

SPANISH MEET, EL CHORRO

24TH MARCH - 2ND APRIL

El Chorro is a tiny village in Malaga Province situated at the outflow of the Guadalhorce River as it leaves the spectacular Gaitanes Gorge. Numerous limestone cliffs tower above the village offering some of Spain's finest sport climbs. As well as the famous Caminito del Rey, the surrounding sierras offer superb hill walking and have a sprinkling of via ferratas. All in all, a great venue for another YRC meet to southern Spain and we are all grateful to Val and Tony for organising the accommodation at Finca La Campana, which can be recommended to future visitors.

Friday 24th March

Michael, Helen, Christine and Jim arrived to a colder El Chorro than expected! We had been experiencing temperatures of above 28°C so the weather, for us at least, was rather a shock.

Saturday 25th March

Saturday dawned bright and early and the Smith/Harrison party set off from Finca La Campana for an initial detour to explore the commercial opportunities in El Chorro and then to walk to Sierra La Huma. We went via the ancient Arabic Staircase, where Michael Smith checked out climbing opportunities for later in the week. In the end, we decided to loop back through the woods to Finca La Campana using a mix of paths and bicycle tracks some of which followed close to the Arroyo de Chorro.

Aaron and Ged headed over to the Valle de Abdalajis crag for their first days climbing: La bavaresa 5+, El olvillo del osillilo 5+ (attempted not completed), Fasi terminal 5+, Los currants 4, Bano de tierra 5 and Musgogenesis 6a.

Mick arrived later that day, having warmed up with two weeks excellent walking in the hills of Axarquia behind Nerja, unfortunately without John Sutcliffe, who was unable to join us at the last minute. Disappointingly, we had learned a few days before that there would not be a visit from Ann-Karin or Kjetil Tveranger either, as Kjetil had fallen and injured his shoulder on the Norwegian ski-touring meet and was in rehab.

After a long day, we all went for a hearty dinner at the Olive Branch bunkhouse and caught up with Helen Brewitt and Daniel O'Leary, two new prospective members, who were staying there for the rock climbing.

Sunday 26th March

On Sunday morning, we were woken by an early call from Richard Sealey who had caught the early train to El Chorro station having spent the night at Malaga Airport! Paul Dover and Bill Gibbs also joined us later that day.

The next crag selected by Aaron and Ged was Fontales (Sector Castrojo) and the following routes were completed: Slipped in 5, Vas pisando huevos 5 and But one 5. Then after lunch, Yo y mi Resaca 5+ was climbed on the Escalera Arabe crag above the staircase.

Mick, the Smiths and the Harrisons set off for a walk in the Sierra de Llana near the Guadalhorce reservoir to the north of the Sierra de Huma. This route had been downloaded by Mick from the Wikiloc site and uploaded onto our GPSs. Good tracks were followed initially and a clear path took us up to a gap in the cliff to access the Tajo de Balesteros summit (1012m), where bluebells were found. The next section followed the GPS trace across limestone scrub linking the odd section of goat path, flaying any untrousered skin before returning to some welcome dirt track!

Monday 27th March

Returning to the Escalera Arabe wall with Michael, Ged and Aaron's routes included: Los timbales 4, Un helado para Leo 3, Here dishes menu 5 (should be 6a!), The lest way 4, La raya a la izquierda 4 and El piarito 3. Then after lunch, another couple of routes were added on the Valle de Abdalajis crag: Oso yogui 5 and Un pobre infeliz 4+ (if direct should be 6a!).

Mick was bound for the Sierra La Huma and set off from the Finca with Bill and Paul. We took the track up through the pines below the climbers' crags which are penetrated by the so-called Arab staircase – an old path taking a relatively easy-angled weakness in the cliffs to gain an olive grove nestling under a second tier of crags.

We passed a small group of cabra montes, the Iberian ibex at the top where the party divided. Mick continued over the barren limestone summit of La Huma (1191m) and returned around its eastern flank. Bill and Paul returned via a bridle path through the forest which provided a good ridge view of the area, then down to El Chorro and back to Finca la Campana.

Following the flaying of skin on the walk in the Sierra de Llana near the Guadalhorce reservoir, Helen, Christine and Jim opted for some less testing walks. These were the Sendero Gaitanejo, part of which forms the walk to the start of the Caminito Del Rey – a peaceful trail with some interesting bird sightings such as Crossbills. After lunch we did the Pico del Convento walk which included the Mirador de la Buiteras.

Although it was a short route it offered spectacular views of Gaitanes gorge and the start of the walkway. Potted descriptions of both walks can be found on the web at <http://aloravalleyview.com/hiking-and-walking-routes-in-and-around-alora-andalucia.html>

Tuesday 28th March

The group assembled at El Chorro station to take the coach up to the drop-off point to descend the newly renovated El Caminito del Rey path, which traverses the Gaitanes Gorge. This is a canyon carved by the river Guadalhorce which narrows to about 10 metres wide and reaches a depth of 700 meters. In flood conditions, the river used to form a huge spout – El Chorro, at the exit of the gorge. The river is now tamed by the dam of the Guadalhorce reservoir and its hydroelectric scheme. The original precipitous walkway pinned to the gorge was built in the early 1900's to maintain the water canal.



The walkway fell into disuse and became very dangerous. A number of our members, including your President, recall doing the exciting traverse some twenty years ago, but it was later closed by the authorities after five deaths in two years. For more information see the website: <http://www.caminitodelrey.info/en/>.



Mick on the walkway and with Helen, Tony & Bill

The gorge is certainly impressive and newly renovated path, complete with staircases, observation platforms and a suspension bridge.

Following just above the original walkway, it has been nicely done and sees a huge volume of hard-hatted visitor watched by the griffon vultures circling above. Definitely worth a visit!

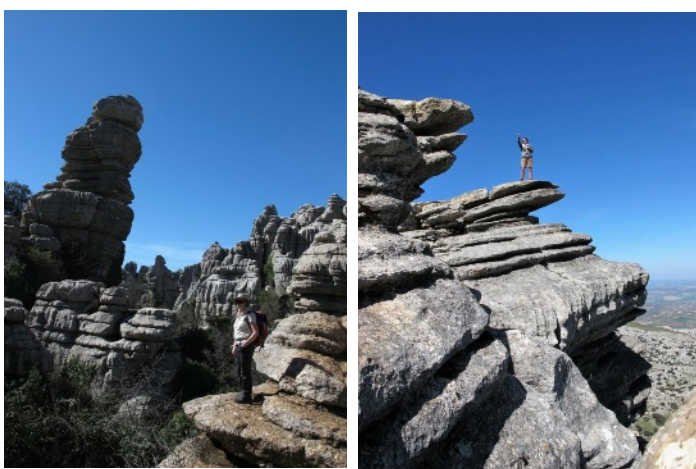
After a welcome beer back in El Chorro, Mick and Bill drove up towards the Guadalorce reservoir and walked up to the Mirador de las Buitreras close to Pico del Convento, where we were fortunate to see a vulture just 20 metres away as it soared into view above the cliff below us. The view down to the Gaitanes Gorge and the start of the walkway was equally impressive.

Following a welcome coffee the Smiths and Harrisons drove off to visit Bobastro which is the ruins of a Mozarabic church carved right out of the rock. The site is impressive, highly atmospheric and offers a tranquil space to reflect and take in the wonderful views. Prior to the church we had driven to the end of the road where the Mirador Tajo Encantada offered expansive vistas of Sierra La Huma, Caminito del Rey and the setting of Finca La Campana. A bonus at the top were sightings of at least 15 Swallowtail butterflies. Ged and Aaron went to the Desplomilandia crag and climbed Flora 6a and Parcia tonta 6a.

Wednesday 29th March

The party drove to the interesting dissected limestone of the El Torcal National Park just south of Antequera. Michael, Aaron and Ged completed the questionably safe El Torcal via ferrata, graded at Difficile and technically closed by the park authorities.

Val, Tony, Richard, Helen, Mick, Bill, Paul, Alan, Angie, Christine and Jim threaded their way through the various paths that cross the limestone terrain. The Jurassic landscape is riven by deep gullies and characterised by its fantastically weathered natural sculptures – think of a limestone version of Brimham Rocks on steroids! Lots of orchids, giant asphodels and other flowers were seen, as well as more cabra montes. Part way round, Mick and Bill traversed the ledges of the superstitiously named Cornisa del Diablo along the northern edge of the park.



Helen admires El Torcal's famous towers and Christine on the Cornisa del Diablo

Thursday 30th March

Mick and Richard set off to do the via ferrata on the Camorro Alto (1378m) but ended up simply bagging the summit with its extensive views over towards El Torcal and La Huma in a biting cold wind. Aaron and Ged returned to Escalera Arabe (Sector Suiza) to ascend Kiwi 5 and La Gaita 5 and two cars ventured to Ronda – Bill and Paul in one car with Michael, Christine and Jim in the other. Travel was by the most direct route and without problem until some tricky navigation in Ronda itself. The 3 doing the via ferratas were Bill, Christine and Michael (henceforth known as the “Threea Ferrata”) soon lost contact with Paul and Jim who decided to explore the town of Ronda. Particularly impressive was the bridge where Jim wisely removed his hat rather than chancing the same fate as the original architect. Eventually the Threea Ferrata were spotted from a distant viewpoint completing the final stages of their ascent. The groups were reunited briefly before Bill and Paul set off to prepare for the barbecue, also via an interesting cross-country route. Michael, Christine and Jim returned via the scenic route which touched on the Sierra de las Nieves national park and had many wonderful views.

Jim's idea to break for a stroll at Ardales taking in the River Turon was a mistake as none of the potential wild life treasures (crayfish, otters, genets, birds and flowers) revealed themselves.

Great barbecue organised by Bill who even sacrificed his potential afternoon in Torcal to go shopping and then managed to get his towel on the barbecue terrace first. The barbecue turned out to be a genuine Antequerian feast with a perfectly balanced menu of meats, salads and strawberries to finish – a heady mix of flavours and aromas. Everyone who contributed to the food preparation deserves commendation.

What better way to finish the day than to watch the sun go down and the moon start to rise whilst enjoying great food, wine and conversation.

Friday 31st March

Mick and Bill drove to Ronda and took a dirt track leading to the Quejigales picnic area, the start of an excellent walk in the Sierra de las Nieves first done by Mick some 20 years ago. This varied walk starts through flower meadows before crossing pinsapo woodland.

The distinctive Spanish fir is a threatened species now limited to just three locations in the provinces of Granada and Malaga in southern Spain. The first hedgehog broom bush in flower was seen at the lowest limit of its height range as we climbed the ridge leading to the old Camino de las Nieves. Passing the Penon de los Enamorados (Lover's Rock), the path reaches a well-restored nevera (snow-pit) used to collect snow which was compacted into ice blocks for transportation to Ronda. The return route then undulates past numerous stands of skeletal pollarded trees. These are all quejigales (Portuguese oaks), an unforgettable sight in this barren landscape.

Meanwhile Ged and Aaron had linked up with our two prospective members Helen and Daniel to visit the Los Cotos (sector Medios) crag where they climbed: Alucinosis 5, Number One 4+, Cursillos 5 and Bruja intrepida 5 (attempted not completed). After lunch Cerebro de broca 6a was added at the Desplomilandia crag.

Alan, Angie and Paul drove to El Mirador and walked to a col below Pico del Convento, from where we traversed difficult limestone terrain to overlook the Gaitanes Gorge. Whilst eating our lunch we were entertained by several vultures circling above and below the cliff edge. We returned via the start of the Camino del Rey.

We all had a memorable meal at the Rocabella restaurant.

Saturday 1st April

Mick left early for Malaga airport. Aaron and Ged did no climbing, but drove to Malaga to watch Atletico Madrid defeat Malaga FC (2-0) at a football game.

Bill and Paul enjoyed the experience of walks round various parts of "Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra" where, besides the many 1000's of Greater Flamingos, we saw several Corn Buntings, Black Winged Stilt, Avocets, Ruffs, 3 Woodchat Shrikes, a single Black Stork and a single Nightingale in full song. The Laguna is in a very large and fertile valley with large indoor livestock units, such a contrast to mountainous area we experienced for most of the week.

Sunday 2nd April

Paul and Bill set off for Malaga at 06.30 for a 10.25 flight but only just got to the aircraft as it was boarding due to major delays during the booking in process!

A most enjoyable week, ideal weather.

Attending were:

MB

Mick Borroff (President)
Tony Penny
Val Penny
Helen Brewitt (guest)
Aaron Campion(guest)
Ged Campion
Paul Dover
Bill Gibbs
Christine Harrison (guest)
Jim Harrison
Alan Linford
Angie Linford (guest)
Daniel O'Leary (guest)
Helen Smith
Michael Smith



**Michael, Helen, Jim, Mick, Christine, Paul.
Alan and Angie at El Torcal**

GALLERY



**Paul admiring the view over the El Torcal karst to the Sierra de Huma
Photo: Mick Borroff**

**Alan, Paul, Helen and Angie at El Torcal
Photo: Mick Borroff**

**Ged, bridge, Via Ferrata Torcal
Photo: Michael Smith**



**Female Cabra Monte – the Iberian ibex
Photo: Mick Borroff**





**Michael Helen Christine and Jim
crossing pathless terrain, Sierra Llana
Photo: Mick Borroff**



**Paul Dover at the top of the
Arab Steps, El Chorro
Photo: Mick Borroff**



**Via Ferrata
Randa**

**Photos:
Jim Harrison**



**View down to the Caminito del Rey
suspension bridge in the lower gorge
Photo: Mick Borroff**