

# 2015 - Iberia Tour Spain + Portugal

by Hotel Caddy

& Other small Ventures 2015



All reports and picture galleries (incl. Padi's and Evi's) can be accessed via [www.xelliant.ch](http://www.xelliant.ch)

## Background

We had talked for years about making an extended Iberia trip. This year we had nothing else on the list...

## Summary

We had only made a rough itinerary/schedule (based on Peggy's wish to revisit Portugal - especially the North). I extended the project to 10 days in Spain westbound - 10 days in Portugal - 10 days return with 10 days reserve..... 40 days total.

Note: we avoided most places we had visited already on earlier occasions (eg Barcelona, Pyreneans, Sevilla, Granada, Tarifa, Gibraltar, Lisbon...) and also Madrid which we plan to visit some time in the future by plane.

### ▲ Facts:

- Duration Total: 8 weeks, of which 38 days / 37 nights (wild camping) in Iberia, 18 days in France
  - . 11 nights from France via Spain to Portugal
  - . 13 nights in Portugal
  - . 13 nights in Spain back to France
- Distance: 10'000 km from CH, of which 8500km in Spain and Portugal (no toll-motorways!)
- Costs:
  - . Diesel: 650 Euro for 550 litre for 10'000 km (between 1.09 to 1.23 Euro / liter)
  - . Restaurants (Spain/Portugal): 360 Euro for 20 meals (usually lunch)
  - . Food shopping (Spain/ Portugal): 210 Euro
- Weather: mostly nice and warm .... last week a few days rather covered and quite cool.

### ▲ Assessment

We did all that could be done in 38 days and enjoyed most of it. One could easily spend 3 months to see more.... and a bit slower. In hindsight I must admit that such intensive trips have become a bit heavy on my mental strength ... I have addressed this issue at various places in the diary ... in fact it is just enormous what we have done non-stop every day! I believe that nobody else can be as crazy as we are....

**My thanks to Peggy** who during the trip did all the looking after bed and food and also gave her precious opinion about where eat and to stay for the night.

## Other Ventures 2015 (a few Pictures at End of Report)

- **Alsace-Pfalz-Luxemburg in Spring by Hotel-Caddy**  
6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> April - Lovely 6-days tour along the Rhine to Kehl/Strassbourg, through the Pfalz to the Mosel at Trier with the Roman Gate. Visit Luxemburg from the bottom of the Alzette.
- **Joining Evi Biketour over the Big Swiss Passes.** 28<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> July - 4 days tour with Evelyne over 7 major passes, Grosse Scheidegg, Grimsel, Nufenen, Lukmanier, Oberalp – 3 nights wild camping in our hotel Caddy, Evelyne sleppin in our igloo tent at Oberwald, Biasca, Sedrun...
- **Hang-Gliding from Niesen.** 8<sup>th</sup> August - Evi and I having a tandem flight from Niesen (2367m) to Heustrich (Evi) and Frutigen (me). Absolutely phantastic and enjoyable, each flight lasting for more than an hour. Thank you Evelyne for this 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Present!
- **Take Toni & Ah-Yuen to Venice.** 9<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> August -Toni and Ah-Yuen (Peggy's brother and. wife from Hongkong) came from UK to visit us. Amongst other trips we took them to Venice. Ah-Yuen was not to happy being forced to stay 2 nights in our igloo tent in a camping at Punta Sabbioni from where we took the ferry to San Marco (beautiful cruise). Overall we did 3200km with them.
- **Resting in our little Dwelling at Ste Marie F.** Departed on 31<sup>st</sup> August (1 night at routier in Donzere) and arrived on 1<sup>st</sup> September in Ste Marie. Soon Evelyne and Rafa joined us for a few days ending with a lovely family dinner and walk at Lafranc. After further quiet 4 weeks we left and drove back in 4 days via Marseille, Nice (just before floddings), Riviera, Lake Orta and Simplon.
- **and 2 package tours to Italy by Castel-Reisen:** 2 Nights in Riviera in February and 7 Days to Amalfi in November.

# Itinerary of Iberia Trip by VW-Caddy



Ste Marie to Ste Marie: 8500km, 38 days / 37 nights

## Diary of Iberia Tour

**Note:** The clock of my camera was still on winter-time (1h behind in CH, F, E – but 0 h in Portugal)

Sun 10. May	Start: <b>Ipsach</b> (home)	End: <b>Remoulins</b> (Gard)	drive: 516 km
<p>Motherday - left at 9.30 - beautiful weather - we saw the Montblanc already from Täuffelen! After entering France at Geneva we took our normal route via Frangy and Seyssel. This time we had a look at the 'Espace du Fier' beside the Rhone. This could be a good place to stop for the night at another occasion. Here we saw a pannel of the Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela (one of the targets of this trip!)</p> <p>Nice lunch picnic along <b>lake Bourget</b> (diving spot). Then continued on main roads via Valence and Pont St Esprit to <b>Remoulins</b> where at 6.30pm we stopped as planned for the night at a camper stand beside the bridge over the Gardon River. Nice Picnic - 28°.</p>			 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Lac de Bourget</p>
Mon 11. May	Start: <b>Remoulins</b>	End: <b>Ste Marie</b> (our holiday residence)	drive: 246 km
<p>Left at 8.30 and after taking a quick look (again) at the <b>Pont du Gard</b> we drove the shortest way on main road to our residence in Ste Marie just to spend one night (enjoyed our oysters bought at the oyster farms in Leucate)</p>			
Tue 12. May	Start: <b>Ste Marie</b>	End: <b>Morella</b>	drive: 503 km
<p>Left Ste Marie at 9.30 and drove into the Têt-Valley under clouds until the sun appeared when we approached the pass to the <b>Cerdagne</b> and on to <b>Puigcerda</b> (Bourg-Madame) in Spain. Nice drive along the Pyreneans refilling our water bottles at a road-side source before La Seu d'Urgell.</p> <p>Then continued towards the Ebro by-passing Lleida. We crossed the <b>Ebro at Flix</b>, then when passing Ascon at nearly 5pm we considered staying along the Ebro (too early). Nice drive above the Ebro Valley and a great view from <b>Coll del Moro</b> (Iberic house) near Gandesa.</p>			 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">fresh water</p>  <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Coll de Moro</p>
<p>Finally we reached the day's target at 6pm and settled on a camper parking offering a nice view of Morella pitched on a big rock. Lovely picnic and then a short walk to the aqueduct before going to sleep.</p> <p>We were alone except for one nice French couple staying in a camper who told me about the Pueblos Blancos which was their target.</p> <p>Note: 500km on main road means 7h solid driving .... stopping here and there and also organising eating and staying makes long days. Tonight we found a spot to stay for the night immediately.....</p>			 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Morella Background</p>  <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Aqueduct</p>
Wed 13. May	Start: <b>Morella</b>	End: <b>Valencia</b> (Playa Malvarosa)	drive: 198 km
<p>Sunrise breakfast outdoors! Took our time to visit the old town, Morella, with traditioal streets surrounded by a city wall since we had to wait till 11am to visit the fort. It was worth a visit also because of the superb view. Also saw the famous mural of the Dance of Death in the sala profundis of the Franciscan Monastery. On the way to castellan we had the lunch menu in a workers restaurant at Salsadella (what did we eat?).</p>		 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Morella</p>  <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Main City Gate</p>  <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Fort towering over City</p>	
<p>Nice drive to <b>Castellon</b>.....then drove a bit around inside town.... did some shopping (Mercadona, Lidl)... otherwise 'für nüüt!' Then tried the closest ways along the coast (x-times dead ends) to reach the big parking at <b>Playa Malvarosa</b> in <b>Alboraya</b> near the Port of Valencia (arrived at 7pm). We knew this parking as we had stayed a night here in 2007 on the way back from Morocco without visiting the city as we had no time while rushing to meet Evelyne and Rafa in Sant Cugat. Enjoyed picnic at the Playa's promenade and then went for a stroll along the Playa until it was time to go to sleep at 10pm.</p>			 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Playa Malvarosa</p>
Thu 14. May	Start: <b>Valencia</b>	End: <b>Valencia</b>	drive: 0 km
<p>Started walking at 8.30 the 5km to the city center passing by the port. A lot to see but the main attraction is the <b>cathedral</b> and its surroundings. The Market is huge but just a market.... On the way to the <b>City of Arts</b>, at 12.30, it started to get very hot (44° at some thermometer) b ut we still made our turn to admire the phantasy buildings. Back close to the port we found a little place to eat. It was so hot (eyes burning) that we sat inside. Good lunch for 9 Euro each: paella, fish/lomo adobado (marinated), cake, beer, coffee.</p>			



The Cathedral



The City of Arts (World Expo 2008)

When we got out it was unbearably hot and we then just survived at our beach, taking several showers. In the evening we even went to cool down at a nearby supermarket. We bought a bag of ice to have cool drinks with our picnic - the very hot wind burning on the skin. A passer-by with his dog outed himself as a former worker in Biel where he lived for 40 years (he had seen my AMAG Biel plate). He said that the thermometer in town at Mc Donalds had shown 50°

**Quote** from the Internet: The **record** set at **Valencia** today: **42.3°C** was 6.3°C above the previous highest May temperature, and was 4.1°C higher than the record for June!

At 9pm my car thermometer still showed 38°.... somehow we survived the night....

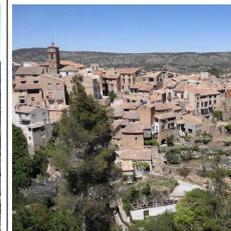
Fri 15. May	Start: <b>Valencia</b>	End: <b>Sierra Alcaraz</b> (10km after Riopar)	drive: 363 km
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.... at 7am it was 19°... thanks! We left after b' fast at 9am and first went for a shopping center. At Carrefour ..... somehow we lost each other and so left only at 11.00 (now had to pay parking).

Another half hour not finding the right way onward towards Albacete (as often later-on I wished I had a GPS). We left the highway at Fonte Figuera towards Hellin to visit the **Sierra Alcaraz**. Before Elche I saw an indicator to **Letur** (somehow remembered the name from some Guide) and turned off. Very nice drive on small road passing the turquoise-coloured Lake Cenajo and the Rio Segura. **Letur** was a remarkable traditional village with nice springs.



Rio Segura

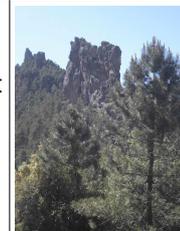


Letur....



... and its Springs

We joined back the main road at Elche after a long (but nice) detour via Lake Fuensanta (near Yeste). Now it was time to look for somewhere to stop for the night in the **Sierra Alcaraz**. Looking and turning here and there ... nüüt! After Riopar we almost lost hope but at 7pm, after filling our water bottles at a source and just before the **Puerto de las Crucetas**, we spotted a small rest area in a forest beside a gurgling creek .... bingo! Peggy cooked us a lovely meal and we enjoyed the quietness. At 8.30pm, the sun had gone, we felt a bit cool though with 18° (1300m). No phone, no radio reception.



Sierra Alcaraz....



... fresh Water!

Sat 16. May	Start: <b>Sierra Alcaraz</b>	End: <b>Andujar</b>	drive: 265 km
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The night was outright cold ... 4.5° at 7.30am. You bet that we enjoyed the hot coffee after shivering while waiting for the water to boil. It got better soon with the sun appearing. We left at 9am and reached **Alcaraz** to visit it's decayed fort (a windy 10°) and the traditional town center. We then crossed the Valdepeñas region and visited **Villanueva de la Fuente** (nice square, nice buildings with wooden balconies) and **Almagro** (nice square surrounded by arcaded houses - a bit touristic).



Alcaraz



Villanueva



electric Candle

Time now to move on South visiting the impressive fort **Calatrava la Nueva** offering a breathtaking view after driving up the 2km steep and rough cobblestone-plastered road.

I had hoped that taking the small roads from Puertollano towards Andujar through lonely mountainous landscapes would not only be nice but would also provide some opportunities for an enjoyable early evening and night. The drive via Mestanza, Solana and over the **Sierra Madrona** was very nice and we even saw deers.



Almagro



Calatrava la Nueva



...from the top

As we did not consider the parking area at the **Virgen de Cabeza** to be good enough we then ended up at **Andujar** where (after trying in vain beside the young Guadalquivir river) we settled near a shopping area for a 'street night' between a few Trucks. Since Peggy had cooked enough for tonight's meal we had a good treat after a short turn at the LIDL beside. Went to sleep after the street had emptied at 23.00. No problems!

Note: We could have continued to Cordoba - but I was a bit apprehensive about finding somewhere reasonable to stay.....



Virgen Cabeza...no stop



Andujar - night quarter

Sun 17. May	Start: <b>Andujar</b>	End: <b>El Torcal Mountains</b> (near Antequera)	drive: 215 km
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Left at 8.30 for one of our major targets of the trip: **Cordoba!!!** We took the highway to get there quickly and then

parked at the big commercial center El Arcangel across the **Guadalquivir**. Easy 1km walk to the **Puente Romano** leading to the **Mesquita** (Cathedral) which was re-built as a Mosque on the foundations of a Christian Church starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. I visited the Mesquita by myself. Then we just strolled around the whole attractive historical center of this old capital, once the most important of Europe during the Muslim period. Near the **roman temple** we had a simple lunch menu for 7 Euro each: **salmorejo** / scramble eggs, fried porc rolls / bacalau..... then continued visiting till after 4pm.



... then drove off in the 'glowing' car towards **Antequera**... with Peggy getting a bit fed up of visiting when, after 6pm, I still tried desperately to look for the great **Dolmen of Menga**... closed on sunday!..... then I was a bit stressed when erring around the old town to look for the road to the **El Torcal** mountains

- by the time I found the way and driving on a winding narrow road Peggy's motivation had reached below 0 levels..... and then almost at the top of the mountain I had an almost flat tire and just made it to the parking for the night which at home I had spotted fortunately in Google Earth. The little stroll provided beautiful sceneries getting Peggy back in the boat and so we had a lovely picknick and a nice evening. After Peggy went to bed I had my usual classical session on RNE Radio - tonight an analyses of **Caruso** with a dozen samples on various arias ..... wow! Then I slept well in spite of the stressing flat tire!



Mon 18. May	Start: <b>El Torcal</b>	End: <b>Lake Guadalhorce</b> (near Ardales)	drive: 111 km
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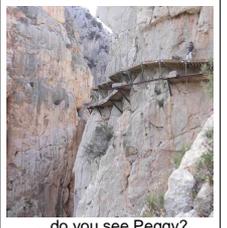
Got up late and after breakfast we started for the marked **Torcal-Roundwalk** at 9.30. It was a small and wild 'sendero' through spectacular rock formations - I could not stop taking pictures every few steps. At the end we even saw a flock of Andalusian Mountain Goats (Ibex). Got back to the car at 11.30 - and now **I HAD TO CHANGE THE WHEEL!** Never done it before on the Caddy but that was no problem.... but even I tried for 1h, I did not manage to put back the spare wheel properly..... thread broken...



Later we returned to **Antequera** to visit its fort and a little part of old town. Then very nice drive to the Guadalhorce Lakes via Alora, Carratraca and Ardales. We finally reached a dam (4pm) and realised that we have to return a few kms to visit the **Gargante de Chorro**, a gorge with a overhanging pilgrim path - **Balcón al Caminito del Rey**. We climbed up and down the steep slope to reach the start of the overhanging footbridge - closed!

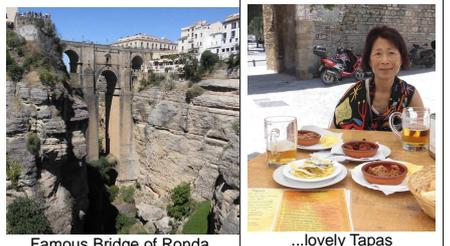


Well, we climbed over the fence and started walking high above the abiss until we entered the gorge. Here we faced a workman who energetically told us to return and even made sure.... (in the end we learned that the path is a wellknown camino and that it would open officially the next day! It was an experience all the same!  
Now was time to look for somewhere to stay the night and after trying several options in all directions we ended up again at the same dam of the **Embalsa del Conde** and settled on a little side road just beside the water (7pm). Had simple picnic until 9pm - very quiet place!



Tue 19. May	Start: <b>Lake Guadalhorce</b>	End: <b>Zahara la Sierra</b> (Pueblos Blancos)	drive: 137 km
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Easy and lovely drive to famous **Ronda**. First we crossed through right away to end up at a camping (del Sur) as Peggy needed very urgently a WC. So she sneaked in and then could not resist taking a clandestine shower...ohoh! As we did not feel like staying in Ronda for 24h we returned to Ronda and parked just outside the gate. Now we spent a few hours enjoying the many gorge views, the town, the cliffs and the wellknown and much photographed bridge. So many restaurants....none to our liking.... just when we reached the city gate ... there was this Tapas place also serving cool beer ... now then!



First we drove to **Grazalema**. Nice town, nice view but still early to stay especially in a very strong wind. So we continued along a scenic road over the **Puerto de las Palomas** (1200m) to **Zahara la Sierra** topping **Lake Zahara**.

We parked at the town's entrance for the night and then strolled through the nice 'white' town. When we reached the other end we found a hidden parking with marvellous views over the lake. Bingo... after moving the car, we climbed up to the fort right above, offering a great 360° view around and down into the white streets. Back at the car at 8pm we just enjoyed the rest of the day till dark.



Night-Spot at Zahara



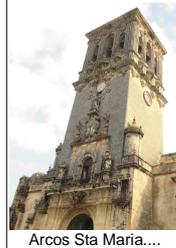
Fort above Zahara



Zahara - Pueblos Blancos

Wed 20. May	Start: <b>Zahara la Sierra</b>	End: <b>Cadiz</b> (Beach)	drive: 174 km
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Very much enjoyed breakfast in 'sunrise with view' after Peggy's Tai Chi.... We left at 8.30am. After passing 2 'pueblos towns' we stopped at the third – **Arcos de la Fontera** spread over a rocky ridge with 2 nice (competing) churches and narrow white streets, then on the way to Cadiz we also made a turn in **Medina Sidonia** which we entered through the arabic Arco de de la Pastora (10<sup>th</sup> c) We reached the coast at Chiclana in very heavy traffic and so we did not stop and headed to **Cadiz** right away.



Arcos Sta Maria....



....San Pedro



Medina Sidonia

First (at 3pm) we parked at the promenade outside the old city of **Cadiz** but it was so hot that we moved the car to the old town at the very end of the peninsula and started the walk from there (at 4pm).

Already hungry we walked and walked – while seeing nice things, always one eye on all the closed restaurants – in the end I felt frustrated. At 6pm we made a surge to visit the **Castillo** which was very nice. Then we hopped into the car and drove out of the city along the endless Playa Victoria to stop at the first open beach parking (7pm). That was a great move.... forgetting all restaurants, we had our nice 'Atlantic beach apero'. Peggy then cooked Albondigas while I was writing in my diary. In the setting sun they tasted better than anything else!....Ende gut, alles gut!



Walk to Cath.Nueva



Castillo S. Sebastian



Our night quarter

Thu 21. May	Start: <b>Cadiz</b>	End: <b>Chipiona</b>	drive: 103 km
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Good idea.... go for a little run on the beautiful beach in the rising sun before breakfast ... Peggy added a Tai Chi session! During breakfast our car neighbor got dressed up and went to work in Cadiz... before he told us the way to the nearby VW-garage for the tyre. There they were very helpful and wrote up a text to be shown at the nearby tyre shop. All went well and 30' later my spare tyre was fixed – for 5 Euro!



Cadiz before BreakfastM

Much relieved we drove over the big bridge to **Puerto de Santa Maria** to have lunch. Quite soon we found the right bar for the apero with Jerez and Caracoles and then a repeat at a restaurant waiting for the paella for 2 followed by a plate of fried fish for 3 people (1 portion went to the doggy bag:-). Now we were ready for a stroll in this old city which played a big role in Columbus' times.



Caracoles...



... with dry Jerez...



.. ready for 2nd



.. after Paëlla... fish

We saw the Iglesia Mayor with storks, the Castillo San Marcos with the first ever world map showing the New World and then slendared along the Guadalete River till 4pm. Slow drive along the coast looking for a nice place to spend the evening. We settled in **Chipiona** close to the light tower. Here, after another stroll in the small town, we enjoyed another spectacular sunset followed by our picnic: the fish from lunch and albondigas from yesterday and salad...then we socialised for a while with a French couple in a huge camper.



Iglesia Mayor



....Castillo in Puerto



Night Quarter..



.. at Chipiona

Fri 22. May	Start: <b>Chipiona</b>	End: <b>Mazagon</b>	drive: 248 km
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Nice morning – we left at 9am. I had planned to get quickly to Portugal – dänkschte!!! First I bothered to visit **Sanlucar** (flop – but cheap petrol and good WC) and near Bonanza we still managed to see the estuary of the **Guadalquivir**. Then I wanted to follow small roads avoiding Sevilla.... after much erring around (once 10km dead end) we reached (via Los Palacios) **the ferry** over the **Guadalquivir** at **Coria del Rio**. From here we followed the nose westwards along small roads hoping to get back to the coastline somewhere... the suddenly I saw a sign to **El Rocio** (which the French neighbour last night had mentioned) –



5km before El Rocio we suddenly saw dressed-up people on Horses and a bit further decorated coaches and crowds of dressed-up people.... now it dimmed on me .... the **Whitsun Festival of El Rocio!!!** Lucky it was only Friday – so we could see and be in it – The weekend would be a big mess - up to **1 million people!** What an atmosphere of Far-West! Traditional houses, sandy streets, unnumbered horses, coaches and poeple all turning up to visit the ceremonies around the sanctuary! By the time we left it was past 3pm!



Now we were hungry and we stopped at the first place at the coast, at **Mazagon**. Just sat down on the terrace of a small restaurant serving a menu at 4pm for 7E (the grilled fish etc were just right for us). By now it was 5pm and so we just settled at port's car park and hung around until dark. The weather had been nice again ... perhaps a bit hot in the sun ... but fine!

Sat 23. May	Start: <b>Mazagon - Spain</b>	End: <b>Torre d'Aires</b> (8km west of Tavira) - <b>Portugal</b>	drive: 172 km
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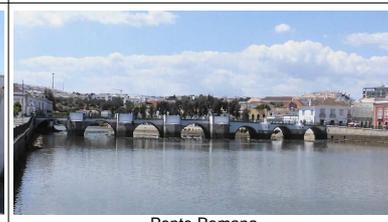
Got up at 7am and left at 8.30..... due to sloppy or non-existent sign-posting I turned in circles before heading towards **Palos** and the **Monasterio de Rabida** to look over the **Rio Tinto** to Huelva and the **Statue of Columbus**. We also had a quick look at the replica of Colombus' ship, the **Sta Maria** (10am). Surprising how small that ship was for such a trip! Easy Sunday-drive on highway through **Huelva** and then to **Ayamonte** where we had planned to take the ferry over the **Rio Guadiana** to the Portugal-side. We just missed it and we did not feel to wait for 1h (why did we not?) .... so we drove out and on to the big motorway-bridge over the Guadiana to **Portugal**.



On the portuguese side a pannel asked foreigners to register their car with their credit card – I felt stressed because I did not understand what this was about – but I did it. It turned out that my credit card had been debited for 0.60 E....for reaching the first exit... We then stopped at the **Castro Marina** but did not enter it (fee). So we continued to **Vila Real de Sto Antonio** which we found a lovely town with a quai along the Rio Guadiana River view to **Ayamonte** .... but first we sat down near the market to enjoy our first **Frango Assado con Pipo** (Portuguese grilled Chicken).



Next stop: **Tavira**, a nice old town too with a roman bridge. We also walked on the fortifications of the moorish fort with nice view over the Gilão River. It then seemed to be the time to look for an evening stop at a place Fernand (firend from fitness) had recommended to visit ... **Pedras El Rey** at the famous Lagunes (**Ilha Tavira**). Now the road was a building-site - blocked cars all over this famous leisure park with a pleasure railway to the dunes - Weekend!



So shocked, we returned to main road even without setting foot down .... after a while I tried a small side road ... and after 2km we found a lonely spot at the lagoon behind the dunes - Torre de Aires. Usually this place is just used for the locals' access to their leisure and fishing boats. Bingo! 6.30 pm (we had not realised yet that it was only 5.30 portuguese time:-). Little walk, apero, picnic, view in evening sun .... all fine and very quiet night!



Whitsun 24. May	Start: <b>Torre d'Aires</b>	End: <b>Alvor (Praya)</b>	drive: 144 km
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We left at 8.30 (7.30:-) after b'fast in sunrise. Drove through **Olhao** non-stop to **Faro**. Nice stroll through old center which was nearly dead. Nice contrast of dunes/lagoon and city walls. Storks here and there clattering. On the way to **Albufeira** we made brief visit to **Sao Laurengo** ('Whitsun service'). I tried to drive along the sea through **Albufeira** (Whitsun) but got so badly trapped I did not realise where I am before we reached the other side..... byebye.. did we miss out on something?



Then we tried **Armacao** – no stop – then **Senhora de Rocha**. This was quite nice but we did not feel like taking the walking shoes out and as it was time to eat we drove inland to **Lagoa** but found no suitable place to eat, not even at the big brocante market. Now I felt a bit frustrated but we still went to the **Carvoeiro Praias** where we enjoyed walking from the **Carvalho Praia** to the light tower and beyond (unfortunately I did not find the famous **Algar Seco** Cliff). Then **Calvoeiro** itself was a tourist trap again ... slowly looking for a place to stay for the rest of the day .... **Portimao** another tourist trap ... just a quick photo-stop at the famous **Praia de Rocha**....



By now I had lost all hope for a meal at a restaurant and was glad that Peggy had done her shopping such that we could just stop at what looked good as a place to stay at **Alvor Praia**.

Here we had a nice evening with Peggy preparing a complete warm meal at first..... Then at 7pm (we still thought 8pm) we were ready for a stroll along the beach and the cliffs and after a few 100m we just wanted to return when some French who live there told us to continue to another little beach and then through a natural tunnel.... now we saw some of the nicest cliffs of the Algarve, the **Praia Tres Irmaos** – We got back to the car in setting sun at 8.30pm. Happy ending after a hectic and a bit frustrating day.



French resident lady...

...showed us the way to...

...the Praia Tres Irmãos

**PS** Peggy's cooked dinner (pork etc) was delicious.... but when we passed by the beach restaurant – I envied the people who seemed to enjoy their romantic dinner at the nearby restaurant.... one cannot have everything!

**Note:** Today we have visited an area making 60% of Algarve's famous south coast ..... in 1 day! One would need at least a week to get a real grasp of the multitude of beaches and cliffs .... but then the area is really a bit overdone with tourism. I think the evening at the Praia Tres Irmãos together with the following day saved our experience of the Algarve to remain a definitely positive souvenir!

Mon 25. May	Start: <b>Alvor</b>	End: <b>Praia de Bordeira</b>	drive: 108 km
<p>We left at 8.30 (our time) and drove through Alvor without finding the church.... then on the Way to Lagos we tried to enter a supermarket but it was still closed – now only did we notice that <b>Portugal's clocks where 1 hour behind!</b> We enjoyed the turn in 'early' <b>Lagos</b> which is quite a nice city without excessive tourism. Then we continued to the nearby <b>Ponta de Piedade</b> to admire the spectacular cliffs.</p>		<p>Lagos</p>	<p>Ponta de Piedade</p>

On the way to **Vila do Bispo** I wanted to visit the **N.S. de Guadeloupe**, a 13<sup>th</sup> chapel and some **Megalíticos** – in both cases I saw indicators guiding off the main road but in both cases I gave up not knowing how far it would be and Peggy was a bit tired to just drive around. Note: Later I found out that the chapel was at 1.5km and even closed on Mondays, the Menhir, only one small one, was at about 2km and not easy to find.

So we went straight to the End of Europe at **Cabo de São Vicente** where one can have the 'last Bratwurst before Amerika'. Wild and solid rocky cliffs sticking out into the Atlantic Ocean – quite impressive – but then we were hungry and I could not convince Peggy to share a Bratwurst.... Back at **Sagres** there was no suitable place for us to eat and in **Vila do Bispo** even less..... but there was a Lidl... and then we just drove 20 min up the coast....



End of Europe - Cabo São Vicente.....

...long way to America...

....at **Praia de Bordeira** we found a great spot overlooking the beach and we liked it so much that we just stayed the rest of the day, even it was only 2pm. Now Peggy unveiled her shoppings at Lidl and instead of picnic prepared a 3-course treat which at this marvellous place in perfect weather was better than anything else in a restaurant.... With full tommy we went for a very nice walk on top of the cliffs until sunset highlighted the undulated dunes on the beach. A very perfect ending of our coast trip from Cadiz.....



Most enjoyable rest at Praia de Bordeira

Sunset Walk and Stork Nest

... tomorrow we will leave the coast for several days..... no definite plans.....

Tue 26. May	Start: <b>Praia de Bordeira</b>	End: <b>Mertola (Rio Guadiana)</b>	drive: 265 km
<p>A bit of morning fog for b'fast but soon the sun pierced through. Quick shopping in Aljezur before turning up to the Serra de Monchique. Very nice mountain drive and then quick detour to the Caldas de Monchique to look for the opportunity to enjoy a thermal bath..... the Hotel and it's offers were a bit too 'chique' for us.....</p>			

....and so we continued to **Monchique**, a summer resort located at 500m (here we saw a public swimming pool - wow – closed till 15<sup>th</sup> June!) .A bit disappointed we gave up this place and drove right up to **Foja** - the top view point at 900m .... just below the top there was a fountain with a fresh water source ... a good wash, a small laundry and refilling our water supplies while enjoying the view ... what more do you want? Did not stay at very top of **Foja** as it was packed with tourists and antennas..



Monchique and ...



Toja....water..



...and great view for Laundry and Wash

Getting back down again (and hungry) we continued on small sinuous roads until we reached a highway IC1 (near **São Marcos**) and after a short while there was this 'routier' restaurant ..... 1 huge prato de dia (6E), cossido for 2 (both of us were full), 2 beers, a coffe and a schnaps – total 10E! Very happy now .... we left the IC1 towards **Mertola** and after passing **Aldomovar** we enjoyed the typical hilly golden steppe of the Alentejo with unnumbered cork trees and stork families in their nests perched on trees, posts and roofs.

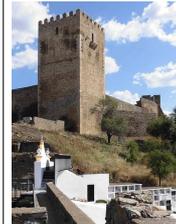


Huge yummy Cossido etc



The Alentejo

When we reached **Mertola** it was very hot! We parked at the town-parking under the provided 'umbrellas' and then forced ourselves to visit town. The main things to visit are the castelo, the archeological site displaying 3000 years of history starting with the Phoenicians (followed by) Romans, Visigoths, Moors....) and the nice view from the fort over the **Rio Guadiana**. (was so hot to climb up the hill)). On the way back to the car I stopped at a bar and ordered a large beer – 3.50 E .... hmm, compared with the cossido at lunch for 6 E).



Mertola on ....

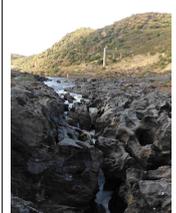


...Rio Guadiana



...Roman Mosaic

Now it was 6pm and as it was so hot I suggested to visit a gorge - **Pulo do Lobo** .... I had seen it on GE at home and hoped to stay there for the night. Starting at 6.30pm - 40 mins for 40km. Unfortunately the last km was very steep down on dirt road and on the bottom it was unpleasantly warm and very humid between the bushes. So we just made a quick turn to look at the river gurgling through the strangely structured rocks as Peggy under no circumstances would stay here for the night (likely to be plagued by mosquitos). Now I drove back to **Mertola** in 30 min(!) . We parked again under the umbrellas by late 9.30pm ... that night we were plagued by mosquitos....the worst of the whole trip!



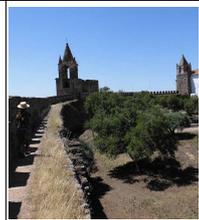
Pulo do Lobo Gorge

Wed 27. May	Start: <b>Mertola</b>	End: <b>Marvão</b> (near Portalegre)	drive: 311 km
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We left at 7.30am right after waking up. On the way out we realised that there would have been a much nicer spot beside the bridge over the Guadiana River - well - a good reason to have breakfast here. Lovely drive to **Mourão** via Serpa (bought some nice pulpo at the Intermarché) and **Luz** (rebuilt 2002 because of the artificial lake Alqueva). In **Mourão** we visited the old fort and enjoyed the nice round views over the lake while walking on top of the fortifications.



B'fast at Mertola



Castelo de Mourao...



View to Alqueva Lake

Another nice drive to **Estremoz**, famous for marble. It was time for lunch and no 'bingo restaurant' in sight.... so we visited first the nice town and the castle. Then Peggy bought a half frango assado for dinner and in the end I still had my Bacalao a Braz with wine and a tiptop coffee! Little shopping in Lidl and then continued to Portalegre after 4pm! Note: We had passed-by Estremoz by bus in 2010 on the way from Evora to Elvas without visiting.



Estremoz: Castelo



...Igreja beside



Palourinho



... Bacalhau a Braz

We reached **Portalegre** at 5pm only and so we just made a short turn. Nice town with an old church and after a cold beer it was then time to think for stopping somewhere.

I had considered **Marvão** already at home .... but only when we approached did I realise that this ancient fortified town is perched high on a rocky hill - it was now 7pm. We drove up and parked outside the walls. Quite exciting visit – very traditional houses enclosed in fortifications from which one had a splendid round-view in the setting sun.



Portalegre



Marvão high up



...within the walls



...on top the walls



... in the streets

Then at 7.30pm just below the city walls and beside the Santa Casa da Misericórdia we found a good spot to sleep beside a few other campers. Now we enjoyed our Frango Assado with mixed salad! When this was finished it was dark already! Twinkling stars and lights from the plane.

Thu 28. May	Start: <b>Marvao</b>	End: <b>Alcantara</b> (Tajo Bridge in Spain)	drive: 213 km
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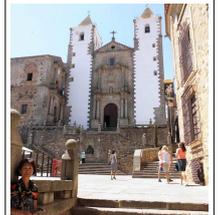


Breakfast - View

As it was cooler here and no mosquitos we slept very well and then had a leisurely b'fast around our camping table. Now Peggy is cooking squid for supper tonight (wherever that will be). Easy drive to Spain and via **Albuquerque** (saw big fort but did not visit) to **Caceres** where we arrived after 12. Extensive stroll through the old town with many impressive palaces, churches (fees) and museums but in fact the whole historic center feels a bit like a museum around a huge square.



Cat'l Santa Maria



Iglesia de San Francisco

Then, a bit outside the main part, we had a simple lunch - poor cosido, small bacalao, thin soup, 1l beer ... and I was a bit frustrated ..... 10' later we bumped into a street fiesta around huge cooking pots of Paëlla and beer flowing abundantly! We got a small helping of delicious Paëlla for 1E and then were upset for a long time because we did not find this place before having our poor lunch!



Fiesta Paëlla..



to good to refuse

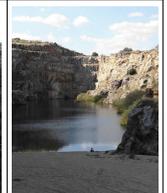


Plaza Mayor

On the way out of town we stopped at Carrefour for a Wifi session etc and then drove straight to **Alcantara** where we arrived after 5pm (spanish time). First we drove to the roman bridge over the **Tajo** and decided that we will sure settle here for the night. But first we crossed over to a high view point on the other side of the Tajo from where one had a magnificent view over the Tajo to Alcantara. We also drove down to the interesting **Cantera**, a quarry with a small lake and a sand beach.

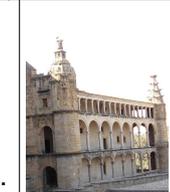


Alcantara over Rio Tajo with Roman Bridge



Beach old Tajo Bed

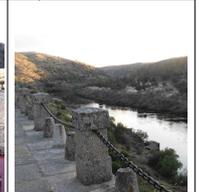
Back to the bridge we still went on to visit the old town although it was very hot. The town was interesting but there was hardly anybody on the streets. Back to the bridge we noticed a water tap right beside the place we stayed and so we had a good wash before having dinner (the pulpo Peggy had cooked this morning), then sitting on for a very romantic evening with a never-ending frog concert while the bridge slowly vanished in the darkness. Note: This Roman bridge is 194m long, 71m high, built in the year 100ad.



Conv. San Benito



Dinner at bridge..



Tajo Summer Night

Fri 29. May	Start: <b>Alcantara</b>	End: <b>Fatima</b> (Grutas da Moeda)	drive: 325 km
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Bridge Breakfast

While I was still deep asleep Peggy started to clean the car..... then we had lovely breakfast while watching the sun conquering the Tajo valley... We left about 7.30 (P-time) and enjoyed a lovely drive back to Portugal and then directly (missing out Monsanto) to **Castelo Branco**. Made a short turn in town and visited the Igreja São Miguel but missed out the Jardim do Paço. Then continued on to **Vila Velha de Rodao** offering a great view of the **Tejo** flowing through a narrow mountain-gap - **Portas de Rodão** into Portugal.



Castelo Branco



Tejo at Vila Velha

On the way to **Nisa** I took a small side-road to visit a Dolmen .... after 5 km we reached a village (dead-end) where we were told that we would have to follow a rough dirt-road – vetoed loudly from beside me....back to main road and then in Nisa my old map caused me to make another detour of 20km... (do I need a GPS?). Finally we arrived at Abrantes ... sandwich or restaurant? .... Peggy needed a WC most urgently.... so bus stop and no suiting restaurant nearby and in **Costancia** not either ... so sandwich on a car park in unbearable heat. Not enough... I had planned to settle for today at a most comfortable parking right beside the Tejo at the **Castelo do Almourol**.....somehow I missed the way and was then totally unable to locate myself again on the map. I only recovered the situation 15km later before **Entroncamento** when I saw a signpost pointing towards **Tomar**...

**Note:** Now at home I found out why I got lost so badly! - At **Costancia** crossing a bridge - I took the side-river Rio Zezere as the Tejo..... so my world had turned by 90°.... wrongly, I kept thinking that we drove south-side of the Tejo..... Even at Entroncamento I had not recovered my sense of direction and it did not occur to me that I could have turned 7km back to Almourol to end the day !



Castelo de Almourol - missed

It was after 3pm when we arrived at **Tomar**. It is an interesting old town on a small river and below a huge castle with a nice view from its fortifications. At 5pm we had finished our tour ... what do we do for dinner and sleeping? The restaurant we saw would open at 7pm only. As I could not make up my mind ... Peggy went to a supermarket and could not resist an offer for steaks! It was now 6.15pm .... so I drove off into small roads to an aqueduct where I was hoping we would find a good place to stay.....

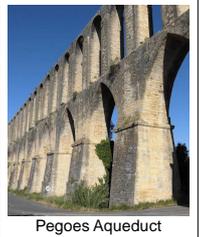


Tomar Castelo



Tomar main Square

The **Pegoes aqueduct** was very nice but the parking was not (and it was too late to visit) .... after erring around on small roads for 30' I finally decided to go on the 30km to Fatima where it got really late and so I just followed indicators to the **Grutas da Moeda** (caves) which we reached in sunset. It got cold and windy. So instead of parking beside a lonely Swiss couple with a camper we went for a bit of lonely shelter at the gate to the Grutas. Peggy now cooked the steaks in the dark in windy 17° and the steaks were cold before eating. .... tonight was not romantic.... At least we slept very well. This was the kind of day causing me, getting older, too much emotional hardship.



Pegoes Aqueduct

Sat 30. May	Start: <b>Fatima</b>	End: <b>Batalha</b>	drive: 24 km
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Quiet breakfast, bye to the Swiss and then back to **Fatima**. It's a huge compound but really .... the only impressive thing to see is how the pilgrims arrive on their knees.....the main Sanctuary was closed due to restauration, so we soon continued to **Batalha**....with the very impressive monastery and the famous 'unfinished chapel'. We had passed here in 2010 during our long march through Portugal and for this time I had only planned a short 'souvenir stop'.



Sanctuary....



... Pilgrims at Fatima



Unfinished Chapel at Batalha

But then at 10.30am the lady at the tourist office told us that there is the **Festa del Pão** (bread) this weekend and so we decided to stay on for the day on a free camper parking right beside the monastery. So after the hard day yesterday we took an easy day .... just hanging around and enjoying what there was to see (also visiting an old bridge nearby with an old toll house. The festivities were supposed to start at 3pm ...but when at 4, we still did not notice anything going on we decided to start our own festivities with our apero. I was still a bit frustrated after yesterday and also for not seeing any foodstalls by now.....well – instead, we had a nice picnic until 7pm!



Our 'Home' at Batalha

Now feeling better we noticed that the Bread Procession was about to start in the cathedral with dozens of bread creations being lined up awaiting their benediction. The bread was packed and decorated in huge baskets and then carried by dressed-up ladies on their heads or on stretchers. The colourful procession (also including men and kids) made a turn around the montery compound and through town in beautiful evening sun.... it had been worthwhile for us to wait so long.



Festa del Pão.....



.....

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Sun 31. May	Start: <b>Batalha</b>	End: <b>Figueira da Foz</b>	drive: 127 km
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We left at 8am towards the sea, stopping at a LIDL in **Marinha Grande**. First we visited **São Pedro de Muel** and then enjoyed following the wild coast up to **Praia do Pedrogão** (we had walked the coast a bit further north in 2010 and it was very similar). Then at Osso de Baleia I missed the way and it took me a long while to be back on track already getting nervous about missing out a good lunch somewhere....We reached **Figueira da Foz** at 12.15 and easily found a good parking (Sunday) beside the estuary of the Rio Mondego, also good enough to stay the night in case.



São Pedro.....



Coast Memories



... of our Walk 2010

Now we walked into town and looking for a place to eat we asked a bar lady who recommended a restaurant (Cosina Nova) nearby. As I did not find it, I asked an elderly couple and they said that they are on the way to that place. Looking at the menu outside it looked great ... but no tables left. Then we saw the couple and they waved us to join... situation saved!

The couple spoke french and helped us to get the order right: 2 menus: soup, fish (me), goat (Peggy), wine and desert.... a couple on the other side gave me one more fish! Got out of table at 3.30pm – very satisfied – then strolled through town with our hosts for 1h, visiting the Igreja São Julião with a beautiful Fatima statue. Later we strolled out on the long jetty. When we reached the car it was 5.30pm, time for a siesta.... and we stayed at the parking beside the Rio Mondego.



Great Lunch and ...



...company



...Fatima



...out on the Jetty

In the evening Peggy cooked the meatballs she had bought this morning (for tomorrow) – but at 8pm we had one each for fun.....

Mon 1. June	Start: <b>Figueira da Foz</b>	End: <b>Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo</b>	drive: 330 km
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Covered sky – first time since we left France! Started for **Coimbra** at 7.30 and made a quick souvenir stop just across the bridge with view of the city's skyline formed by the famous university. Then drove through the narrow and picturesque **Modego Valley** (remining Ticino) to **Penacova** and then on to **Gouveia** where we started to enter the **Serra de Estrela**. Very nice drive, high enough (1600m) to get above the clouds and the winding road offering great views with glaring gorse-bushes (Ginster) and bare bolders all over the slopes.



Coimbra and ....



nearby Mondego Valley



Serra Estrela

From **Manteigas** we then continued to **Belmonte** where we paid a visit to the fort with nice views, a nice church with a beautiful Fatima statue. Short drive to **Guarda** where we first headed for the castle tower which was locked. The lady from the tourist office then walked us back up and I think she was quite happy to have a reason to leave the office for a moment:-). The impressive cathedral and many of the houses in town are built with gray stone cubes giving a very special atmosphere.



Belmonte...



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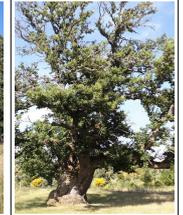
Guarda from Fort

We also saw an interesting restaurant (even tripe) but it was only 4pm instead of 7.30 – so with regret we dropped the idea.... probably still perturbed, I could not find the right road for 20 mins until I asked at an Audi-garage. Soon after, at Pera de Moço we stopped at a small dolmen and a little later near Guilhafonso we admired the very old huge castanheiro gigante - the biggest of Europe!

In **Pinhel**, at 6pm, we started to look for somewhere to stay the night....We expected a suitable place to take the table out for eating the meatballs Peggy had cooked last night - no way! .... So we continued over a pass to the **Douro Valley**.



Dolmen



Catanheiro gigante

Beautiful but long drive in late sun – unfortunately in a rush – when we reached **Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo** after 7pm, I was emotionally exhausted.....So we just stayed at the main square of this small town (there was even a WC) and had our apero while Peggy made couscous with Piri-Piri to go with the meatballs. It was real yummy but I was still upset as my mind could not forget about portuguese specialities. Now it is 9pm and nobody around anymore.... good night after a long and eventful day again!

Tue 2. June	Start: <b>Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo</b>	End: <b>Pesa da Regua</b>	drive: 265 km
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First thing in the morning after 7am we drove up the hill to **Castelo Rodrigo**. An old, almost deserted, fortified village. Beautiful view and great atmosphere in lovely morning sun. After visiting the village we went back to Figueira to make a short turn there too until 8.15. Then nice road winding through olive slopes to the bottom of the Douro Valley at **Barca de Alva**. Enjoyed the piecefull atmosphere when strolling over the bridge looking down to the decks of river-cruise ships....remining us of our Nile-Cruise just a few months ago!



Castelo Rodrigo



Figueira C. Rodrigo



Douro at Barca d'Alva

The road then followed the Douro for a while offering great views as it climbed into the hills before turning away to Freixo de Espada (I went for a short turn). Later we joined the Douro again at **Pocinho** (nothing more than a view of a big dam). As there is no road along the river we drove north to **Vila Flor**. Before I could think of having lunch there I found myself on a (new) express-road and zipping too fast and straight through beautiful country-side. Good I turned off at the Pinhão-exit and when we reached **Alijo**, a small town, we decided to stop for lunch. A simple dish of home cooking 'Rindsbraten' in very local setting did the trick for today.



Wild Cherries - Douro



Alijo....



..Santa Maria

Here we entered the world of the Douro wine. The drive down to the Douro at Pinhão through all these beautiful vineyards was absolutely top. In Pinhão we made a short stop and admired the small railway station with lovely azulejas pictures of local wine-sceneries. Also made a quick turn at the river-port before following the Douro towards **Peso de Regua**. Enjoying the river we considered to stop for the night at the carpark of the 35m(!) lock gate just before Peso de Regua but it was only 4pm and the place was not considered good enough to enjoy a early stay.



Vinyars at Pinhão

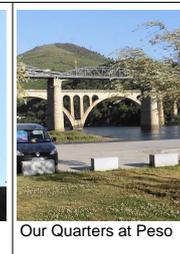


Pinhão Station wit Azulejas



Lock Gate 35m

I knew that it will be a rush again... but I opted for driving first to **Lamego** to visit a famous sanctuary on top an endless stair..... it was very hot up the stair ... the church was nice ... but then we did not feel like staying here for the night ... so there was not enough time to really enjoy and even less to visit town except a quick visit to LIDL:-). Straight to the Douro. Lucky enough ... we found an excellent place at **Peso de Regua** just beside the river with nice view also to the 3 bridges across – it was now 7pm – just about enough time to enjoy the evening ending with a beautiful sunset over the Douro.



Note: Had we seen that place to stay at 4pm.....then Lamego would have been for tomorrow.... now... here I decided that tomorrow we will skip the planned visit to Vila Real and the famous Mateus Wine-Castle for the benefit of a day in Porto which we had enjoyed so much in 2010....

Wed 3. June      Start: **Pesa da Regua** (Douro)      End: **Porto**      drive: 130 km

After lovely b'fast we started before 8am the lovely and leisurely drive along the Douro on the winding N108 to the outskirts of Porto. It took us over 3h for 110km, stopping here and there and also making detours (by missing the way). Entering **Porto**, the road along the Douro to the center at **Ribeira** was blocked .... big mess – but eventually we reached the Douro again just after the Ribeira and then at 11.30 found a place to stay near the estuary of the Douro, 4 km from the center (walked passed there in 2010 already). Just found a good place to have a simple lunch (I was silly to push for eating on 1<sup>st</sup> floor inside instead of enjoying the terrace in the sun).



Started walking along the Douro to the center at 1pm and then revisited the old city in one go - Igreja Carmo, & Igreja Carmelitas (Rokoko), Torre de los Clerigos, Igreja Ildefonso, Cathedral-Se, San Bento Station (Azulejas), Ponte Dom Luis. In the end we strolled in the Ribeira and along the Douro getting back to the car at 7pm ... as we had seen a much nicer place 500m closer to town, almost under the motorway bridge, we moved before settling for good. Beautiful view up-river to Ribeira and down-stream to the Estuary. First apéro then picnic and hanging around in nice evening atmosphere. We went to sleep at 11pm.... This was a busy but not too stressfull day!



Thu 4. June      Start: **Porto**      End: **Viana de Castelo**      drive: 214 km

Typical thick fog.... we left at 7.30 and drove up the coast-line (the way we had walked in 2010 from Porto Aiport) to **Agudela Beach**. Then having difficulty to find the way, mostly on small cobble-stone roads to **Vila do Conde** to visit an aqueduct leading a long way to a castle towering the center (an elderly man whom I asked for the way told me in french that GPSs are not expensive and easy to use....). We reached **Guimaraes** just on time to get a seat at a small local resaurant just outside the old town....(Menu 5E: soup, fish (Peggy), alheira sausage (me), wine, coffee).



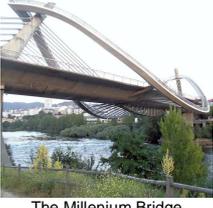
After 1.15pm and satisfied we enjoyed the visit of this important medieval city although all churches were closed but admired the outdoor Cross Scenes. In the end we passed but did not visit the big Ducal Palace. Left at 3pm to continue to **Citania Briteiros**, a celtic village.... Didn't get in – fee for not seeing much – and instead continued over the hills to the sanctuary **Bom Jesus** on top of a hill and a big flight of stairs.

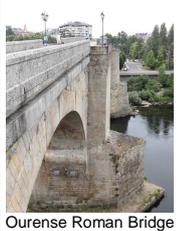


The visit was woth-while more for the 'holiness' of the site than the decorations in the church. The pictures in the big hall about spreading the gospel to the entire world and the scenes of Jesus are interesting. Leaving it was 4pm – too early (and hot) to stay at the near forest we came across – so we continued to the coast by-passing **Braga**.... When reached the beach at **Esposende** – thick fog and unbearable cold wind! Disappointed, we decided to continue to **Viana de Castelo** where we found a reasonable place to stay along the Rio Lima.



This site in a park was ok as it was distant enough from the sea to be out of the cold fog and wind. By the time we had settled it was 7pm. Time enough for picnic and a little stroll along the Rio Lima.

Fri 5. June	Start: <b>Viana de Castelo</b> (Rio Lima) - <b>Portugal</b>	End: <b>Ourense</b> (Rio Miño) - <b>Spain</b>	drive: 159 km	
<p>Peggy started before 6am to clean and make order...while I still slept. Thick fog..... just when after b'fast we thought to leave the fog dissolved and so we made a turn in town which was quite nice. I had no clear plan for the day and just headed along the Rio Lima towards Ourense in Spain. Next place we stopped at 11pm was <b>Ponte Lima</b>, another old town with a very nice roman/medieval bridge over the extremely clear Rio Lima. The town was otherwise very touristic such that we decided to continue to <b>Ponte de Barca</b>....</p>		 <p>Viana....</p>	 <p>...de Castelo</p>	 <p>Ponte Lima</p>
<p>Bingo!....we dropped into the best place in town to have lunch (soup, salad, fish with potatoes and rice / 2 steaks with fried eggs and fries, wine desert, coffee for 5E each)! A little stroll over the bridge for digestion.... we left at 2.30pm to continue up-river into the mountains mostly beside big lakes to then over the divide at <b>Alto de Viero</b> towards Ourense and the Miño River. <b>Note:</b> Before <b>Bande</b> along <b>Lake Conchas</b> we missed out a great attraction: <b>Aquis Querquenis</b>, remnants of a roman thermal center, still having hot springs - no mention in the guides and only a mini-sign along the road....</p>		 <p>Lunch treat at...</p>	 <p>..Ponte de Barca</p>	 <p>upper Rio Lima</p>
<p>At <b>Celanova</b> we stopped to see the magnificent cathedral/monastery San Salvador. We just caught the lady of the tourist office who then showed us around and also to the pre-roman Capela de San Miguel, famous for the sun to shine through a hole at both equinox dates. It was almost 6pm (spanish time) and so we asked the lady about where we could settle for the night.... she told us about the thermal sources in <b>Ourense</b> and the way to find them..... half hour to Ourense ... then it took a long while and patience until we found the perfect place to stay....</p>		 <p>San Salvador...&amp;...</p>	 <p>Capela São Miguel...</p>	 <p>... at Equinox</p>
<p>Thanks to Peggy's sharp eyes and my ruse to find the only path to get to that spot 100m from a thermal well open to public (all seemed to be locals) and just beside the Rio Miño! At 19.30 Peggy pumped her first water – the evening was saved! Did we enjoy <b>THE WASH!!</b> After a nice picnic in the evening sun we went for a stroll along the river and to our surprise came across 2 small pools with hot water. Well – that's for tomorrow – we continued the walk and then we had another surprise: a phantasy foot-bridge attached to a car bridge - The <b>Millenium Bridge!</b></p>		 <p>Wow .. warm water!</p>	 <p>I love Ourense</p>	 <p>The Millenium Bridge</p>
<p>Of course we walked over it and enjoyed the view of the river, the roman bridge and to the city. When we got back to the car it was dark and time to end the day!</p>				

Sat 6. June	Start: <b>Ourense</b>	End: <b>Tui</b> (Rio Miño/Minho) - <b>Spain</b>	drive: 114 km	
<p>Peggy got up in the dark and went to the well to wash her hair under the pump (in privacy:-). After b'fast we walked over the roman bridge and then 2km to the town center. The old town itself is not outstanding but we liked to see and feel the very hot <b>Burgas Hot Spring</b>....up to 60°. On the way back we took a very exciting bath in the pools which we had discovered last evening. The water was rather warm and after 10 mins one felt rather hot. Btw – I very much enjoyed the shower too – as it was a warm shower for a change:-). We took an easy time here until after 10am.</p>		 <p>Ourense Roman Bridge</p>	 <p>Burgas Hot Spring</p>	 <p>...our hot Pool</p>
<p>Then along the Miño River in direction of <b>Tui/Valenca</b>, we made a stop at <b>Ribadavia</b> to visit the small old town with an old castle. It was a bit too touristic to have lunch here... so we left and then changed over to the southern side of the Miño to have lunch at <b>Cortegada</b>.... no way .... next village .... no food in the only bar .... but people pointed to the Portuguese side... so instead of 2.30 pm it was 1.30pm again and sure we found a simple place to eat at the next village <b>Melgaço</b> – Peggy had a huge serving of 'Bife' and at last I had my huge Francesinha, a very popular kind of 5-decker hamburger with everything, wine and coffee (15E). For details.... please look up in Google:-)</p>		 <p>Ribadavia</p>	 <p>Francesinha (left)</p>	

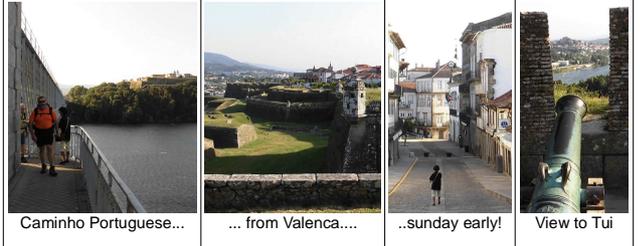
Full to burst we made a small turn to the fort and then continued to **Valenca** but crossed right away over the Miño to **Tui** and found a good spot to stay on the riverside (4.30pm instead of 3.30pm) with great view to the Valenca-side. Then walked to old **Tui** realising that we were on the Caminho Portuguese. Then enjoyed the stroll through the old town – we also crossed a few pilgrims doing the Camiño Lusitania (at 2 days from Santiago). Then went back to the car to enjoy the evening atmosphere beside the river – but it was very hot.



We did not feel bored as there was a Saturday gathering at the boats club right behind us.....

Sun 7. June      Start: **Tui**      End: **Illa A Toxa** (near O Grove)      drive: 167 km

We started at 8.30 to walk over the **Eiffel-Bridge to Valenca** ... already encountering early pilgrims. Then we made a big turn all around the huge fortifications to the opposite side of town where we entered the old town through 2 long gates through the walls and then strolled through the old streets ... hardly anybody except back-packing pilgrims. Enjoyed the nice view over the Minho to **Tui** and our night quarters then walked back over the bridge getting to our car at 10am.



Half hour drive to **A Guarda** at the estuary of the Miño. A Guarda was nice but not special and so we continued over the rocky coast to Baiona with a short photo stop at the **Cabo Silleiro. Baiona** was very crowded (weekend) and so we just visited the great statue of the **Virxe da Roca** with a beautiful view over the ocean. Then continued to **Vigo** which I tried to cross non-stop but then got lost in the huge port. By miracle I just caught the right lead to the main road to Pontevedra.... when (it was now 1.45pm) we spotted a road-side restaurant.... we decided for....one dish of pescaditos .... but due to misunderstandings.....



... they served us 2 big dishes....lucky that Peggy could not resist to order a very special plate of delicious ink-fish tapa (she had spottet on the way back from WC). By now the restaurant was full and people ate all sorts of great stuff while we got full to the top on pescaditos..... It was still good and there was a great view over the bay!

Easy drive to **Pontevedra** (Sunday).... easy parking and still digesting lunch we made a long turn through town. It was very hot and now I write and look at the photos, I only remember things vaguely such as the quarter circle Pilgrims Church with 2 towers, walking through small streets and squares while avoiding the sun and the medieval Ponte de Burgo of the 12 century replacing the older roman bridge which had given the name to the town. I can see, Peggy is already walking on the bridge....



Then we continued to **Raxo** and along the bay to **Sanxenxo**.... all the beaches were overcrowded (sunday) and it was very hot..... so we just made a few photo stops and continued to **O Grove** at the end of the peninsula. It was now past and now knowing what else to do I drove to **A Toxa**, a small island with a famous chapel clad in Coquilles St Jacques, the **Capela de San Sebastian** When I stopped at the first parking, already considering for the night, Peggy did not consider and did not even want to leave the car. Well ... I did my sight-seeing and when I came back we decided to go back to O Grove....



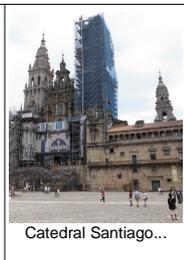
Now we still took another look at the chapel.. and then just made a turn to the other side of the island... bingo... a loney parking at a pleasure-boat peer overlooking the bay! Now everything was fine and a guy even told us about the mineral water fountain only 250m away! The evening ended the day perfectly... after apéro and picnic we even made a little stroll in the setting sun.

Note: let's face it ... we are exactly 4 weeks on the way and except in Valencia did not sleep more than once at any place. We are getting tired and also a bit saturated after visiting 100+ things to see ....and there is still much to come!

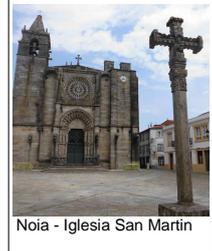
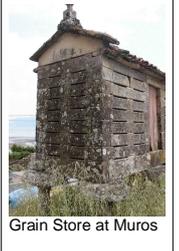


Mon 8. June      Start: **Illa A Toxa**      End: **Cabo Fisterra**      drive: 219 km

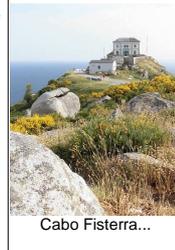
Nice breakfast - water from the spring.... At 9.30 started easy drive to Santiago along the bay, stopping here and there, such as the pilgrimage church - Santuario de Escravitude (Slavery) where we chatted with an Asian lady-pilgrim. Note: the Legend talks of a miracle when a pilgrim to Santiago was cured of dropsy by the holy water and then exclaimed: "Thanks, Virgin, for releasing me from the slavery of my ailment".

 <p>San Escravitude</p>	<p>Arrived in <b>Santiago</b> after 11pm. No problem parking and starting the visit walking up to the cathedral at first. Sure, the cathedral and the square were very impressive and it was nice to stroll through the narrow streets watching hundreds of pilgrims (an industry - long queue at the Oficina Peregrino) but then after 2.5h we went back to the car.....enough.....</p>	 <p>Catedral Santiago...</p>	 <p>...de Compostela</p>	 <p>Oficina do Peregrino</p>	 <p>...rua do Vilar</p>
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We did not feel like eating in the very touristic restaurants and so I missed again the much-praised seafood I had been longing for the whole way.....and I feared that it will not be for tonight either...(this issue frustrated me much of the time). So we drove towards the Fisterra, me taking a photo here and there (stony grain stores) and Peggy getting itchy for shopping. Quick stop at **Noia** (strange cemetery – church closed) and **Muros** quite nice but at 4pm too early to stop and have dinner. In **Cee** we did not find a good place to stay and then wasted 1h to decide what to do .... in the end (after shopping in LIDL - for just in case;-) we drove to the Cabo Fisterra.

 <p>Noia - Iglesia San Martin</p>	 <p>Grain Store at Muros</p>
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Arriving at **Cabo Fisterra** at 6.30pm, we found a very nice spot, sheltered by rocks and with splendid view over the end of the cape into the Atlantic Ocean. Still in a difficult mood Peggy started to cook the albondigas (from LIDL:-) and as we were both very hungry we enjoyed the meal even more and then felt much better. We had been very lucky to be able to park in the shelter permitting us having dinner at our table! We then enjoyed the nice walk around the windy cape in the setting sun giving the landscape an awesome atmosphere. There were many people around enjoying too!

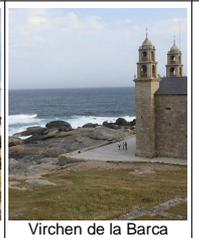
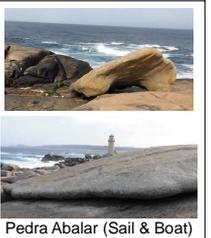
 <p>Cabo Fisterra...</p>	 <p>Apéro then Albondigas</p>	 <p>... end of Camiño</p>
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Reflection: now that I write this a few months later ... The outdoor scene at Cabo Finisterra holds for me as strong a souvenir than the visit in Santiago..... also we felt there that we are starting our way back.....

Tue 9. June	Start: <b>Cabo Fisterra</b>	End: <b>La Coruña</b>	drive: 205 km
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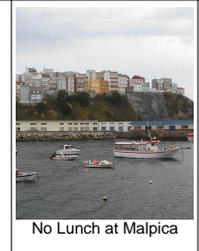
Peggy woke up very early and suggested to move the car to the other side of the ridge to have sunrise b'fast.... great idea! It was only 7am and the first walkers already arrived.

Soon we left the cape and after photo stops at **Fisterra-Village** and **Cee** we enjoyed the drive to Muxia to visit the famous Senhora de la Barca and the Pedra de Abalar, rocking bolders of the form of a sail and a boat - Santiago's (St James') landing place. A local (who had lived in CH) took us a round and gave us some explanations. The whole place and its atmosphere were exciting – but the cold wind limited our enthusiasm to stay longer than 1h.

 <p>Big Grain Store in Cee</p>	 <p>Virchen de la Barca</p>	 <p>Pedra Abalar (Sail &amp; Boat)</p>
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I dropped the detour to Camarinas and went for **Baio** to see signposted Dolmen – did not find them – so we continued to **Corme** and its lighthouse which was nice but not very enviting in the strong wind.

Now I started to get very short on fuel which I expected to get at **Malpica** as well as seafood lunch (again....). Being nervous about the fuel running out and squeezed in very narrow lanes, mostly leading into dead ends - Peggy lost patience ... (no sea food!) and on we went for another 17km to **Carballo** – which welcomed us 1<sup>st</sup> thing with a petrol station – uff!. More relaxed now we made a turn in town to find a place for lunch. Erring around in the center for a long while, feeling cold while just taking a glance at a bar, an elderly french-speaking local encouraged us to step in. We had a large mixed dish for us 2 – excellent calamares and a yummy cordon-bleu. Better than no sea-food!

 <p>No Lunch at Malpica</p>	 <p>+ Wifi at Carbal</p>
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The local outed himself as having lived in Lausanne. He was right now having lunch with his niece and nephew from Lausanne who told me that Stan Wawrinka had just won Rolland Garros (which cheered me up even more:-). Now they even helped me into the bar's private Wifi ---- (Whatsapp: Evi's long bike ride + Laetitia's teeth). In good spirits we left towards La Coruña .... the sky had cleared up ... and when we passed a very nice lonely beach at **Caion** we could not resist to walk on the beach and take a freezing shower... ..now clean inside & outside we made a short turn in Caion without stepping out of the car and then....

 <p>Beach at Caion &amp;</p>	 <p>freezing Shower</p>
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... reached **La Coruña** before 6pm and parked near the entrance of the fort on the small peninsula (even put an eye on a parking lot for the night). Relaxed we now walked along the bay to the center and marvelled at the long range of glass-clad buildings at the waterfront, so typical of this city and its region. We enjoyed the stroll trough the busy streets and glanced at the hundred offerings for dinner.... far too early!

 <p>La Coruña - Glass Water Front</p>
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It was still too early after the tour up to the old part of town where we visited a few churches! Well - we knew that we had what's needed in the car – the 2<sup>nd</sup> helping of albondigas from last night, ready for a harbour-view dinner in the car:-). When it was time to sleep at 10pm, I realised that there was a gate keeper watching us all the time – as we had seen a hidden fallback place at the Parque de Maestranca at 300m we moved and then slept very well there - undisturbed!

Note: Tonight I had let go on seafood because we had decided to buy the famous **Percebes Muscles** at the market the next morning.... why so important? We had eaten them once in 2007 when camping on a lonely cliff near Tisnit in Morocco in 2007 and they were very exciting to eat!



Castillo San Anton with Harbour-View

Wed 10. June	Start: <b>La Coruña</b>	End: <b>Playa de las Catedrales</b> (12km from Ribadea)	drive: 233 km
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At 6.30 we moved right away to the Hercules Lighthouse to have breakfast. This done, we enjoyed the morning atmosphere to make a turn on the cliffs around the impressive light-tower, with 55m the highest Roman Tower in the world! .... then at 9am we walked straight to the market in the old town. When we arrived the food stalls were still empty and the food was just about being unpacked to be exposed. After hanging around for a while Peggy spotted the first Percebes Muscles at 9.45 and bought 200g for 7 Euro! Drove out of town at 10.30.



Hercules Lighthouse



Buying Percebes !

Nice drive to **Ferrol** (lost the way once) and past **Playa Valdovino** to **Cadeira** where I had hoped to have a nice lunch..... Cadeira was not outstanding but it was soon 2pm ...and no lunch for us! The lunch-hunt continued all the way to the **Estaça de Bares**, the most Northern point of the coast. Here we downgraded our lunch hopes to a fulfilled sandwich treat....instead we had a wonderful hour at this rough cape with an unmatched abundance and variety of flowers fighting for attention with the cliffs and the breaking swell. Nice drive past **Viveiro** and then to....



Playa Valdovino



Estaça de Bares

..The **Playa de las Catedrals** .....where we arrived at 4pm to spend the rest of the day! That was the place... phantastic cliffs with caves, arcades, small sandy beaches .... the swell changing the scenery with the tide and the light of the mixed sky. In one of the cave a bag-pipe player played traditional music. After 1h of exploring the tide pushed us back to the stairs..... It was now 6.30 and I did not mind to start the next phase ..... apero and then dinner with the delicious **Percebes Muscels** as the main actors!

At 9.30pm we made another turn to the cliffs in sunset .. no more visitors ... we had the whole place for us alone!



Playa de las Catedrals....

....

....

Cave

Good things to come

...Percebes

.... Tide in the Evening ...

Thu 11. June	Start: <b>Playa de las Catedrales</b>	End: <b>Ponferrada</b> (Camiño)	drive: 235 km
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Slept till after 7am.... after b'fast returned to look at the scenery once more in morning light .... we had to walk on the top because of high tide but the exciting views from all angels just kept us going for another 1.5h as we walked to both sides of the shore.

Easy drive to **Ribadeo** .... just made a short turn to see the awkward Torre dos Morenos (Jugendstil) and then broke away from the coast towards Lugo.



Walk in the Morning..



.. do you see Peggy?



Ribadeo - T. Morenos

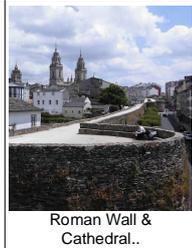
At **Pontenova** we made a short stop to see the furnaces of an abandoned iron mine before continuing through nice countryside to **Lugo** where we arrived at 1pm – just the right time to look for lunch – with some 'insistance' we found a small place with local dishes on the menu: 1<sup>st</sup> paëlla, 2<sup>nd</sup> veal snout (morro)/veal ribs, milk rice for desert - 9E each! Satisfied, we then enjoyed an extensive walk on the UNESCO roman city-wall (85 defense towers / 2km) fully enclosing the old center.



Old Furnaces in Pontenova



Veal Snout and Ribs



Roman Wall & Cathedral..



... the Fishermen... see Note:-)

**Note:** At home I could not find out about the 'Fishermen'..... so I sent the picture to the tourism office Lugo. They replied within 1h pointing out that this set-up is part of the '**Cofradía Sacramental de la Ultima Cena Lugo**' - the scene of the 'Last Supper' used for processions..... what surprised me was that I seemed to posses the unique clear picture! ... then I found a link to a video of the processions from 29<sup>th</sup> March to 4<sup>th</sup> April 2015. <http://semanasanta.galiciadigital.com/es/semana-santa-en-lugo> - the picture beside is a snapshot of the video!



Procession Ultima Cena

We left Lugo at 4.30pm saying bye to our old companiero, the young Rio Miño. Very nice drive over the **Pedrafita Pass** between 2 Sierras. Now reaching the main Camiño de Compostela we stopped at **Villafranca de Bierzo** at 6.30pm to look for a place to stay for the night. The small town was quite crowded with pilgrims and so we continued to **Ponferrada** where we at first tried to find a place outside town..... nothing we liked. Almost having lost hope .... when after crossing the bridge beside the castle, there was this huge parking and at its far end just the right place for us (and a few other campers)!



It was only 7.15pm now and so while we were having apero and picnic, Peggy decided to fry her veal steaks she had bought this morning (for tomorrow....).

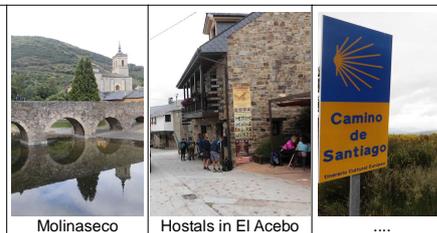
After that we still had time for an leisurely walk to the river (with an iron foot bridge), then walking on a foot-path around the impressive castle in the setting sun at 9.30pm. Getting back to the car, I realised that we were parking just beside a pilgrims guest-house. Curious, we entered and the place was like a youth hostel with all the conveniences for young backpackers – I almost felt like staying (6E the berth - fully booked). To my amazement I saw pictures of the holy Swiss Niklaus von der Flüe on the walls – it turned out that the guesthouse's name is **San Nicolaus de Flue!**



Fri 12. June	Start: <b>Ponferrada</b>	End: <b>Playa de las Cuevas</b> (10km from Ribadasella)	drive: 344 km
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Quite cold this morning (11°) and so we left quite early. I chose the small road of the camiño over the mountains....

... soon we stopped at the roman bridge at **Molinoseco** from where the road climbed up to 1500m. Near the top I took a wrong turn and ended up 5km later in a village lost in a small valley..... 5km back through beautiful yellow bushes to chose the right road....ok. From now on we saw a never ending procession of pilgrims (a bit like the refugee pictures in Sept 2015 – but no kids). At 10am we made a short stop in one of the small villages, **El Acebo**, where many pilgrims had stopped for the night and were now getting ready to start for the day.



Next we stopped in **Astorga** to see the cathedral and the Gaudi palace. At the bus stop we chatted with a few lady-pilgrims from US... one of them taking a bus due to a leg inflammation.... another one was from Colorado and got very excited when I told her that I had read the book 'Centennial' 40 years ago which was much about the place she lived! As we were a bit late we skipped Leon and continued northwards over a pass to **La Robla**, then eastwards to join the road to the **Picos de Europa** (2600m).



It was then a very nice drive through wild mountains up to the **Embalse de Riaño** (huge dam), up to the **Puerto de Ponton** (1300m) and down through the exciting (never ending) **Desfiladero de los Beyos** (gorge) to **Cangas de Onis** . Now it was 5pm.... I had planned to drive into the Picos de Europa to Covadonga and up to the mountain lakes (Enol, Ercina) to stay for the night..... There was a webcam in the tourist office showing the lake but there was only fog... the wether forcast for the next few days was 'gruusig'..... forget the Picos! So we just had a quick look at touristic Cangas de Onis and its roman bridge....



.... and continued to the coast at **Ribadasella**. Nice little port but before 6pm the parking was a bit too crowded to stop already.....enough time to take a chance to continue along the coast. Near Llaes we turned towards a signposted playa at 1km and there was a very rough cliff with blow-holes, the **Bufones de Pria**. Unfortunately they were not in action as there was no ocean-swell and there was not really a suitable spot to stay.... so we continued for another try....



another small side-road... bingo – **Plaia de las Cuevas!** A lonely car park heading into a small cove surrounded by cliffs with gates and holes and.... 7.15pm - they will not run away – well-deserved apero then the steak Peggy had fried last night. A bit tough I thought – never mind – this was more than compensated when we made a turn in and around the Cuevas. Now is 9.30pm, time to get ready to sleep (and snorr). As the Picos were out of the plan we could now consider ourselves to be on the way home.... still a long way though!



Sat 13. June	Start: <b>Playa de las Cuevas</b>	End: <b>Burgos</b>	drive: 275 km
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Gray morning but not too cold to enjoy b'fast outside with surrounding cliffs. Lovely coast drive past **Llanes**, in **San Vicente de la Barquera** over an old bridge and then to **Comillas**, a very nice small town with a 'dream castle' with chapel. There is also the **El Capricho de Gaudi** and the **Pontific University Palace** ....both to see with a fee of course... but on the way out of town we visited an impressive cemetery with a great view (free of charge:-).



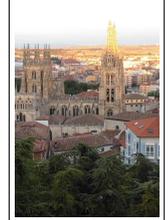
A bit later we reached **Santillana del Mar**, which some guides praise as the nicest town of Spain.....it was nice and interesting but for our taste it was too touristic and museum-like (perhaps I would say the same about Gruyères in CH). Easy drive to **Santander**, easy parking outside and 10 minutes later.... 1pm... the yummy-looking restaurant offering the menu for 9.50 Euro! 1<sup>st</sup>: Peggy : Paëlla /me: Cossido Montaña (Fabada Asturiana), 2<sup>nd</sup> Peggy: fish / me: yummy Rusos al Queso (Tätschli mit Chäs), red and white wine.



Started walking to the center at 2pm..... but after a long while we wondered where the center is. There just seems to be a busy main street with all the shops and a few small side-streets but nothing really to visit. Well, we did not insist as it was rather cool with threatening rain and so we returned to the car at 3pm. Nice drive to Burgos through green countryside over 2 gentle passes and down through a canyon of the young **Ebro** at **Quintanilla**. Approaching **Burgos** we made a turn in Carrefour while I was still wondering how we would find a place to stay for the night (no proper street map).



It was past 7pm but Saturday and not much traffic and so I just drove towards the center when I saw an signpost for a castillo on a hill ..... after several km on a small winding road ... there was this lonely car park in a forest just beside the **Castillo de Burgos**..... even better – 300m to the best view point over **Burgos** just overlooking the whole city and the cathedral in the setting sun! Then returned to car for apero at 8pm and picnic. Today it has been raining a little a few times on the way to Burgos and it was rather cool with 16 to 18°.



Btw: At lunch in Santander we saw on tv-news that there had been floodings in Madrid....our direction...

Sun 14. June      Start: **Burgos**      End: **Segovia**      drive: 232 km

Started walking down to **Old Burgos** at 8.45am, chilly 11° but sunny.... At first we visited the cathedral and could even enter to witness the Sunday service... then we noticed the big crowd around old center (the Plaza del Rey) as there was a big race to start. We enjoyed to stroll through the old center, the Plaza Mayor and the park along the little Rio Arlanzon and back through the Arco Santa Maria.

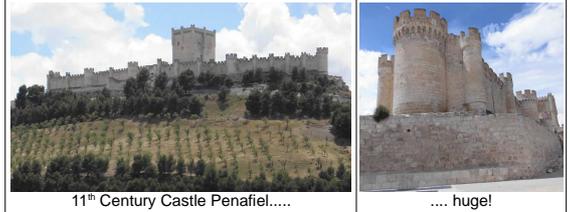


But then after only 1.5h we climbed back up the hill but before moving to the car we made a turn around the Castillo de Burgos and its defences enjoying the view once more.

Easy drive southward to **Lerma** and half hour visit of this nice old town with a big monastery where we had the luck to follow a rehearsal of a nun's quire (they looked like in Sister Act). Another easy drive to Aranda de Duero (young Douro - was brown because of heavy rains) expecting lunch ... nice town with many people but Sunday prices - Menu's between 20 and 50 Euro – well – after turning around for 1h we saw a small tapas bar in a side street with a very good offer... 2 raciones: orejas (pigs ears) and paëlla and 2 beers....well done!



Now happy ... we continued towards Segovia but first followed the Duero Valley to visit a big Castle at **Penafiel**. Really impressive Castle and it was so well renovated that it looked new. Now we crossed typical central-spanish plains with huge wheat-fields, some beautifully patched with Mohn (poppy). After **Cuellar**, we experienced squally showers which stopped just in time when we approached **Segovia** so we could admire the nice city panorama and get an .....



... idea of where we could look for a place to stay the night as it was 5pm by now (we had no maps). We made quite a few loops on small streets at the bottom of the valley but then we spotted a small parking beside Iglesia S.Lorenzo, at 10 mins walking distance from the famous aqueduct. As the sun just appeared we left for a quick walk to the aqueduct and the city defense walls offering a great view over the aqueduct ... then followed the aqueduct the whole length before visiting the nice Iglesia S.Salvador.



View of Segovia with.....



..... Aqueduct

We just got caught by a heavy shower the last 200m before reaching the car – just about ok with our mini-umbrella. It was 7.30pm - time for a leisurely picnic in the car and so it was quickly 9.15pm when I wrote today's notes in my diary. Now 13°. Note: The parking had been built very recently and the fountain beside sounded like a gurgling river.

Mon 15. June	Start: <b>Segovia</b>	End: <b>Toledo (Rio Tajo)</b>	drive: 218 km
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Got up at 7.30am – 12° and still heavy rain... we took our time with b'fast enjoying the hot coffee! Just when we decided to step out into the rain at 8.45, the rain stopped and it was dry for the whole visit. Interesting city ... we entered town at the aqueduct and the Cadenas House and then passed the Lozoya- and Hercules-Towers, the cathedral (fee) etc to reach the huge Alcazar Castle (fee) with impressive fortifications dominating the plain. Then came back along the city walls and the San Andres Gate and reached the car after 10.30am (2h visit only as we were cold).



Segovia Cathedral



...Alcazar Castle



...Loyosa Tower

1h easy drive to **Avila** where we parked at LIDL just outside the city center – the old center is inside an impressive, well maintained romanian wall (2.5km/88 towers). We started walking at 1pm – ideal time to look for lunch – neither outside nor inside the walls while sight-seeing (cathedral etc) did we find a place of our liking.... amongst dozens of restaurants! (not the right dishes / too expensive / wrong ambiance) – I became impatient (again) and the 11° in strong wind did not help – at 14.15 we gave up and started to walk back ... but then a small pannel: 1 glass of wine with 1 Tapa for 1.20E – bingo!



Avila-Catedral



.... DefenseWall

Really just what we needed – a racion of yummy porc skin with mashed potatoes for me and a racion of yummy ragout for Peggy. Feeling satisfied we enjoyed the walk back to the car even making a detour to admire the walls from outside. We left about 3.30pm and enjoyed the beautiful drive under a sun-lit chaotic sky with very clear view over the hilly landscape. On the way we passed the **Puerta de Paramera** and then the pre-historical **Toros de Guisando** near **El Tiemblo**.



Toros de Guisando

When we approached Toledo the sun seemed to win and the temperature rised over 20°. This enabled us to have splendid view of Toledo as we drove high above the Tajo on the opposite side... almost circling the city, making several photo stops. It was past 6pm and time for finding a place to stay .... well ... just as we reached the ancient footbridge (Puente Al Cantara) leading to the city-gate we spotted a small carpark ....



Approaching Toledo....over the slope of Toledo - the Rio Tajo....



..Night Quarters at Puente al Cantara

... we found a narrow parking lot heading towards the Rio Tajo with view to the old city. Now relaxed we enjoyed apero followed by a leisurely meal (Peggy even fried sausages and vegies). The viewpoint's wall was our table.

At 9pm we decided to go for a walk to enjoy the view over the Tajo and the City in the setting sun, the cathedral and the castle dominating the sky line. In the far distance the panorama was animated by thunderstorm clouds reflecting the sunlight but also being flickering from lightnings as darkness set in. We got back to the car after 10pm – what a memorable day - again!  
We were very lucky to find this small cark park where locals park free of charge obviously to go working in the center..... so we were alone late at night....



Late Evening Walk....

Tue 16. June	Start: <b>Toledo</b>	End: <b>Ventano del Diablo</b> (near Villalba de la Sierra)	drive: 251 km
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Quiet night – got up at 7.30 and enjoyed view-breakfast. At 9am, after crossing the Al Cantara bridge we entered **Toledo** passing the Puerta de Alcantara. Toledo is really a highlight and we really enjoyed strolling through the narrow streets and admiring the cathedral and old buildings. But then... it is very touristic and one has to pay fees to visit anything and everything. So our tour lasted about 2h and we were back at the car after 11.30pm. Today the weather was very nice and comfortable.



Toledo Catedral...



...Calle Comercio...



Puerta Al Cantara

Easy drive... a bit monotonous... to **Cuenca**. As I did not know what this town was about I asked someone how to get to the old town .... we thought he is kidding us when he said 'by taxi'. As we were hungry we settled outside the first simple restaurant .... just had 1 menu for 2 (+ 1 more wine for Peggy) - 1<sup>st</sup>: Fabada (not as good as in Santander), 2<sup>nd</sup>: spare ribs from oven, desert, wine and coffee (10E). The lunch was ok but just and town offered nothing to see..... so we just went to ALDI for bread and drove off for today's expected HIGHLIGHT – Ciudad Encantata (I was then in a very bad mood .... for missing out on something 'unspecific').



New Cuenca

We immediately entered a gorge and at the end of the gorge I realised that the Old Cuenca was on top of the gorge.... so we turned around, crossed the little river to drive back on the other side offering great views over the gorge and wild cliffs. There was the **Old Cuenca** – perched on the rocks above the gorge! Now I recovered my spirits and we enjoyed the visit of this old fortified town. It was 6.30pm by now .... we should have stopped here for the night ....



Old Cuenca perched on Rocks



.....



.....

.... but I was already fixed of the next target, the Ciudad Encantada. Soon we reached **Villalba** to enter the **Serrania de Cuenca** by a narrow gorge, the **Ventano del Diablo**. The parking of the gorge's viewpoint offered a splendid view over the valleys in the setting sun.... after 10 mins we continued and 8km later reached the **Ciudad Encantada**.... 7.30pm ... great disappointment: unattractive carpark and the things to see where fenced in a private park behind a gate (fee).



Ventano del Diablo..



... Gorge



did not see this\*

It took less than 5 minutes to decide and we were back on the way to the **Ventano del Diablo**.... 8pm already but still nice to stay for the night.... great picnic in sunset with the last beams at 9.30.....

*\*Note regarding Ciudad Encantada: Later at home I found out in the Internet that the attractions (rocks) of the Ciudad Encantada are not only in the fenced park .... they are spread around in the forests near the 'ugly' parking... we could have returned easily the next morning ... had we known....*

Wed 17. June	Start: <b>Ventano del Diablo</b>	End: <b>Montserrat (Monastery)</b>	drive: 530 km
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The sun was up when we got up at 7.30. Our mind was set for a long drive, impatient to get home (Ste Marie). I chose Monserrat as today's target being sure that we would find a good place in a marvellous set-up of rocks.... and still enabling enough time for tomorrow's stop-over at L'Escala for lunch and spanish shopping.

We left at 8.30 and had a most beautiful drive through the **Serrania de Cuenca** with gentle morning mist over the lakes, then over a pass of the **Montes Universales** and soon after we reached the **source of the Tajo** where we made a rest. It was exciting for me to visualise the river's itinerary passing Toledo and via Alcantara to Lisbon and flowing past the Belem Tower into the Ocean. Then we continued to the Sierra de Albarracin and had a look at the old fortified town of Albarracin.



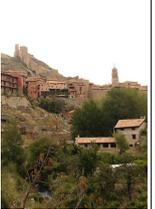
Emb. La Toba



Tajo Source ....

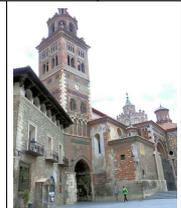


..with Statue of José Gonzalvo



Albarracin

Next, at 11am – 1h visit of **Teruel** with a 'special' cathedral and very pretty gate towers. Then nice drive to **Alcaniz**. On the way I kept looking for a good place to have lunch – but we were either too fussy or whatever. In Alcaniz it was 2pm and so we just stopped for shopping and Peggy bought some steaks for dinner... today I did not mind as there was still a long way to go. Also enjoyed the drive on the N420 to **Reus** crossing the **Ebro** at **Mora d'Ebre** then by-passing Tarragona we turned up to **Montblanc** (here with Evelyne & Rafa years ago after a Calzots Fiest). Took me some nerves to find the road to **Igualada** ... but then that way was very nice too.



Teruel Cathedral and..



Tower

From here it was only a short way to **Montserrat** which we approached from the back.... without messing around we just stopped at the small parking of the lonely romanic monastery **Santa Cecilia** overlooking the plane with the famous Rocks towering behind us. Now it was 6.30pm .... enough time to enjoy the view in the setting sun having apero and dinner – Peggy cooked, cleaned and cleared until 8.30pm when all was in order. Well, there was no fun to walk around because of strong wind.



Our last Night Quarter



at the Monastery

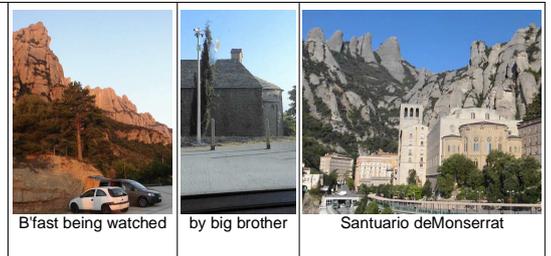


Santa Cecilia - Monserrat

Thu 18. June	Start: <b>Monserrat</b>	End: <b>Ste Marie (France)</b>	drive: 289 km
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Got up at 6.30 and watched sunrise ...with beautiful lighting of the rocks behind us. During b'fast in the car I noticed that we were headed directly by a surveillance camera at 10m distance.....

We left at 7.45 to visit the Monserrat Sanctuary which we had visited in 1982 when we were camping near Escala for the first time (our kids were 6 and 4). We parked along the road outside the official parkings and arrived at the sanctuary before the first tourists and so could enjoy the views (even saw Tibidao in the distance) and the quietness of the church. A lot had changed but the location and setting in the rocks is still exciting. Got back to the car at 9.30am and enjoyed driving down very slowly.



Then we took the road to **Manresa, Vic and Girona** (by-passing) Barcelona and arrived in **Escala** at 1pm as planned to have lunch at our favourite small restaurant. Disappointment – the Thursday menu had changed and there was no 'home-style' Paëlla... The rest of the day was routine shopping at LIDL and Mercadona until 3.15pm and getting back to **Ste Marie** at 17.30.... then clearing up and first proper shower in 5 weeks time ....aaaaahhhhh!!!!

Fri 19. June – Sun 5. July      **Resting+ in Ste Marie**      drive: 10 km (1 time shopping by car)

We stayed bit more than 2 weeks to rest and doing as little as possible. But Peggy did of course all that was necessary for normal life! Otherwise the only event was the visit of Willi and Ingeborg without their dog Babette who had died recently .... we were all very sad. A few days before we left for home we suddenly saw planes circling over us and then realised that there was a big bush-fire at less than 3km. The strong wind was blowing the fire and the smoke towards the old village center!



Mon/Tue 6./7. July      Start: **Ste Marie**      End: **Ipsach**      drive: 762 km in 2 days

Routine drive along main roads via **Montpellier, Ales, Valence, Voreppe** to **St Laurent du Pont**. I was tired driving and so we stopped at the empty car-park with a WC just outside the center. The next day routine drive via **Chambery, Lac de Bourget, Collonges, Bex, Divonne** (shopping – no fun here as it is too short from CH-border) ... PS When we got home all had changed: Our neighbours, Flörls had built a new Terrace and the Käsers a new slope (replacing the former jungle)....



This report was written between 1<sup>st</sup> September and 3<sup>rd</sup> November (partly in Ste Marie)

### Other small Ventures 2015



**Mai - Juli: Iberia Trip**

**End July: Joining Evi's Biketour over the Big Swiss Passes**



**August: Hang-Gliding from Niesen**      **August: Take Toni & Ah-Yuen to Venice**      **September: Holiday in Ste Marie**



