

A MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB

REVOLUTION takes a Panerai Luminor Submersible on an extreme adventure through the Moroccan wilderness.

BY HUGH FRANCIS ANDERSON
PHOTOGRAPHY JOHNNY FENN



It's early October and I'm in the middle of the Agafay Desert, Morocco.

The blistering sun beats down on my face, with its sole purpose to scald me, and the 40°C heat makes the air alarmingly heavy as it travels into my lungs. Sweat rolls from under my cap and splashes onto the dust beside my feet, and the landscape around looks more like Mars than Earth. I glance at the large 47mm Panerai Luminor Submersible on my wrist – I've been running for 30 minutes, yet it feels like forever. As this is a light warm-up for the inaugural IGO Adventures NWO50 Moroccan Challenge, a four-day quadrathlon through the Moroccan wilderness, I'm nervous to say the least.

Founded in 2015, IGO Adventures facilitates life-affirming journeys to some of the remotest corners of the world. The first event I participated in took place in Norway through the winter months, and wanting to push myself both physically and mentally again I opted for the polar-opposite in Morocco. "We aim to find stunning remote locations around the world which we believe should be experienced," says IGO founder Bobby Melville. "We are trying to create a series of annual global expedition challenges that cover every different type of terrain and environment on earth." It is only natural, then, that the watch on my wrist has a heritage that is deeply engrained in the world of adventure.

The Panerai Luminor Submersible 1950 3 Days Chrono Flyback Automatic Titanio has its very origins in the military field, and was originally developed for use by the special forces. The beginnings of this particular model trace back to 1956, when Panerai first created a submersible for the Egyptian navy. And now, in 2017, I'm putting the latest model to the test through the Moroccan wilderness, from the desert to the mountains.



We begin from the luxury desert camp of the Terre des Etoiles, where we have been acclimatising for two days. This oasis in the desert is a true haven in the wilderness, and certainly seems to settle my nerves as the start time draws closer and closer. The first stage sees us cycle some 50 kilometres through the desert to Lake Lalla Takerkoust in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. I unscrew the start/stop timing pin of the Luminor and depress the push button at 10 o'clock that controls the stopping and starting of the chronograph. (The push button at 8 o'clock operates the flyback function and zeros the chronograph hand after it has been stopped.) Although primarily designed for timing dives, it also works wonderfully to keep pace while cycling through the desert. Out here, timing must be calculated precisely. Work too hard too early and you risk heat exhaustion. So, the timing hands set to work, I watch as they tick slowly around. It's going to be a long day.

As I pound away at the pedals, I recall the words of George Bullard, adventurer and partner at IGO Adventures. "For me there are three things that inspire our journeys. It is important that there is an inherent and natural possibility for adventure. We try and find remote yet accessible parts of the planet that are not only connected but are also disconnected from the world so that we can truly



This page, top to bottom: Cycling 50kms through the 40° heat of the Agafay Desert; the Panerai Luminor Submersible 150 3 Days Chrono Flyback Automatic Titanio; Berber camp on the banks of Lake Lalla Takerkoust.

reconnect with nature. They are obviously novel and exciting destinations, places you might not ordinarily visit with your friends or family, unless you are on an adventure. The historical significance gives the expedition a degree of place and relevance that people can relate to." And, as I roll along the final descent to camp, my body plastered with desert dust, my muscles aching, and the Luminor meticulously keeping time, I understand George's words with profound clarity. To have cycled through the Agafay Desert, deep in the Moroccan hinterland, is an experience like no other; but there are still three days to go. Ouch!



RIVER DEEP

Settling into the traditional Berber camp on the first night, I'm both shattered and energised for the following day. As I somewhat haphazardly take a short camel ride along the banks of the lake, I mentally prepare for what's to come – kayaking around Lake Lalla Takerkoust, followed by a near-50-kilometre orienteer through the ever-steepening foothills.

As the sun rises, I quickly collect my paddle and life jacket and run towards the lake. Timing is everything today. The chronograph minutes and seconds hands are both positioned centrally on the dial and are distinguished from each other by using contrasting colours: the seconds hand is blue, while the minute hand is rhodium plated, moving instantaneously with a jump forwards every 60 seconds. This is key when out on the water; not wanting to lose stride, and having only a second to glance at my wrist as I paddle eagerly forward, the chronograph reading is both simple and clear, even through the hazy spray of the water. The rubber strap is of huge benefit here, too, and indeed throughout the entire event. Rubber may be ideal

for diving, but it's also brilliant for sweat and lake-water spray. Back on dry land, I collect my map and compass, and run off into the wilderness.

The cool early-morning temperature dissipates quickly and I'm soon struggling as the sun burns at my neck. Luckily, I find a few competitors along the way, and we vow to stick together. Such is the nature of an IGO adventure, it is far less a competition, but more about the participation itself – the camaraderie, the friendships, the willingness to help those in potential trouble. As participant Louise Rey commented: "Everyone was amazing, I was deeply in awe of the mental strength of everyone and how nobody, despite being tired and hungry, ever snapped at anyone and kept being supportive and cheerful, no matter what." It is in this vein that the second day ended after almost 10 hours. Our bodies felt broken and, had it not been for each other, our minds may have faltered, too. As the light faded and the temperature dropped, we settled down for a much-needed rest, with the soft whisper of an Arabic lute gently soothing us to sleep.



This page, clockwise from top right: Founder Bobby Melville helps replace the inner tube on a participant's mountain bike; George Bullard gives a participant a helping hand; Hugh Francis Anderson and participants cross the finish line on Day Two; Kayaking stage on Lake Lalla Takerkoust; Hugh enjoys a short camel ride around Lake Lalla Takerkoust; Hugh and participant William Hadman sprint for the finish line.



This page, clockwise from top: Start line of Day Three and 50kms through the Atlas Mountains; participant and overall winner Mark Hart at the finish line on Day Three; Hugh Francis Anderson and William Hadman embrace at the finish line; George Bullard warming up before the start; Hugh at the end of Day Three.

MOUNTAIN HIGH

Howling hounds and crowing cockerels woke me early on the penultimate day. I forced my eyes open; my body needed more rest. Before long we were back on our mountain bikes again, this time to cycle up into the Atlas Mountains themselves. Within minutes my legs began to cramp and I knew that it was going to be a painful day. And painful it was. With numerous mechanical problems along the route, which set me back almost an hour, my body was ready to give up, and my mind almost did, too. It was only the Panerai on my wrist that kept me in check.

Man may struggle in the heat and dirt, but the Luminor's robust construction keeps it precise throughout. The P.9100 calibre within the Luminor Submersible 1950 was in fact the first automatic chronograph calibre developed and made in the Panerai *manufacture* in Neuchâtel. Many details bear witness to its sophisticated construction: the vertical clutch, the column wheel, the two spring barrels connected in series which guarantee a power reserve of three days, the oscillating weight, which winds the watch as it moves in both directions, and the variable inertia balance which oscillates at 28,800 vibrations per hour. It may be 40°C outside, battling knocks, penetrating sun and an endless barrage of sand and dirt, yet that movement within continues unwaveringly.

I crashed through the finish line on the third day, my body a mess of lactic acid and heat exhaustion. As I lay in the dirt, at 1,500 metres above sea-level on a plateau deep in the Atlas Mountains, I questioned why I chose to do this event, why I chose to put myself in a position where my body could, quite literally, give up. Yet I already knew the answer, and it was a profound moment. With each deep, uncontrollable inhalation, I knew that I had achieved something; to push oneself to the extreme is one of the most life-affirming sensations I have experienced.





This spread, clockwise from top left: Bobby Melville talks to a local as he waits for participants at a checkpoint; Berber camp on Day Two in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains; the Panerai Luminor Submersible basks in the sun; participants enjoy a traditional Moroccan dance on the final evening; warming by the fire after four days in the Moroccan wilderness.

I'm reminded of Panerai's very foundations in the extreme, a notion that has become lost in time. It was on the eve of the Second World War that the original Panerai Radiomir (the younger brother of the Luminor) first came into existence, to be built specifically for the First Submarine Group Command of the Royal Italian Navy. This model, featuring a 47mm, cushion-shaped case, and a flat, wide bezel, is as apparent today as it was in the late-1930s. It strikes me that the Luminor on my wrist is a piece of military heritage in its own right. It was built for war, it was built for hardship, and it was built to last.

After an enormous portion of freeze-dried army rations and a quick check over by the physio and the doctor, I relaxed with my comrades, breathing in the vastness of the mountains around. Before long I headed to bed, knowing that only one event remained – a long scramble to Oukaimeden, Africa's highest ski resort, some 2,600 metres above sea-level.

When I awoke, the sun lay teasingly on the peak of Jbel Toubkal, the highest summit in the Atlas Mountains. The air was fresh, and the cool mountain breeze blustered across the plateau. I hadn't expected it to be so cold. With a renewed energy, I set off on the long climb, and as I tracked through a gorge, where vines covered the bare stone walls, where water flowed, flowers blossomed and grass grew, I was taken aback at how the scenery had changed. Just two days ago, I was in the arid desert, with nothing but sand, dirt and the unrelenting sun, yet now

I was in an almost jungle-like fantasia, heading in the direction of a ski resort. "Is this really Morocco?"

I kept thinking. I checked the Luminor, one-hour down. Soon the gorge turned to loose mountain rock, and the scramble began. Rocks slid uneasily beneath my feet, and the coolness of the morning all but vanished. I checked my wrist again, two hours down. Ahead I saw the IGO flags some 500 metres away, and I pushed through the muscle burn to reach the peak, before running the short distance through the town and across a grass-filled plateau to the finish line. I depressed the push button on the Luminor, just over 3 hours it read. Those already through embraced me, and we sighed in relief at the completion of this challenge. As the other competitors crossed the line, we whooped and hollered in support. The energy was utterly electric.

As the sun set on our final night, we corralled around the fire in total bliss. The adventure was both life-affirming and wonderfully charming. This inaugural Moroccan challenge was also the ideal testing ground to determine the toughness of a timepiece. At a time when adventure and durability are at an all-time high in the horological world, it is only by taking a fine timepiece into the wilderness and punishing it that you begin to understand its true ability. The Panerai Luminor Submersible is one such tried-and-tested timepiece. Perhaps it will remain on the wrists of suave city-folk, or deep underwater, but to know it can handle the extremes of the wild is valuable to know. ★

