

The Silver Road: La Ruta Vía de la Plata

Wednesday 1 - Tuesday 14 September 2010

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This is a preliminary write up until I can confirm more details in a couple of months but it should give you an idea of the trip which, basically, in two weeks riding south through Spain and back north through Portugal.

For 400 miles, the Silver Road runs virtually due south from Gijón on the north coast of Spain, to Seville in Andalucía. Passing through León, Zamora, Cáceres, Salamanca, and Mérida, it is one of the most important routes in Spain, dating back to the Bronze Age when it was the main route north for gold and tin (but not silver) mined around Tartessos where the first great western culture flourished. When the Romans arrived, they spent a few centuries paving and generally sorting it out in time for Hannibal and his jumbo brigades to traverse Iberia and kick them out. During the period of Muslim domination, it was called the Camino Mozárabe and, in the middle ages, both Christians and Arabs used it as a pilgrim road north to Santiago de Compostela (and still do). Pilgrims gave it its modern name in which the *Plata* refers to the Arabic for 'broadly-paved road' rather than the silver it also means in modern Spanish.

With a history like that it's little wonder that the entire route is steeped in rich cultural and religious history and, although that may not be the best reason to ride it, it's a pretty good one. So, the plan to date – and it may vary as things firm up – is to ferry to Santander arriving at noon and ride 275km to León for the first night. Then overnight at Salamanca "the most spectacular renaissance city in Europe", then Cáceres, then two nights in Sevilla. Easy riding, only 200-250km a day, allowing early arrivals and time to explore in the late afternoons.

From Sevilla, we head north-west into Portugal and spend six leisurely days riding through Portugal to return to Santander on Monday 13th September, to catch the 16.30 ferry to Portsmouth, arriving 13.00 on Tuesday. This Portuguese leg is being planned by a couple of mates who live in Braga and, when I get their proposals, I'll add further details to this listing.

In terms of the flavour of the trip, those who have travelled with me before know that I always look for hotels with charm and/or history that are value for money (i.e. not Hilton-type modern boxes) and menus with character that offer more than just steak. I'll prepare daily route suggestions seeking scenery and bends (where available) and each stop-over point normally should be reachable by major roads, if not motorways, as well.

COSTS

**Prices are per person, half board, without ferries: Sharing twin or double €750
Single room (where available) €1000 Deposit of £50 per person to Mike & Jan, please.**



Bookings close and final payment to be made by 1st July

TRAINS AND BOATS AND...

I've been looking at ways of getting to Santander. Ferry costs with P&O are:

Solo sharing twin cabin £377 Solo sharing 4-berth cabin £350 Rider & Pillion, twin cabin £506 for both.

But there's another way, other than riding all the way down through France for those, like me, who don't like ferries very much, and that's to take the Motorail train from Paris to Biarritz then ride over the Pyrenees to meet the ferry in Santander. This would mean ferry to Calais on 1st September, ride to Paris, take bikes to Gare Paris-Bercy before 8.00pm, cab to Gare d'Austerlitz (not far) to catch the night train to Biarritz. Up early, 250km on motorway to meet the ferry by midday. Seemples.

There is a special promo fare of £200, if booked 90 days in advance, four sharing a couchette. Add Calais ferry of, say, £60 and it's also quite economical. If you're interested in this, then please email me soonest: I will need to book the tickets at 9.0am on 1st June as these prices are very limited, first come, first served.