

CENTRAL SPAIN AND THE PYRENEES

April 2019

It took a good book to get me through the 24-hour ferry sailing from Portsmouth but fortunately Doug Scott's "Up and About" is a compelling read. The late arrival in Santander meant that I'd chosen to stay overnight before heading into the Picos de Europa the following morning.

I really enjoyed the Cantabrian cocina and vino in the hotel restaurant but the piano player was so bad that I tipped him to stop playing until I'd finished eating.

The ride up through the Picos was really enjoyable but nowhere near long enough and I was soon out on the plains heading for my next overnight stop. Avila was a real find, reminiscent of Carcassonne but smaller with burgeoning perimeter walls. Unlike Carcassonne I was able to ride into the Citadel to the Parador before taking an evening walk through the narrow streets and 16th century architecture.

Another morning's ride beckoned up into the Gredos mountains, west of Madrid. I can thoroughly recommend the N502 over the Puerto del Pico. By early afternoon I was back down on the plains, crossing La Mancha in Don Quixote windmill country, before arriving in Cuenca and the familiar cliff hanging old town.

Leaving Cuenca the two National Parks, east of Madrid, offered great roads, close up sightings of vultures and more medieval walled towns. I was essentially reversing a route that I'd followed two years ago, minus Andalucía, before heading north past Zaragoza into the Pyrenees.

I spent four days in the mountains, including two nights in France and although the high passes were closed there was still plenty to navigate. My journey back into Spain took me over the Col du Somport and high snow fields, before descending into warmer climes and my hotel, right in the centre of Pamplona.

Fortunately, there were no bulls running during my visit but it was Good Friday, so the locals put on a spectacle, parading statues from the cathedral around the streets, accompanied by brass bands and colourfully dressed individuals. Once the throngs had cleared I visited the highly recommended tapas bars, passing on an evening meal.

Read more overleaf...



Contact Gordon

Email gordon@linbeck.co.uk for a chat or advice on your next motorcycle adventure.

CENTRAL SPAIN AND THE PYRENEES (cont.)

My final days riding, heading back to Santander, was through country I'd not explored before, so I employed the services of a Michelin map and roads marked with green lines alongside them. I wasn't disappointed.

At first I was in open landscapes but that soon changed to limestone hills and the Cantabrian coastal mountains. I spent hours riding along river valleys and enclosed gorges, before descending down to Santander, bathed in sunshine. I'd taken delivery of a new 1250 GS Rallye just three weeks earlier and appreciated the extra power.

All the time I was in the mountains I really enjoyed the riding but the ride between the Picos and the Gredos, across La Mancha and from Zaragoza to the Pyrenees did nothing for me. In recent years Spain has attempted to build itself out of recession by constructing new roads, sadly these rather sanitised the journey at times. So, beware and make sure that you select the older roads to travel along when venturing down to Spain.



Cantabria on the Final Day



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