

Al Katrun (Libya) – Madama (Niger)

Dates: October 2004

Vehicle: Nissan Patrol 2.8D

Total km: 388

Description: This piste is used by smugglers and convoys of trucks filled up with sub-Saharan emigrants to try their luck in Libya and possibly Europe. The ambiance of Al Katrun reflects these activities and there are reports of robberies on the outskirts of the village. Thus, some discretion should be used when talking about your destination and whereabouts. Mohammed Tager of the Wadi Alhikma agency, runs a camping ground in the old Italian fort in a small hill opposite to the police headquarters. He organizes the paperwork efficiently for the passports (10LD) and car (5LD), voyages through the area and also arranges guides in your car (800LD) or in another car (1200LD) to Niger or Chad. Nevertheless, and at least for Libya, there is no need for a guide as the piste is mostly clearly visible. The Libyan checkpoints can be a hassle, especially at km 126 and 249. In the later, Libyans inspect the Mercedes trucks filled with emigrants, thus confusion and bribery are common.

This piste runs about 60km west of the main piste marked in the 500.000K Russian F-33A (Tummo) map. The piste runs mostly south and the first 180km are very sandy. Afterwards and until km 249 the piste crosses several plateaux alternated with floodplains and canyons. From this waypoint until Madama, the piste is firm and fast, crossing plains with the Tummu and Mangueni escarpments clearly visible to the east and west, respectively.

The Libyans are building a paved road from Al Katrun to Tummu, and they have started the construction from Tummu, thus the description until km 293 will be obsolete in the future.

Route findings and marks: Until km 22 there are lots of tracks, thus just head for the next waypoint zigzagging between the palm trees. Afterwards, the piste is clearly visible all the way to Madama. Although marks are scarce, there are a few tires and small concrete blocks after Tummu. In the plateaux areas, the piste tends to diverge into multiple tracks.

Fuel: Al Katrun and Tajarhi, although the later might be irregular. If needed, Libyans might sell expensive fuel at the checkpoints. A fuel station is being built in Tummu.

Water: Al Katrun and Tajarhi. There are wells and reservoirs in the Libyan checkpoints and at Madama.

Traffic: Until the Libyan checkpoint at km 274, traffic is mostly irregular. In one of the previous checkpoints, Libyans claimed that they had never seen tourists using this piste. After this checkpoint, there are plenty of trucks circulating.

Driving: The first 22km were made zigzagging through a dune field with palm trees. Afterwards the piste is firm until the Libyan checkpoint at km 79. Before arriving to the checkpoint it is advisable to deflate tires and use low range if you are in an overloaded vehicle. From this checkpoint until the checkpoint at km 126 the piste is flat but very sandy. If in an overloaded vehicle, low range will be needed and it is best to avoid the hottest hours of the day. After the checkpoint, the piste is more firm but there are several patches of soft sand until km 182. Afterwards, the piste is firm and with several rocky areas, thus it is best to reinflate the tires. After km 249, the piste is firm and fast with occasional patches of soft sand.

Suggested duration: Depending on the hassle of the Libyan checkpoints, this piste can be done in a long day of driving. If an overnight is needed, then the most scenic part is between km 228 and 233.



km	Latitude - degrees	Latitude - minutes	Longitude - degrees	Longitude - minutes	Description
0	24	53.3	14	31.4	Wadi Alhikma agency. Old Italian Fort. Head south, through the main road
10	24	48.9	14	30.1	Exit of dump area, cross dune field heading SE
22	24	43.4	14	32.7	Piste well marked
48	24	30.8	14	27.5	Car wreck. Head SW
67	24	23.1	14	20.5	Point in piste
76	24	20.0	14	16.3	Entering Tajarhi. Fuel in village centre
79	24	19.1	14	15.4	Libyan checkpoint in extremely sandy area. Deflate tires before reaching the checkpoint
108	24	4.4	14	12.4	Point in piste. Very soft sand, slow going
126	23	56.0	14	7.9	Libyan checkpoint. Piste less sandier, but keep tyres deflated
182	23	27.7	14	0.6	Piste firm with occasional patches of soft sand. In a km piste ascends into a plateau. Reinflate tires
195	23	23.5	13	55.3	Piste firm over rocky plateaux. Piste diverges into multiple tracks, head SW
205	23	19.4	13	52.1	Exit of rocky area into plain. Occasional patches of soft sand. Heading SW
213	23	16.0	13	49.0	Tyre mark. Fast piste over rocky plateaux
224	23	10.3	13	47.5	Heading S over rocky plateaux
228	23	8.4	13	48.1	Exit of plateaux into dry floodplain followed by an ascending canyon
233	23	5.8	13	48.9	Stick cairn. Exit of canyon heading SE-S
242	23	1.8	13	52.0	Exit of floodplain by a small rock and sandy pass. Terrain rocky with patches of soft sand. Do not deflate tyres, use 4WD

249	22	58.6	13	53.8	Exit of rock and sandy area into firm and fast plain
259	22	54.3	13	56.3	Two small hills. Head SE-S
274	22	47.7	14	1.3	Libyan checkpoint. Mercedes trucks with emigrants are checked at this point
293	22	39.1	14	5.4	Tummu. Libyan checkpoint. End of paved road coming from Al Katrun. Exit checkpoint heading South through firm and fast piste
314	22	30.3	14	1.0	Fast and firm piste heading SW
343	22	16.1	13	53.5	Small concrete cube with mark 61. Piste continues firm with occasional patches of soft sand. Head SW
373	22	4.3	13	42.4	Piste continues firm with occasional patches of soft sand. Head SW
388	21	56.8	13	38.8	Madama. Military fort. Mercedes trucks with emigrants are checked at this point