

## Ulysses GB Reccie to Picos De Europa May 2015 from the Pillion.

### Day 1. Meeting at **Portsmouth** for the **Brittany overnight ferry to Santander.**

None of us had ridden in the Picos before although Barry and I had visited by car some 35 years ago. So long as people realised that this was a 'reccie' we were happy that eleven of us signed up for this trip, coming from as far apart as Liverpool, Norfolk, Cornwall, the Cotswolds and Banbury and Nottingham and New Mills. Richard and Sharon from Cornwall took the shorter route from Plymouth to Santander (3 hour trip), but the ferry went some days earlier. The rest of us set off with some trepidation as very strong winds were forecast. Les's bike was blown over but he was determined not to miss the ferry or the trip and was prescribed rest and pain killers for his bruised leg. By the time most of the group met at The Big Wheel Café at the Pier the wind was increasing and the café was about to close. The owner kindly stayed open an extra half an hour to let us eat.



Fortunately we were let on the boat early. It should have left at about 5pm and arrived by 5/6 pm the next day. The departure was already delayed owing to the strong winds, which threatened to reach gale force 6-8. In fact I believe it reached 9 with high seas! The bikes were packed in with double mounts holding the bikes. We started off in the bar and enjoyed the benefits of a French boat, French tarts, and food and wine.

Entertainment was laid on, singers, variety acts, bingo and a jazz band. Pete had recommended the A la carte meals but we felt we may not do it justice with the storm and would wait until the return journey. The snack bar was fine. The journey was great for the group to catch up or get to know each other and talk about the riding routes. The alternative route to Spain could be 2 nights riding and stopping over en route through France and arriving shattered.

The winds increased, they reached 125 kilometres an hour and the seas were spraying high up on the ship. This was worse as we rounded Northern France and there were frequent banging sounds as the ship met the big waves. I eventually left the group in the bar as I went to my cabin having had a glass of wine, travel sickness pills and kept my sea bands on. This worked a treat as I slept for 10 hours. I also appreciated Pete's tip of having a portable kettle and tea bags, and milk was supplied on board.

### Day 2. **Still on the boat.**

In the morning some still felt queezy or lacked sleep but the winds had gone down. The Bay of Biscay was relatively like a mill pond and some even spotted dolphins. You could even walk around and sun bathe on the deck. We enjoyed our breakfast and the on board

movies. The cabaret came back on, then lunch and we prepared ourselves to disembark for 6:30pm.

Optimistically we freed our bikes and chatted to other bikers ready to disembark. Then came the bad news. The crew said we would be further delayed and suggested we went back upstairs. The bow doors would not open. They attempted a repair that failed and the solution was to turn the boat round and reverse all the vehicles up the ramp. This would take some time. After 10:30 Pm the bikes had to be secured again and we went back upstairs. The crew also notified our hotel of our late arrival. Naturally the bikes were last off as they had to clear the deck above and, reversing all those caravans and trailers must have been quite daunting.



Eventually we drove up the steep ramp into the unknown and Barry lead the group in darkness to the hotel with an updated sat nav. Others followed closely. We arrived at about 2 :45 am and met virtually no traffic on the motorway. Richard and Sharon were waiting on their balcony to greet us. We went straight to bed and it's as well we had lunch on the ferry. We had missed our first night, sampling the siderias and food of Northern Spain. Brittany Ferries later reimbursed some of the fare for the delay.

### **Day 3. Ride to Covadonga and lakes and Cangas di Onis.**



Despite the late arrival and lack of sleep our bikers were keen to 'go' and explore the Picos. This chain of mountains is 20 KM inland from the coast is 'like an extension of the Pyrennees parallel to the North coast of Spain'. I believe the mountains are part caused by the African plate pushing up mountains of limestone that once formed part of a sea. There's also a bit of glaciation and river erosion thrown in which makes the scenery stunning. The guides

describe them as part of the Cantabrian mountains consisting of three massifs, Central and Eastern and Western. The deep Cares Gorge divides the Central and Western parts. This area still has wild animals 'wolves and bears' and groups of shepherds who move up from the valleys in the summer with their sheep, goats, cows and occasional pigs.

For our first day we chose to do one of the shorter routes up to Covadonga and Covadonga lakes. We were into the mountains almost immediately and all the hassle of the journey dissipated as we gloried in the sunshine and the magnificent scenery and good empty roads.



Richard and Sharon had already spent two days in the Picos and were very happy to retrace some roads they had already reccied as the rides were so good. We went through the lower routes with apple trees and cider making premises. We soon came across the limestone hillsides and lovely windy roads.

We had a short break at Cordodovanga, where famously King Pelayo achieved the first major defeat of the Moors and began the reconquest of Spain. Unfortunately the museum was only in Spanish so we left this out but the Cathedral was lovely to see.

Despite yesterday's tiredness the group were keen to do more and the weather and rides were so superb so we went up to the lakes and enjoyed a snack a drink and sunshine.



Onwards we met more hair pins and lovely views including the sea and sheep with bells on. Simply stunning roads and lots of lovely bends. We also encountered shepherds escorting their cows. We finished our day going to Canga di Onis where there is a Roman bridge and a good café. More French style tarts and ice creams!



On the way back we could not resist taking in the sea at Ribadesella. Back to the Hotel Montemar we had a chance to sample the delights of the bar and were very impressed by our friendly barman Augustin who served up generous Spanish gin, beers and tea but no cider.

In the evening we set out to discover Llanes, a nice spot on the sea shore, and we started out sampling the ciders, sat round the harbour and practised shaking up the bottle and pouring into the glass from above. Richard and Sharon were our British cider experts and others including Andy, Martin and Bob were keen to learn. The cider was not as sweet as British ciders and some of us preferred to stick with the wines. We soon found a favourite cider bar that we started out in every night and also served tapas. Some tried out their pouring machinery too.

Then we were ready to eat. Trip adviser recommended The Siete Puertas restaurant which did not disappoint. We enjoyed the food which was very reasonable, tasty with wine thrown in. Huge grilled prawns. We loved our second waiter Mingo who got the order right and made no notes. We booked a table there for our last night too and everyone went for the prawns. Excellent value and atmosphere. We will be back.



Back at the hotel the Spanish measures continued and some of us enjoyed a refreshing cup of tea. A great day and a great night.

#### **Day 4 The Eastern Massif including Sotres and Treviso**



Having done the West we had to explore the Eastern section. Some wanted a rest or a leisurely day on the beach. In fact sea mists hung along the coast for most of the day but through the Gorges inland the weather was gorgeous.

We soon got into the Cares Gorge which was very exciting and on towards Sotres and Tresviso. We had a nice stop at the Pena Castil bar/hotel.

We followed a narrow but empty trail along to Tresviso. What a lovely spot to walk and watch a very remote world. Another place to return to.

#### **Day 5. The all day circular route round the middle section of the Picos that would take in Potes and included the Hermida Gorge and Posada de Valdeon.**

Everyone was up for more and an early start. Another glorious day as we first took the coastal motorway to our road through the mountain gorges.



We stopped for a break at Potes for a rest and decide whether the party wanted to continue. There was no question. With such glorious riding we had to feast ourselves with the scenery.

The road wound from the Alpine pastures up to the high mountains. There were wild daffodils in parts. We stopped at for another break and to see the views from the hairpins and the eagles above.

After empty winding roads we reached our destination near the snow line. The view point near Posada de Valdeon.



We then went on to Posada de Valdeon which we had visited over thirty years ago. A lovely spot still unspoiled where we enjoyed a rest and a doorstep sandwich.

A great location and my Spanish has now increased to spectabile, Maravilloso, espeldido, prodigio, maravilla, fantastico, Who says that we aren't fluent!

Then back to our favourite sideria in the evening. Some sampled another Llanes restaurant, Piratas de Sablon, again with gusto. This time sea food, prawn paella, crab paella and a selection of numerous crustaceans including barnacle shells, prawns, spider crab and lobster! A very exotic evening!



## Day 6. Along the coast

Some wanted to explore the coast and the seaside in a more leisurely way and took in various beaches and resorts. Barry and Brenda and Pete and Mim went to explore another part further into the Picos and the Cantabrian mountains to Fuente De where they have a cable car. This was yet another brilliant days riding and scenery.



We stopped briefly at Fuente De but plan to go up the car for the views next time. It was getting very hot and it was 31 degrees in the canyon on the way back and the beaches called. We went back to Llanes for our last meeting in the sunshine at the hotel bar followed by a sideria and ending up at our favourite Siete Puertas restaurant for our last night meal.

## Conclusion

The main cost was the overnight ferry and transporting the bikes, plus petrol. Eating out and drinking in Spain was very good value and cheap. Our Merseyside members did 1032 miles there and back, the main journeys being in UK. So the long ferry journey was worth it, to reach such spectacular roads that were relatively traffic free. Sadly it was time to go home. The boat trip was considerably less stressful the second time and we said our farewells but I would be very surprised if there is not demand for another trip next year!

## Comments from group members on the Forum included

A wonderful trip. We are already thinking about a return.

A wonderful trip. One of the best.

What a memorable week.

A magnificent trip of a lifetime

A great week. The company, location, rides, food, cider and unplanned excursions meant that it was a trip to remember.

What an excellent reccie!

If it's first come first serve I know 11 people at least who would put their name down.

We may need to split groups or restrict numbers to make this trip work so well in future, if and when we do it again. Many thanks to all who made it possible and for such a great week. We will be back!

**Mrs Vanamonde 2015**