

## Wintering in Spain 2018-2019

This article was written as a series of e-mails to our friends at home and in particular, our Pilates group.

As such it was never intended as a travel blog, just us chattering to a few chums who were interested as to what we were doing when we leave them every year for three months to England's grey, cold and wet winters, while we skip off to sunnier, 'warmer climes'. So making the usual promises 'to write home', we did just that in our somewhat chatty style. Some remarks are clearly addressed to our Pilates Group. Others to those who know us well, including what Lin describes as "Wendy's penchant for wanting to walk up every peak she sees when she looks out the window in the morning".

As such, it is therefore not always particularly coherent to outsiders, with our interest in the Spanish Civil War, oblique literary references, and our desire to spend most of our time up mountains or just walking. However, as a response to Nicks call at the last AGM for new blogs, we thought someone might be interested in our informal, rambling way of spending time travelling through Spain, mostly staying in free Aires and 'wild camping' places. Finally we decided to send it in as we did actually meet other 'Murvi's' too!

We usually do have a 'sort of route' planned ...vaguely, but this year we had to spend 3 unplanned weeks around the Marbella area while Lin went back and forth to the ophthalmologist. It is thus not quite our usual pattern and had it not been for eyesight worries we would have gone on to Portugal. For those interested, we have added a list of most of the places we stayed at, almost in the order we stayed at them, just in case someone might like to visit them.

Lin Powell, Wendy Palmer, Lola and Gracie



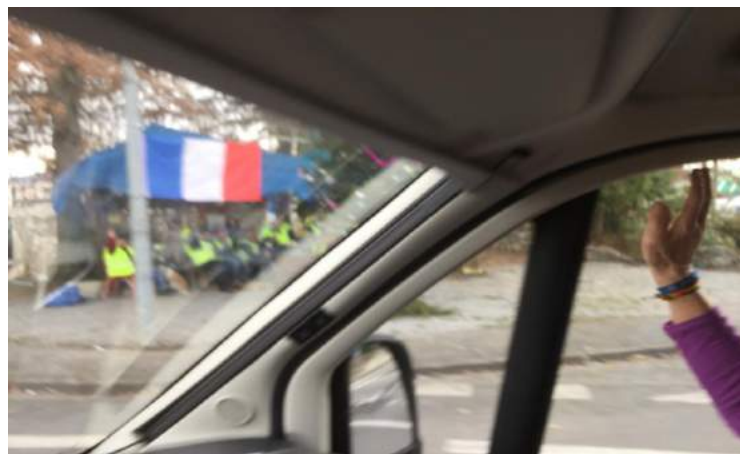
Winter break time has come around again so off to warmer climes for us. Plans to meander through France visiting the odd Christmas market on the way have been abandoned with the news that France is still in Revolution mood. So, sneaking off the ferry from our quiet Sussex port of Newhaven in the middle of a wet, cold, December night we felt sure to miss those Gilets Jaunes. But no, there they were to welcome us into France with their bonfires and barricades on a roundabout just outside of Dieppe. As we wove our way through the tyres, (there to stop the lorries), we gave a hearty thumbs up with a big smile calling "Je suis Remainder" in the hope they would not change

their minds about letting us through and instead hold us hostage against French Fishing Rights. We sped towards our chosen escape of the pay motorway in order to hasten our journey through France secretly hoping they had burnt the Péages at the other end (but no, not a yellow vest in sight). In fact, rather spookily, there were no other camper vans in sight either on a journey where usually every third vehicle is one. Unlike in England, when faced with the Brexit cliff edge, everyone seems to have decorated their house like a psychedelic glitter ball.

France is gloomy and few 'Joyeuses Fêtes' and 'Climbing Santa's' greet us.

France, in protest, has cancelled Christmas.

Ho Ho Ho...the final frontier ... and there they are ! Les Gilets Jaunes!



<https://thewire.in/world/gilets-jaunes-protests-france>

<https://www.connexionfrance.com/French-news/French-drivers-must-pay-for-gilets-jaunes-free-peage-says-motorway-company-Vinci-Autoroute>

Adieux.

## Hola España .

We awake to sun and blue skies over the border in a town Aire at Jaca in Spain.  
Hola!

We drive off down through Spain along La Auto-via Mudejar, affectionately called the Muddy Jar Highway. It is now cruise control for 285 miles to a small village called Navajas, just 50 km north west of Valencia, to join some old friends for Christmas.

So now 1100 miles from home, it's on with the shorts and off walking the hills for a week.

Wendy, Lola and Gracie at the start of their winter walking.



## Christmas

Christmas Eve, and at a small ermita about six miles walk away ,



Lin is to be sacrificed to the Gods (while doing a quick Pilates exercise). Wendy pondered on quite which Gods to give her up to. Perhaps not. We have another 3 months to go. Lin also does a lot of the driving and she has also offered to cook the 'pigs in blanket' for Christmas lunch tomorrow. (Phew , near miss there then Lin).

Christmas with friends at Navajas.



We spent a sunny Christmas week walking high in the Sierras where ibex and griffon vultures were all that kept us company . The paths are high and narrow but the views spectacular.

Pico Espadan 1100 mtrs.( Think Snowdon 1085m).



Now all Wendy has to do is find a route down  
And where wires for descending are no help to paws.





It was all so exhausting that on arriving back at base Lin actually fell asleep in the shower while the Pizza burnt.

### New Years Eve

The Spanish arrive 'en masse' with generations of family and neighbours to celebrate New Year in Fiesta Style, complete with their pergolas, t.v.s, fridges, kitchen tents and of course, paella pans the size of small tractor tyres.

It's definitely time to move on!!

We go up over the mountains to the Costa Blanca range 25 miles north west above Benidorm.

High up we go, to the Sierra Mariola and a small village called Alfafara to enjoy a memorable few days including seeing the olives being harvested.



We stayed in a private Aire still under construction and where we were the only guests. As a result, our hosts Ricardo and Isabel felt obliged to ply us with wine, apples and a bottle of fine virgin olive oil direct from the Co-op in the village.

With wine nibbles and chats, no English but a bit of Spanglish, hands and translation by Google, we had such a fun , super evening in their newly built house.

More excellent walking along a ridge where there were several old ice houses. This particular one was built around the mid 18 century to store snow in the winter and which was then sold off in blocks in the summer. All are built above 1000 metres altitude. They tended to die out at the beginning of the 20 century when artificial ways of making ice arrived.

Below is one of the twelve ice houses on our walk from Alfafara.



### **The Coming of the Kings**

... and then there was the coming of the Kings. This is always a big event in the villages. Three Kings Day, 'Dia de Los Reyes', falls on January 6th every year. It's the day in Spain when most children receive their Christmas presents.

We saw the celebrations at El Castell de Guadalest, ( the place you go up to for a day trip if you are staying around the Benidorm area).



(No, it's not the chap from the olive field).

### **January Meanderings**

January is passing as we meander our way in the sun across the Sierras drifting from village to village, staying a week here and a week there.

### **El Berro**

Onwards and upwards... up to El Berro in the beautiful Sierra Espuna national park. As someone wrote,

"El Berro is the twistiest 14 kms ever, from Alhama de Murcia. Don't arrive in the dark. They will tow you in by tractor if required!"

There are actually two roads up and this is the one clearly not to take, the second one really is fine. (The Mula end).

We will stay probably for about a week and enjoy the splendid walking and if we are lucky we might just see some wild Barbary sheep. As it happened whilst there, we joined up with three other Murvi's who were travelling together around Spain; Steve, Chrissie and Tony and Julia .

One of Wendy's walks up at El Moron. Gracie checked to ensure they were all there and guiding a certain Club Chairperson around the balcony path.





## Ricote

We stayed for ten wonderful days in an Aire in Ricote, (the light area in the middle right of the photo) amongst the lemon groves and surrounded by mountains.



The mountain dogs Lola and Gracie have been enjoying themselves running around the hills every day . Lola who has always been the number one climber of pico's and muntanya's has decided to take a step back now she is getting on a bit. The task has now been passed to Gracie who despite having legs only 6 inches tall has passed the test with flying whiskers.



Gracie, now no.1 mountain dog amongst the lemon groves at the Aire at Ricote .

More walking and more mountain tops complete with radio masts.

This peak, Los Almences, was reached by a little used path, indicated by yellow and white painted flashes on bits of rock. Naturally the path crossed every other peak in order to get there.

The way off from the peak required shimmying down a rock face .

Lin loved it (not)while the dogs just take it all in their stride, or flying leaps in this case.

Wendy spent time trying to convince them all was well.



A few locals, who always have right of way just headed straight at us as we passed through the small village of Sucina. It was not really on our way but as a friend had just bought a small house there, and we had time to spare, we thought we would 'go see'.



It was a one man and his dog sort of place, but on this occasion , just the dog ...bringing up the rear.

### **Catral.**

Next stop Catral , 25 mins north from Torreveija, to visit an old friend and where our two dogs Lola and Gracie originated from. Gracie was actually born at Pia's three acre pad, complete with olive grove. No gallons of olive oil for us this year as the olives only fruit every other year.

While we were there and for those who think our poor wee mites undergo too much mountain walking we decided to take a day trip into town.

The 50 minute train ride (Vuelta-return 5 euros each) proved more daunting than the mountains to dear Gracie who decided under the seat was the best way for this particular trip. The day out in Alicante sight seeing was a welcome change with loads to do and see.





Gracie on the train to Alicante.



The villa where Gracie was born. Pia's pad.

Lin says it must be her turn soon to be in the photos

Well ..some people will do anything to get in a photo. Another Pilates move Lin?

### **Mula**

We zig zagged our way back and forth across Murcia, often back tracking and revisiting places to meet up with friends. The Aire at Mula, just up the road north of El Berro, does not at first sight seem the most splendid place to stop, being behind a disused swimming pool covered in graffiti. As a consequence the parking for all vans seem to have gravitated sideways onto the edge of the large car park in front of the new sports centre and as such is fine and well used.

Mula makes a good base to visit the local the area from , has a Via Verde running up to Caravaca de la Cruz, as well as having its own splendid castle.



The Via Verde cycle way just outside of Mula. Parking is available at El Nino station if you do not wish to cycle through the town.



Gracie is not sure whether the train or the bike is most horrible , this was one of the very blowy days we had. But the almond groves all around here along the Via Verde are beautiful and their fragrance amazing.

So far we have been spared the rain which must be still “mainly on the plains” for the moment but the winds are coming and are beginning to blow! Depending on which one is blowing , they can be gale force. At this time we were experiencing the cold, north westerly wind called the Ciezro. There have been many severe storms and floods particularly further north.

Fortunately it has not been that cold as we still have the sun, even if a bit blowy.

Well actually, really blowy!

<https://conjamonspain.com/2014/08/13/the-winds-in-spain-a-lot-of-hot-air/>

More locals along the Via Verde towards Caravaca.



I know you think Spanish shepherds should perhaps look a bit old and muffled up ... but this jolly chap really was the shepherd.

The Basilica del la Vera Cruz at Caravaca de La Cruz where the holy cross is housed .Truly Special. It is listed as the fifth, Catholic Holy City.



### **Seaside Stories**

As much as we love the Sierras, we also love the sea and so it was down to the seaside.



**La Azohia**, a small seaside village near Mazarron, Murcia where we spent a week wild camping in a rambla just off the seashore and where friends joined us for a few days.

Yes, they are muntanyas in the background. Did you really think seaside = Benidorm or Torrevieja, for our little brown sturdy legs?

You can actually see mountains from most places, albeit in the distance, but this is one of our favourite costas where the mountains meet the sea and we can walk to them from our camper van.

<http://www.allyouneedinmurcia.com/en/>

Penas Blancas , the highest point has of course been conquered...several times.



### **La Manga del Mar.**

Aaah...La Manga del Mar. Some love it , others hate it.

It's like Benidorm on a 'sleeve' of land ( manga) in the sea. That's it in the background.



We are at **Cabo de Palos**, staying in a car park at the Faro, the lighthouse where the manga joins the mainland.

From our end there is a rugged coastline where Wend set off for a good 15 mile linear walk with young Gracie while Lin and Lola enjoyed the seaside, strolling along the deserted beaches and around the little harbour before collecting the hikers.

Part of the coastline of Wendy's and Gracie's walk.



### **Mojocar**

Below is sunrise at Mojocar taken from the van where we parked on the beach as we travelled, west into Andalucia. It is the second largest community in Spain stretching along the coast to Portugal and renowned for it's 'white villages' or 'Pueblos Blancos'.

<https://www.roughguides.com/article/white-magic-five-stunning-white-villages-of-andalucia/>

A room with a view.



Next day we had a long, hot walk atop a hill ridge overlooking the sea, weather remains glorious and although some Spaniards are still dressed like 'Nanooks of the North' while we are in shorts, some have removed a layer or two. So it must be warm.

Disaster has struck...

Lola first, then Gracie somehow got a bug, probably some old rubbish they ate up from the beach. Looking pretty dodgy for a while with disturbed nights and urgent consultations with friends for advice and remedies. Gracie picked a fight with a big black dog and is now mentally scarred (not really likely as she is already whacky). We are not really sure if refusing breakfast, first time known to woman, is a result of this or the bug. She was lucky it was an old mama bitch who just decided to tell her to behave herself. No physical damage. Clearly ideas above her station now she is chief mountain dog (all 6 ins of her).

We continued to camp wild on the sea shores and clamber around the coastal paths. The natural park of Cabo de Gato is a place we love to visit and so we rested on the beach, just west of Las Negras for a couple of nights.



The village of Las Negras.





Lola is not too sure what's over the edge along the lovely coastal paths of the Cabo de Gato.

### **Lucainena de los Torres**

Then it was up into the hills to Lucainena de los Torres , very peaceful and more walks along a Via Verde and huge mining ovens. The road up from Nijar is 28 kms of twisty and unguarded roads in parts. While a beautiful ride and quite driveable it is not for the nervous or to be driven in the rain or dark. The route via the Tabernas desert, cowboy country , is probably preferable. If you have not visited this area it is interesting scenery and where many Wild west movies have been shot. It is complete with a Hollywood ' Fort Bravo' you can visit for a wild west experience.



These group of kilns at Lucainena consist of eight round buildings which were constructed in 1900. The train line constructed exclusively for the purpose of carrying the minerals ends at the sea at Agua Amarga on the Cabo de Gato.

There is usually a Murvi Morello parked in the car park where we stay at the entrance to the village, but we have yet to meet the owner after two visits over several years.

Well, with all this loveliness together with glorious weather , it was just too enticing and so with the hills continuing to call it was off to the Sierra Nevada for us.

### **Guejar Sierra**

The road from the coast up to the Sierra Nevada takes you through Los Alpujarras

a most wonderful part of Spain.

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpujarras>

The A- 348a road from Ugijar to Orgiva in the Alpujarras on a sunny February morning is the most spectacular, beautiful 47 kms of mountain road you can ever drive along, hanging high above the valley floor of the Rio Guadalfeo.

A cautionary tale, it says the road surface is bad. You often see these signs on mountain roads...



but this road is perfectly safe with care and even has a white line and a 'bumper bar'.

There are many places to stop for a while to gaze at the stunning scenery including the snow of the Sierra Nevada, (above the tree on the left) the white villages (right) and to savour the almond blossom scent.

See Venice and die, smell fresh almond blossom and breathe!



Our journey took us around Granada to the north west side of the Sierra Nevada national park to the mountain village of Guejar Sierra which is a main gateway to the north faces of Mulhacen, Alcazaba and Veleta, the three highest peaks . It is also an entry point for the Vereda de la Estrella, one of the most famous hikes in the Sierra Nevada 'The Way to the Stars'.



1800 meters up we looked across the valley towards them with the village far below. Bright yellow patches of gorse throw up the smell of coconut (vanilla?) when in the sun and in the maquis we constantly have the ever present rosemary, sage and thyme.



Taken at dusk from the van, “ I envy the blush of the snow clad Sierra Nevada”



The camera just missed the glow on the snow which was as everything else here, a sight to behold.

If this wasn't enough, all the while a nightingale chirruped away in those branches, just six feet above the end of the van. Yes, we did have to check it really was.

The warm weather seems to have brought Spring, La Primavera, early this year. The Spanish *Primavera* is from *primera* (first) and *ver* (to see) representing the time of year when it is possible to first see new life. And that is just what happened.

A somewhat bloody newborn lamb at 5.00 pm on our first evening climb.



The walks are spectacular, the scenery, fauna and flora amazing and nearly all too much to take in, but not quite.

It maybe see “ Venice and die” (the original was actually Naples?) but truly see the Sierra Nevada on a sunny spring day and live!

From here we travelled west wending our way towards Portugal in a very lazy, leisurely fashion and rested at a weird and wonderful place with pancake rocks called El Torcal .

It was then on to Casares with its sulphur baths which Lin cheerfully took an unscheduled dip in.

No, you really wouldn't want to see the photos.

### **El Torcal**

Our next stop was El Torcal de Antequera . It is a nature reserve in the Sierra de Torcal mountain range located south of the city of Antequera, in the province of Malaga, in Andalucia.

It is known for its unusual landforms and is regarded as one of the most impressive limestones landscapes in Europe.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El\\_Torcal\\_de\\_Antequera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Torcal_de_Antequera)

There is a visitors centre where you can park but we stayed overnight in the large car park at the bottom of the hill, as there was a heavy mist and the road up is quite narrow and unguarded in places, with tourist buses zipping up and down. There is a good footpath from the lower car park to the visitors centre. It is also one of three signed walks with good viewpoints, superb examples of the rocks and a reconstructed thatched hut.





One of the most amazing places to walk around.

Travelling a short distance from there, we spent a great afternoon at the Lagunade de Fuente de Piedra which is a large wetland. Although in the province of Malaga it is in beautiful countryside well away from the coast and is a popular birdwatching spot complete with an information centre and a small gift shop. A twitchers' paradise. Among the many different birds that can be observed here are the Barn Swallow, Housemartin, Nightingale, Grey Heron, Glossy Ibis, and the Whiskered tern. We saw none of these (well, not that we recognised) but loads of ducks and egrets, avocets and storks! However, it is probably most well known where the Greater Flamingo breeds about this time of year, migrating in large numbers and making it the largest colony on the Iberian peninsula of this beautiful and delicate bird. You really need to visit early or late in the day as they seem to rest in between times and just stand on one leg with their head tucked in. They can be anything up to 5 ft tall.



We caught them late afternoon just as they were stirring for a last feed. See also the little black and white fella, the Avocet.

## **Casares**

Casares is a small village up in the hills north west of Malaga and a super place to stop for a few days. We in fact returned here when we had to delay our trip to Portugal. Blas Infante Perez the 'founder' of Andalusia was born here and was a proponent of Andalusia being an independent state, so a sort of special place. Sadly he was shot by the Nationalists (Franco's mob) in 1936 at the start of the Spanish Civil War. We spent many nights here mainly because it was a beautiful place to stay with many lovely walks.



The sulphur baths on one of the walks from Casares. Mum is under the water somewhere and has left me on guard to let her know if someone is coming as she didn't have her swimming costume with her.

## **The Rock.**

The Strait of Gibraltar , which lies between the south coast of Spain and the northern coast of Morocco, is the only place where water from the Atlantic Ocean mixes with water from the Mediterranean.

We have always avoided Gibraltar mainly because the walks include the Apes on the Rock and we could not risk the dogs getting bitten. However, we thought we would give it a go this year.

Shouldn't have bothered.

As author Laurie Lee once commented "Gibraltar is a piece of Portsmouth sliced off and towed 500 miles south". Well, maybe in his time. That, is being nice about it.

It is actually very 'Un-British', if you exclude, Marks and Spencer, Waitrose and Morrisons, with left hand drive, mostly Spanish inhabitants, no dogs allowed on buses, cable car , boats or beaches, one sign said no dogs allowed to pee, although there were very few places to walk a dog and many visitors complained of dog faeces. Right then.

However, beer was horrendous British prices. Streets were smelly and dirty and everything was over priced. Many parts looked like a building site and were very noisy.

The best part was where our camper van was parked opposite Gibraltar, in the Marina in La Linea, in Spain where Wendy is standing.





This lump of rock has 7 M.E.P s !!

If Spain wishes to use it to oppose Brexit . They are welcome to it. In fact, they are welcome to it full stop.

### **Tarifa.**

And so to Tarifa and the wild Atlantic. By this time it was Andulcia day, 28th February. A public holiday here so all the Spaniards are at the beach.

Tarifa is known for its wind, so surfers of all types descend in biblical proportions.



Gracie with the wind blowing through her hair getting ready.

Tarifa sadly, has one of the highest suicide rates in Spain, apparently through depression caused by the winds.

It is at the southern most point of Spain and indeed Europe. Here you are a mere nine miles from Africa whose immigrants frequently get washed up on the enormous beaches.

Last time we were here we saw the Guardia Civil (police) driving along the beaches checking 'mounds' for bodies.



They apparently try to make the trip across on anything from ironing boards to home made rafts. This one we found on the beach today, so maybe they made it across , as it is quite sophisticated with a sail and rudders.

We wild camped for a couple of nights about 13 miles west along from Tarifa on a rugged stretch of coastline known for its sand dunes and Roman ruins at El Lentiscal, Bolonia. There are a couple of places to park but we found the best one was at the end of the village in a field , at the end of a short coastal road.

<http://www.hellehollis.com/en/blog/visit-bolonia-in-cadiz-one-of-the-best-beaches-in-spain.htm>

Wend atop the sand dunes at Bolonia beach.



Next stop **Benarraba** , a small village perched on the side of a deep valley, just for a couple of nights on our way up to Ronda and where we joined a 'gastronomic' delight .

Many villages have food fayres this time of year and we just happened to be lucky !

The Aire is at the start of the village which does not seem to have a level piece of road anywhere!. It is not advisable to try to enter the village in the van, but has pleasant, if somewhat steep walks.



### **Ronda and Civil War stories.**

Next Ronda...a beautiful city and a ' must to see' and enjoy, including the journey winding up from the coast. We stayed at the fairly new, secure Aire on the edge of town near a Deportivo (sports centre) where a "shouty lady", as one reviewer described her, kept us all on our toes as she took her late and early fitness classes. Definitely not Pilates judging by the music. It really was not a problem.

Here is the most photographed tourist attraction, the Puente Nuevo bridge, between the old and the new towns and which sixty years to build.



It is also said that during the Civil War both Republicans and Nationalist prisoners were thrown from the bridge to their deaths. It varies in the telling, but it is said that hundreds of Communist were marched off the neighbouring cliff by Franco's Moroccan troops. For a searing fictionalisation of such a massacre based on events in Ronda, see Hemingways 'For Whom the Bell tolls'. There is no reference to such events posted at the bridge itself however .

The three year long, bloody conflict that divided Spain inspired great writing and has continued to fascinate to this day. Whether it is contemporary accounts, historical or fiction set during the 1936-1939 conflict, there is a huge choice of very good reads on the subject.

Of the many novels, amongst our favourites for anyone interested in this part of Spains history, are the fairly recent ' Winter in Madrid' by C.J.Sansom and 'The Return' by Victoria Hislop. Then of course there are the classics of Hemingway, George Orwell and Laurie Lee ( although debated by some as to what he actually did there).

The famous painting by Picasso 'Guernica' is another part of the civil war history and a 'must see' in the Museo Reina, in Madrid. Pablo Picasso's motivation for painting the scene in this great work was the German aerial bombing of the Basque city of Guernica.

Later, in our civil war journey we go up to the Valley of the Fallen, Spains most sombre tourist attraction.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/europe/general-franco-grave-valley-tourist-holiday-site-fallen-spain-spanish-dictator-spanish-civil-war-a7652841.html>

Now on a lighter note...Da Da! The Rondettes.



Ronda' s own Pilates gang.

They will probably be the next lot to get tossed over that bridge. There is still time. Clearly on their way to the baths.



Banos Arabes, 13 century bath house situated in the picturesque old city.

The Arabic baths in Ronda, although small, are well worth viewing with a short animated video in English taking you back in time to help visualise their use.

...the lot above would not have got in as the baths were used mainly by Muslim men and who used them to socialise. Women used them separately once or twice a month.

...maybe...just maybe...though they might have changed the course of history..with not an abaya or Burqa in sight.

Would like to see an animated version of that!

### **Mar del Plastico**

Now a change of plans, not going to Portugal after all because Lin has to attend several ophthalmologists appointments in Marbella spaced over a couple of weeks.

So its to the land of the polytunnels. See Simon Reeve series on the Mediterranean, stage 4. They really are 165 miles of horror.

This area in southern Spain known as Mar del Plastico is a landscape dominated by vast stretches of polytunnels, or green house farms as they are politely called.



Google Earth shows the real horror.

<https://oikosvienna-blog.com/2015/07/07/el-mar-de-plastico-or-the-greenhouse-horticulture-production-of-almeria/>

Now loads worse since that article.

The grim side of Spain we normally avoid but sometimes you just have to drive through.

### **Cabo de Gato**

Once you have driven through the polytunnels , eventually there is the lovely Cabo de Gato coastal natural park where we met up with old friends at the port Aire of Almiramar where we stayed for a couple of nights before going on to Almeria and San Jose..

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabo\\_de\\_Gato-N%C3%ADjar\\_Natural\\_Park](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabo_de_Gato-N%C3%ADjar_Natural_Park)



Almeria where we spent an afternoon wandering around The Alcazaba (fortress).

Along with this imposing Moorish fortress overlooking the city we visited a fortified ,16<sup>th</sup> century Cathedral and a street market where we all bought 'Moorish' cushion covers.

It is a port city which was heavily bombed by the Nazis for Franco's mob against the Republicans in the civil war and which promoted the building of fortified underground shelters.

"The Shelters of the city of Almeria are one of the most important engineering and architecture works carried out during the 20 century in Andalusia...built in 1936-1939".

Heaven forbid if that is true, says it all . I guess there is not too much scope in the design of the Polytunnel.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almer%C3%ADa\\_air\\_raid\\_shelters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almer%C3%ADa_air_raid_shelters)

Almeria, land of plastic , probably not in the first five or even ten 'must see' cities but its worth at least an afternoon to visit if you are over that way . It is fairly compact and you can park at the port where you can stay overnight. Its the sort of place people visit during a day out coach trip.

Next stop a few nights stop in San Jose and a visit to the lovely beaches at Playa de los Genoveses and Playa de Monsul.



Its then goodbye to friends and back to the hills and up through Spain on roads less travelled .

### **Homeward Bound**

Homeward north is the general direction and places of interest with van friendly, scenic stopovers our rough guide.

We head up through Castilla-La Mancha which is a region in central Spain to the south and east of Madrid. It encompasses plains dotted with vineyards, mountains, castles...windmills and storks.

Rarely travelling two or three hours a day at a leisurely pace we visit many lovely typical Spanish villages and towns on our way, just stopping for the night here and there and taking time to stroll around and enjoy walking the local countryside .

First stop **Hellin** and a visit to the Roman ruins on the outskirts and a climb to the top of a volcano. Lola found it all too much and succumbed to a headscarf and being carried most of the way up.





## Riopar

Next stop Riopar, a glorious place to stay for the weekend with walks to the source of the Mundo river, waterfall and Arabic ruins. Not really a place to visit in December, January or February...wait until the weather warms up a bit as now in the middle of march we are 'suffering' temperatures in the mid twenties. The walks were good but the wretched processionary caterpillar was out and about on the ground. Lethal for dogs and not too good for humans either.



There were lines and lines of them across the paths and roads up at the source of the Mundo river, but fortunately nowhere else.

<https://gosbi.com/en/the-processionary-caterpillar-is-here-dangerous-for-humans-deadly-for-dogs/>

Time definitely to move on...to where there are no pine trees.

## Castilla-La-Mancha

Here is the setting of the 17th century novel 'Don Quixote' by Miguel Cervantes and which has undoubtedly served to make La Mancha internationally well known and provide it with a jolly good tourist trade.

So now to windmills and Don Quixote.

**Puerto Lapice**, is one of the few towns actually named in Cervantes novel and where Don Quixote spent the night at an inn. We walked the very streets Cervantes wrote about but did not actually find the one laying claim to be the spot where our hero was knighted. Now don't get us wrong, we did not actually read Cervantes. We sometimes have trouble enough reading English let alone 17 century Spanish (or most Spanish come to that except key phrases) but fortunately the town relies in part, on English speaking tourists.

We were also encouraged by Wend having listened to Bernard Cribbin's rendition of Monsignor Quixote on Womens Hour and inspiring us both to read this little known novel by Graham Greene(1982). It is based loosely on the Knight Errant but with Greene's main character being a Catholic priest, Father Quixote and his companion Sancho , the communist Mayor of El Toboso, who travel through this area of Spain and thus giving added interest and direction to our travels. An enjoyable and fun read with typical Greene moral dialogue, set in post Franco Spain.

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monsignor\\_Quixote](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monsignor_Quixote)

That aside, the phrase 'tilting at windmills'is probably what Don Quixote is famous for and how most people would have heard of him.



The view from the van of the windmills at Puerto Lapice and where we walked to late afternoon before going back down to stroll around the town and to enjoy our own bit of 'tilting.'

Next, we could not miss out **Consuegra** where the famous 'tilting at windmills' took place and Cervantes Don Quixote sought to attack his imaginary enemies. Below is Calderico hill where the windmills form a unique silhouette across the top together with the Castillo and which makes a wonderful vista to be seen for miles around. There are twelve windmills remaining out of the original 13 and four still retain the complete machinery. One is a tourist office and one is an outrageously priced gift shop where we could not resist buying a Don Quixote memento for this wonderful part of our voyage.



Don Quixote's 'monsters'.



We skipped past Madrid where we had previously spent a four day city break and which is probably the best way to appreciate Europe's highest capital. One of the best times to visit is in mid May, when the weather is reasonable and the Festival of San Isidoro, the farmers patron saint of Madrid is held. We were treated to a marvellous free laser light show over the central lake, supported by a moving classical music concert as part of the festivities last time we were there. Included also of course was a trip to the Museo Reina to see Picasso's 'Guernica'.

### **Storks**

You cannot travel this region between migratory routes without seeing the large white stork. It is a protected species in Spain and is supposed to migrate off to Africa for the winter, but now seems to have taken up permanent residence.

They build their huge stick nests everywhere, in the tops of trees electric pylons, churches and the roofs of ordinary houses. Known also for delivering babies in baskets ,they are fast becoming another part of the tourist trade in some villages.



Storks we found nesting on the roof of a house in **Ei Boalo** where we stayed overnight and enjoyed seeing these large white birds circling around the church where they had also taken up residence.

### **The Valley of the Fallen** 50 kms north west of Madrid.

Due to the forest of pines and the cold winds, we kept close to the van and the Basilica .We were however disappointed by our visit. It is poorly lit inside so you cannot admire the large tapestries or read about the stories depicted in them.

Best perhaps to visit once they have exhumed old Franco from inside (supposed to be happening in June this year) and have planted him somewhere else.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-franco/spanish-government-readies-removal-of-dictator-francos-remains-idUSKCN1Q0259>

Maybe then the place can become a real tribute to the tens of thousands who perished in the Civil War and be a real 'act of atonement 'as Franco who had it built, claimed it to be.

"As I understood it", Father Quixote said "This was meant to be a chapel of reconciliation where all the fallen on both sides were to be remembered"

On one side of the altar was the grave of Franco , on the other the grave of the founder of the Falange (Spanish Fascists).

"You won't find even a tablet for the dead Republicans" the Mayor said.



The Basilica at the Valley of the Fallen

### .Segovia

Away from the coast, together with altitude and middle land mass, not too surprisingly the temperatures are falling although still bright and sunny and warm once out of the wind.

Famous for its architecture, castle, cathedral and one of the most stunning Roman aqueducts you are likely to see ,it is another 'must see' city and one to take your time over.





Staying over night next to the Plaza de Toros we had a leisurely 20 minute walk to the old walled city, most of which was along old cobbled streets following the path alongside the aqueduct until it reached the city wall. The streets are filled with colourful local shops , including clothes shops 'to die for'.

Mmmmmm...



The cathedral is simply magnificent both outside and in. One of the most imposing we have been in for a while.



Leaving Segovia we take leave of the Monsignor and the Mayor who are off to Salamanca to the west while we head north eastwards to San Sebastian.



Until the next time...Adios Amigos.

One more overnight stop in the rioja wine region at a scenic Aire by a river and an old medieval bridge with the village of **San Vicente de la Sonsierra** and its bodegas high behind us.

It's now onwards and upwards ..to the coast and San Sebastian and France.

Get ready with those Yellow vests.

### **San Sebastian**

We travelled the Bilbao to San Sebastian corniche marvelling at the super scenery when lo and behold..oh if only we had the camera at the ready. Just outside of San Sebastian a group of about forty children aged roughly 12/13 yrs were walking along the sea wall..whoosh..a large wave bashed against the sea wall and crashed down on top of them. Fortunately there was a sea wall and a rail between them, the sea and the road. Wend nearly fell off her seat laughing and Lin put her foot down more worried about the salt water crashing over the van.

At least half of them were covered completely.It was like a pin ball scattering them in all directions and them shrieking wildly. Other pedestrians also roared with laughter but presumably were available to avert any real disaster, although we must say, we did not look back..too busy laughing still !

Arriving at San Sebastian we had to park outside of the town because the Aire was crammed packed with only inches between vans. It was horrible.





But just 30 mins up the road we found a super place.

Deciduous delight, with no pine trees, but picnic tables and BBQ. We took a lovely two hour walk up the hillside to some caves.

Onwards to France..and to lovely **Sare**, a small French village just over the border, just east of Biarritz. We have visited here before and enjoyed a ride up the mountain on the little cog railway. This time we decided to walk on one of the many paths up the mountain, accessible from the large Aire on the edge of the village.



The little cog railway like the one on Snowdon...and yep it is still warm and sunny!

From there on in it was just homeward bound stopping off at friends before catching the ferry back home from Dieppe.

We found one more delight, midway between **Alencon and Chartres, the Aire La Madeleine Bouvet** which was pretty, set beside a lake and quiet and peaceful.

No Gilets Jaunes to greet us this time though.

Au revoir.

## Aires, WildCamping and Campsites

Be warned . please do check GPS references as they were copied from Park4night

**Jaca** -Aire. GPS . Lat 42.568298 long. -0.54519. or Lat. N 42° 34' 6" long. W 0° 32' 43"  
Facilities.**Free** Ref. Park4night.

**Navajas. Camping** Altomira Campsite. ACSI 2913. GPS: Longitude: W 00° 30' 37"  
Latitude: N 39° 52' 29" or 39.8748° N, 0.5102° W. **Pay. 1 8euros per night.**

**Alfafara** Camper Park.-GPS. lat. 38.78358 long. -0.552933.or Lat. N 38° 47' 1" long. W  
0° 33' 11" **Pay. 8 euros per night.** Ref Park4night.

**El Castell de Guadelest.** Large car park in centre of village opp. Tourist info.Centre.**Pay  
4 euros.**no facilities.

**El Berro.** Camping Sierra Espuna ACSI.3063 **GPS** :N 37°53'16.8" W -1°29'34.656" or  
37.888000,-1.492960 **Pay 18 euros per night**

**Ricote** - Aire. GPS lat. 38.151299 long. -1.3667 or Lat. N 38° 9' 5" long. W 1° 22' 0"  
Facilities.**Pay with 2 euro tokens bought locally.** Ref. Park4night

**Mula.** Aire.GPS.N 38°2'22.2036" W -1°28'50.124"or 38.039501,-1.480590 .Facilities.**Free**  
Ref.Park4night.

**La Azohia.** Wild Camping. **GPS** :N 37°33'13.3164" W -1°10'13.26" or  
37.553699,-1.170350 .Rambla either side of road. No facilities **.Free.** Ref.Park4night.

**Cabo de Palos.** Car Park at Faro.**GPS** :N 37°38'3.1235999999999999" W -0°41'31.1712" or  
37.634201,-0.691992 . No facilities. **Free.** Ref Park4night

**Mojocar.** Wild Camping.\_On the beach by Torre at end of town towards Carbonarra. **Free.**  
No facilities.

**El Playazo** Wild Camping at the beach in designated sand car park.Off road between  
Rodalquilar and Las Negras . No facilities **.Free**

**Lucainena de Los Torres.** Small car park at edge of village.Opp.Via Verde. No facilities.  
**Free**

**Guejar Sierra.** Camping Las Lomas.Campsite. **Approx. 20 euros per night**

**El Torcal de Antequera.** Large car Park.**GPS** :N 36°57'10.7964" W -4°32'39.732" or  
36.952999,-4.544370 .This is for visitors centre but there is a large car park without going up hill. No  
facilities. **Free.** Ref. Park4night.

**Casares-** Aire. GPS lat. 36.446098 long. -5278290 or lat.N 36° 26' 46" long. W 5° 16' 42"  
Facilities. **Free.** Ref park4night.

**La Linea Marina.** Area for Autocaravans. **GPS** :N 36°9'22.68" W -5°21'24.12"or  
36.156300,-5.356700 . **Pay.12 euros.** Facilities. Ref Park4night.

**Tarifa.** Wild Camping at Beach outside town. No facilities

**El Lentiscal Bolonia.** Wild Camping. Car Park on Grass.**GPS** :N 36°4'52.6152" W  
5°45'36.8496" or 36.081282,-5.760236 . Go past this site (5 euros) and continue to dead end..No  
facilities.**Free.** Ref.Park4night.

**Benarraba.** Aire . **GPS** :N 36°32'57.48" W -5°16'44.544" or 36.549300,-5.279040 .Facilities.10  
euros. We parked on edge for **free** and no facilities. Ref. Park4night.

**Ronda.** Aire. **GPS** :N 36°45'7.5599999999999999" W -5°8'52.548" or 36.752100,-5.147930 **10  
euros** Ref. Park4night.

**Campillos.** Aire. Part of large car park.**GPS** :N 36°45'7.5599999999999999" W -5°8'52.548" or  
36.752100,-5.147930. Facilities. **Free.** Ref Park4night

**Almerimar.** Aire.,at Port **GPS** :N 36°41'45.9528" W -2°47'39.012" or  
36.696098,-2.794170 Facilities. **Pay 10 euros.** Ref. Vicarious Spain Aires.Park4night

**Almeria Port.** Car Park. **GPS** :N 36°49'56.2728" W -2°27'55.584" or36.832298,-2.465440 .No  
facilities. **Pay 6 euros**

**San Jose.** Large of village. No Facilities **.Free**

**Hellin** Aire. **GPS** :N 36°49'56.2728" W -2°27'55.584" or 36.832298,-2.465440 . Facilities. **Free.**Ref  
Park4night



**Riopar** Aire-GPS. Lat. 38.496546 long. -2.421556 or Lat. N 38° 29' 48" long. W 2° 25' 18" Facilities. **Free**. Ref. Park4night.

**Puerto Lapice** Aire\_-GPS :N 39°19'35.4" W -3°29'0.74400000000014"or 39.326500,-3.483540 Facilities. **Free**. Ref Park4night

**El Boalo**. Aire. GPS :N 40°43'15.2436" W -3°55'20.352" or 40.720901,-3.922320.Facilities. **Pay 3 euros**

**Segovia**. Aire.GPS :N 40°56'27.2436" W -4°6'27.4572" or 40.940901,-4.107627. Facilities.**Free**. Ref. park4night.

**San Vicente de la Sonsierra**. Aire. GPS :N 42°33'33.4764" W -2°45'35.46" or 42.559299,-2.759850 .Facilities. **Free**. Ref Park4night.

**Erreterria** - Aire. GPS. N43 o 16.076 W001 o 54.071 .Ref. Vicarious Aires of France.Facilities. **Free**

**Sare**. Aire. **GPS** :N 43°18'43.9164" W -1°35'2.25600000000003" or43.312199,-1.583960 Facilities. **Pay 8 euros**. Ref. Park4night

**Aire La Madeleine Bouvet** midway between Alencon & Chartres

GPS . lat. 48.470901 long. 0.901995.or Lat. N 48° 28' 15" long. E 0° 54' 7"

It is in the Vicarious Aires of France and Park4night. Facilities. **Free** or Euro relais 2 euros