



A Cycle of Catalonia

Carcassone - Cadaqués - Barcelona - Andorra - Carcassone
an album of landscape photographs from 1977 by Paul Malone

Maps showing the routes that were taken in the book and the locations visited

Notes to the maps

To make my way to Catalonia I first had to take my bicycle on the train from London Victoria to Carcassone. At the time I was staying in Warrington, Cheshire and so took the opportunity to do the 3 day cycle ride down the A49, the B4000 and the A4 which you can see in the boxed insert.

These maps have been kept simple but I think there is enough information there to follow the route on more detailed maps or online. Many of the place names have been converted from the Spanish or English translations into Catalan; the French are as they were.

Both the England and Catalan map scales are similar with the England trip being about 250 miles. The elevations have been left out but it is obvious from the photographs that this area of the Pyrenees mountains and Catalonian coast is extremely mountainous!



The author: Preparing to embark. Warrington. September 1977

In June 1976 I graduated from my Fine Art course at Reading University. The following year was spent working at various part-time jobs and, at the same time, engaging in art projects in a disused chalk quarry outside of the town. With this artwork I succeeded in being accepted for a place in sculpture at the Royal College of Art. Therefore, there were several weeks to occupy before the start of term in October 1977.

In previous years I had gone on several cycling tours in Europe* and was keen to do another one. This was to add to my travel experiences and to collect material for my new art course at the RCA. In making these trips, many hard lessons had been learned, especially when it came to the robustness of my bicycle! The one you can see in the photo is made from a scrap frame and bits and pieces that I had customised myself.

Cutting down weight in terms of the pack was also a 'must'.

This was especially so as on this trip I would be traveling through the High Pyrenees. From left to right in the photo is my tent, foam mat, rucksack with clothes, etc. and a water bottle wrapped in blanket material; soaked in water this kept it cool. The side panniers contained my camera and everything to do with food.

The plan was to cycle from Warrington, down the Severn Valley and across the Lambourn Downs, to pick up the A4 into London. From there I would be taking my bike on the train to Carcassone and tour down the Mediterranean coast to Barcelona. After a week spent sightseeing, the tour would cut inland into the Catalonian interior and up to Andorra. After descending to Ax les Thermes I would then climb across to pick up the road back into Carcassone. The train would then take me back to London in time for the start of term at the RCA.

This was the first time I took a decent camera with me - a Pentax SLR 35mm - the results of which you can see here in this book. I developed the negatives myself in 1977 but only recently in 2021 did I have the time to scan and prepare them. As you can see from the photos the weather was surprisingly good and I had a great time immersed in the landscape. This period saw Spain expand economically so it is an interesting record of the area before it was extensively developed.

* Other cycling tours in the same period

1973: Firenze - Cote d'Azur - Carcassone - Bordeaux - train to Rennes - Cherbourg - Southampton - Reading

1974: Barcelona - Carcassone - Lourdes - Biarritz - Bordeaux - train to Rennes - Cherbourg - Southampton - Reading

1975: Valencia - Barcelona - Puigcerdá - Toulouse - Barcelona - train to Rennes - Cherbourg - Southampton - Reading

Following trip in 1981: Milan - Carrara - Siena - Pesaro - Ravenna - Venice



Bridgenorth Forest was my first night out camping after a 70 mile ride. I had used this spot on previous tours which was next to the road but up a steep hill. In the foreground you can see the only flat area ideal for pitching camp. At night the forest was alive with wildlife rustling and flapping about. It was little wonder that sleep was a rare and intermittent commodity.



The next day was the longest at 100 miles and followed the River Severn. This part of the trip was on busy main roads to keep up the pace and in this photo can be seen the Malvern Hills across the fields. After a climb over the Cotwolds and down to Cirencester, I was to divert off along White Horse Hill and then to Lambourn. Here I stayed the night on the farm of a friend and his family.



After picking up the train in London and an eventful trip (the train caught fire outside Toulouse) I landed in Carcassone. I needed to wait a couple of days, for my bike to arrive, which was spent sightseeing this unique walled town. In those days it was not so developed and still retained its sense of history intact. You can see here also the extensive viticulture of the surrounding region.



Leaving Carcassone and traveling East the road skirts around a spur of the Pyrenees. Again, this was a very fast section of road, my progress aided by a strong wind. I spent the night in the Youth Hostel in Perpignan and then set off again along the road to the Spanish border.



Along this flat section of road were several small towns, dotted on the horizon and silhouetted against the Pyrenean foothills. Again, vineyards were the most common form of agriculture. At some of the youth hostels there were competitions about who could buy the cheapest bottle of wine. As I recall the winner was 5p including a deposit bottle which you got 1p back for. Not bad wine either!



Eventually the road arrived at the Col over the Pyrenees spur. The road, in a series of sweeps, bypassed several gorges or defiles on its way to the top. On descending it passed through the rather unlovely border town of La Jonquera before arriving at Figueres on the plain.



Stopping off in Figueres for a few days to visit the Dali Museum and tour the town. It was also a good opportunity to restock my larder and take a break after the crossing of the eastern mountains. Above you can see the near deserted campsite with my tent in the early morning. Plenty of wildlife, especially ants in a wide range of sizes - also millipedes rolling over my flysheet.



Leaving Figueres, the road runs straight as an arrow towards the coast. It was a good opportunity to see the geology in the roadside cuttings. There was not very much traffic along this road but the feeling was that it was part of a series of infrastructure projects in anticipation of the opening up of the coastal resorts.