

ATLAS QUEST by UTAT

13ème édition, du 3 au 7 octobre 2024

SMILES, STARS AND RECORDS

October 2024

For over 3 days, the 13th edition of the Atlas Quest brought together almost 500 competitors on the Oukaïmeden plateau at an altitude of 2600 m in the heart of the Toubkal National Park. This event has become a must, bringing together elite and amateur runners from over 15 countries in Morocco.

As well as competing in the 5 formats on offer: 12km, 26km, 42km, (Challenge 42km+26km) and 105km, the Atlas Quest is an adventure, a journey, a moment out of time where all the runners and volunteers live and share experiences and memories.

The Atlas Quest offers an exceptional and demanding playing field, nestled in the heart of the imposing Moroccan Atlas Mountains. Between lush green valleys and arid valleys, the participants pass through authentic Berber villages, discovering at every step a nature that is both harsh and bewitching. It is in this grandiose environment that they push back their physical and mental limits, in symbiosis with the raw beauty of the massif.

It's also a great opportunity to get away from it all, to get back to basics and discover the warmth of the local people, their kindness and their smiles. A year ago, these communities were hit hard by an earthquake, leading to the cancellation of the event. With determination, they set about rebuilding their villages. The race organisation, in its own way, has provided support by supplying tents for the emergency.



@Photo Fred Bousseau

The main races, the 105km and the 42km, set off under the clear, starry skies of the Oukaimeden plateau. During the briefings, Cyrille Sismondini, the event director, reminded everyone of the exceptional setting in which the competitors would be competing, and that the stars would not only be in the sky, but also in their eyes.

The riders' arrivals and testimonials proved him right.

RECORDS FOR L. SANTELLI AND C. BANNWARTH IN THE 105 KM

The flagship event of the Atlas Quest, the 105 km for 8000 m D+, called UTAT, Ultra Trail Atlas Toubkal, has consecrated 2 great champions and international figures of the Ultra trail.

Lambert Santelli started the race with Guillaume Beauxis (winner in 2022), but from the second climb and after 1h30 of racing, the Corsican, record holder of the GR 20 in 2021 in 30h25, winner of the MIUT 115 in 2023 and 4th in the Grand Raid de la Réunion 2023, will find a second breath to take a few lengths lead and find a rhythm that the Pyrenean athletes will not be able to follow. He then went it alone to claim a magnificent victory and the race record in 16h47min, welcomed by his family who were on hand.

Guillaume Beauxis came second in 17:53 ahead of Stephen Roux from Haute-Savoie in 19:05.

In the women's race, Claire Bannwarth, who had just finished 3rd in the Tor des Géants, lined up for her 23rd Ultra of the year. She gave her rivals no chance, gradually moving up the rankings to take 5th place, also setting a record for the event in 22h33min. Second place went to Nathalie Bourgeois, followed by Justine Houteer Magni.

FRANCO-MOROCCAN VICTORY IN THE CHALLENGE AND MARATHON RECORD

The other flagship event of the Atlas Quest is the Challenge, which consists of a marathon on Saturday (42km/2,600m D+) followed on Sunday by a 26km/1,400m D over 2 different routes and 2 different valleys, starting from Oukaimeden.

Noël Giordano, the 27-year-old Corsican shepherd, has added another line to his ever-growing list of achievements. He learnt to run in the footsteps of Lambert Santelli, is one of today's best downhill runners and has progressed flat out to post a 10km time of under 31'30.

From the start of the marathon, he was accompanied by Matis Leray (32nd in the UTMB 2024), but he took control of the race and never looked back, triumphing in a record time of 4h30min, bettering Rachid El Morabity's previous time of 4h33'.

Matis Leray finished 2nd and Maxime Olivier 3rd.

On the Virée d'Ikkiss (26km/1,400m D+), Noël Giordano took 3rd place after a fine comeback in the final kilometers, catching 4 runners in the process and winning the final Challenge classification in 7h09min08s.

His runners-up for the day and for the Challenge were Matis Leray in 7h51mins and Maxime Olivier in 9h57min05s.

In the women's race, there was a great duel between Moroccan Aziza Raji, 2nd in the Marathon des Sables 2024, and French runners Astrid Renet and Eva Blaise.

Despite Astrid Renet's best efforts to keep in touch with the Moroccan, she lost out on Day 1 by just under 4 minutes, suffering from her opponent's speed on the flat sections. Eva Blaise came 3rd in the Marathon.

Over the 26km, Astrid Renet did everything she could to close the gap and win the day's stage. The 2 women covered just over 20km together before Astrid took the lead with less than a kilometre to go. Although the young Frenchwoman was the first to arrive on the Oukaimeden plateau, it was in the last 100 metres that she was overtaken by the Moroccan, who was carried away by the euphoria of achieving the double.

The final ranking of the Challenge went to Aziza Raji in 10h02min31s ahead of Astrid Renet (10h05min43s) and Eva Blaise (10h51min29s). History will also remember the friendship forged beyond the sporting challenge, with Astrid Renet inviting Aziza Raji to come to her home near Chamonix to 'run in the mountains, when you want to'... that's also the spirit of the Atlas Quest.

REACTIONS AT THE FINISH



@photo By Sochhhhhh

Lambert Santelli - winner of the Atlas Toubkal Ultra Trail (105 km)

« It's the hardest race I've ever done, because of the altitude, the technical nature of the terrain and the fact that I'm semi-autonomous. It's like being at home in Corsica, it reminds me of the GR 20, that's what I like. You're on your own... Without assistance, it's something else, a real adventure. These mountains are majestic, and when you stand in front of the Toubkal, you feel very small. It's just amazing. »



@photo Thomas Giraud

Claire Bannwarth - winner of the Atlas Toubkal Ultra Trail (105 km)

« I loved this route, it's one of the toughest races I've done in a 100km format. The climbs are very steep, the descents are demanding, there are rocks everywhere and you always have to be careful. The scenery is just crazy and sharing the bivouac with the other riders is a really great experience. »



Noël Giordano - winner of the Challenge (42km + 26km)

« It's a real technical mountain, like my training trails in Corsica, with magnificent scenery. I was touched by the people I met in the villages and their smiles it was my first trip to Morocco. It was a wonderful adventure.»

@photo By Sochhhhhh



**Aziza Raji - vainqueur du Challenge
(42km + 26km)**

« I didn't know these mountains, it's really very technical, it was a tough race every day. I fought with Astrid, we ran a bit together, it was a good moment and I'm happy with this victory in my country. ».

@photo Fred Bousseau

The 2025 edition of Atlas Quest will take place from 2 to 5 October 2025.

ABOUT ATLAS QUEST

The Atlas Quest was created in 2009 and celebrated its 13th edition in October 2024. It was the brainchild of Cyrille Sismondini, who discovered the Atlas in 2007 and not only fell in love with this region but also dreamt of making it better known. The organisation actively contributes to the development of the region, working closely with local stakeholders. The aim of creating this event was to make it a different kind of sporting event, with a worldwide reputation, and to introduce trail runners from all over the world to a massif of rare beauty. A race that takes place at altitudes of 1,700 m and 3,700 m, on Moroccan paths where competitors share a sporting experience on the territory of those there.

A COMMITTED EVENT

As a major player in the Moroccan mountains, Atlas Quest has a duty to set an example in terms of sustainability. This responsible approach is part of a real desire to preserve its own environment, the home of the locals playground of the riders, the Toubkal National Park. Everything brought into the area is disposed of or recycled. An entire waste management system has been put in place including cleaning up the Oukaïmeden site, collecting and sorting waste at checkpoints along the route, and finally transporting it by mule to be recycled in Marrakech. In this way, at every stage, everyone involved is a link in the chain that is vital to the success of the project.

ATLAS QUEST BRINGS TOGETHER THE 3 PILLARS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Economic :

- 596 working days for local participants for a 4-day event
- 75% of the organisation's budget injected into the region

Social :

- 40 participations offered to local talent (race numbers / medical check-up / equipment)
- First aid training for mountain guides

Environmental :

- Exchange of empty bottles for full ones
- Reusable cutlery for meals
- Maintenance of damaged paths
- Heritage discovery and guided tours

COMPLETE RESULTS : <https://trail-atlasquest.com/live/>

News : <https://trail-atlasquest.com/fr/>

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