

The Salt Road by Jane Johnson.  
Viking 2010.

Jane Johnson has written one previous novel, *The Tenth Gift*, set like *The Salt Road* in two time periods and countries, one of which is Morocco. While researching her first book in North Africa, Jane met her Berber husband, and it is clear from *The Salt Road* that her love for him extends to his country in abundant measure.

The two main protagonists of *The Salt Road* are women, an Englishwoman called Isabelle and a nomad called Mariata. As the result of finding an amulet among his possessions after the death of her father, and feeling somewhat out of sorts with her life in London, Isabelle decides to take a holiday in Morocco with her friend Eve; it is a trip, which is to change her life.

Mariata is a courageous, determined and beautiful woman of fine lineage who refuses to be bound by the constraints of Berber society, particularly those where decisions about her own life are made by others.

The journey that each undertakes for very different reasons is to bring them together in a powerful and moving way.

Jane Johnson's evocation of the desert in all its terrible majesty is as good as it gets, and it is very easy for the reader to feel present as the events of the book unfold.

This is the best kind of engaging story telling, lyrical, evocative and satisfying, and it marks Jane Johnson as a real talent to watch.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh