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bncdoc.id	AT3
bncdoc.author	Howard, Geoffrey
bncdoc.year	1990
bncdoc.title	Wheelbarrow across the Sahara.
bncdoc.info	Wheelbarrow across the Sahara. Sample containing about 39748 words from a book (domain: leisure)
Text availability	Worldwide rights cleared
Publication date	1985-1993
Text type	Written books and periodicals
David Lee's classification	W_misc

<1005/c>	' he added. 'I know,' I said. 'It should be filling the skyline. The other map shows the piste dipping south through a village. No sign of that either.' 'Nothing much we can do, except bash on,' he said. 'How's the craps, Geoff?' Mick chipped in. 'About the same.' 'I've got 'em,' he added, 'and Paddy was sick during the night.' 'Well, there's plenty of pills in the Land Rover.' 'I'm OK now, thanks,' said Paddy. 'We'll push off and see you in a couple of hours.' Ten minutes later the escarpment was at my feet. I was not at the bottom of a cliff but at the top, looking down across another dusty plain four hundred feet below. It stretched for miles and became lost in blue haze and mirage lakes. The symbol for the escarpment on the map was as small as a greenfly and easy to misinterpret but we would have to be more careful in future. The track switchbacked and twisted down the escarpment to the valley below. I ran, letting the wheelbarrow have its rein. It was a clattering, perilous descent, during which the wheel rim became seriously loosened, and the kit thrown into a jumble. Salt, oats and water-containers lost their lids and disgorged their contents among my clothes and papers. To add to my injuries that day, Mick was in a sombre mood - Norwich City had been beaten by York. Next morning it was unusually still and warm, with a light covering of cloud. The piste was crossed now and then by gullies of sand and ran along the foot of the escarpment, which towered several hundred feet above it to the left. Provided I could hit the patches of sand quickly enough and keep the momentum, the wheel would skate across. I charged at them, yelping encouragement to the wheelbarrow, and patting it when it had done well. The stillness at dawn had been but a prelude. Mid-morning, we were overrun by a storm. The wind, like a deluge of muddy water, lashed grit and small stones from the cliff above. I went on, protected by goggles, smog-mask, gloves and thick clothing. I was making heavy weather of it but dared not rest for the cold. We were under the shadow of flying grit, the sun no more than an aura of gold. At one o'clock, without warning, the wind dropped, dust settled, and I was under a pleasant sky.
<div data-bbox="240 752 319 840"> </div> <p>Key:</p> <p>Footprint</p> <p>ConEn1</p> <p>Footprint</p> <p>ConEn2</p> <p>Footprint</p> <p>ConEn3</p>	<p>The driver of a passenger lorry</p> <p>stopped to give me some bread and carrots. In return, I gave him one of twelve tiny mouth-organs that Hohner had given me. He puffed at it, producing not a discernible tune but a catchy rhythm, while attempting a dance not unlike the Irish clog variety. Ten or more passengers - all men, some in western dress and others in robes - gathered round singing and clapping. I told them I was late, picked up the shafts and left them to it. Half an hour later, I was in a forest eating the bread they had given me. Stone pillars, a yard thick, lay scattered and broken, like fallen Greek columns. The prehistoric trees looked as if they had been felled the day before, but they were as sterile as hot bricks from a kiln and probably one hundred and thirty million years old. I sat on a log among the shadows of creatures now extinct and others long since departed for pasture in the south. The next day took us past the quarter-way mark, and brought us within seven miles of In Salah. From camp we could see the silhouette of its palm-trees, framed by dunes on either side, which, as daylight faded, were decorated with pin-points of silver light. Mick shouted above</p>

	<p>the noise of the petrol stove. 'Look at that view! Roll on In Sha-la-la. I wish I was in those bars tonight.' I could not wait to leave this north-easterly dog-leg either: no more walking into the wind; no sand for five hundred miles. Instead, the rocky tourist route to our half-way mark, Tamanrasset - the end of backwater villages, and, I hoped, of the long silence from home. The next morning, 21 January, the tent was wet with dew, the first time for weeks. I had worked until one in the morning, finishing reports and letters, writing a shopping list, and packing films and tapes. It had blown a gale in the early hours and I had been up with my torch at three o'clock to attend to the guy-ropes and check that the washing was still on the line: it was, but it had become red with dust. I had not slept much and was up before dawn. After drinking a mug of tea, I packed away the tent and set off, watching the trees float nearer as the pale sun thawed the earth. As trite as it sounds, I had forgotten what greenness was until I saw those palms. The desert had been sterile, free from odours, except my own, and void of sounds, except those of the wind and the</p>
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