

Warm Weather Training

Way back in January, Bob Hamilton asked the Google email group if anyone'd be interested in some warm weather training. My training and fitness was at an all time low. And some warm weather would certainly be appreciated. The suggested itinerary was a tough mixture of mountain running, mountain biking, and road biking on the mountain roads. But with more optimism than sense I signed up.

As the day approached, the tour group had slowly whittled itself down to an elite few. Graham Pearce (gulp). Bob, Mike Baldwin, and me. All my good intentions of an improvement in training and fitness before the tour had come to nought, so I was going to have to balance getting something from the week with surviving it!

Bob had done lots of research on the internet and found an outfit called **Rio Frio Holidays** (www.rio-frio.com) who offered us a great package, tailored to our exact needs: we were all keen bikers and wanted to mix cycling and running. 4 nights half-board accommodation in shared twin rooms; airport transfers for us and our road bikes; a guided road ride & vehicle support during other rides; a guided MTB ride, including bike hire; a guided run; a sports massage each, all for about £500 each including a cheap Jet-2 flight to Malaga, cheap local grub and quite a lot of beer.

We've all got pretty busy lives, so the departure day 20th March came round quickly and found us in various states of preparedness! Shirley and Kay provided a taxi service to LBA (you *can* fit 4 runners and their luggage, 4 bike bags, and 2 drivers into two cars - just!). Bob helped us avoid wasting time and money in the airport shops when his super-deluxe cycle carry case disintegrated at the last minute and all hands were needed to help fix it in the departure lounge at LBA - eventually we flew out with it held together with gaffer tape.

We'd all packed summer gear, so it was a relief to emerge from the plane at Malaga into the sunshine. Hurrah! Our guide for the week was Mel, who runs Rio Frio with his wife Marie. And Mel's neighbour Jeff, another ex-pat, was helping with the airport run. As we drove up into the glorious mountains the temperature dropped a little but the sky was blue, the limestone scenery was glorious, and our spirits were high. Our base for the week was a delightful hamlet in the Andalucia mountains, with just a few houses and a bar.

After the flight, we thought we'd kick off the week with a short 7k evening trail run. It was here that we got the first benefits of a guided holiday - we were driven out to a perfect location, pointed in the right direction, and even found Marie part way round to make sure we hadn't got lost. A perfect little run. And the pattern for the week was set - Graham went haring off, with Bob chasing him hard, and Mike kindly keeping me company at the back.

Back to base for showers, plenty of home-cooked grub, and our only visit to the little taverna in the hamlet. Problem was it was just too cold in the evenings - most other evenings we stretched the hospitality of our B&B hosts Jeff and Shirley by lingering in front of their log burner and drinking their beer all evening.

Day 1 was a long road bike ride. Mel led the ride, and guided us on local roads that were well surfaced, traffic-free, and swooping up and down through the fantastic scenery. Truly great cycling. But in the previous months my longest bike ride had been about an hour.



And we'd done twice that, on hillier terrain and at faster speed, even before we stopped for morning coffee. Graham and Bob had been despatched to bag a local peak, as the rest of us settled down to several rounds of coffee and cake. We rode on through fantastic scenery on more super roads, but I was finding it harder and harder, until after about 40 miles I ground to a halt, and happily waited in the sun for the broom-wagon to take me to join the others at lunch.

Lunch was always a highlight! Mel arranged for us to stop at local tavernas where we tried just about everything on the menu at some stage or another. Delicious. And the company was good as we chatted about the morning's efforts and the plans for the afternoon. While I rode home in the broom-wagon for a shower and a snooze in the sun, the other chaps tackled an even hillier 30 miles or so back to base.



Day 2 was to be a mixture of mountain running and road biking. We were dropped at the base of a mighty mountain. It was a very long haul to the top, but runnable to a greater or lesser extent depending on your fitness. Clearly I was holding everybody up, but they were pretty good about it. We knew it was going to be cold, so we were wrapped in every bit of clothing we had. We didn't linger on the summit as the wind was perishing - my Camelbak

tube froze up! Then there was a wonderful long descent down the other side of the mountain, twisting and turning, on ice-carriers' tracks. What an experience.

After over 4 hours of running and walking we arrived in a delightful village and found a sunny spot outside a taverna for another long lunch. Then the broom-wagon for me, and a 30 mile bike ride over mountain passes for the chaps.

Day 3. Graham was still full of bounce, so he was set off on a long solo mountain trail run. Bob, Mike, and I were happy enough to tackle a local ridge walk. It was exciting stuff, with wobbly limestone and wobbly legs and serious drops in places. As all week, the scenery was idyllic with alpine terraces, olive groves everywhere, and distant mountains.

A few of us had our sports massage this day, and I found this gave me renewed strength for the final day.

Day 4, and mountain biking was on the itinerary, with Mel guiding us on tracks and paths, through olive groves and skirting high mountain fields. There were some pretty sharp mountain bike skills in the group, and a cracking pace was set. Here we had the only mishap of the week, when high speed and a tricky camber dumped Mike into a ditch. He was a bit of a mess really, but bravely cycled on. We celebrated the last full day with a truly splendid lunch in Rio Frio, sitting in the hot sun eating freshly caught trout wonderfully cooked, with Mike gently bleeding and popping pain-killers in a shady corner.

Finally, a quick clean-up and off to the airport, with a spot of retail therapy in the giant Marathon store to round the week off.

Did I benefit from this? Yes! It was a great week. Mel at Rio Frio was a real find - helpful throughout, encouraging, and able to give something to everyone in the group. Even though I was well behind the others in running and cycling fitness, and MTB skills, I still had a great week. Graham had extra runs and extra loops to keep him happy. And Mike and Bob enjoyed themselves chasing Graham. The week has given me the confidence to do longer rides and runs again, and the motivation to get a lot fitter too.

Thanks to Bob for organising - save me a place on the next one!

Paul

