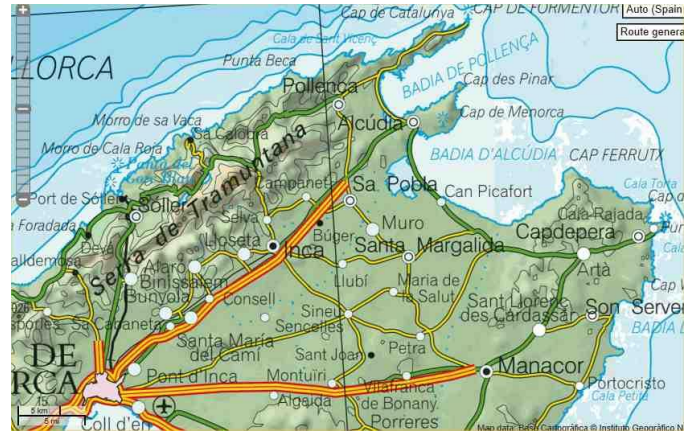


## Before the Bike Ride

Mark loves Majorca. It is the place for a perfect cycling holiday. However he also loves to take his wife there, in part so he could disappear for the odd day and cycle. He has been there so often that he almost has his own table at his favourite pub Tolos.

When he was on holiday with his wife he normally stayed at the classy Pollentia Hotel but when cycling he preferred the Romantic Hotel. He had taken Peter on a cycling holiday here a few years ago – seems to be the reverse of what you might expect with the name of the hotel.



Mark and Peter were keen to return to Majorca and this time asked all the “21 Virages” cycling group if they would like to come along. Alec signed up immediately. Mike was more wary – would he be able to keep up with these very fit and fast 50-year olds? He knew that they were very good at waiting for the slowest, which would be him, but would his knees hold out going up the long hills in Majorca? He came up with an idea – to get someone else to come along that was older and slower. Now Jeff was older by almost 2 years and could be very fast in short bursts but he seemed to not have the stamina for long rides. He had cycled with the “21 Virages” before but lacked the confidence for cycling with this group in Majorca now that he was a true pensioner. Mike worked on him, “Jeff you just need to practice a bit more. You are fitter than you think. They will wait for you”.

The New Year came and the team exchanged emails about booking the flights and the hotel, and by January 4<sup>th</sup> Alec, Mark, Mike and Peter were booked in, with each of us having our own room – we were all keen to steer clear of sharing rooms in a hotel called “Romantic”. Jeff had now overcome his fears and asked Mike about coming. Mike sent an email to Alec, Mark and Peter to check if Jeff could come along. Peter replied, “Jeff is a nice bloke”, and that was it – our team of five was complete. Now Jeff is renowned within GASBAGS for wanting to change things and had acquired the job title “Ideas man”. In this case he had the idea to book an extra night and to book half-board.

The next step was to book the bikes, and our experienced pair of Mark and Peter said we should book through “Pro Cycle Hire”, which had a shop very near the Romantic Hotel. Pro Cycle Hire had a website through which you could choose and book a bike. Within no time both Peter and Jeff had booked 2 bikes each! The other three had less difficulty with the website. Alec and Mark, the only ones that would still be working by the time of the ride, went for Van Nicholas Titanium bikes with Alec even asking for the electric gear option. Jeff requested a bike with 3 gear rings at the front and booked it through a different branch of Pro Cycle Hire in Alcudia. He was told that it would be delivered to the shop in Port de Pollença.

In late January Jeff prompted Mike to send an email to Mark and Peter about possible routes. Peter replied with links to three routes, (a) hilly long ride to sa Calobra, (b) flat ride looping out to Petra, (c) hilly short ride to Cap de Formentor. Mark replied stating, “I just intend to ride wherever without any planning”, which could be even mean going up and down the same road a few times as we were to realise later.

In April Mike sent out an email about which transport to and from Newcastle Airport. Alec agreed to take his car which pleased Mike as his car could be left with his newly-returned wife. Mark replied to state, “I will make my own way there but will need a lift back”. Mark knew the history of Alec’s car – one of the most unreliable cars still on the road. He didn’t mind not getting home after the trip but wanted to ensure he arrived at the airport. However after Alec sent out an email stating the split of costs, Mark replied, “I am fully independent”. Peter would be in Majorca

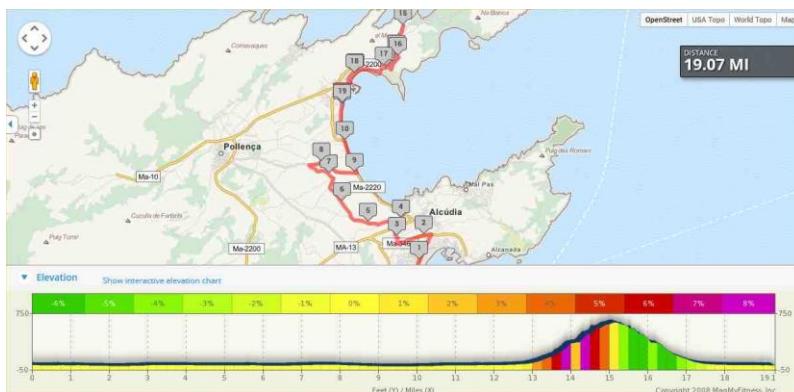
when we set off as he had booked a few days there with his family. He agreed that he would keep his hire car and transport us to and from the airport.

The day before the trip Alec emailed Mike. He was overseas at a meeting and would arrive back in time. However he had to attend a meeting about a “Crisp cutter” on the following Wednesday so would leave Majorca on the Tuesday evening. Alec would still take his car but Mike would need to drive it back alone. The good point was that he would be taking one suitcase in the hold so our helmets could go in there plus all the bottles of suntan lotion and shampoo that Jeff was bringing.

### Saturday May 3<sup>rd</sup> Port de Pollença to Alcudia to Mirador es Colomer

Miles 26 Elevation gain 218 metres Min & Max Temperatures 21 to 26 DegC

Alec’s car arrived at the Newcastle airport without any incidents so now Jeff and Mike knew that they were likely to arrive in Majorca. The flight was at 10:10 and arrived in Majorca at 13:30. We were collected by Peter in a tiny car. Mike squeezed in the front with his backpack on his knee. Alec, Jeff and Mark played sardines in the back. Peter informed us that he had a stomach bug from food that he ate the previous evening, and had been violently sick and not slept much. Was Mike too close to him? Should he keep a brown bag ready just in case? We arrived at the Hotel Romantic without any incidents within an hour and just before 3pm. Peter disappeared to his room.



Mark set off confidently along the sea-front road, with the other three in tow, to find Pro Cycle Hire. He knew Port de Pollença like the back of his hand, but after walking for almost a mile we had to turn back, and found the shop on a side road very close to the hotel. Our bikes were reserved for us so after a quick adjustment they were ready. However Jeff’s bike had not been delivered so he was lent a bike so he could cycle to Alcudia. Peter turned up at the bike shop dressed in his cycling gear and on his bike. He was confidently drinking coffee and eating cake as if his sickness was a thing of the past. Mike spotted Danny who had delivered bikes to Menorca the previous October. Had Danny watched Mike’s YouTube of the “Tour de Menorca”? Was Mike famous in Majorca? No! Danny had not watched it!

We all cycled to Jeff’s bike shop in Alcudia. Just before we arrived Peter fell off his bike and cut his knee. He was not happy! He now felt sick and painful. The shop had a bike of the right size and with 3 chain-rings but just a 2-ring



changer. Jeff argued and argued and finally won but ended up with a smaller bike with 3 chain-rings.

We returned to Port de Pollença with Peter disappearing and not being seen till breakfast the following day. Jeff also disappeared – a pensioner needed his rest. Alec, Mark & Mike cycled up to Mirador es Colomer, with a tough (to Mike) cycle uphill for 2 miles with the gradient reaching 8%. We cycled back with Mark proposing that we get a pint at Tolos, his favourite café, with Mark being greeted like the prodigal son.



Jeff, the “Ideas man” had booked to eat in the hotel all by himself, then joined the other three later.

Sunday May 4<sup>th</sup>

Port de Pollença to sa Calobra

Miles 68 Elevation gain 1993 metres Min & Max Temperatures 18 to 26 DegC

Peter appeared late for breakfast and did not eat anything. He had tried soup which had stayed down. He said he would miss the day's ride.

The rest of us set off at 9:15 to cycle to sa Calobra being led by Mark. Mark stated that we would be stopping every 14 miles for coffee so Jeff would feel that he could make it. We



stopped for the first stop at Campanet after 14.35 miles – close enough. It had been almost flat but then we had a tough 5 mile climb up to Coll de sa Batalla. Alec and Mark arrived first then Mike and quite a time afterwards Jeff emerged but he was still doing well for a 66 year old. The café, at 26 miles and less than Mark's standard 14 mile gap, was packed with bikes. Jeff decided to return to the hotel as his return trip was all downhill and he ended up cycling 44 miles.

The remaining three continued on - undulating then a tough 2 mile climb followed by 6 miles downhill. We ate our lunch at sa Calobra then Mike set off 15 minutes before the other two for the 6 mile cycle back uphill to Coll de Cals Reis. Near the top Mike could see the other 2 getting close but thought he would reach the top first but cramp started just under his thigh and he was passed by Alec.



At the top Mark was thrilled that he had beaten Alec up the main part of the 6 mile climb. Alec & Mark had both eaten thick Spanish omelettes whilst Mike had eaten schnitzel – was this the cause of the cramp? Mark stated that the next stop would be at the cross-roads in 2 miles as the outside café sold the sweetest oranges in Spain. Both Alec and Mark nursed Mike down the 2 miles and we stopped at the café with 46 miles cycled. Mike wrung out his sweatband watched by 2 amused cyclists – Mark thought that this

was exceeding funny. We set off with Mike being nursed along on the undulating road till we turned off for the downhill back to Port de Pollença. Mark reached a speed of 42mph with Alec being slower and Mike even slower. We reached the flat with 8 miles to go. Mike saw Alec about 300 metres in front and set off at 24mph trying to catch him with all thoughts of cramp gone. Mike caught Alec then Alec slip-streamed Mike and they set off after the distant figure of Mark. They caught him (he had slowed down) and now the three raced back with Mike's thighs in agony. Mark proposed Tolos again and we were joined by Jeff and Peter. Peter had felt improved after a rest in his room and at 11am had set off to cycle a similar route to Jeff.



Over 2 pints of beer Mark explained his cycling downhill technique over dinner. You should look round the bend and not at the road. The discussion went onto the rides for the following days. Mark and Peter, our route gurus, proposed a flat ride going out to Manacor then lunch at Petra. Mark then stated that the third day should be a mix of hills and flat, with the ride going up to Luca then turning east to the flat lands.

## Monday May 5<sup>th</sup> Port de Pollenca to Petra to Pollenca

Miles 65 Elevation gain 500 metres Min & Max Temperatures 18 to 26 DegC

Jeff cycled 63 miles

We cycled off at our normal time of 9:15 with Peter almost back to full fitness – thus much fitter than Mike or Jeff. Our first coffee stop was at Santa Margalida after a fast 18 miles. On the way there we stopped to check the route and we were joined by a Scotsman from Inverness called Hector. His Scottish accent was so broad that it looked like we would need Alec to translate. If Scotland becomes independent will Scottish be taught in schools? Will road signs be in English and Scottish?



The lunch stop was to be Petra but Mark wanted to detour through side-roads to Manacor first. Mark loves side-roads and thought he had the route saved away on his Garmin. But after cycling up and down the same road three times the route to Manacor seemed to have been lost and we arrived at Petra after 30 miles. The village square was packed out with cyclists. We relaxed and had lunch in the midday sun.



The next destination was to be Campanet. Peter peered at his map. The route was to be Sineu then Llubi then sa Pobla. Hector, who turned out to be a super-fast cyclist, nursed Jeff along for a time then Jeff decided to take a short way back but still ended up cycling 63 miles. Hector said goodbye after he had raced along with Alec and Mark. We came to a junction with Campanet just 2 miles away but in the wrong direction. A decision was made to proceed to Pollenca. The four of us ordered a large beer rather than a coffee in the square in Pollenca. The route back to Port de Pollenca was discussed with Mark and Peter saying that we should just amble back – ambling turned out to mean 18mph for 5 miles.



For once Mark was happy to miss Tolos and we chose the beach-side café adjacent to our hotel instead. Mark and Mike put back 2 large pints, which might have been a reason that Mike fell out of the shower, bumped his backside and water poured onto the bathroom floor.

## Tuesday May 6<sup>th</sup> Port de Pollenca to Cap to Formentor to Cala san Vicento

Miles 37 Elevation gain 908 metres Min & Max Temperatures 15 to 36 DegC

Over breakfast Peter said, “I think we will cycle up to Cap de Formentor then return to Cala san Vicento for lunch”. Suddenly any thoughts of cycling to Luca disappeared. Jeff was thrilled as this ride was the one that he hoped to cycle.

We cycled two miles uphill again to Mirador es Colomer, with Mike trailing at the rear. Mark remarked, “It is just undulating now till Cap de Formentor”. The road actually dropped back to





sea level over 1.5 miles with the gradient reaching 10%. Mark remarked, "I forgot about that descent!". The beach gave us a view of Richard Branson's house. We cycled on uphill for the next 3 miles and the undulations started for the next 4 miles and included cycling through a tunnel and then on till we reached the Cap de Formentor.



The café prices were astronomical but Mark was not deterred from buying what looked like a delicious piece of cake. A brown goat appeared and slid up to Jeff who brought out some hotel food that he had

surreptitiously removed from the hotel breakfast. The goat was delighted but then spied better food on the adjacent table and jumped onto the table.



The return trip to Mirador es Colomer was hard with slopes of up to 10%. Jeff shouted to Mike not long after leaving the Cap, "Let's talk" – talking being Jeff's favourite occupation. However Mike was concentrating on enjoying or enduring the cycling and cycled on. We reassembled at Mirador es Colomer. Alec and Mark decided to cycle up to Talaia d'Albereutx which was 170m above our present

location. On the way back down Mark almost came a cropper as he had to veer off the road to avoid a car then almost went over his handlebars as he had to brake hard to miss a wire.



Jeff, Mike and Peter waited patiently until Jeff's patience ran out and he walked off to the Mirador de la Nau point. Peter and Mike chatted. "I have not enjoyed the hill climbing," stated Peter. Mike was astonished as he looked up to Peter as a superb hill climber. Mike wondered whether Peter's new love of painting had turned him soft. Mike received a phone call from Alec. Alec and Mark had assumed that we had cycled on so they were now on the way to Cala san Vicente. The three still at the Mirador cycled down the hill and arrived at what Peter stated was the only cove in Cala san Vicente but there was no sign of Alec or Mark. Mike phoned Alec who stated that they were at the only cove in Cala san Vicente but there was no sign of them. It was finally realised that there were two coves and all five re-united to eat lunch. Alec, Jeff and Mike cycled the shortest way back to the hotel with Alec packing then getting a taxi to the airport. Mark and Peter took the side-road way back and of course called in at Tolos for a large pint.

**Overall**

The short cycling holiday had been superb with excellent camaraderie. We had perfect weather. The hotel breakfasts were very tasty and filling. The fast "21 Virages" members always waited for the slower group. Mike had been described the year before as "genetically gifted" but now that title could be passed to Jeff. We cycled almost 200 miles with 3600m of elevation.

**The Team:**

				
Alec	Jeff	Mark	Mike	Peter