

3rd Taragalte Festival, 11 – 13 November, 2011

The world is in turmoil, economic crisis, Arabic spring, earthquakes, tsunami's, nuclear catastrophy, floods, up coming elections in Morocco, in all of this Halim and Ibrahim Sbai of the Taragalte Concept and L'Association Zaila, decided to continue organizing the 3rd Taragalte Festival with the date set for 11 11 11. They had decided to change the season from February to November because of the favorable weather in this period. (www.taragalte.org)

It had been 5 years since my husband Adriaan, also treasurer of our foundation Sahara-Roots, (www.sahara-roots.org) had visited the area of M'hamid and so he gladly excepted the invitation from Halim and Ibrahim, to attend the 3rd Taragalte Festival on 11 11 11. The Sahara Roots projects had consistently been growing since the beginning of 2007 but until now he had only been able to see what was achieved via photos and video as well as listening to our stories.

11 November 11: We arrived in Bivouac "Le Petit Prince" (www.cherg.com) in M'hamid around 14.00hrs and had enough time to prepare our tent on the Taragalte Festival terrain, so as to be able to explain to those interested in our projects. The official opening of the festival at 16.00hrs was attended by officials from the regional government.



After the presentation of our projects to the officials, children gathered around us to see the various posters and to receive pamphlets about our work in the Sahara. They recognized everyone on the posters and really enjoyed looking through our photos albums, something very new to them. One of the children was so interested in our booklet "Le Sahara et moi" that reading together was a gift to both him and me. It was very hard work for him but he was so enthusiastic that we decided to give him the booklet, another seed was planted.

In the foreground the various musicians had started to play from the open-air podium that had been provided in this magical atmosphere and scenery in the Sahara. In the upcoming darkness of the surroundings, the palm trees were lit up so that everyone could easily find their way. For dinner we were offered homemade couscous which the local women had busily been preparing in the traditional way for hours, no gas, no electricity, just a fire. It was nothing like the couscous that we made from a packet at home, it was absolutely delicious, a compliment to the women of the Sahara! In the bright light of the moon we quietly walked through the desert to our tent which would be our home for the next 3 days.



12 November 11: Walking through the oasis from the village Zaouia to the village of Oulad Mhia together with artists, visitors, locals attending the festival, we were accompanied by Halim who explained to us the centuries old way of live in these oasis. A demonstration was given by one of the locals, who quickly climbed one of the palm trees laden with dates, to show how they were cut as well as to show the cutting of the dead palm leaves. These are used to make palm fencing, roofing, protection of newly planted trees etc. As we walked through the dry fields it was hard to imagine that they could ever be green. It is now the time to prepare the fields for the sowing of seeds after the harsh summer. In February and March it will be harvesting time on the fields. In one of the villages we past by however we discovered green fields, food for the animals such a beautiful sight.



During a lunch break we listened to musicians from the oasis area's and after which a traditional lunch was served. With no utilities at hand we did as the locals and ate with our right hands. We then continued walking through the village of Oulad Mhia where the signs of desertification became very clear to all of those participating on this tour. It is on the outskirts of this village that we have our tree planting project close to the Marabout of Sidi Khalil. As we continued walking through this area Halim explained the necessity of this project while music was being played in the background.

As we arrived at the Festival site the sun was setting and we passed by the Taragalte Boutique. It was here that the many different products made by the women from four villages in the area had been laid out. Under the guidance of the Dutch organization Butterfly Works (www.butterflyworks.org) a new project for women in the area of M'hamid had been underway for at least a year. It was great to see that so much progress had been made by the women and those helping them. In the evening there were many artists both national and international performing on the magical sand dunes in the desert around M'hamid el Ghizlane.



13 November 11: In honor of the great Moussem of Sidi Khalil, a caravan of about 70 camels, with guides as well as visitors riding them, left Bivouac Le Petit Prince to experience the desert life by camel. It was exhilarating for me once again to be riding camels and to experience the calmness of the desert even though there was a little bit of sand storm. This also is a part of life in the desert and with the wonderful weather we were having. visitors might have thought that the weather would always be like this. The chech (blue shawl worn by the men of the Sahara) was really the best protection against the stinging sand. Cameras had to be wrapped safely in plastic zip lock bags. Luckily the wind died down quickly as we listened to the singing of our guides. A wedding ceremony was demonstrated and tea was served nomad style. An amazing experience.

The last musical event of the evening was Khaira Arby from Mali. Having seen her in Amsterdam during a concert in the Bimhuis, it was a total different experience to see her performing in this pure and beautiful desert environment. It was an honor to experience this.



14 November 11: To close the festival it was decided to plant trees together with the artists and visitors still present in bivouac Le Petit Prince. We decided to make use of the Groasis Waterboxx's (www.groasis.com) which we had bought with us from the Netherlands. (These waterboxx's enable trees and vegetables to grow with a bare minimum use of water because of their ability make use of condensation). Together with Khaira Arby and all the other performers, visitors and local people still present we planted the trees. It was an emotional experience for all those present as she sang after the planting that first tree. After the tree planting all the performers who were present at the ceremony received a copy of the French/Arabic booklet "Me and my Sahara".

A note of thanks.

We would like to thank Halim and Ibrahim Sbai for allowing us to be part of their dream: the Taragalte Project and Festival.

We also thank the Governor of Zagora for making this festival possible.

A big thank you to thank all the performing artists, national and international for joining this wonderful 3rd edition of the Taragalte Festival. A special thank you to Khaira Arby for planting trees with us.

Also many thanks to the team of Butterfly Works for all their wonderful work with the women of M'hamid as well as their volunteer work during the festival.

Finally many thanks to all the local people, both men and women, who worked so hard in setting up the Taragalte festival site and bivouac Le Petit Prince as well as providing the wonderful food and to all the visitors that attended the 3rd edition of the Taragalte Festival.

We hope to see you all at the 4th edition of the Taragalte Festival in M'hamid El Ghizlane!

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