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# EVE BRANSON FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

NEWS AND DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS

ISSUE 25 NOVEMBER 2014  
COMPILED BY EVE BRANSON

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It is quite a difficult area to reach, so my son Richard very kindly chartered a plane for my secretary Amie and me to fly direct – such a treat! And so it was that on Tuesday 14th October, we touched down in Fes Saiss Menares Airport, empty, save for one other plane and the many police and security guards.

We were met by Rachid Lagnimi, Director of the Security and Safety Department at the university and were swiftly welcomed to Morocco with a call from the President of the university, Driss Ouauouicha.

We felt like royalty as Rachid swept us off in a limousine to the Michlifan Hotel, Ifrane, where we would be staying for the next 3 days. A vast hotel in stunning surroundings of the world's largest cedar forest! Our hosts, Driss and Abdu Saoud, Honorary Moroccan Consul in California then met us for dinner and briefed us on the days ahead.

On waking the next day the October sun was streaming in through our windows and the air at over 5000ft was noticeably clean and pure, the mountains beautiful and covered with lush trees. King Mohammed VI stays in Ifrane himself a few times a year to enjoy the skiing on these mountains and his father, the late King Hassan II of Morocco chose to reside in Fez as opposed to Rabat for the cleaner air quality that aggravated his asthma less.

After breakfast, Driss and Abdu met us to embark on a tour of the university and its facilities.

## Al Akhawayn University

The Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane was founded in 1993 by Royal Dahir (decree) and opened its doors to students in January 1995. It bases itself on principles of diversity and an international outlook, using the American university system as its model and English as the language of instruction. It offers three tier teaching:

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The university mosque is built as a replica of the Koutoubia in Marrakech, a mosque I am familiar with as you can imagine!

As part of the university's commitment to its principles of diversity and an international outlook, the university's mission is driven by values of human solidarity and tolerance and students have to complete a minimum of 60 hours community service to complete their degrees.

We were fascinated to hear about how the university was built from an endowment given by King Fahd of Saudi Arabia when a Saudi oil tanker spilt its load off the coast of Morocco – the money was intended to pay for the considerable clean-up operation however, the clean-up was never realised as strong winds blew the oil spill away from the coast, leaving the endowment to be used to create the university.



UNIVERSITY SWIMMING POOL



AZROU COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

## Exploring Ifrane and the surrounding area

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The following day, we visited some of the community projects supported by the university, most notably an inspiring 'Centre for Community Development' in the nearby city of Azrou.

On the short drive to Azrou, we saw the many new trees that have been planted along the road side, to replace those removed to make space for the Royal Palace currently being built high up in the mountainous cedar forests.

Azrou itself is the largest and oldest city in the area, being centuries old and has a population of 60-70,000. It is built in the mouth of an ancient volcano and you can make out the rim of this volcano surrounding the city.

'The Centre for Community Development in Azrou' offers health care for women and children, as well as pre-professional training for all the community, through workshops and



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*Eve Branson*

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