



GET THE OUTDOOR HABIT IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

DID IT RAIN IN SPAIN?

EL POU – 2002

By Dave Green

This year saw changes to the traditional week trip. The dates had been changed from Easter to the Jubilee week at the beginning of June in the hope of avoiding the traditional rain and thanks to cheap flights the epic mini bus journey was no longer a feature. All the changes seemed popular as we had 14 members and one guest, which is the best attendance in the 5 years I have been a member of the group.

Following a chauffeur driven mini-bus to Heathrow (George will be saying we are going up market), the flight left on time for Brussels where we got the connecting flight to Barcelona. After arrival it took an age to sort the paperwork for our four hire cars, which we collected just in time to join the Barcelona rush hour, a bit of challenge for Dave, Sarah, Ian and Ian who were just getting used to the left hand drive cars, hence we were avoiding changing gear with the door handle.

Eventually we all arrived safely at our villa called El Pou near the town of Berga in the foothills of the Pyrenees. We were given a warm welcome by the owners who gave us a guided tour, we were all very impressed by the Villa especially our own swimming pool (George please note!). The problem then was the nightmare of sorting who was sharing a room with who; Pam please note no scandal to report!

The first day was fairly relaxing with a short walk from the Villa in the morning. After lunch and a short swim in the warm midday sun, most of the group went to the historic town of Vic. Meanwhile Nina and I went back to Barcelona airport to collect Marilyn, who was unable to fly out until Saturday.

On the second day we visited the local town of Berga and were extremely lucky to find it was the day of the annual Fiesta. It was fantastic to see the music, dancing and Giants moving through the crowded main square. The theme of the fiesta was "fire" so setting off firecrackers in the middle of the crowd seemed to be all part of the fun, a huge fire-breathing dragon (like a pantomime horse) charged through the square and took great delight in burning the crowd. I thought I was at a safe distance with my video camera, but the beast still managed to burn me with the fireworks in his mouth. Fortunately I was not injured, which is perhaps as well as I not sure what my travel insurance company would have made of me being burned by a "Fire Breathing Dragon".

Later in the day we returned to El Pou for a swim and dinner. Some of the group had thought of returning to the Fiesta in the evening, but it was decided to watch proceedings on the local TV station. This was a good move as the grand finale about 30 people with massive fireworks charge through the crowded square, locals were prepared with all their body including their face covered, but I think we had a lucky escape. Question; are Spanish Fiesta's exempt from EEC health and safety legislation?

The next day it was a short drive to the monastery in the mountains at Montserrat. After a couple of hours visiting the church and numerous gift shops, it was time for a walk to the mountain peaks above the monastery. The majority of the group cheated by taking a ride up the mountain railway, while the purists and those afraid of the near vertical railway ascended the hard way. Eventually everybody reached the highest point (1236 Metres) in the mountain range, with stunning views. Most people thought this beautiful walk with stunning views was the highlight of the holiday.



The following day it was off to Barcelona by car and train. Most people toured the city using the Metro and the popular tourist buses. The priority of most people seemed to be anything to do with Gaudi Architecture, be it his houses, his park or the "Sagrada Familia" Cathedral which has become a symbol of Barcelona. As many of you will know the Cathedral is still being built and it must be the only

place in the world where thousands of tourists pay to enter a building site. However, even in it's current state it really is an amazing sight, particularly when you climb the narrow spiral stairs up the spires. The museum below the cathedral is also very interesting, particularly the plans for the completed Cathedral that will seat 5,000 people and have a central spire twice as high as the existing spires, mind you it will take another 50 years to complete; NOG's trip in 2052? Another interesting point to note is where did Gaudi get his inspiration for all this wonderful architecture? Answer: He joined a walking group to visit the local mountains!

On the penultimate day, people were a little late to rise out due to the hectic schedule on the previous two days. After a late breakfast some people headed to the town of Berga, others did a short walk from a monastery in the hills above Berga, while those with some remaining energy went to find the local cycle hire. Mind you they didn't get very far as the bikes were totally unsafe to ride, another example to compliance with EEC health and safety legislation in rural Spain.

The plan for the final day was an early start and an attempt at climbing the mighty Pendraforca (2500 metres). However a combination of morning mist, forecast thunder storms and

a lack of mountain gear resulted in only Ian Reese and Matt attempting the climb. So as not to waste the early start most of the other people headed back to Barcelona to catch up on the sights missed earlier in the week.

Then it was tidy up, pack up and head for the airport for the flight home. I am sure everyone will agree that we all had a good holiday and saw some fantastic sights, made all the better by the presence of Ian R, Ian K, Adrian, Nick, Terry, Matt, Harvey, Dave, Sarah, Sue, Stella, Nina, Marilyn, Kay and Maggie. Who knows the inspiration gained on this trip will lead to in our future lives!

An one final point, did it rain in Spain? Well we had a couple of very heavy thunder storms, but it didn't last long and certainly didn't spoil our enjoyment.

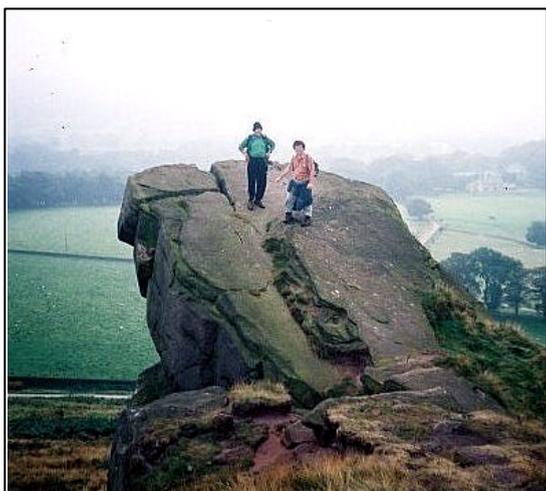
GRADBACH MILL

By Dawn Bishop

As the Salisbury trip was cancelled (September 27th-29th) a few of us decided to go to the Peak district instead.

Nigel and I had an ulterior motive, as we wanted to visit Alton towers; Nigel to try out the new ride Air and me because I had never been there before. George and Neil decided they would come but that they would do a walk both days.

The hostel was a flax mill, which made sewing silks until the end of the 18th century when it became too expensive to use waterpower. The YHA has renovated the main mill and the mill manager's house. We stayed in the mill manager's house which was very comfortable. It must be said though that this hostel is run on quite strict lines and the hostel manager is a rather grumpy character who seems to have the ability to make himself rather unpopular. When we arrived at about 9.30 pm we made straight for the local watering hole, The Rose and Crown about two miles away at Allgreave, where we had a few pints of Robinson's the local beer and booked ourselves in for evening meal for the next evening.



Saturday morning Nigel and I left for Alton towers and George and Neil set of on a walk around the local area. Alton Towers was fantastic. We managed to do twelve rides including all the big ones Nemesis, Oblivion, Submission, and Hex. The best ride we both agreed was Air the new ride, it does really feel like you are flying. After all this G-force and adrenalin we managed to catch the last performance of the ice show to relax before leaving the park. In the pub that evening we exchanged tales with George and Neil; they told

us about the walk they had done to the hanging stone and the village of Wincle, while we all tucked into an excellent meal and drank a few more pints of Robinson's beer; then it was a race back to the hostel before the rigidly enforced curfew.

The walk on Sunday started out following the route that George and Neil had taken the day before. We visited Luds Church Cave then followed the path to the Hanging Stone. A huge rock stuck out from the hillside at an odd angle. From there we headed down to the River Dane and followed the Dane Valley Way which took us past a fish farm. We stopped on the river for a choccie biscuit break; around this time the mist started to lift and the sun started to come out; we followed this path for another mile or so before joining the Gritstone Trail. This path lead us up hill first through a wooded area and then open fell land onto The Wincle Mind; a ridge which gave stunning views of the surrounding countryside. We walked up to the highest point where we stopped for lunch, looking down on the village of Bosley and its small reservoir.

After dinner we followed the ridge for a short while then cut back down into the valley before doing a small road section. Back on the footpath again we carried on down to the river, through an area which is used for clay pigeon shooting; as we headed up the other side of the valley we passed many a clay pigeon that the hunters had missed. This footpath had the distinct advantage of reaching the top of the valley right outside a pub.

The Boar was an excellent hostelry which sold a good selection of beers, but because we still had a few more miles to walk and a long drive home we stuck to the soft drinks. After a short stop we carried on heading over open moorland again, seeing large groups of pheasants wandering around with the sheep on the open hillside. The last part of the walk followed a public access path between Midgley hill and Tagsclough hill, to Burntcliff Top. From here we could see the mill nestling in the valley below us. Just after 6 pm we negotiated the steep path down and across the river, back to the hostel and the car. We estimated that we had covered about 14 miles and had all enjoyed it.

Now it was time for the long journey home, as we headed to the M6 we experienced a sunset that needed a tripod and a long exposure to do it justice then it was down to Nigel's driving skills a hamburger, very loud rock music and plenty of fresh air to get us home in one piece around 11pm.

