

IFMR Cultural Tour of Northern Spain 12/24 September 1999



The Intrepid Travellers

Neil and Maggie Hardwick	RC Bewdley
Neville and Jean Riley	RC Meriden
Tony and Ann Rawlings	RC Avolon
David and Davina Robertson	RC Linlithgow
Alan and Margaret Cooper	RC Carmarthen
Brian and Sylvia James	RC Carmarthen
Geoff and Diana Morriss	RC Carmarthen
Jeff and Gareth Lewis	RC Carmarthen Tywi
Jeff Watkins	RC Bath West
Michael Watkins	

The Car

Brians' bike broke down the day before departure! Undaunted he followed the bikes in a hired car.

Sunday 12 September

Our first test - - -to all assemble at the Travel Inn in Plymouth! Difficult, but we all manage it! First of many convivial evenings. Early night, we are up at dawn!

Monday 13 September

Short ride to ferry. Then the usual pantomime of lashing bikes to railings; only to discover that you then cannot open your panniers! Regulation huge breakfast once the luggage is stowed in the claustrophobic cabins. Was that a wise move? - - - various members are soon affected by the dreaded mal de mer. Pills are distributed. Order is soon restored; most are able to assemble at dinner time. And so, to bed.

Tuesday 14 September

We arrive in Spain! Is it hot and sunny? - - no it is not!

We are soon off the ferry and away; all except Bike-less Brian who is bogged down with red tape in his dealings with the car-hire firm. (And then by his inability to find the road out of Santander!) We, fortunately, have Coops to lead us speedily on our way. We have opted for a scenic route in the foothills of the Picos de Europa. Europa? Eureka! - - were there ever so many hair-pin bends? Spectacular scenery as we dash through a breath-taking gorge. I soon long for a straight road as a relief from the bends - -it never came!

Lovely old hotel - - the road outside is made of polished granite slabs; thank heavens it's not wet! We had booked a meal in the hotel on this, our first night in Spain. In the event, at 2100hrs we are marched away through the town to a bar/restaurant where we eat and drink well. All the expatriates have been briefed to act as interpreters

Wednesday 15 September

Wonderful coastal scenery. The roads are good and there is little traffic .But lots of bends! Tonight, we will be staying in Santiago de Compostela. The pilgrimage is decidedly easier on a bike rather than on foot. However, most pilgrims seem to arrive by coach! Our hotel turns out to be part of a monastery in the centre of the town. Easy walking to all the sites. After dinner we are entertained by a troupe of wandering minstrels - - a real bonus!

Thursday 16 September

Gentle riding in the morning - - -albeit a bit wet. And the usual bends! Into the hills in the afternoon for a spectacular ride down to Puebla de Sanabria where we stay at a Parador. Here we meet up with David Rowse; a past president and honorary member of the Carmarthen club. Good meal and lots of reminiscing! Some of the group decide to do a dash to Braganza in Portugal. They have a very wet ride back. Not best pleased to hear that we have decided to go there the following morning!

Friday 17 September

As planned, a quick detour to "do" Portugal. The usual winding road! We are not impressed with Braganza, but we do have a pleasant coffee break in a small cafe where the waitress speaks French. (Unlike our experiences on the Eastern European Tour; no one here speaks English!) A fruitless search for "stickers" to prove that we had been to Portugal!

Suddenly we arrive at a plain - - presumably where the rain mainly falls. But not today! The roads are as straight as a die and some of our sporty riders achieve unheard-of speeds. A modern hotel in Salamanca where we meet up with David and Valerie Rowse again.

Saturday 18 September

An R and R day! Rest and recuperation. Presumably the Watkins brothers are bored with our company - - they head for home! The rest head for Salamanca. We do manage to have coffee in the square, but then it clouds over. The forecast was for temperatures of 25C. In the event it was 15C and windy. Souvenir Salamanca sweatshirts have to be purchased! More cathedrals and museums.

Sunday 19 September

Back on the road and heading south. Neil and Maggie have to leave to pack their daughter off to college. The rest visit the amazing walled town of Avila. The steep, cobbled streets prove quite a handful in the rain! Then back to the hills again as we cross the Sierra Grado's on our way to Toledo. Our hotel was formerly the archbishops' summer palace; our balconied rooms have spectacular views of the city. A 20minute walk into the town centre for sightseeing and food keeps us fit - - especially the return!

Monday 20 September

Another R and R day. We spend the day exploring this amazing place. Our trip had, somewhat tongue-in-cheek been styled " A cultural tour" - - but we certainly had our fill this day! One of the largest cathedrals in Christendom, the Alcazar, and many fascinating museums. Plus, the 20-minute walk back - - - we slept well this night!

Tuesday 21 September

Today we retrace our steps as far as San Martin de Valdeiglesias and then head up scenic roads towards Segovia. We are not prepared for the monastery at El Escorial - - it is vast! Later we learn that it incorporated a royal palace! Lunch at the ski resort at Puerto de Navacerrada; up in the clouds. Then into Segovia in good time to explore the city and its famous Roman aqueduct. Our hotel is right in the centre of town, so not too much walking. Just as well for northern travellers who discover that the combination of Brufen and brandy is not really the best treatment for a stomach upset!

Wednesday 22 September

Heading north along minor roads towards Burgos. We cross a plain, will it rain? Into the city in time for lunch. This is one cathedral we cannot visit; it is being cleaned and restored! Back on the plain it does rain - - - with a vengeance! Thunder and lightning - - - we get very wet. Undaunted, we push on. Our hotel is in a spectacular limestone gorge; lots of eagles and vultures!

Thursday 23 September

Isolated spot - - - but who has written IFMR in lipstick on the sign post?

An amazing ride back to the coast. Up and out of the gorge onto a barren plain, then down through alpine-like countryside into a coastal plain. All in a couple of hours riding! We have allowed plenty of time and so decide to have a leisurely lunch at El Astilero. Only when we arrive in Santander, not having seen said lunch spot, do we realise that El Astilero is the name of a region!!

There is no justice in this world - - - this, our hottest day in Spain is spent waiting for the Ferry. (And for some of us, getting lost!)

Friday 24 September

Is spent on the ferry. Weather warm, and all the bumpy bits were during the night. Pills help! Last night is spent in Plymouth. By now usual convivial evening!

Saturday 25 September

Disperse. Home again, home again, jiggedy jig.

Random Jottings

☒ The only technical hitch on the entire trip was Neil's' bike refusing to start on top of a mountain pass. Moral! - - -if you must fit sophisticated immobilisers; make sure you carry a spare battery for your key-ring! (It's amazing what can be achieved with strips of Coke tin and a radio battery!)

☒ Coops' penchant for tapas, tripe, guts, gizzards and various other foodstuffs earn him the sobriquet "Iron Guts".

☒ It has been suggested that on future Morriss/Coops tours a packing and kit-list be provided. The management is working on this. However, in the meantime interested riders are recommended to consult either Steve and Angela Pritchard who carried all their luggage for the "Anglian Amble" (or was it the Kent Kanter – Ed) plus two weeks camping in France in their panniers and top-box :or Jeff and Gareth who managed ten days in Spain with only fifteen pairs of pants and socks. Each!

☒ IFMR in lipstick? Kilroy was here (And so were the Hardwicks!)

☒ Grateful thanks to Coops who acted as lead rider for the whole trip; and despite his best efforts, managed to lose no one!