's eyes! Then, Yacine was barraged with questions, comments and answers from both Chaki and I, at nearly the same time. Just stop and think about all of this.

Here I am, 51 years old, sitting in North Africa, having tea, on-top-of-the-world! I could not imagine my life getting any better! When all of a sudden, in an instant, I am given an even greater gift!

Praise be to GOD!

(Now, 2008, years later, I still am not able to find the words to adequately express my emotions and my gratitude. A transcript of a interview conducted in 2004 with Bousselham Chaki is available, at the Vietnam Archive Project, Texas Tec., University.)

May 22, Friday

@ 9 PM ~ Still no hot water. No clean clothes. Today is Friday, the Islamic Sabbath. Bread, jam and coffee for breakfast. French fries and tea for lunch, provided by one of the village men, after we had eaten our eggs, bread and cheese. Work continues. Dinner was soup, French fries, black olives, and spiced eggplant. All will be well.



The Schools At Basra

I had my very first fig, plucked from a tree. It is nothing like what is inside a "Fig Newton".



EDM, Jim, Tuhami, Yacine

May 23rd, Saturday

@ 9:30 PM ~ No hot water ~ but I have clean clothes! Breakfast of coffee and bread. Lunch was eggs, bread, cheese and tea. Dinner was in Ksar El Kebir at "our" cafe' ~ burgers, sauce, olives, fries, soup and tea. After dinner, we walked around the market area. I bought two types of cookies, and Yacine bought four types of cured olives ~ Lemon, hot pepper, vinegar, and I-don't-know-what. Yacine knows how much I like to eat olives so he allowed me to sample one of each, saving them for tomorrow's lunch.

The majority of the survey work is complete. All that remains is to survey the flat "valley Floor" area where this year's excavations will take place. I must also measure the wall, and check the magnetic orientation.

Nancy bought some type of ointment for her many bug bites. For some reason, the bugs devour her and leave Yacine & I alone. The ointment is "Systral Creme 20g. Agent Antiprurigineux et antiallergique".

The tube says: "Application locale, selon directives Ci-incluses. Non-graisseux, lavable. Conserver au frais. 1g. contient: Chlorhydrate de Chlorphe'noxamine 15mg. en e'mulsion huile-eau dermo affine" by ASTA MEDICA. The only reason that I mention this is that the ointment also works very well on relieving the itchiness on my hands. They are both nearly intolerable!

All is well.

May 24th, Sunday

@9:30 PM ~ Worked all day - little accomplished. "Nam-mares" last night. All will be well.

May 25th, Monday

@9:30 PM ~ Yacine sprained his ankle. All in all, I am not surprised, as he has worn sneakers all this time. I have given him my soft-soled, cotton pull-on shoes to wear for as long as he needs them. Nancy will be the "rod-man" for the survey of the ancient cemetery. There is a checkpoint at the intersection of the two major roads we travel on from Arbaoua to Basra. This intersection is also where the train tracks intersect one of the roads. Each day, there are police or gendarmes spot-checking the vehicles. Today was our turn to be checked. Nothing really serious, just curiosity I think. They studied our passports, and Yacine's identity card. I could not do anything other than sit in the back seat and listen to Nancy and Yacine converse in French, with the gendarmes. When we returned to the hotel, a surprise was waiting. The owner had rigged a shower, with hot water, in one of the spare rooms. As gentleman, Yacine and I offered the first shower to Nancy, while we guarded the door. All is well.

May 26, Tuesday

@9:30 PM ~ we have finished the topographic survey and all misc. measurements! Breakfast and lunch was same-o, same-o. Dinner was at "our Cafe" in Ksar El Kebir. Rice with shrimp, soup, salad, bread, tea, and water. While in El Kebir, I faxed home, just to say hi'

My friend Mac says, "Beware the unguarded moment". This proved true today. While we were having our mid-day tea break with the men, one of them took out a pipe and a small cellophane bag. After loading the pipe, he offered me a toke! I politely excused myself, and went for a walk. This was the first time I had witnessed hash use in Morocco. I was surprised, to say the least, because not only is drug use illegal in Morocco, it is also against the Islamic teachings.

All is well.



The Village of Al Basra



Stockpile of Hay

May 27th, Wednesday

@ 8:30 AM ~ No hot water - Nancy tells me that the hotel owner took the propane tank he gave us for heating the water, for a bar-b-que.

@ 9:40 PM ~ I am sitting in room #7, second floor, in the Hotel Splendid.

We left Arbaoua about 9:30 this morning, and drove to Basra to meet people from "the Institute." From what Nancy tells me about them, I think they are government officials - talk much, do little, and take credit. But that is OK, because without their permission, we would not be here. They never showed up ~ perhaps because of the rain.

While we were waiting for them, about 30 men showed up ~ not all at once, but over a 20 minute period. When I asked Nancy about them, she told me that most likely, they had heard about next week's excavations, and are looking for work. Nancy devised a plan, which seems to be fair, for the selection of who will work. Each man wrote his name on a slip of paper, and placed it in a big straw hat, that belonged to one of the men. She mixed up all the names, and then asked me to draw out 16. All the men formed a circle, shoulder to shoulder, around Nancy & I. I removed my glasses, covered my eyes with one hand, and drew out 16 names. Eight men will work for the first two weeks and eight men will work the following two weeks. With one exception, all the men accepted the results well. Having thought about the selection process for a while now, I think it was not fair, because no regard was given to the need of the men ~ whether they are single, married, with or without a family.



A Few Abel Bodied Men of Basra



"Top Secret" meat market

Just after leaving Basra, village, Nancy stopped at the "Mayor's Office." She needed to provide

him with a list of the men, and women who will be working. While I was waiting, I took a few photographs of the market area, including the meat market. I was promptly scolded by a paramilitary man with an Uzi slung over his chest ~ He wagged his finger at me and shook his head. I got back into the car, and pretended to take a nap. It must have been a "Top Secret" meat market.

Nancy drove to Kenitra, where we ate lunch at a roadside Meat Cafe'. We had tea, roasted onions & tomatoes, spicy black olives, bread and big pile of lamb chops seasoned with salt and cumin. It was a wonderful feast!

Then onto Yacine's home where he made mint tea with quite the flair, and which was a lot stronger than what we had at the cafes!

I drove from Kenitra to Rabat, and enjoyed the conversation with Nancy. I think we were both relieved that the survey was done, as we were much more relaxed than the past week. Just as we entered the outskirts of Rabat, we encountered a traffic rotary. As is customary in the States, I stopped before entering the rotary to yield the right-of-way. This was not acceptable to the police officer who was directing the flow of rotary traffic. He yelled, blew his whistle, and motioned me to pull over. Fortunately, Nancy was able to explain my lack of understanding of the rules of the road in Morocco.

Dinner was pizza and water ~ more than enough as I was really not hungry after our big lunch.

I found a cafe' for coffee and sweets for desert. Then bought a small alarm clock so I would not oversleep in the morning.

All is well.

May 28th, Thursday

@ 1 PM ~ A good night's sleep. Hot shower this morning. Coffee, etc. for breakfast.

I met Yacine in the park at 10 AM and went to the Medina. Very close quarters, very crowded, hot!

Yacine put on his best bargaining hat for me, and I stocked up with presents to bring to the family.

Pizza and fries for lunch ~ 40 DH.

@ 9:30 PM ~ Misc. snacks and tea in the afternoon; a short nap; picked up my good clothes from the laundry ~ 14 DH for pressing pants and shirt. Yacine and I had our last meal together. Tea, bread, fries, soup, rice and lamb burgers.

By this time tomorrow night, I should be home!

All is well, thank YOU!



Another Point of View



Tanger

Morocco 1999

In early spring of 1999, Nancy Benco telephoned me, and asked if I was interested in making another trip to Basra, in order to make a more detailed survey of a portion of what she refers to as "The Valley Floor". My initial reply was an emphatic YES. I then asked if I could bring a helper. Nancy's reply was, "Yes, but I can't pay for him". I offered to pay for his airfare, if she would provide room and board. It was agreed. My eldest son Jason accompanied me, and proved to be a most able assistant.

I did not keep a journal during 1999, but Jason did. For details of his experience, you will have to contact him. I started one, but gave up after a few days because I was too tired and too intent on the work.

Our stay in Morocco ended with Jason and I being taken to Tangier, by Nancy. She found a very nice, new hotel for us with a view of the harbor and the coast of Spain. We offered her the use of the room shower, but she had to return to Basra.

Jason & I decided to walk around the city, and did just that. We walked our legs off ~ mine anyway!

Our tour took us up hill and down, past so many interesting sites. We stopped for dinner at a small cafe, just off the main drag, which we both agreed would be better than a tourist restaurant. Placing our order was quite an experience... it was the first time we had to interact

with people, without an interpreter. We mostly pointed, smiled, and nodded our head. One choice was denied by the waiter. Perhaps it was not fresh, or perhaps he knew that we would not like it. It looked like meat from some type of organ. All in all, the meal was very good.

On the walk back to the hotel, the streets and sidewalks were very crowded. As is typical for the evening. I dodged a few people, by stepping off the sidewalk a few times, and generally behaved as one does in the city. I noticed one young man looking straight into my eyes, which is unusual for strangers. The second time he passed me by, he seemed to purposely bump into me, which caused me to step off the curb, where another young man bumped and spun me around. I stepped back onto the sidewalk, took a few steps, and felt for my wallet. Still there. BUT, they had successfully stolen my tobacco pouch & dirty handkerchief. We slept well on our full stomachs.

Morning arrived way too quickly. We were woken by the staff, a quick shower, coffee and rolls, then off to the airport. We visited with a young trio from England, who were returning home after three weeks of back-packing. The flight to Casablanca and to the States, if I recall correctly, was uneventful. But I did make up my mind to quit smoking, due to 10 hours without a smoke.

During 1999, Aziz Benlayachi, of Basra, provided a lot of help with the survey of the magnetometer areas. We struck up a friendship, that has endured our age differences, our cultural differences, and September 11, 2001.

