



## ***A Loop Through Andalucia***

*Riding with the Spanish Angels*  
*October, 2012*

Every trip has something extra special – this year we were protected by *Spanish Guardian Angels*



Patty and James set out on a loop around the Spanish province of Andalucia – which was the center of Moorish culture before the Spanish reconquered Spain from the Moors in the 1400's (the Reconquista).

**The Spanish Angels:** The people of Spain must be the kindest people on the planet. We had so many people help us along the way. In Spain, outside of the major tourist cities, if you stand with a map in your hand for more than a minute, someone will stop and offer to help.

- When we reached a town, we could always count on someone to lead us to our hotel – a police car, a bicyclist, or a pedesrian.

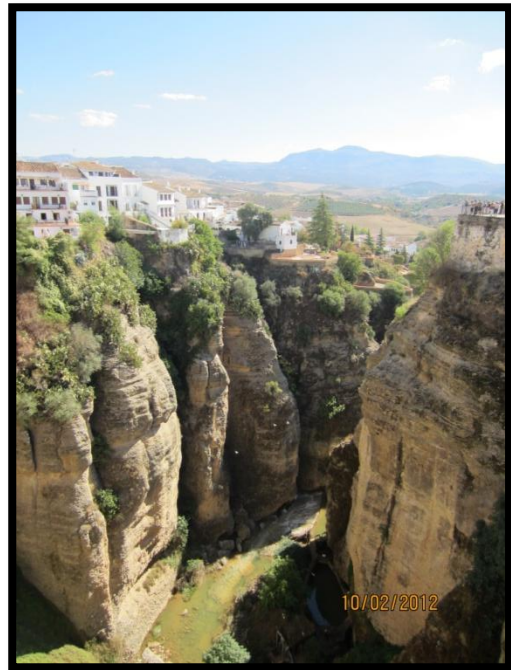
- When we could not find our way into Seville, first a police car guided us to the right road and then a bicyclist led us for 10 miles until he was sure we were going to make it.
- When we were caught in a bad storm high on a mountain pass in a tiny coffee bar far from any taxis, buses or trains, everyone in the bar got on their cell phones and found someone who could carry us to safety.
- When we reached a small town with only one hotel and the hotel was full – we were too tired to go further. The hotel owner drove us 4 miles to his private apartment and then came back and retrieved us in the morning.
- When we were almost caught in another really bad storm (hurricane level) a police car that had passed us earlier came back to make sure we made it to safety.

**Day 1: Malaga to Marbella:** We start out in a light rain which soon turns into a intense downpour. At times we ride through water almost a foot deep. James has to keep warning Patty to hold her feet up so they will not become submerged in the water (her pedals are lower). The next day we learn that 13 people died in that storm.

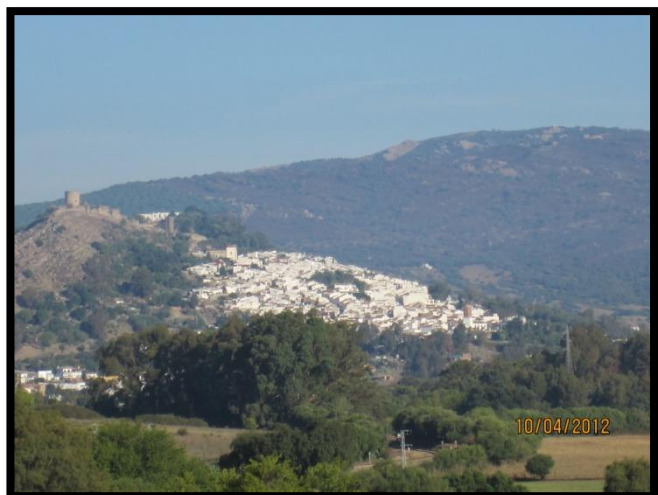
**Day 2: Marbella to Ronda:** Straight up into the mountains. We spend five hours in 1<sup>st</sup> gear and meet our first Spanish Angel when we run out of water. He is filling large water containers at a roadside spring and insists on us filling our water bottles first and ensures us emphatically that the water is good.

**Day 3: Rest Day in Ronda** which is an amazing walled city divided by a deep gorge with a river flowing through it.

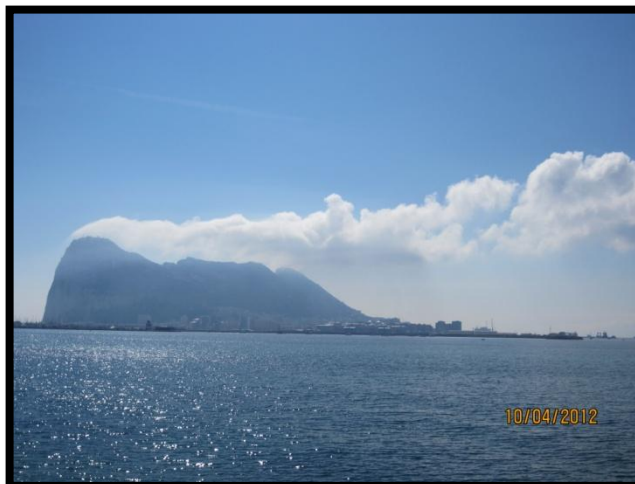
**Days 4 and 5: Ronda and on to Gibraltar** with a night in Jimenez de la Frontiera. Four of the towns we stay in proudly bear the suffix “de la Frontiera” from 600 years ago when they marked the frontier between the Spanish and the Moors during the Reconquista. James hikes high up above the town and is the only visitor to the enormous fortress.



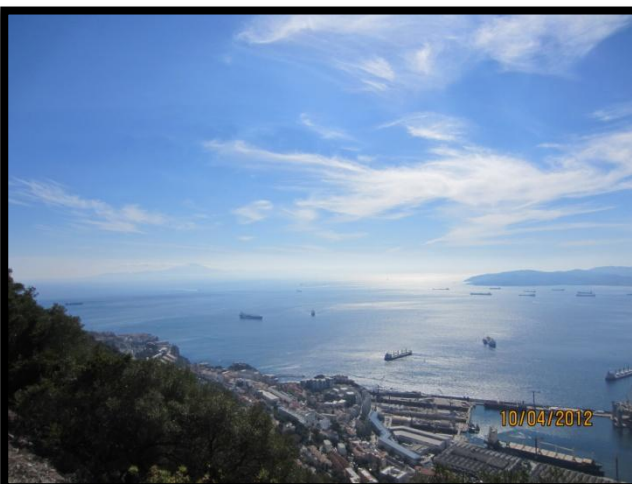
**Ronda: Divided by the Gorge**



**Jimenez de la Frontiera: on the way to Gibraltar**



**The Rock of Gibraltar (we got lost on it)**



**From the top of Gibraltar (Africa in the distance)**

After taking the tram to the top of Gibraltar, we somehow manage to get lost for two hours on an abandoned dirt trail on the side of the mountain of Gibraltar. Trivia question: What is the only city in the United Kingdom in which you drive on the right side of the road?

**Days 6, 7, and 8: Gibraltar to Cadiz** with nights in Tarifa and Veher de la Frontiera. We have a very long, steep climb over a coastal ridge to Tarifa – from the top you can see hundreds of miles of the African coast. We stay in a stunning palace in Veher.

**Day 9: Rest day in beautiful seaside Cadiz.**

We have our first Tapas dinner (small plates) and go to an amazing Flaminco performance. We are half of an audience of four for 3 dancers, a guitarist, a singer, a bartender, a waiter, and a cook.

**Days 9, 10, 11: Cadiz to Arcos de la Frontiera.** We take a ferry across the Cadiz bay to Rota to avoid the highways out of Cadiz. Spanish cities are surrounded by ring highways which are very hard to get by on a bicycle. We decide to obey the law and ride on a side road which turns into gravel and then into a tractor path and then into a mud flat.

After pushing the bike through the mud flat we have to take the bike apart and carry the pieces across a narrow gully. We clean enough mud off to get the bike rideable and then find a car wash in town. What would have been a 10 minute ride on the highway turned into a two-hour nightmare in the mud. At the tourist office the next



**Bici (our bike) on the ferry from Cadiz to Rota**





**We had to cross the mud flat, take the bike apart, carry the pieces across the gully, clean the bike to make it rideable again, then we took it to a car wash in town – two hour operation**

day, Patty asks about problems like that and the woman says to ignore the no bikes signs on the highways and just “go for it” (we test the “go for it” concept three days later and get busted).



**Our balcony at the converted convent in Arcos had a mural on the wall of the exact same view as it looked 400 years earlier**

When we enter an old town or city, Patty always arranges a hotel somewhere in the oldest part of town which means pushing the bike for a kilometer up a steep hill on cobblestones. In Arcos, we stay in a converted convent at the top of a huge hill with a forever view from our balcony of the countryside. We find an incredible Italian restaurant and go there for lunch and dinner. James stands at the entrance and helps the owner encourage other English-speaking people to come eat there (he rewards us with free lemoncello!).

**Days 12 and 13: Arcos to Seville.** The land is hilly and is covered with cotton fields south of Seville. The way into Seville is so complex with ring roads we decide to just “go for it” on the major highway. After 3 minutes on the 80 mph highway, a Policia Guardia car pulls us over and, after giving us a stern lecture about the dangers of riding on the highway, follows us to the next exit protecting us and making sure we get on the right side road to Seville. We get lost again

within half a mile, but a Spanish cyclist Angel patiently guides us for 10 miles through the side roads until he gets us on a road which he knows even we cannot get lost on.

#### **Day14: Rest in Seville.**

Seville is the most beautiful city in Spain. The city is a centerpiece of incredible architecture and museums. They have installed a 50 mile system of bike path with special bicycle traffic lights, two lane bike paths, and bicycle rumble strips. Patty learns to love sangria!



**Seville has dual bike lanes and special bicycle traffic lights!**

**Days 15, 16, 17, 18: Seville to Cordoba.** In Palma de los Rios, we stay the night in a museum which has, among many other items, a stunning painted wooden chest which once belonged to Christopher Columbus.



**As we enter Palma de los Rios, we see a beautiful carriage with four horses waiting outside a church. The Best Man for the wedding sees us gaping at the carriage, grabs Patty and literally forces her into the carriage so she can have her picture taken! These people are incredible!**

James unfortunately spends the night vomiting from food poisoning from the previous day. With James still sick, we keep riding and reach Cordoba and a Rest Day. Patty debates on taking severely dehydrated James to the Emergency Room, but manages to bring him back to functional with Gatorade.

**Days 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24: Cordoba to**

**Granada.** Leaving Cordoba, we avoid the highway and take a windy tiny road so old, steep, patched, and potholed we can only make about 6 miles an hour. We pass a yellow sign warning us of something but we cannot understand it (we decide it says trucks not allowed on this road which makes sense). But miles later a small bridge across the road is washed out (that was what the sign said!) and we are forced to backtrack to the highway and hope the Policia don't catch us again. A member of a construction crew blocking the shoulder steps out and guides traffic around us so we stay safe. We yell "Gratias, Gratias" as we go by. Another Angel.



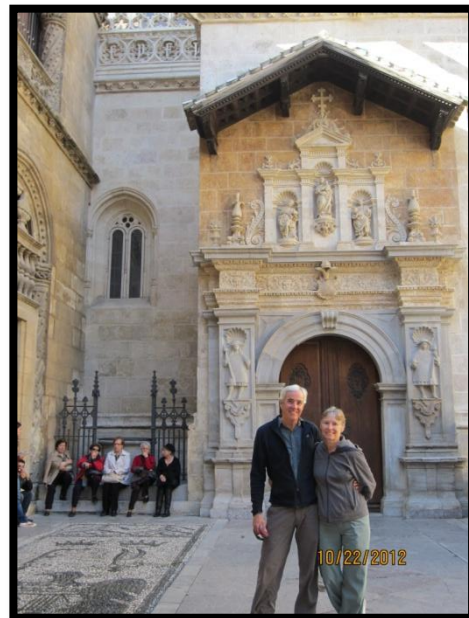
**Hundreds of castles**

James remains sick but still pedaling for two more days losing 10 pounds on a diet of Gatorade and bananas. With James sick and a major storm closing in, we alter our path south rather than heading up into more mountains. For five days, all we see are millions and millions of olive trees covering every inch of hillside.

As the storm finally closes in (all of Spain has been blasted with rain except a tiny bit around us), we hole up for a rest day in Acala de Real. We brave the rain the next day to get closer to Granada and are pounded by cold rain for two and a half hours. But we do get within one easy day's ride of Granada. Our hotel has a huge fireplace at which we try to dry out our clothes and shoes. The weather clears for our final run into Granada.

**Days 26, 27: Granada is wonderful!** Our first day we walk the city and the Alcazair area. The second day, we have reservations for the Alhambra, Spain's most famous site and an incredible Moorish palace from before the Reconquista. We spend four hours walking the Alhambra.

**Day 28: Granada to Alhama.** We know a storm is closing in again and, as we set out from Granada, it starts to lightly rain. When the rain comes down heavy we duck under cover and manage to get out of the Granada suburbs still mostly dry. As we head down a 20-mile stretch of farmland, we see we are heading directly into what looks like a massive wall of either hurricane or tornado clouds. We race trying to find cover before it hits us. About two



**Hanging out in Granada**





**The view on the way to Alhama de Granada – tomorrow we know will have to climb those mountains to get to the coast**

minutes before the storm hits we find a gas station and pull under the awning. A Policia Guardia car (another Angel) which had passed us half an hour before has come back looking for us to make sure we made it to safety.

After the storm rages for an hour, the birds come back out singing and we have a beautiful ride to Alhama de Grenada. We ride up a kilometer-long hill into the city to find out our hotel is way down at the where we just came from and then another kilometer down a narrow river

canyon to an ancient Moorish bath (hot spring). The weather stays nice that evening and we get to soak in the hot springs pool for an hour with a bevy of 80 and 90 year olds.

**Day 29: Alhama to Malaga.** As we wake up, it is dry and we prepare to leave early. But just as we get on the bike, it begins to rain. Hoping that the rain will come and go as it did the day before, we set out on a 15-mile hill up a mountain pass through a deserted National Park. The rain comes harder and harder and we are soon both soaked. We climb for two and a half hours until we reach the top and start a long ride across the top of the pass in bucketing rain. It rains so hard, Patty cannot see at all and James has to coach her by shouting “more brake”, “less brake” (she controls the main drum brake). After a few miles we are both shivering from the wind and approaching hypothermia. A coffee bar magically appears



**After 2 ½ hours riding in bucketing cold rain we surrender and take Bici apart**

where there is not supposed to be a coffee bar (according to what people have told us) and we gratefully pull in.

We strip our sopping clothes off in the bathroom, put dry sets on and realize we cannot ride any further in that cold rain. Patty asks about buses and taxis and there are none to be had (we know there is no train). Patty asks the bartender if there is anyone who could drive us to Malaga for 100 Euros? The whole bar starts talking and calling on their cell phones to see if they can help. After half an hour, the bartender says Gabriel will come in an hour if we can get the bike into the trunk of his car. With a Bike Friday, we can take it apart! We gratefully disassemble the bike and load it easily into the trunk of Angel Gabriel's car and he drives us two hours to Malaga. It would have been an incredible ride in good weather with a 3,000 foot drop to the Mediterranean, but it pours cold rain the whole day. The Spanish Angels help us once more.

**Days 30, 31: Malaga to Bend.** We rest and pack the bike and try to dry our clothes and shoes. It rains cold and hard all day and we are so happy we are not riding in it! On Day 31 we fly back to rainy, cool weather in Bend (oh well).



**Granada from the Alhambra**



**Mountain road outside of Ronda**