

BY BRENDON BOSWORTH

# ESCAPE FROM AGADIR

A LETTER FROM  
CENTRAL MOROCCO

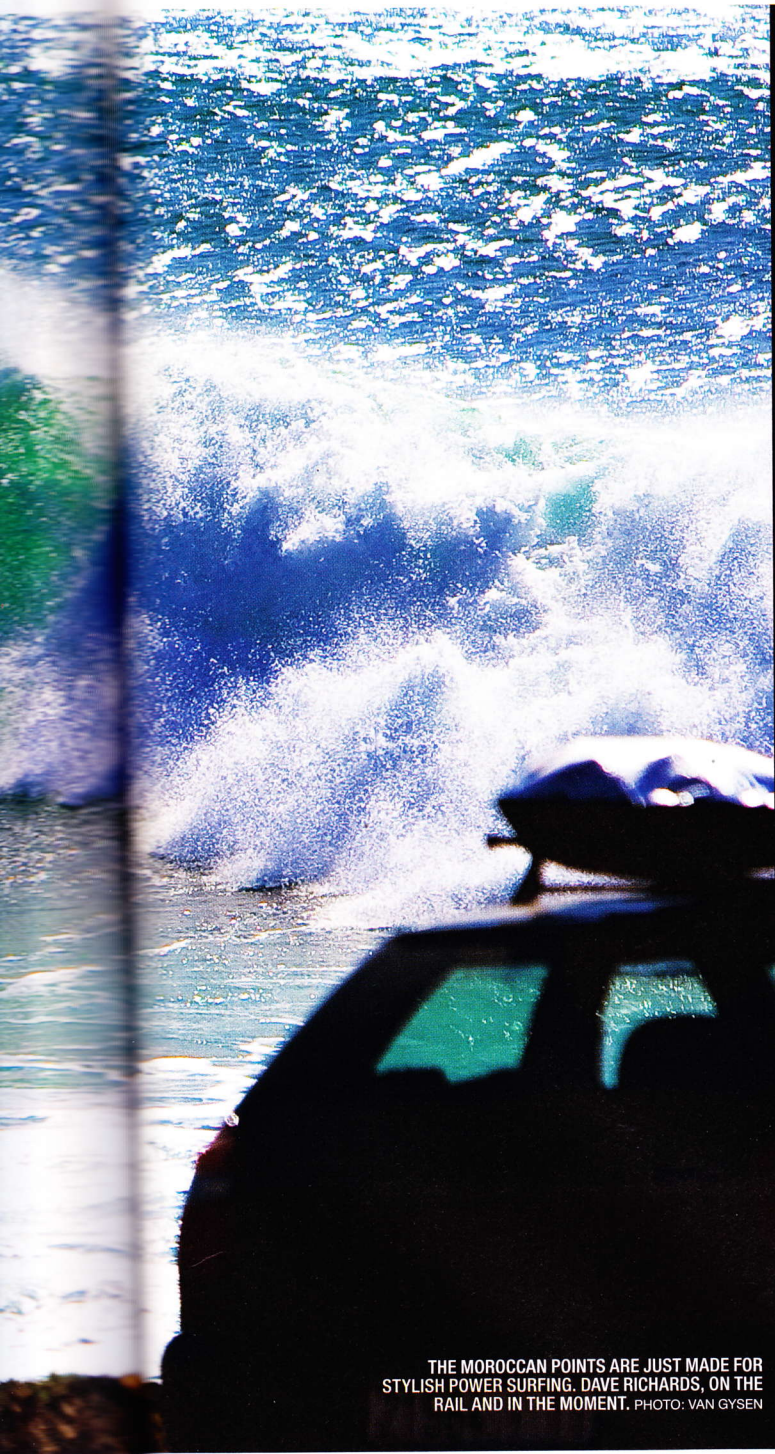
**A faint smell of feces rides ahead of the morning breeze, washing up from the river that trickles past my apartment and sullyng the crisp air.** Romantic visions of the sweet scent of saffron percolating with the shrill hail of morning prayers have long been shattered. The small fishing town of Taghazout, which swells with Moroccan holidaymakers in summer and is home to a motley crew of trans-continental surfing vagabonds in winter, is not an exemplar of sound waste management. Patches of trash dot the roadside: a haphazard collection of plastics, bottles, and glass. On some days these piles are in flames, but this morning they're being picked apart by a tribe of scavenging goats. The

hungry rogues ferret through everything, gulping down whatever edible morsels they find.

They barely flinch when one of innumerable RVs that ply the coast from the bustling port town of Tangier, which flanks the Strait of Gibraltar up North to the desert regions of Dakhla, in the still-disputed annexure of the Western Sahara, glides past. Kitchen-appliance white, it glistens artificially. The silver-haired retiree behind the wheel waves no greeting and stares straight ahead, mind focused on the next camper park where he'll wedge in between a swarm of mobile homes, all jostling for a position closest to the ablution blocks. There'll be bowls, a few games of bridge, and maybe some bottles of

French Chardonnay. A generation of pensioners living it free and easy. Behind the RV, a cream Mercedes 240D, 1970s edition, lumbers along, caught in the jet stream and aching to pass. Morocco's trademark grand taxi has four in the back, two squashed in the passenger seat, and the driver nonchalantly tending the wheel. He's the man I learned to watch out for: innocuous on the outside, but inwardly a moral sociopath. Surfboards, backpacks, and foreign accents make his eyes moisten and his mouth salivate. His palms sweat bullets of grease the minute he spots you outside the airport or bus terminal. Tourists exist to bulk up his pension fund or pay for the repairs on his cab. A genial attempt at an Arabic or French



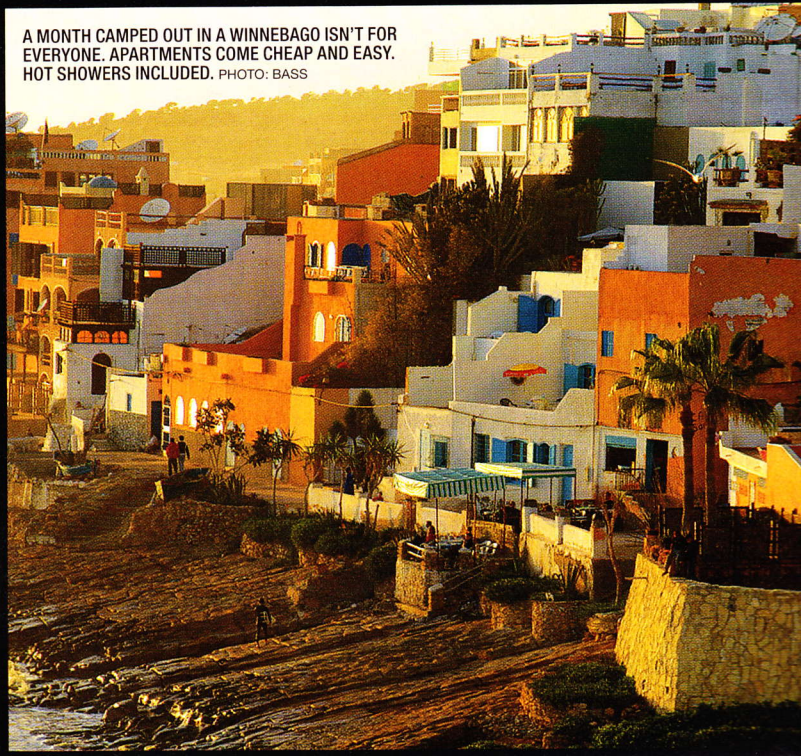


THE MOROCCAN POINTS ARE JUST MADE FOR STYLISH POWER SURFING. DAVE RICHARDS, ON THE RAIL AND IN THE MOMENT. PHOTO: VAN GYSEN

ANCHOR POINT, STACKED THREE-DEEP AND REELING. PHOTO: BASS



A MONTH CAMPED OUT IN A WINNEBAGO ISN'T FOR EVERYONE. APARTMENTS COME CHEAP AND EASY. HOT SHOWERS INCLUDED. PHOTO: BASS



ensionem  
a cream  
ers along  
pass. Mo  
in the back  
d the driver  
the man I  
in the out-  
Surfboards  
his eyes  
alms sweat  
you outside  
exist to bulk  
hairs on his  
French

greeting does nothing to temper his cunning. He will charge you three times the going rate; he will not feel bad about it.

Further down the street, a board-laden SUV idles patiently outside one of the surf camps. Its roof sags beneath an assortment of mals, pop-outs, longboards, and thrusters. The guide is up on the roof, tying knots in the straps, making sure it's all secure. Below him a group of patrons mingle uncertainly. They don't know each other well enough to look comfortable yet, aren't sure about their companions' skill levels. The where-are-you-from-and-what-do-you-do small-talk has already dried up. Like most variants of the modern surf camp, there are no tents here. No

## ON SOME DAYS THESE PILES ARE IN FLAMES, BUT THIS MORNING THEY'RE BEING PICKED APART BY A TRIBE OF SCAVENGING GOATS.

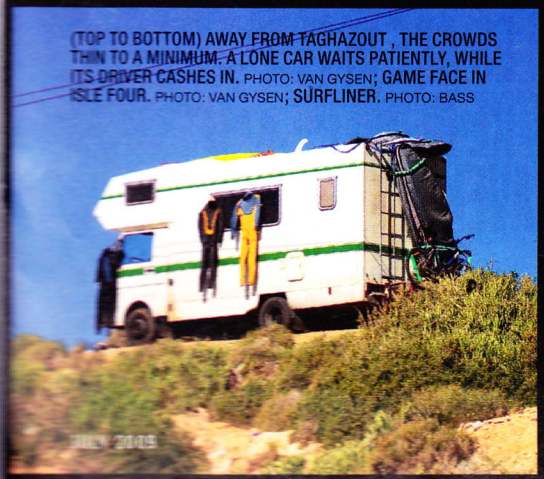
need to pull out a compass or pore over maps; nothing to do with camping at all. The fast-food of surfing: compressed vacation packages boxed and ready for those with the cash to pay for it. But what to expect? This town is the mainstay. Here the crowds congregate and clusters of learner

surfers clog the gentler breaks. But let them have Hash Point. It's an imaginary non-wave that should be celebrated solely for its allusions to high times and nothing else. There are surf camps, surf restaurants, surf shops, apartments for surfers, and overpriced ding repairs. But for all





TIAGO PIRES, RECEIVING A THICK AFRICAN HANDSHAKE.  
PHOTO: TESTEMALE



(TOP TO BOTTOM) AWAY FROM TAGHAZOUT, THE CROWDS THIN TO A MINIMUM: A LONE CAR WAITS PATIENTLY, WHILE ITS DRIVER CASHES IN. PHOTO: VAN GYSEN; GAME FACE IN ISLE FOUR. PHOTO: VAN GYSEN; SURFLINER. PHOTO: BASS

## A WILLOWY FIGURE SCUTTLES INTO VIEW. GLUE BOY'S PITHY EYES MOVE WITHOUT SYNCHRONICITY, AS IF UNAWARE OF EACH OTHER'S EXISTENCE.

the by-products of surfploitation, it lacks the garish seediness that coats somewhere like Bali's Kuta. The odd block of hash goes unnoticed. The town maintains its unhurried mien and take-me-as-I-am disposition.

The hum of the camp transport and the awkward buzz of its passengers segue to make way for an unsettling rattle. A grating respiratory rasp: the sound of air being sucked through corroded nasal passages. A willowy figure scuttles into view. Glue Boy's pithy eyes move without synchronicity, as if unaware of each other's existence. The dissociated orbs peer out from a skull that overly indents at the temples, like the skin is

being pulled inward by an ever-shrinking brain. A crusted bubble of gunk cakes his left nostril. In his hands he cradles a transparent plastic bag with a puddle of resin pooled at the bottom, pilfered from one of the repair guys or bought from someone who doesn't mind helping him on his way to the giant solvent factory in the sky. The fiend says nothing, just stares. Guys in wetsuits don't have dirhams to beg.

I change course for the sand path below the main road, mainly to avoid Glue Boy, but also to stay clear of the traffic. I tread carefully, cautious of the splinters of crushed Heineken bottles that disfigure the morning scene. It's an incongruous intrusion. Islamic lore forbids the consumption of alcohol, but Morocco is widely considered the most liberal of Islamic nations. Here religion is omnipresent. The call for morning prayers wakes you up early at sunrise. People duly prostrate themselves five times daily to give thanks to Allah. In some towns you'll walk into a hotel or shop to find the owner kneeling on a prayer mat, forehead pressed to the floor, body facing towards Mecca, folded in supplication and quietly reciting his scriptures. The devoutness is enviable. It's the type of piety that makes religious non-subscribers feel they may be missing something. Liquor, however, is not bound by the same fortitude. Drink cannot be sold or consumed in direct view of a mosque, but it does line the shelves of the main supermarkets in major towns, in this case Agadir. It can also be found in Agadir's nightclubs and casinos, where tourists suckle back on the overpriced sauce. Still, you don't see beers being slugged in public and most bottle-tops seem to pop behind closed doors.

The trampled shards of glass blend better than the Euro girl in the five-inch shorts, who comes strutting down the path. Her lithe, white legs spill unselfconsciously from the scrap of denim around her waist—a dire infringement, considering Islamic dictums on personal modes—





A FEW WAVES BEFORE DARK, THEN HOME FOR A STEAMING TAJINE. PHOTO: VAN GYSEN

ty. Flaunting a pair of hoochie-mama cut-offs in public really is pushing it. Right now this young Euro upstart is walking pornography, and she might just be oblivious. Either that or she's pointedly raising the middle finger to religious convention and patriarchal rigidity, urging the women to join her, daring the men to try and stop her. Whatever her reasons, she does not go unnoticed. I pass the pinup girl and spy the ubiquitous collection of hired cars—cheap, imported boxes from Korea and roomier sedans from France—perched on the roadside above the reeling, sand-flecked, second section. Like some post-modern statement about the clash of the ancient and the modern, the camel man walks past, dressed in a *djellaba*, pulling his disconsolate dromedary behind him. “Taxi, Taghazout, Taxi!” he shouts, as the animal mindlessly chews its bottom lip. No takers this morning.

Far on the outside peak, a plague of black neoprene bobs expectantly. Pack animals twitching with adrenaline. The few telescopic lenses glinting in the sunlight add further pressure. Get the shot for that magazine, bedroom wall, Facebook page, or work-stricken friend back home. Get it at any cost. The question arises: Why paddle out here? Why traipse past the growing number of innumerate faces, the nut-seller with his tray of peanuts and his endless calls of “keka-wiiiiiiiiiiiiiet,” the kid who really doesn't look that hard up, begging for money, the sedentary photographers, and throng of voyeuristic spectators? Why risk falling on your ass, slipping down the slimy rock at the jump-off point, or getting maimed by a set whilst they throw popcorn and laugh at you? Miles and miles of tapped and untapped coastline sprawl out north and south of here, curling and curving into potential setups. Drive that road, find that spot, slip into the water, and bask in self-imposed isolation.

I suppose it's the same as asking, why paddle out to

## FAR ON THE OUTSIDE PEAK, A PLAGUE OF BLACK NEOPRENE BOBS EXPECTANTLY. PACK ANIMALS TWITCHING WITH ADRENALINE.

because everyone I asked told me a different name for each spot, I got a little confused. It's likely a Moroccan local, or veteran visitor from another clime, is convulsing with smug laughter as he or she reads this article. Maybe I'm the one laughing? It's just not permissible to mention certain spots in international surf mags.

Whatever the case, I came home with my own *Sipping Jetstreams* moments etched into the celluloid of long-term memory. I won't forget the brightly painted doors, the endless pots of sweet mint tea, or the toothless grin of the market seller who plied me with flaming red chilies. I still feel bad about not flipping a few dirhams to the wrinkled old man with the clubfeet who lay sprawled like a dying crab outside the Souk in Agadir. The narrative of a proud Berber friend, who gave a heartfelt rendition of the plight of his grandfather who came from his village in the mountains to boldly fight against the French colonial invasion, gave me an insight into a world I doubt I'll ever fully understand. All these still-frames combine in an irrepressible montage, but what I'll remember most is slipping into the deafening silence of a North-African barrel and checking my pulse to make sure I was still alive. ↪

**\* TO SEE MORE PHOTOS OF MOROCCAN CULTURE AND REELING RIGHT POINTS, CHECK OUT OUR EXTENDED PHOTO GALLERY ONLINE.**

Log on to [Surfermag.com/507](http://Surfermag.com/507)